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The Environmental and Climate Impacts of Nationalism and Trade Wars – Implications for Canada and the ASEAN

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Introduction

Resurgent nationalism, protectionist trade policies, the scramble to secure strategic resources, stockpiling, and efforts to enhance electric energy production are reshaping and undermining environmental protection frameworks across North America and the Indo-Pacific, establishing the bases for considerable environmental damage while accelerating the effects of climate change. With a focus on the implications for the middle powers of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Canada, this article reveals the non-traditional security concerns for these countries from these emerging economic forces - beyond their capacity to address on their own versus traditional security or defence issues.[2]

The resurgence of economic nationalism, rooted in the *America First* response to the rise of China and exemplified most by the two Trump administrations, has redefined

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[2] Mely Caballero-Anthony, "Policy Forum: Securing or Securitizing? Human Security in Asia. Non-Traditional Security: Concept, Issues, and Implications on Security Governance." *Georgetown Journal of Asian Affairs*. 3, 1 (2016): pp. 5-13.

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the policy landscape by undermining long-standing environmental regulations, weakening multilateral cooperation, and privileging short- and long-term industrial and trade gains over ecological and environmental sustainability. In North America, shifts in policy enforcement, executive orders, and tariff structures have eroded decades of environmental progress, creating uncertainty for cross-border environmental governance involving Canada, Mexico, and the United States. In the Indo-Pacific, similar nationalist impulses are disrupting cooperative environmental efforts, particularly within ASEAN, where member states have struggled to balance economic competitiveness with ecological and environmental protection and the effects of climate change. The resulting fragmentation of global environmental governance threatens coordinated efforts to address the implications of rising air and water pollution, waste materials, deforestation, the loss of biodiversity and climate impacts. Ironically, globalization was long criticized for promoting a "race to the bottom" in environmental standards, yet this new wave of economic nationalism risks generating an even deeper regression by dismantling shared frameworks and weakening global accountability. Confronted by an intractable superpower rivalry with dire environmental and climate consequences while being intimately connected to these powers, Canada and the ASEAN share common external and internal challenges. It is argued that Canada and the ASEAN, through cooperative policy design, shared climate adaptation strategies, regional standard setting, and trade mechanisms that reward green innovation, governments can mitigate the destructive environmental consequences of protectionist competition, aggressive extraction initiatives, and climate change impacts that will further disrupt and displace populations. With the recent normalization of relations with China, Canada can build on its positive reputation in the ASEAN and benefit from the high potential for economic growth in the region while addressing the extreme vulnerabilities faced by the region.[3]

Every year, thousands of environmental researchers and climatologists report on the devastating impacts of climate change due to our industrial and consumption activities and track the distorted funding practices of governments that continue to

[3] William Choong and Joanne Lin, "Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy: When Rhetoric Extends Beyond Reach," *Fulcrum: Analysis on Southeast Asia*, 23August 2023, https://fulcrum.sg/canadas-indo-pacific-strategy-when-rhetoric-extends-beyond-reach/.

support these destructive outcomes.[4] These reports also provide details on practices and policies that could mitigate or even reverse these trends. In marked contrast, these issues and solutions barely register among policymakers as priorities. Individual nations now confront their own immediate economic and financial growth concerns within a context of a visible return to regional power and superpower competition with the resulting disrupted trade and investment practices. Increased insecurity, both economically and militarily, now animates national discussions, rather than efforts at collaborative approaches to broad environmental and ecological alarms due to industrialization and climate change. Nationalistic policies and the realignment of security and trade partners are the main topics of the day, completely replacing past celebrations over the benefits of "free trade" in raising billions of people from around the globe out of extreme poverty. The uneven implications of these environmental and ecological crises are most evident in the deep but troubled relationship involving all the nations of the Indo-Pacific and North America as both the main contributors to the problems, e.g. greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs), as well as victims of these unfolding crises. These regions are also intimately linked through a long history of immigration, trade, investment and multiple other forms of economic, cultural and political exchanges (both positive and negative) that defy the simplistic nationalist logic of self-reliance over the benefits of mutual exchange and collaboration. The extent to which this is a shared and troubled relationship is best revealed through a Non-Traditional Security perspective, where neither ASEAN nor Canada can alter the competitive dynamic among major powers yet experience the worst effects.

The region of Southeast Asia, comprised of Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar (Burma), Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, Philippines, Singapore and Timor-Leste (East Timor), is recognized as having undergone a significant and rapid level of industrialization, transforming the region in a highly uneven manner with both positive and negative extremes. Collectively, they constitute the world's fifth-largest economy, and their 690 million people represent the third-largest population on the planet after

[4] William J. Ripple, Christopher Wolf, Michael E. Mann et al, "The 2025 State of the Climate Report: A Planet on the Brink". *Bioscience*, 75 (2025): pp. 1016–1027, https://doi.org/10.1093/biosci/biaf149. United Nations Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. "Assessing knowledge: methodological assessment of the impact and dependence of business on biodiversity and nature's contributions to people". 8 February 2026. https://www.ipbes.net/business-impact.

India and China. However, as has been observed, "the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) 5th Assessment Report (AR5) has flagged Southeast Asia as likely the region most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change,"[5] recently witnessed again with climate-fueled cyclones and monsoons that displaced 100 000s, killed over 1600 and destroyed homes and infrastructure.[6] For Canada, the financial and property losses and human costs of flooding and wildfires continue to mount, with more catastrophic events occurring on a regular basis.[7] Both suffer from the lack of meaningful planning and investment in preparedness, now made even more daunting by the rise of economic nationalism, superpower conflict and the breakdown in global governance structures that would generate the wealth to address these challenges.

