

# Sustainable Development Goals Weaponized by the West to Ensure Its Hegemony

By [Uriel Araujo](#)

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Theme: [Environment](#), [Global Economy](#), [Oil and Energy](#)

*Much is talked about the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs), part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which was adopted by all United Nations (UN) members in 2015, integrating environmental, social and governance topics. Sustainability is a core concept here - and such is increasingly becoming a controversial topic, sometimes associated with "[climate colonialism](#)". One could even talk about a "sustainability fatigue". Even Brazil's president **Lula da Silva** has famously accused the European Union (EU) of disguising protectionist initiatives under an environmental agenda. Within the nationalist and state-developmental camp (especially in the Global South, formerly known as the Third World), there often is a perception that all environmental discourse and topics amount to merely a veil over neo-colonialist interests.*

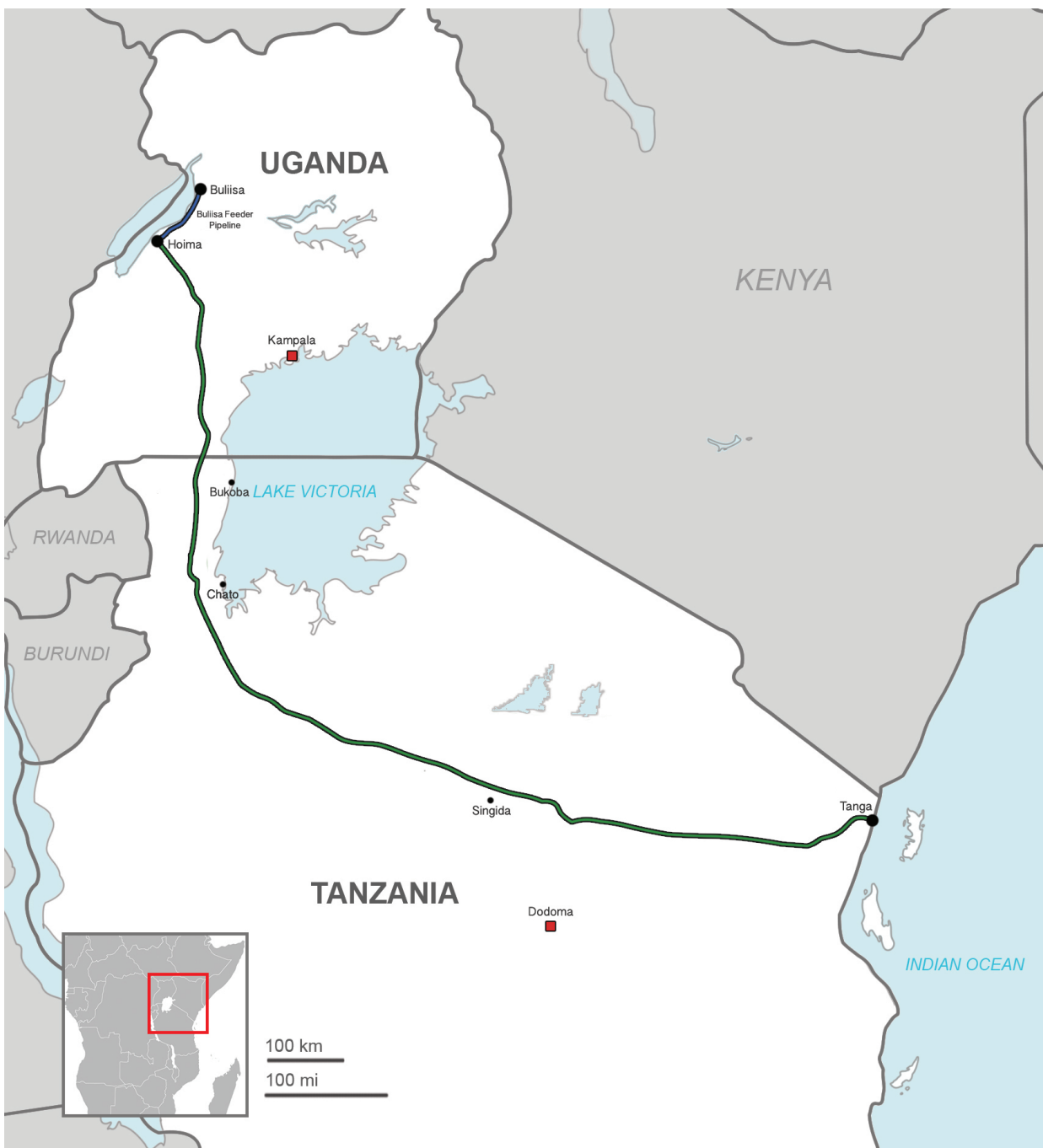
It has always been a great challenge to reconcile, on the one hand, national industrial and developmental needs and, on the other hand, environmental concerns. Such is a complex balancing, involving intricate technical issues. The environmental problems in any case are matters of greatest importance to the future (and present) of mankind. There is no denying that the rising levels of pollution and deforestation, among other concerns, need to be dealt with in an efficient manner. It is also true, however, that at the same time the so-called environmental agenda is weaponized by great powers. There really is a false dilemma at play here: true facts can also be used for propaganda. The burning forests and poisoned rivers (and their effects) are real and so is the weaponization of environmentalism and sustainability and the double standard about it.

