

After the [killings in Paris](#) the mood here is sombre. In a sombre mood we are reflective, we concentrate on what it is that really matters. If the mood has any effect on the thousands of delegates arriving soon for COP21 then it can only help elevate thoughts about humanity's future above crude and immediate preoccupations with "the national interest".

Yet even before the killings the international atmosphere moving into the Paris conference was palpably different to that leading into the 2009 conference in Copenhagen. Then it was one of irritated excitement, of unstable but intense expectation of something historic and decisive emerging.

Now there is once again an intense buildup of pressure and expectation, but it is more tempered, more mature, a kind of understated determination not to allow the occasion to pass.

Of course today's mood is in part a reaction to the disaster of Copenhagen. But much else has changed in the past six years. For one, as the scientific warnings become even more distressing, the sense that the world is in deep trouble has spread from the scientists and the NGOs who take their warnings seriously to wider civil society, imparting to government representatives a deeper sense of responsibility.

Equally, we can now see starkly what was still hazy in 2009 – the world order has been radically and permanently shaken up. Today, two-thirds of global greenhouse gas emissions come from developing countries, a proportion expected to reach three-quarters by 2030. China alone now accounts for 40% of global emissions.

The hard facts of escalating global emissions have turned the moral claims and the geopolitics of global warming upside down. It is no longer possible for developing nations, represented by the G77-plus-China bloc, to set itself against the rich nations. The tables have been turned. Instead of the South saying to the North "you caused this problem so you fix it, and then we might follow", now the narrative from the North is "please, China and India, can you work with us to help solve this problem. We're all in this together."

Geopolitically, China has been reluctant to take on the role of global leader in a way

commensurate with its economic clout. Given the extraordinary rapidity of its transition to economic superpower, perhaps it's unreasonable to expect it to assume so quickly the geopolitical responsibilities that go with it.

Yet in the case of climate change it would be fair to say that China has adapted swiftly. At Copenhagen, China behaved like a petulant ex-colony with a chip on its shoulder. It was still throwing bombs into the negotiating rooms.

In the six years since then it has grown up. The transition to the more cosmopolitan presidency of Xi Jinping plays a part, but so too does the maturing of the Chinese economy, with the shift away from helter-skelter expansion involving as much concrete, steel and bitumen as possible, to one that can see enormous possibilities in leading the world into a technologically sophisticated low-carbon industrial future.

And behind it all is a clear-eyed recognition on the part of China's leaders that a changing climate represents a severe threat to the welfare of the sprawling nation's 1.2 billion people, not to mention the long-term survival of the regime. India now threatens to be the bomb thrower in Paris. Perhaps before India can join others in committing to a firm global agreement it must first forgive the west for colonialism and release itself from its historical resentments. Maybe British Prime Minister David Cameron's first and most constructive act in Paris could be to meet with Prime Minister Modi and ask India to forgive Britain for its sins against the subcontinent.

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