The Return of Economic Nationalism

There is little doubt that the neo-liberal model of development, defined by bilateral, regional and global free trade agreements, the easier movement of goods and capital, and the privatization of state industries, released an unprecedented torrent of economic activity and growth. In response to the debt challenges, low growth, and the "lost decade of development" of the 1980s, politically this model offered the prospect for a "peace dividend" (reduced military expenditures), middle-class growth, the establishment of democratic institutions, and the spread of collaborative and innovative approaches to address pressing global issues, e.g. conflicts, disease, hunger, education. At the centre of all this economic and political potential were two features: the internet, providing an unmatched level of global communication, information, financial exchanges and a broad awareness of issues. The second was the elevation of important United Nations entities such as the World Bank, IMF and the World Trade Organization in supporting these initiatives. Recognizing the environmental impacts of this economic resurgence, "sustainability" became an important standard in advancing governance models and practices to mitigate damage with an emphasis on not compromising the

[5] Mely Caballero-Anthony, 2016, ibid.
[6] United Nations News, "Deadly storms sweep South and Southeast Asia, leaving over 1,600 dead". 4 December. 2025. https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/12/1166516
[7] Kathryn Bakos, and James K. Stewart, "It's time to address Canada's major shortfalls in climate adaptation". *Corporate Knights*. 6 April 2026. https://corporateknights.com/perspectives/guest-comment/its-time-to-address-canadas-major-shortfalls-in-climate-adaptation/?

needs of future generations.[8] However, there was always a certain inevitability to the breakdown in the neo-liberal economic order that underlay globalization and the larger rules-based Western order made possible by the dominance of the United States with the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s. As the economic benefits of globalization would increasingly be unevenly distributed both within and among nations, and as international institutions and many governments were unable to address the economic dislocations from the "offshoring" of manufacturing and the inequities that emerged, support for the neo-liberal international order dwindled.[9]

The bluntest evidence of this dynamic was revealed through the Global (but largely Trans-Atlantic) Financial Crisis that emerged in 2008, a self-inflicted crisis resulting from insufficient oversight of speculative practices within the US and European banking sectors, resulting in a financial and economic collapse not seen since the Great Depression. While the governments of the United States and Europe would devote many years to repairing their financial institutions, reviving major companies and addressing massive job losses in the public and private sectors, China would not only maintain its high rates of growth but also launch the audacious *Belt and Road Initiative* in 2013 to considerable interest from around the globe. Offering a state-driven investment model for hard infrastructure such as transportation, energy, and communication, both symbolically and tangibly China offered an investment and development model that challenged the dependence on Western-dominated financial institutions for support, e.g., the World Bank.

> From the moment the BRI was unveiled in 2013 with comparisons to the ancient Silk Road, it was clear China had sprawling ambitions …. It started off with heavy state-driven investment into hard infrastructure abroad. Most of the estimated $1tn (£820bn) has been poured into energy and transport projects, such as power plants and railways. Beijing touted this as an economic win-win - it told other countries these investments would stimulate development, while

[8] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs - Sustainable Development https://sdgs.un.org/goals.

[9] John J. Mearsheimer, "Bound to Fail: The Rise and Fall of the Liberal International Order." *International Security*, Vol. 43, 4 (Spring 2019), pp. 7–50, https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00342. G. John Ikenberry, "The end of liberal international order?" *International Affairs* 94: 1 (2018) pp. 7–23. https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iix241.

at home it sold the BRI as a way to help Chinese companies, boost the economy and burnish the country's reputation.[10]

While there have been numerous criticisms of China's *debt diplomacy* and failed implementation in various countries, "China reaped a huge economic benefit in trade. A slew of agreements brought access to more resources such as oil, gas and minerals, especially as the BRI's focus widened to include Africa, South America and the Middle East. About $19.1tn of goods were traded between China and BRI countries in the past decade".[11] These quite varied trajectories between China and the United States (and to a lesser extent Europe) would continue to be animated by increasing tensions and hostilities as China continued to demonstrate remarkable success at home and abroad. As the Lowy Institute has documented, "in 2001 more than 80 percent of economies had more two-way trade with America than with China." By 2018, "that figure was down to just above 30 percent — with 139 out of 202 economies with available data trading more with China than with the United States. That pattern has held with the latest data, which covers the full year for 2023 for 205 economies. About 70 percent of the world, or 145 economies, now trade more with China than with América."[12] In addition, "In recent years, the much more notable increase has been in the intensity of China's trade relationships. In 2023, 112 economies traded more than twice as much with China as they did with America, up from 92 in 2018. This suggests that visions of "containing" China's global influence have largely become futile.[13]

China's dominance in clean energy has attracted the most attention. "In China, 2025 saw record additions of both wind and solar capacity, and the country now manufactures over 80percent of the world's solar panels, 60 percent of wind turbines, and 75percent of EVs and batteries." [14] While celebrated by environmentalists for their leadership role in adopting and exporting these critical solutions to addressing climate

[10] Tessa Wong. "Belt and Road Initiative: Is China's trillion-dollar gamble worth it?" *BBC*, 16 October 2023 https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-67120726.
[11] Tess Wong, 2023, ibid.
[12]Roland Rajah, Ahmed Albayak. "China versus America on Global Trade – Data Snapshot," *Lowy Institute: Indo-Pacific Development Centre*, January 2025.
[13] Roland Rajah, and Ahmed Albayak, 2025, ibid. John J. Mearsheimer, 2019, ibid.
[14] Keri McNamara, Trevor Melanson, Sicellia Tsui, and Ciara Torrance. "Clean energy surges worldwide, even as U.S. policy lags," Clean Energy Canada - Clean Energy Review 2026, https://mailchi.mp/cleanenergycanada/clean-energy-review-5709671?e=74857055ad).

change, this has only exacerbated concerns in other nations over the fate of both their traditional automotive sectors and newer sectors as well. "China, the world's manufacturing powerhouse, is churning out roughly eighty-five thousand cars a day; the United States can scarcely produce a third of that number".[15] In the application of robotics, the US, with annual installations ranging from 26,200 to 40,400 units," is "in line with other leading adopters, such as South Korea, Germany, and Japan. But China installed 295,000 industrial robots in 2024, which is almost nine times more than the United States … a long-term perspective confirms the automation gap: In 2024, China had around five times more factory robots in use (2,027,200) than the US (393,700 units). This development is based on China's national robotics strategy released in December 2021, with the aim of enhancing competitiveness."[16] This expansion in 2024 represented more than the rest of the world combined. In addition, "China's global lead extends to 37 out of 44 technologies … covering a range of crucial technology fields spanning defence, space, robotics, energy, the environment, biotechnology, artificial intelligence (AI), advanced materials and key quantum technology areas."[17] This success is founded on what appears to be now an unmatched research and production structure in science and technology.[18]

As the scale and strength of China's trade and investment strategy grew and expanded across the globe, this fostered notable dependencies in a wide variety of goods and trade imbalances with the United States. Even though global US companies would become hugely profitable from their investments in Chinese manufacturing, within the United States there would be increased charges of *dumping* and *currency manipulation* by China from domestic US producers competing against Chinese goods within the US and global markets. While the two administrations of President Donald Trump are associated most with *America First*, it was the US administration of President Obama that set the