The logic of it is quite similar to that behind the weaponization of human rights (or of diversity and wokeism, for that matter). For example, there may indeed be concerns about the way China deals with political-religious extremism and the related domestic security issues (an Eurasian [transnational problem](#)). Some Chinese initiatives to fight Islamic extremism are indeed controversial: the "Vocational Education and Training Centers" have been described by critics as "concentration camps". In any case, Washington highlights the matter (often in a hyperbolic and distorted manner) while aiming to engage Muslim-majority nations and their civil societies to urge their leaders to cut down on trade with Beijing, thereby reducing the flow of oil to the Asian superpower - the goal being, among other things, to have South Asian countries block Chinese low-interest infrastructure projects. These very projects, ironically, can contribute to achieving SDGs in the region.

The American humanitarian concern can only be described as hypocrisy if one is aware of the fact that the United States, as the Human Rights Watch (HRW) [reports](#), for more than two decades has made use of the so-called "[indefinite detention](#)", and has been imprisoning (without due process of law) and torturing thousands of adults and minors (mostly Muslims), who are kept in places like Guantanamo Bay or in CIA "black sites" and [secret prisons](#) in

[more than 50 countries](#) worldwide.

Back to the environmental issue, one can see, time and time again, the same kind of hypocrisy and double-standard. Various African energy projects, as I [wrote](#) a couple of years ago, have been repeatedly opposed by the US-led West. In September 2022, for instance, the EU Parliament passed a resolution stating that the Tanzania's and Uganda's East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) project poses "social and environmental risks." The European Parliament thereby advised its member states not to support (either diplomatically or financially) Uganda's oil and gas projects. Uganda's Deputy Speaker of Parliament **Thomas Tayebwa** reacted to that by describing the European resolution as the "highest level of neocolonialism and imperialism" against Uganda's and Tanzania's sovereignty. Bear in mind that the whole continent of Africa in 2020 accounted for merely 3.8% of the world CO2 emissions from industry and fossil fuels.

