BACKSEAT DRIVER: THE UNITED STATES AND ITS ROLE IN GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL INITIATIVES

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role that American presidency has played in the shaping of U.S. environmental policy over the past two decades, namely in major global initiatives such as the Montreal Protocol, the Earth Summit, and the Kyoto Protocol. It employs the presidential role theories that are directly related to global policy making, such as the party leader and the chief diplomat theories. An emphasis is given to the analysis of the power relationship between the U.S. President and other chief actors, namely the United States’ Congress and special interest groups. It seeks to illustrate how the power play between the executive branch and the legislative branch impacts effective or ineffective policy making. Democratic and Republican Presidents are compared with regard to their willingness to work with the legislative branch. The paper pays particular attention to Presidential leadership and effectiveness with in regard to international cooperation on global environmental initiatives and policy making.

The paper’s central argument is that when the U.S. has proactive environmental leadership from its chief actors, it strengthens the multilateral efforts to address global environmental policy. Inversely, when leadership takes a back seat we will find multilateral efforts weakened. It also illustrates how domestic as well as foreign political factors play a role in shaping U.S. global environmental policy.
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INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the issue of global climate change has increased in importance in international politics. The United States, a seemingly pivotal figure in all global affairs, has at times taken a back seat in multilateral efforts to promote environmental protection. What factors account for the United States’ policy stance regarding problems related to global climate change?

It has been said that in order for the United States to achieve environmental progress on the world stage, it must first overcome its foreign policy differences with other nations and pursue international cooperation. This is a point made repeatedly in Oran Young’s book *Global Governance: Drawing Insights from the Environmental Experience*. Young raises the issue of the potentially adverse global consequences imposed on one party by the action or inaction of another. According to Young, the lack of action by leaders in the United States government to cooperate with foreign governments has lead to dire environmental consequences.\(^1\) Similarly, Ronald Paarlberg’s *The Global Environment: Institutions, Law, and Policy* points out that global environmental policymaking can be depicted as an international cooperation problem. According to Paarlberg, the greatest barriers to successful environmental policymaking are presumed to be differences between governments abroad, not differences within governments at home.\(^2\)

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\(^2\)
An alternative view of how the U.S. can become a more useful player in the battle against global climate change focuses on improving U.S. domestic interests rather than its foreign policy interests. This view is detailed in Elizabeth DeSombre’s *Domestic Sources of International Policy: Industry, Environmentalists, and U.S. Power*. DeSombre argues that effective environmental action will be taken by the U.S. when domestic leaders find themselves with a similar goal to that of environmentalists. This occurs when we increase the number of states subject to the type of environmental regulation already imposed by the U.S. on its domestic actors.  

Additionally, Petra Holtrup’s *The Uncertain Superpower: Domestic Dimensions of U.S. Foreign Policy after the Cold War* points out that domestic politics is the key factor in explaining why the United States offers or fails to offer leadership regarding global environmental policy. In this view, domestic factors rather than interstate relations play a critical role in U.S. international environmental policymaking.

Over the last three decades, the U.S. President has played a pivotal role in global environmental policy making and at times the lack thereof. As a key player in international affairs, the U.S. is expected to foster remedies and encourage cooperation in addressing threats to the global community. The following chapters will demonstrate that

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when the U.S. has proactive leadership from its president, it strengthens the multilateral efforts to address global environmental policy. Conversely, multilateral efforts become diminished at times of weak U.S. presidential leadership.
CHAPTER 1

BIRTH OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS

The problem of ozone depletion first caught the attention of the American public in 1974. Scientists F. Sherwood Rowland and Mario J. Molina of the University of California in Davis discovered the catastrophic link between the chlorine in Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) used in many commercial products such as aerosol cans and air conditioners, and the depletion of ozone in the stratosphere.1 Thinning of the ozone layer allows greater penetration of UV rays, which could pose serious threats to humans and the environment, such as a dramatic increase in the occurrence of skin cancer.2 Their report spurred action by the American public and government, as well as other nations.3

The American public responded in earnest to the media reports, and by 1978 “the US market for spray cans had fallen by nearly two-thirds because American consumers were acting on their environmental concerns.”4 A health conscience U.S. saw the potential risks of cancer as wake-up call, thus making the American public ready and willing to buy products absent of CFCs.5 The U.S. Clean Air Act (CAA) was amended in 1977, with the stratospheric ozone protection amendment, allowing EPA officials to state the following:

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5 Ibid., 31.
Regulate any substance...which in his judgment may reasonably be anticipated to affect the stratosphere, especially ozone in the stratosphere, if such effect may reasonably be anticipated to endanger public health or welfare. This legal authority attempted to balance the scientific uncertainties with the risks of inaction. And it opted for a low threshold at which to justify governmental measures to confront dangers to the stratosphere.\(^6\)