[15] Maddy Crowell, "The Plot to Save America. Inside the movement to reindustrialize – and rearm – the country," *Harper's Magazine*, March 2026, pp. 36-37.
[16] International Federation of Robotics. World Robotics 2025 Report by *International Federation of Robotics*, 25 September 2025.
[17]Jamie Gaida, Jennifer Wong-Leung, Stephan Robin and Danielle Cave ."The global race for future power. Who is leading the critical technology race?" *ASPI*. February, 2023. p. 1
[18] Shaun Narine, "Why the American technological war against China could backfire," *The Conversation*, 17 December 2023, https://theconversation.com/why-the-american-technological-war-against-china-could-backfire-219158

basis for this populist thinking in response to the financial crisis. In response to the economic damage of the financial crisis, large budgetary outlays, with a focus on infrastructure projects, were all to be sourced from materials produced within the United States to restore employment, but violating existing trade agreements. Obama's large government bailout in keeping the American auto sector from financial collapse was conditional on a large Canadian contribution or risk the loss of investment and jobs – an early version of "home-shoring" industry.[19] Preoccupied by domestic issues and ongoing conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria, relations with China remained cordial. Donald Trump's first term would build on this populist theme with *Make America Great Again*, the main difference being his externalizing the reasons for America's decline, with a focus on China, a practice that would continue under the Biden administration and reach new heights under Trump's return to office. The culmination would be Trump's "Liberation Day" (April 2, 2025) lashing out at practically all countries on the planet with unprecedented tariff levels.[20] Domestically, both the Trump and Biden administrations have held to very low corporate tax rates, sizable capital spending deductions, deficit and defence spending, and large sectoral subsidies as a way to regenerate America's manufacturing base – at the expense of all existing bilateral or international trade agreements. As Hoang Thi Ha observes, "As far as trade with the US is concerned, the multilateral trading system has ceased to exist; Southeast Asia's market access to America is thus rendered inherently conditional and persistently vulnerable."[21] In addition, deep uncertainties are generated with increased exports from China in response to Trump

[19] Kristine Owram, "A horrible, ugly, stressful process: The five-year legacy of Canada's auto bailout In total, the Canadian and Ontario governments spent US$13.7 billion to bail out GM and Chrysler. Was it worth it?" *Financial Post*.19 July 2014, https://financialpost.com/transportation/a-horrible-ugly-stressful-process-the-five-year-legacy-of-canadas-auto-bailout.

[20] Simina Mistreanu, "A timeline of US-China tit-for-tat tariffs since Trump's first term". *Associated Press News.* 10 February2025, https://apnews.com/article/china-us-tariffs-timeline-trump-xi
Barath Harithas, Kyle Meng, Evan Brown, and Catharine Mouradian, "Liberation Day" Tariffs Explained". CSIS. 3 April 2025, https://www.csis.org/analysis/liberation-day-tariffs-explained.

[21] Hoang Thi Ha, "Southeast Asia Navigates Trumpian Storms: Disruptions, Recalibrations and Adaptations." *Fulcrum: Analysis on Southeast Asia*, 10 February 2026. https://fulcrum.sg/southeast-asia-navigates-trumpian-storms-disruptions-recalibrations-and-adaptations/.

tariffs,[22] navigating individual deals with the US,[23] and the potential risks of China's response[24] - not unlike the Canadian situation in relation to these large trading partners.

The new global context is comprised of the threatening language and policies of reshoring - home-shoring, tariffs, quotas, counter-tariffs, purchase and investment guarantees, export controls, the rigid application of *rules of origin*, trade diversion, and non-tariff barriers (such as export subsidies, currency exchange controls, restrictive licenses), price supports - price guarantees, and security reviews. In addition, there are renewed efforts at domestic state ownership and long-term public financing in strategic industries. These instruments collectively have become understood as *the weaponization of trade*, which fosters investment insecurity and drives up costs for producers and consumers, with notable increases in defence spending across the Indo-Pacifica and North America at the expense of addressing other needs. These economic and *national security* concerns and costs further reduce the impetus for regulatory efforts to address environmental and climate concerns, no matter how serious, due to the higher priorities of national economic security and defence in an unpredictable trade environment.

Energy, Strategic Resources and the Environment

Between responding to (rather than addressing) the effects of climate change and the energy demand of AI and the high-tech "fourth industrial revolution"[25], there is a frenetic pace to the establishment of new energy infrastructure. Referred to as the "age of electricity,"[26] projections suggest the need for massive amounts of electrical generation far beyond our present amounts to meet the commercial and consumer demands for air

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[22] Deasy Pane, "Trump's Tariffs and China's Subsidies: Southeast Asia Caught Between a Rock and a Hard Place." *Fulcrum: Analysis on Southeast Asia*,3 October 2025. https://fulcrum.sg/trumps-tariffs-and-chinas-subsidies-southeast-asia-caught-between-a-rock-and-a-hard-place/.

[23] Hoang Thi Ha and Dien Nguyen An Luong, "Vietnam's Trump Card: Navigating Growth, Politics, and US Relations", *Fulcrum: Analysis on Southeast Asia*, 3 June 2025, https://fulcrum.sg/vietnams-trump-card-navigating-growth-politics-and-us-relations/.

[24] Olivia Tan Jia Yi. "How China Might Retaliate Against Southeast Asia's US Trade Deals," *Fulcrum: Analysis on Southeast Asia*, 27 August 2025, https://fulcrum.sg/how-china-might-retaliate-against- southeast-asias-us-trade-deals/.

[25] Katie Terrell Hanna and Ivy Wigmore, "What is the Fourth Industrial Revolution?" *TechTarget Network*. 9 June 2025, https://www.techtarget.com/whatis/definition/fourth-industrial-revolution.

[26] International Energy Agency. "World Energy Outlook.," 2024. https://www.iea.org/spotlights/the-world-is-moving-at-speed-into-the-age-of-electricity.

conditioning, heating, refrigeration, electric vehicles, electronic devices, autonomous vehicles, cloud computing, computer chips, robotics, data centres and artificial intelligence. Rising costs, shortages, and an aging infrastructure system for delivery have added to economic concerns. In response to these projected needs, debates have ended over the fossil fuels versus green energy approaches of the past, with a new consensus that fossil fuels will be part of the energy mix well into the future. This has addressed organized concerns about investment decisions, exploration and *stranded assets* in this sector. In addressing existing and future energy needs, an *anything goes* approach has been adopted, whether for coal, oil (and related fuels), natural gas, nuclear, solar, wind, geothermal, propane, hydrogen or hydroelectric production.