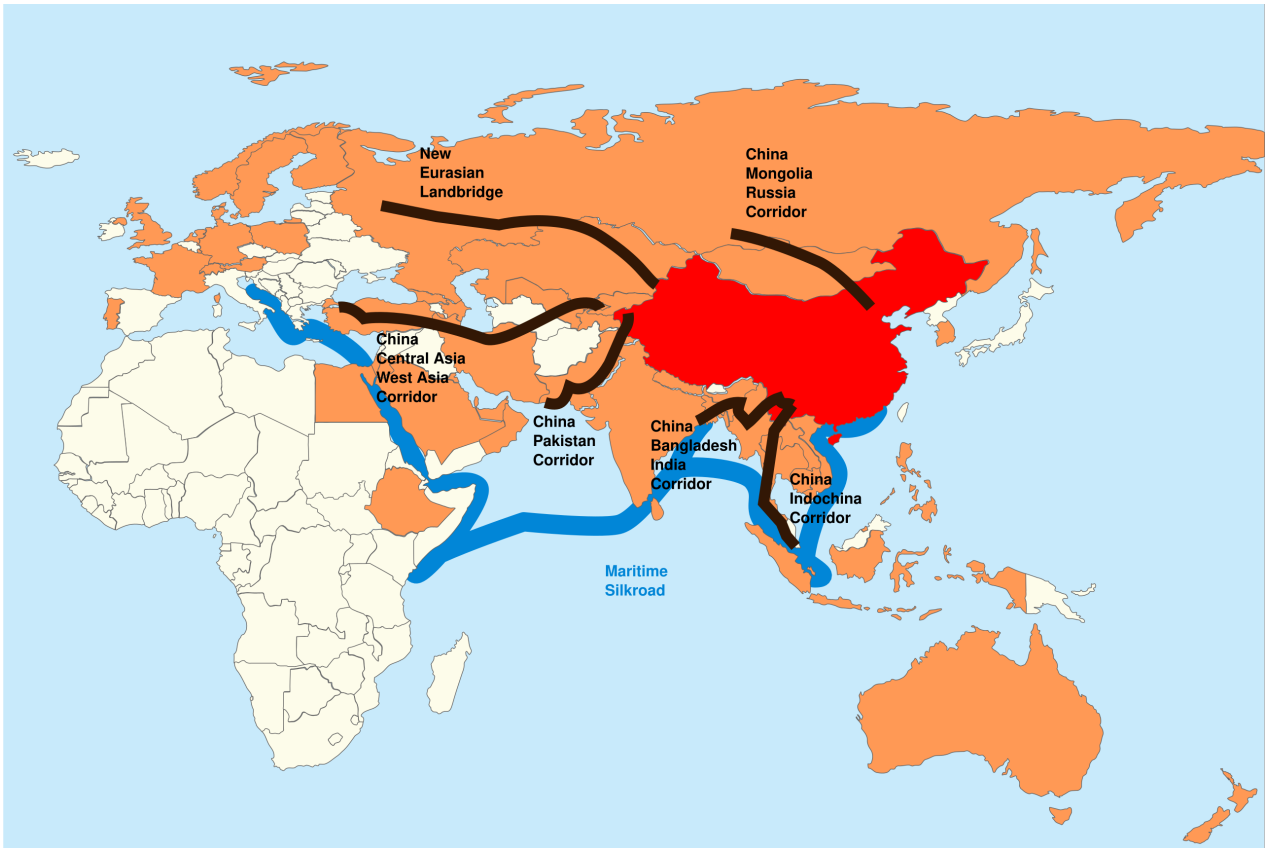


The most blatant instance of the US weaponizing environmental agendas lies, as I [wrote](#) before, in the very way it seeks water hegemony through a number of initiatives framed in the language of climate concerns. Biden's Washington exerts pressure on Brazil on the matter of the Amazon while [endorsing Ford F-150](#), an electric truck that damages the Amazon river (the aluminum used poisons the waters).

Such game goes even beyond the scope of the "Global South", sometimes being weaponized by the United States against transatlantic allies (who, mind you, are also the target of a [subsidy war](#)): for instance, in 2022, **John Kerry**, who then was the American "Climate Czar", that is Biden's special presidential envoy for climate, warned investors against funding a Nigeria-Morocco gas pipeline project which could benefit Africa and also Europe. The way Washington has [played](#) the [European energy crisis](#) in the last years, by the way, is key to understanding the current conflict in Ukraine. In fact, American geoeconomic and [private](#) and even [shady](#) interests about [gas](#), energy and resources play an important role in the ongoing Ukrainian crisis - in addition to Washington-led NATO [geopolitical goals](#) pertaining to encircling Russia. But that is another topic.

Managing natural resources and water access is one of the great challenges of the 21st century, and various disputes and conflicts can be expected to emerge over such issues, both on the intra-national and international level. Unfortunately, one can also expect environmental rhetoric to be increasingly used as a tool by a superpower such as the United States.

But the SDG are not necessarily "the enemy", even from the perspective of the East or the Global South. Hannah McNicol, a University of Melbourne doctoral researcher, [argues](#) that China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in fact largely converges with the SDGs, with the former adopting the latter's framework. Thus, according to McNicol, "the SDGs are materially achieved via BRI economic and infrastructure policies."



China in Red, the members of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank in orange. The proposed corridors and in black (Land Silk Road), and blue (Maritime Silk Road). (Licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0)

Discussions about the SDGs usually emphasize the environmental angle (clean water, clean energy) or sometimes the gender angle, however the SDGs encompass industry and infrastructure as well as the fight against poverty. There is no way to achieve any of that without responsible and consistent [re-industrialization](#) - no matter how much is talked about the supposed “post-industrial” world today. No developing or emerging nation should be shy about seeking industrial power while even the West struggles to overcome deindustrialization. It is precisely because manufacturing/industrialization matters so much that it has become the target of economic warfare - which is often framed in the language of sustainability and environmental concerns. It is just part of the game.

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