Using this amendment, in 1978 a national ban on CFCs in aerosol cans was passed.\(^7\) This national ban was hugely popular, and swiftly passed through Congress with significant bi-partisan support.\(^8\) The successful implementation of this ban and the laudatory media coverage gave the largely North American public the impression that the problem was solved. The discovery of the ozone hole over Antarctica in 1985 by members of the British Antarctic Survey’s Meteorological and Ozone Monitoring Unit (MOMU) came as a surprise that spurred further action.\(^9\) Because of this discovery, U.S. NASA scientists in 1985 analyzed their satellite data and found that the whole of the Antarctic was affected. The renewed scientific and public focus increased to a point that gained the attention of the Reagan Administration.\(^10\)

The 1985 discovery redoubled scientific interest in ozone research. Reagan’s EPA Administrator Lee Thomas’ and his team of scientists took up the task of collecting

\(^6\) Ibid., 23.
\(^7\) Ibid., 27.
knowledge on ozone with a vigorous program of research. The sheer amount and scope of the scientific evidence collected, with the help of scientists from other nations, were instrumental in convincing skeptics in America and building an international coalition of parties willing to stop the thinning of the ozone layer.\textsuperscript{11}

While the direct link between human production of CFCs and the existence of the ozone hole was not confirmed, and the specific chemicals that cause the depletion, as well as perfect substitute chemicals, were not yet known, the scientific community stood in firm agreement that the general production of CFCs was capable of causing dangerous ozone depletion that was already increasing the occurrence of skin cancer around the globe. Formal negotiations for an international treaty on ozone-depleting substances (ODS), including CFCs, began. Because the ozone issue dealt with issues of health, most members of Congress saw this as a non-partisan issue. This solidarity was effectively shared with the American public and government. During the early 1980s, the U.S. set the strategy for reaching an international agreement this issue; along with Canada, Finland, Norway, and Sweden.\textsuperscript{12}

\textbf{The American Realization of an Environmental Problem}

The American mass media described a general scientific consensus about ozone-depleting substances and an imperative for action. This message was given to the American public starting again in 1985, and there was close coverage of the Montreal negotiations once they began in 1986. Newspaper and magazine articles in popular

\textsuperscript{11} Benedick, \textit{Ozone Diplomacy}, 28-29.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 31.
publications including *Time* and *Sports Illustrated* were written, press conferences were widely played on the television, televised lectures and discussions were utilized, as well as public education programs. An article by Robert Boyle in *Sports Illustrated*, a publication which had nothing to do with policy issues, warned its sports readers of the potential disaster of CFC use. “This is an issue as important as National Defense,” warned Boyle. In addition, U.S. classrooms across the country educated children about the harmful effects of ozone-depletion. With attention on this issue at an all-time high, the American public reached the same conclusions as ozone scientists, and let their legislators know.

The science was explained to U.S. legislators over and over again. EPA scientists held congressional briefings and Congress called their own debates and hearings on the topic repeatedly, keeping it at the forefront of the congressional agenda. Congress was included in the formation of the U.S. position and strategy for negotiation and members of Congress regularly observed the negotiation process throughout, providing a key link between the negotiations abroad and the Congress at home. The State Department observed the strong bipartisan support of the Montreal Protocol by Congress and used it to try to persuade the Reagan Administration of the treaty’s wide public appeal.

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14 Ibid., 12.

15 Ibid., 6.

16 Ibid., 57.

17 Ibid., 66.
Congress tried to convince the Administration to take a supportive role in negotiating the agreement and the Senate eventually unanimously voted to ratify the treaty.\footnote{Paul Harris, \textit{Climate Change and American Foreign Policy} (London: Macmillan Press Limited, 2000), 99.}

With an educated American public and legislature, increased pressure was applied for the development of new regulations and on ODS-producing corporations to take voluntary action. The companies supported further research on ODS because they “needed to know whether their activities could be dangerous, even if the eventual truth were to be unpleasant” and so cooperated somewhat with the international data-collection effort, which was now being compiled Canada as well as European countries such as England, France, and Germany.\footnote{Benedick, \textit{Ozone Diplomacy}, 46.} These companies were afraid of public backlash over harm they had already caused the ozone layer and of regulatory action below the international level. With the “threat of a patchwork of varying state regulations” many U.S. producers supported uniform federal regulations, and indeed eventually backed the international agreement struck at Montreal. The reason the producers agreed to uniform regulations was because this would limit any costs incurred, since they would be shared proportionally.\footnote{Ibid., 48.} Companies such as Du Pont, Allied, and Pennwalt had voluntarily acted before the 1978 ban on CFC aerosols, benefiting from their more economical substitutes, and carried this experience into the 1980’s.\footnote{Ibid., 41.} More importantly the American
corporations saw the advantage in international firms being subject to the same sorts of restrictions they were.