To this end, the United States has been very aggressive in catching up with major competitors, with President Trump, on his first day in office, announcing a National Energy Emergency,[27] and calling on all related agencies and departments to facilitate extraction. Towards the end of February 2026, he established an Energy Dominance Council and then reported that *American Energy Dominance Is Back,* with a world record in LNG exports, the opening of hundreds of millions of acres of federal lands for oil, gas, and coal production, approving over 6000 drilling permits, initiatives to revive coal and nuclear, and the largest deregulation ever, including the ending of EV mandates.[28] The effort is to bring down energy prices and match China's successful planning in energy production[29] and India's energy expansion [30], both of which have had limited regard for the Paris Agreement, where "to limit global warming to 1.5°C, greenhouse gas emissions must peak before 2025 at the latest and decline 43 percent by 2030."[31] Recent projections

[27]Government of the United States – The White House, "Declaring a National Energy Emergency," 20 January 2025. https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/declaring-a-national-energy-emergency/.
[28] Government of the United States – The White House, "American Energy Dominance Is Back Under President Trump." 24 February 2026. https://www.whitehouse.gov/articles/2026/02/american-energy-dominance-is-back-under-president-trump/.
[29] Lauri Myllyvirta and Belinda Schäpe. "China's 15th Five-Year Plan — Implications for climate and energy transition." *Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air*.6 March 2026. https://energyandcleanair.org/chinas-15th-five-year-plan-implications-for-climate-and-energy-transition/.
[30] Kevin Silverstein, "How India Is Powering 1.4 Billion People While Deploying Renewables." *Forbes*. 25 March2026. https://www.forbes.com/sites/kensilverstein/2026/03/15/how-india-is-powering-14-billion-people-while-deploying-renewables/.
[31] United Nations Climate Change, https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement.

thus suggest quite serious weather extremes from this trajectory of rising temperatures,[32] with only bright spots being recorded with the increases in the adoption of clean energy technologies and the potential for the more efficient use of fossil fuels to possibly prevent the worst-case scenario.

For Southeast Asia, the response to these rising energy needs has been the development and plans for over 100 hydroelectric power dams across the Mekong River basin involving China, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Laos (which is set to be the "battery" of Southeast Asia). The number and scale of these projects have raised grave concerns over both environmental and economic impacts, and geostrategic concerns about China's ability to control downstream outcomes without regard to the shared governance model in place.[33] Despite the low emissions upside of these projects, the energy needs of the region are dominated by both imported oil and domestic coal production.[34] Canada's resolve in this area is just as clouded in relation to clean energy. While benefiting from a large advantage in established hydro-electric power (but insufficient to address projected energy needs), the vision is to become an *energy superpower*, exporting more oil and natural gas by diversifying beyond the United States through exports to the Asia-Pacific region and Europe as a source of revenue. The domestic mix is very broad, with an emphasis on nuclear power, more hydro-electric, clean energy, natural gas and even coal. Nevertheless, existing advantages in exporting oil, gas, and hydro-electric power to the US serve to strengthen Canada's andMexico's[35] negotiating position over trade and tariffs and sustain our economies in important respects,m given the high energy demands anticipated across the US. This is an

[32] United Nations Environment Programme, "The world is likely to exceed a key global warming target soon. Now what?" 25 November 2025, https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/world-likely-exceed-key-global-warming-target-soon-now-what#.

[33] Phan Xuan Dung, "Vietnam's Response to Controversial Mekong Projects in China, Laos, and Cambodia." *Fulcrum: Analysis on Southeast Asia*. 22 May 2025. https://fulcrum.sg/vietnams-response-to-controversial-mekong-projects-in-china-laos-and-cambodia/. Lauren Mai, "Dammed if They Do, Dammed if They Don't: Southeast Asia's Hydropower Rush," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, October 29, 2025, https://www.csis.org/blogs/new-perspectives-asia/dammed-if-they-do-dammed-if-they-dont-southeast-asias-hydropower-rush.

[34] Mirza Sadaqat Huda, "Towards a Just Energy Transition in Southeast Asia," *Fulcrum: Analysis on Southeast Asia*, 13 June 2025, https://fulcrum.sg/towards-a-just-energy-transition-in-southeast-asia/.

[35] Carlos Pascual, Alejandra León and David Crisostom, "Can Mexico and the United States Take Advantage of their Energy Potential?" *Revista*, 26 June 2025, https://revista.drclas.harvard.edu/can-mexico-and-the-united-states-take-advantage-of-their-energy-potential/.

advantage not enjoyed by Southeast Asia. Combined, these initiatives across the Indo-Pacific and North America suggest minimal regard for increased emissions and the effects of climate change.

The greatest environmental and ecological concerns relate to the impacts emerging from the monumental drive for strategic minerals that are essential to what underlies the whole high-tech sector in producing consumer and defence products, and for the fourth industrial revolution.[36] Even more than China's research and manufacturing prowess, its control over strategic resources is unmatched. As the economist James Meadway observes, "It is decades of patient investment and deliberate policy that has led to China being in the dominant position across essential mineral supply chains. Chinese companies control more than 50 percent of the globe's refined copper production, with four of the world's largest smelters located inside the country," and "China is the dominant supplier of 19 out of 20 critical minerals surveyed by the International Energy Agency, commanding 90 percent of global refining capacity in some cases."[37] The ability of China to regulate global supply in this area and limit retaliatory trade actions, or punish antagonistic postures, has led to a panic among developed nations, now racing to secure alternative mineral sources and establish processing capacity."[38]

The United States has been globally the most financially aggressive in this "minerals land grab",[39] as the European Union struggles to secure a supply of "crucial raw materials" to reduce its dependence on China and the United States.[40] In Canada, various provinces have adopted *critical mineral* strategies and adopted "fast track authority" to quickly expand or begin mineral extraction, and the federal government, during the hosting of a recent G7 meeting in 2025, established a Critical Minerals

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[36] Katie Terrell Hanna, and Ivy Wigmore, "What is the Fourth Industrial Revolution?," *TechTarget Network*. 9 June 9, 2025, https://www.techtarget.com/whatis/definition/fourth-industrial-revolution.

[37] James Meadway, "The US is merely the latest to join the global rush to hoard critical minerals," *The Guardian*, 6 February 2026, https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2026/feb/16/critical-minerals-shortages-jd-vance-trading-bloc-analysis.

[38] James Meadway, 2026, ibid.

[39] Carlo Martuscelli, Frida Preub, and Jacopo Barigazz, Europe flails as US launches critical minerals land grab," *Politico*, 11 March 2026, https://www.politico.eu/article/europe-flails-as-us-launches-critical-minerals-spree/.

[40] Team 10+, "Europe fails to meet raw material target for batteries and panels," *Innovation Origins*, 3 February 2026. https://ioplus.nl/en/posts/europe-fails-to-meet-raw-material-target-for-batteries-and panels?utmsource=substack&utm_medium=email.

Production Alliance.[41] However, this significant ramping up of mineral extraction in all forms has raised concerns as to costs incurred by the large number of Developing Nations, Indigenous and rural communities potentially subject to this mineral land grab by large powers.[42] South America and Africa have garnered the most attention due to the high levels of legal and illegal mining across these continents that have resulted in a significant number of mining disasters, displaced Indigenous peoples and rural residents, deforestation, and destroyed environments, with the deaths of numerous environmental activists and land defenders – and a context that is increasingly evident across Southeast Asia and Mexico.[43] As the CEO of Global Witness has remarked, the "renewable energy boom has triggered a rush for critical minerals. But the mining industry's history of exploitation, environmental destruction and human rights abuses means this push for clean technology could quickly turn dirty."[44]

Less recognized, but more likely to drive aggressive extraction and competition, are the evolving defence applications of these strategic minerals, in which the US and its allies face significant *geostrategic vulnerabilities*. Production, processing and critical mineral supply chains are largely dominated at this time by *adversarial nations* such as China and Russia.[45] These emerging national security concerns further reduce the prospects for amicable supply agreements given the persistent risks to defence without domestic production or reliable coalition partners. They also promote what is recognized as the most problematic feature emerging – the increased need to stockpile at the expense of the needs of other nations and over any support for free trade[46]. This practice has only

[41] Government of Canada, "Critical Minerals Production Alliance," https://www.canada.ca/en/campaign/critical-minerals-in-canada/our-critical-minerals-strategic-partnerships/critical-minerals-production-alliance.html.
[42] John R. Owen, Owen, Deanna Kemp, Alex Lechner, et al, "Energy transition minerals and their intersection with land-connected peoples," *Nat Sustain*, 6, (2023): pp. 203–211, https://doi.org/10.1038/s41893-022-00994-6.
[43] Hye-Joon Lee and Valerio Loi, "Defending in Numbers." Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development, 2023, https://forum-asia.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Defending-in-Numbers-Rising-Together-Against-All-Odds-com.pdf . Global Witness. "Missing voices. The violent erasure of land and environmental defenders," 10 September 2024, https://globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/land-and-environmental-defenders/missing-voices/.
[44] Mike Davis, "Standing with the people fighting for our planet. Annual Report and Financial Statements" *Global Witness*, (2024):p. 24, https://gw.hacdn.io/media/documents/Global-Witness-Annual-Report-2024.pdf.
[45] Vlado Vivoda, Ron Matthews and Jensine Andresen, "Securing defense critical minerals: Challenges and U.S. strategic responses in an evolving geopolitical landscape," *Comparative Strategy*. (2025): pp. 281-315, https://doi.org/10.1080/01495933.2025.2456427.
[46] James Meadway, 2026, ibid.

become more salient with the U.S-Israel attacks on Iran and the closing of the Straits of Hormuz, resulting in oil, natural gas, helium, jet fuel and fertilizer shortages, in which larger powers benefit at the expense of other nations with less capacity to hoard.[47] All these various vulnerabilities are increasingly evident across Southeast Asia with the effort to secure strategic minerals by the major powers.

The "Asia-Pacific region is tremendously rich in minerals, accounting for more than half of the world's metal ore production," and within Southeast Asia, "Indonesia and the Philippines, together with Papua New Guinea, account(ed) for a staggering 82 percent of the total mineral exploration budget for the region in 2014.[48] Since then, there has been a rapid expansion in Thailand, Malaysia, Myanmar and Laos, the latter two recognized for their inability to regulate this mining activity, with serious environmental consequences across borders.[49] Even though Southeast Asia has been less visible in this mineral grab, there has been a marked increase in this area, with the same concerns rising rapidly,[50] along with the potential for larger geopolitical conflict in the region, with both China and the United States active in gaining resource advantages.[51] From a government perspective, "large-scale mining has often been justified with enticing promises of national development and local benefits-sharing arrangements," [52] but there are

[47] Elbinsar Purba, "The War Against Iran and the Fragility of Southeast Asia's Energy Responses". *Fulcrum: Analysis on Southeast Asia*. 15 April 2026. https://fulcrum.sg/the-war-against-iran-and-the-fragility-of-southeast-asias-energy-responses/. Keith Bradsher, "Natural gas stockpile cushions China from supply shock," *The Globe and Mail*, 8 April 2026, https://www.theglobeandmail.com/business/international-business/article-china-natural-gas-stockpile-middle-east-iran-war/.

[48] Pascale Hatcher and Etienne Roy Grégoire, "Territorial Control, Dispossession and Resistance: The Political Economy of Large-Scale Mining in Asia". *Routledge Handbook of Global Land and Resource Grabbing*, ed. Andreas Neef, Chanrith Ngin, Tsegaye Moreda, and Sharlene Mollett, (Routledge, 2023): 234. 2023https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003080916

[49] Mongabay, "Armed groups and junta profit as toxic mines devour southern Myanmar," *Mongabay Conservation News*, 23 April 2025, https://news.mongabay.com/2025/04/armed-groups-and-junta-profit-as-toxic-mines-devour-southern-myanmar/. Mongabay, "Rare earth mining expands into Laos, threatening entire Mekong River." *Mongabay Conservation News*, 27 October 2025, https://news.mongabay.com/2025/10/rare-earth-mining-expands-into-laos-threatening-entire-mekong-river/ .

[50] Prapimphan Chiengkul. "The Human and Environmental Costs of Critical Mineral Mining," Fulcrum: Analysis on Southeast Asia, 2 December 2025, https://fulcrum.sg/the-human-and-environmental-costs-of-critical-mineral-mining/ .

[51] Tham Siew Yean, "From Promise to Peril? The Hidden Risks in Malaysia's Mine-to-Magnet Rare Earth Push," *Fulcrum: Analysis on Southeast Asia*, 27 January 2026, https://fulcrum.sg/from-promise-to-peril-the-hidden-risks-in-malaysias-mine-to-magnet-rare-earth-push/.

[52] Hatcher, Pascale, and Etienne Roy Grégoire, 2023, ibid.

significant weaknesses in Southeast Asia in regional and national governance structures to address the impacts on communities and the environment. Even though regulations for Environmental Impact Statements are in place, "a lack of enforcement measures for meaningful public participation throughout the EIA process is a critical implementation gap. EIA regulations in 7 out of 10 Southeast Asian countries only partially require or do not require project proponents to comply with the results of public participation, undermining the processes to consider and reflect inputs and concerns raised".[53] And as has been observed, numerous governments lack any meaningful capacity to regulate mining activity across their nations, and those that do face considerable pressure from large powers and global mining corporations. From this emerges what is the largest non-traditional security threat, namely the effects of these destructive mining activities on a very large but vulnerable rural population of the region. "Less well known is that the rural population of these nations, at 333 million, is roughly half of the total population of 685 million (in 2023). The majority of this rural population is directly or indirectly involved in agriculture, and in most of Southeast Asia the agricultural sector of each country is also undergoing significant changes[54] due to aggressive industrialization.[55] In a region prone to natural disasters (storms, floods, earthquakes), subject to the worst effects of climate change, and now confronted by the implications of destructive mining practices, the destabilization and displacement of this population could lead to significant economic and political instability unless adaptation and regulatory frameworks are significantly strengthened, and environmental degradation reversed. This could be made worse to the extent that the region experiences a considerable loss of income and is unable to financially address rising unemployment related to a decline in manufacturing and other trade-exposed sectors due to trade conflicts.

The consensus on further fossil fuel production and usage and the *minerals grab* in play across the Indo-Pacific and North America, with the potential for this to expand into

[53] Dayoon Kim, Pamela Das, Nella Canales. "Advancing the right to a healthy environment in Southeast Asia: addressing implementation gaps and opportunities," *Stockholm Environment Institute*, April, 2025.
[54] Perkins Dwight H., "Foreword," In *Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security in Southeast Asia*, edited by Rajah Rasiah, Anter Venus, and Nur Annizah Ishak, Springer Nature: Sustainable Development Goals Series, 2025.
[55] ASEAN Secretariat, "Sixth ASEAN State of the Environment Report," September, 2023, https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Sixth-ASEAN-State-of-the-Environment-Report-SOER6_20240517_COMPRESSED.pdf.

offshore mineral mining,[56] establishes the context for an unprecedented level of extraction, environmental damage and emissions.[57] The larger significance of this "minerals grab," though, relates to the lost potential for cooperation and collaboration in responding to these challenges, as the efforts at trading blocs are the "final exotic, nail in the coffin of the old global trading system. The era of mass abundance, as supplied by unfettered free trade and global markets – "neoliberalism" – is over."[58] The language of shortages is now dominant, in which the "rush to hoard precious metals is not the action of states secure in the knowledge that a vast, globalised market will always be ready to supply whatever is needed. This is what states do when they realise resource pressures are real – and other states have an incentive to carve them out …. It's a world of state versus state competition, on behalf of their national businesses." Capturing these combined environmental, climate change and geo-political challenges, Meadway further argues that "we live in a new world of strategic competition between states over scarce but essential resources, with shocks to supplies from human activity and natural disasters an ever-present risk. This means recalibrating how we think about our economy: the new economic fundamentals today are resource constraints and climate and nature crises, and these, rather than human activity, will increasingly shape the world we inhabit." This bleak assessment captures the prevailing mood in which we have seen a concerted effort to shore up what national strengths we have through the disregard of environmental issues and emission controls to ensure economic security and advantage. As has been observed, though, this effort to *out-compete* China's dominance by creating an alternative

[56] Mary McColm, "Beneath the Surface: The Geopolitical Implications of Shifting Deep Sea Mining Regulation," *Harvard International Review*. 8 October 2025, https://hir.harvard.edu/beneath-the-surface-the-geopolitical-implications-of-shifting-deep-sea-mining-regulation/. Leonardo Macelloni. "Mining the ocean floor: 5 deep-sea sources of critical minerals essential to technology, and the fragile marine life at risk," *The Conversation*,10 March 2026. https://theconversation.com/mining-the-ocean-floor-5-deep-sea-sources-of-critical-minerals-essential-to-technology-and-the-fragile-marine-life-at-risk-275804.
https://hir.harvard.edu/beneath-the-surface-the-geopolitical-implications-of-shifting-deep-sea-mining-regulation/."

[57] International Energy Agency, "Sustainable and responsible development of minerals,"2021. https://www.iea.org/reports/the-role-of-critical-minerals-in-clean-energy-transitions/sustainable-and-responsible-development-of-minerals.

[58] James Meadway, 2026, ibid.

supply chain seems "improbable.".[59]The complex linkages in place between global and national mining corporations, private and public financing, and the varied relationship with numerous governments across the globe suggests only greater economic disruption and uncertainty if aggressively pursued. Whether these practical considerations may become evident remains to be seen, but the negative implications of this competition continue to unfold for Canada and Southeast Asia.

Canada and the ASEAN

The ASEAN and Canada face significant challenges in responding to a superpower rivalry that not only creates insecurity by disrupting trade and investment but seeks advantage by pursuing "one-on-one" national agreements[60] that undermine regional agreements and governance structures that may serve to reinforce these regional partners. Both Canada and ASEAN are recognized for their fragmented governance structures, where either the provinces in Canada or the member states of ASEAN have been notorious for pursuing their own agendas at the expense of the potential benefits from collaborating across borders. However, it is widely recognized that a new context has emerged in which domestic economic security can only be achieved by opening cross-border exchanges and collaborating on infrastructure initiatives, as the costs of these differences and barriers can no longer be afforded. Canada can play a strong role in ASEAN by supporting this agenda, ensuring its own trade diversification needs while benefiting from and fostering the growth necessary across Southeast Asia to ensure political stability.

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[59] Craig Anthony Johnson. "Why the U.S. is unlikely to curtail China's critical minerals dominance," *The Conversation*, 3 March 2026, https://theconversation.com/why-the-u-s-is-unlikely-to-curtail-chinas-critical-minerals-dominance-275416.

[60] Radityo Dharmaputra, "Indonesia's 'In-Between' Foreign Policy," Fulcrum: Analysis on Southeast Asia, 16 April 2026, https://fulcrum.sg/indonesias-in-between-foreign-policy/ . Tham Siew Yean. "Malaysia-US Agreement on Reciprocal Tariffs: Calm Before Another Storm?" *Fulcrum: Analysis on Southeast Asia*, 17 April 2026, https://fulcrum.sg/malaysia-us-agreement-on-reciprocal-tariffs-calm-before-another-storm/. Mara Cepeda. "US wants an industrial hub in Luzon. Will this push Philippines up the supply chain?" *The Straits Times*, 17 April 2026. https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/the-us-wants-an-industrial-hub-in-the-philippines-what-does-it-mean-for-supply-chains. Mark Rendell, "Canada and Mexico on different paths heading into USMCA crunch time". The *Globe and Mail*. 1 April 2026. https://www.theglobeandmail.com/business/article-canada-mexico-usmca-review-date-trade-talks/.

At a surface level, Canada and ASEAN share similar broad concerns with the second Trump administration overturning "long-standing pillars of US foreign policy, slashing aid, weaponizing tariffs, and dismantling multilateral and normative commitments." [61] And where Canada and Southeast Asia share *deep ties to the US economically, strategically, and developmentally* – the reality is that Southeast Asia is much more vulnerable. While Canada was hit with sectoral tariffs in areas important to US home-shoring (auto industry, steel, aluminum, wood products), most of our trade with the US remains free of tariffs. As the economist John Rapley has observed, Canada has enjoyed peace for almost free being under the US security umbrella, and easy access to the world's biggest market.

> Rich in resources that the industrial economy to the south required, we didn't need to spend as much building new industries or maintaining industrial competitiveness. We just pulled stuff from the ground and sent it south; what manufactured exports we sold to the US were made largely within that country's industrial sector. So, Canadians, with minimal effort, attained a standard of living that other countries had to make greater sacrifices to reach. In effect, Canada got to be a rich Third World country – or rather, it got the benefits of being a 51st state without any of the attendant expenses.[62]

The numerous economic limitations we confront are largely self-inflicted, ranging from a lack of federal-provincial coordination and planning, internal trade barriers, monopolies with perennial low spending on R&D, to decades of underfunding in infrastructure (ports, roads, transportation), research and innovative companies, affordable housing and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. And while there have been job losses and uncertainty due to the Trump administration, negotiations continue with the US and Mexico given the deep economic connections among these three nations, whereas the nations of Southeast Asia were subject to differing and often humiliating terms to lower punishing tariff rates to ensure some measure of competitive access to the US market. It is recognized in ASEAN that the aggressive adoption of the terms of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), which created the largest trade

[61] Hoang Thi Ha, 2026, ibid.
[62] John Rapley. "Venezuela attack shakes Canada's economy far beyond oil – it's a reckoning for the ages". *The Globe and Mail*, 9 January 2026.

bloc on the planet in 2020, would mitigate the damaging effects of the US tariffs.[63] If supported by cross-border infrastructure investment in a variety of critical areas, e.g. energy, the region could continue to enjoy significant yearly economic growth rates[64] - a context not dissimilar toCanada[65] with significant opportunities for both Canada and the ASEAN.

For the ASEAN, along with the costs of tariffs and investment uncertainty, and the numerous challenges documented earlier, the region is placed in a very difficult and precarious position, subject to the fallout from an increasingly hostile conflict between an old and a new superpower (despite the claims of a multi-polar order).[66] However, China's emergence as an economic superpower comes with weak soft power skills, where the US, as the superpower, has a rapidly declining interest in *soft power* (or, as Samantha Power observes, is committing "soft suicide).[67] This creates an opportunity for Canada in Southeast Asia, as "there will also be more diplomatic space for institutional entrepreneurialism to address transnational challenges. New plurilateral groupings of like-minded countries will have more room to develop."[68] In addition, for Canada to meet the challenge of "America First,"it is suggested that"it will have to adopt a more expansive diplomatic presence, working with like-minded partners to maintain what remains of the multilateral order, coupling that to an expanded foreign aid program to cement ties."[69] Canada's advantage in wealth, with trillions of dollars in banks, pensions and equity funds, and a more secure relationship with the US. going forward, places our

[63] Neville Lai Yunshek. "RCEP: How will this trade agreement shape the future of multilateralism?" *World Economic Forum*, 25 March 2025, https://www.weforum.org/stories/2025/03/rcep-how-will-this-trade-agreement-shape-multilateralism/.
[64] Manu Bhaskaran. "Southeast Asia: Coping with a Challenging Trade Order,"editors edited by Terence Chong and Daljit Singh, *Southeast Asian Affairs* (2025): pp. 34-48. East Asian Bureau of Economic Research, "Impacts and responses to a global trade war: The benefits of a multilateral ASEAN response," *Analysis for ASEAN*, July, 2025.
[65] Federico J. Díez and Yuanchen Yang, "IMF Country Focus: Canada Can Grow Faster by Unlocking Its Own Market." 27 January 2026, https://www.imf.org/en/news/articles/2026/01/27/cf-canada-can-grow-faster-by-unlocking-its-own-market.
[66] Ryan Hass, "Pax Americana Is Over: What Comes Next and How Will It Impact Southeast Asia?" *Fulcrum: Analysis on Southeast Asia*, 27 November 2025, https://fulcrum.sg/pax-americana-is-over-what-comes-next-and-how-will-it-impact-southeast-asia/
[67] Samantha Power, "Samantha on the New Global Order," *BBC*, 10 March 2026.
[68] Ryan Hass, 2025, ibid.
[69] John Rapley, 2026, ibid.

government in a strong position to work directly with ASEAN in filling the gaps in aid and assistance to address critical limitations left by the withdrawal of the US, while strengthening the effectiveness of governance within ASEAN, expanding trade opportunities and responses to the implications of climate change. In addition to the conclusion of a free trade agreement, the adoption of a Plan of Action to implement the ASEAN-Canada Strategic Partnership (2026-2030) establishes the bases for deeper and broader forms of collaboration, as the "two initiatives will help to better anchor Canada as a reliable partner in ASEAN in areas of mutual benefit, including food security, energy resilience, and the green transition."[70] And while Canada has consistently been viewed as of low strategic relevance to the ASEAN member states, the US – Iran war has lifted Canada's potential as a supplier of essential fuels, fertilisers and food for the region given the impacts and vulnerabilities revealed by this conflict. However, despite initial meetings on critical minerals and energy resilience with the ASEAN, the sense is that Canada (government and business) must engage with national and business sectors more directly to understand, support and benefit from the varied needs across Southeast Asia.[71] Thus, currently there are opportunities to address more immediate challenges, but larger issues of climate change, e.g. emissions reductions, and the environment will require longer-term exploration of mutual benefits as both regions confront limitations arising from geopolitical tensions among larger powers.

In contrast to Canada, within ASEAN, climate change and extreme weather events remain Southeast Asia's top challenges in 2026 among those who inform or influence public policies, "signalling a heightened public awareness of its economic, social, and environmental repercussions."[72] However, their ability to focus on these concerns has been severely constrained due to the US tariffs and the US – Iran war. Confronted with an agri-food system "hobbled by reduced planting, diminished fishery catches, and rising prices along the value chain"[73] (and why the Trump administration is the second-ranked

[70] Kristina Fong Siew Leng, "ASEAN and Canada: Building Bridges with the Great White North," *Fulcrum: Analysis on Southeast Asia*, 4 August 2026. https://fulcrum.sg/asean-and-canada-building-bridges-with-the-great-white-north/

[71] Kristina Fong Siew Leng, 2026, ibid.

[72] Joanne Lin, et al., "The State of Southeast Asia: 2026 Survey Report," *ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute*, April, 2026.

[73] Elyssa Kaur Ludher, and Paul Teng, "One Shock Too Many: Why Southeast Asia's El Niño Response Must Be Different," *Fulcrum: Analysis on Southeast Asia*, 3 August 3, 2026, https://fulcrum.sg/one-shock-too-many-why-southeast-asias-el-nino-response-must-be-different/.

challenge), the region also faces the potential effects of a "super" El Niño weather phenomenon in 2026-27. This could severely affect food production, further raising prices and extending food insecurity into 2028. With varying capacities of each member state to address it, social unrest and threats to political stability have increased as potential issues. In Canada, economic issues prevail over environmental or climate change concerns,[74] with strong public support for governments to focus on infrastructure investment, e.g. pipelines, ports, oil and mineral extraction, and securing external investment in response to ongoing trade and investment challenges with the United States.[75] While Canada has not as aggressively and openly undermined environmental agencies as the Trump administration has, [76] the federal government has diminished environmental considerations in advancing infrastructure projects,[77] and cut budgets to labs and staff engaged in environment and climate research.[78] And while there are no concerns over "political instability" as per the ASEAN, there are serious risks to disregarding environmental and climate change impacts posed by unresolved treaty and land issues and the increasing toll of wildfire activity across Canada (that disproportionately affects First Nations communities).[79] Indigenous issues and Reconciliation may rank extremely low in public opinion in importance, but the legal recourse, organizational abilities and media visibility now possessed by First Nations communities will continue to increase. This provides important environmental oversight and may restrict proposed extractive

[74] Angus Reid Institute, "Top Issues," August, 2026, https://angusreid.org/top-issues/.
[75] Tzeporah Berman. "Canada is drifting toward petrostate politics, even in B.C.," *The Globe and Mail*. April 10, 2026. Tzeporah Berman, "With a new oil pipeline, Canadians are being asked to make a bet on the past." *The Globe and Mail*, 6 August 2026.
[76] Kling, Catherine L., Stephen Polasky, and Kathleen Segerson. 2025. "Changes in US Environmental Policy Under the Trump Administration: An Economic Perspective". *Environmental and Resource Economics*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10640-025-01025-6
[77] Radwanski, Adam. "Carney's dealmaker. Companies seeking government funding or fast-tracking must make their case to the blunt former investment banker, who has little interest in partisanship or policy debates". *The Globe and Mai20 l*. December, 2025.
[78] Roxana Suehring, and Patricia Hania, "Budget cuts at Environment and Climate Change Canada threaten Arctic science", *The Conversation*, 8 March 2026, https://theconversation.com/budget-cuts-at-environment-and-climate-change-canada-threaten-arctic-science-276606. Jean-François Venne "Federal science cuts may have ripple effect on universities," *University Affairs*, 11 March 2026. https://universityaffairs.ca/news/federal-science-cuts-may-have-ripple-effect-on-universities/
[79] Government of Canada, "Rapid Review: An intersectional analysis of the disproportionate health impacts of wildfires on diverse populations and communities," https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/healthy-living/rapid-review-intersectional-analysis-disproportionate-impacts-wildfires-diverse-populations-communities.html.

activities unless their concerns are addressed. In addition, a largely reactive and fragmented response to longer and more destructive wildfire seasons has had only broader catastrophic effects on more communities, e.g. mass evacuations, property and infrastructure destruction, air quality alerts. "Three consecutive record-breaking wildfire seasons—2023, 2024 and 2025—have demonstrated that climate change is accelerating fire behaviour beyond the capacity of existing systems. Wildfires are now a crisis."[80] As in ASEAN, our ability to reverse the visible and escalating effects of climate change and extreme weather, whether alone or with ASEAN, is minimal but increasingly represents the most serious non-traditional threats confronted by these nations when the prospects for collective global resolve to reduce emissions remain faint

Conclusion

As this analysis has demonstrated, the number of nontraditional security threats has significantly increased. The new context of economic nationalism has introduced novel and unexpected threats beyond climate change and financial stability, including weaponized trade practices, AI and the fourth industrial revolution, energy and resource insecurities and aggressive extraction with both traditional and nontraditional security implications. Given the regional power/superpower competition with little regard to the impacts of climate change or environmental damage, where even adaptation is an imperative but limited by more pressing priorities in establishing some degree of economic security among Middle Powers. Economically and morally, there is a strong case for a Canada-ASEAN relationship to address immediate and long-term challenges confronted by Southeast Asia. Whether the futility of the prevailing tactics among the dominant powers will become evident remains to be seen, but there is little doubt that regional alliances are the only way to bring pressing issues to the fore. With wildfires and droughts across the western United States and Canada, record-breaking heat, unprecedented wildfires and droughts across western and eastern Europe negatively impacting agriculture, inland shipping, and critical infrastructure,[81] and extreme weather

[80] Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, "Canada on Fire: The catastrophic and escalating effects on lives and communities. *Senate Canada*, June, 2026.

[81] European Commission – Joint Research Centre, "Worsening drought and record heat grip Europe, fueling extraordinary wildfires and extremely low river flows," 12 August 2026, https://joint-research-

events in Southeast Asia[82] – perhaps we are nearing the tipping point that will initiate the collaboration needed to remedy the costly implications of our detrimental practices related to increased emissions and climate change. One also suspects, though, that the super-power / regional power rivalries in place preclude the likelihood of conceding to China's manufacturing and trade advantages accrued in this area any time soon, making national-level adaptation in many areas a pressing imperative over the ability to address the root problem.

centre.ec.europa.eu/jrc-news-and-updates/worsening-drought-and-record-heat-grip-europe-fuelling-extraordinary-wildfires-and-extremely-low-2026-08-12_en

[82] BBC News, "Three storms strike Asia in a week battering millions with heavy rain and strong winds." 11 August 2026, https://www.bbc.com/news/live/c68xnykwrnvgt

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