Interestingly, although some business circles had originally encouraged those US officials attempting to modify the US position and delay any treaty, at the critical moment major industry representatives declined to support them. Pragmatic industry execs traditionally paid more attention to the science and to public opinion than did those politicians and bureaucrats who opposed governmental regulation as a matter of principle. Besides, industry feared that a breakdown in the international negotiations might provoke a US domestic political backlash that could lead to even more draconian controls. In the final analysis, industry preferred to face a stronger treaty, which would at least bind its foreign competitors, than unilateral US controls with no treaty.22

A year before the signing of the treaty the Alliance for Responsible CFC Policy, an organization of around 500 companies involved in the production and use of CFCs, became the first industry representative to endorse the agreement.23 With this and at least tacit support of many other US industries that would be affected by Montreal, the only remaining roadblocks to a strong U.S. position were the ones at the top.

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22 Ibid., 63-64.

CHAPTER 2
FORCED ENVIRONMENTALISM: REAGAN AND MONTREAL

The Reagan Administration was a different story than the American public, Congress, or industries. Many individuals and entire departments within the administration were ideologically opposed to the treaty from the beginning and were not easily swayed. Economic arguments against the treaty made the loudest noise. Reagan’s advisers attempted to demonstrate that it would be detrimental to the U.S. economy to enforce legislation monitoring measures to contain ozone depletion. These dissenters were also fiscal conservatives who favored low taxes and small government. The Office of Management and Budget, the Office of Science and Technology Policy, the Departments of the Interior, Commerce, and Agriculture, and many White House staff regularly questioned the U.S. position on ozone despite the consistent conclusion of studies they requested. Indeed, the dissenters argued that international regulation could harm the U.S. economy, whether or not the science was sound.¹

These opinions were steadfast. William R. Graham, Jr., Reagan's science advisor, also questioned the U.S. position, saying that the issue's scientific uncertainties were too great to rush into an international agreement. Although most in the scientific community stood in agreement that CFC production was detrimental to ozone-depletion, Graham disagreed. This is important because Graham was one of Reagan’s top official in matters

¹Benedick, Ozone Diplomacy, 59.
concerning scientific studies. The Washington Post reported that the Reagan Administration was rethinking its ozone position, due in large part to Secretary of the Interior Don P. Hodel who, among others, felt the treaty would "violate President Reagan's philosophy of minimal government regulations."3

A huge media misstep by Interior Secretary Hodel made opposing the Montreal Protocol problematic. Hodel’s personal protection plan against the increased risk of UV rays as published in the Washington Post, to use more sunscreen and wear a hat and sunglasses, was ridiculed and discredited by the press and environmental groups. In addition, Hodel saw solving domestic environmental issues, such as U.S. pollution and acid rain, as costing U.S. tax payers less money that dealing with what he viewed as an expensive international issue. Ultimately, the National Resources Defense Council was able to show that Hodel’s plans would cost more than ten times the implementation costs of a freeze on CFC production.4

Predictably, economic arguments made the most head-way in gaining Administration support. The President’s Council of Economic Advisers produced a cost-benefit analysis that showed, putting all argued uncertainties aside, that the monetary benefits of preventing future deaths from skin cancer far outweighed costs of CFC controls as estimated either by industry or by EPA. This conclusion, which was based on the most conservative estimates and did not even attempt to quantify other potential

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2 Anderson, Protecting the Ozone Layer, 80.
3 Ibid.
benefits of preventing ozone layer depletion, dismayed the revisionists and helped sway some administration officials who had been watching the controversy from the sidelines. More importantly, it was later discovered that the analysis created by the President’s Council of Economic Advisers was skewed towards illustrating an artificially inflated CFS control cost.  

By leaving out any mention of detrimental effects of ozone depletion on the environment, these economists were initially able to sway a large portion of individuals within the Administration, but the debate continued. The intractability of the dispute between agencies put the decisive power in the hands of Ronald Reagan himself.

Secretary of State George Shultz shared his unmitigated support for the strong U.S. position on CFC control with President Reagan. His department argued this side, though the Domestic Policy Committee and White House staffers used their authority to edit these papers, thus subtly sabotaging the department’s efforts. The State Department had been pushing for a strong U.S. position, and many ambassadors and members of the U.S. government had personally been asking other nations for their support. They argued that weakening the U.S. stance this late in the negotiations “would damage U.S. international credibility” and ruin relationships that had been built thus far. Additionally, Congress and the American public were firmly behind the treaty. The

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5 Benedick, *Ozone Diplomacy*, 63.
6 Ibid., 65.
7 Ibid., 65-66.
8 Ibid., 66.
Senate had already passed a resolution calling for the ratification of the Montreal Protocol. A retreat would force domestic backlash such as state and national regulations and pending court decisions, damage public relations at home and internationally, and have possible electoral consequences in the upcoming 1988 elections. These arguments convinced Howard Baker, Reagan’s new chief of staff, who was less ideologically motivated than previous staffers. Reagan also understood all of these arguments, and understood that the scope of the protocol was considered a potential “major foreign policy and environmental success” for his administration.

But here, the documentation trail goes cold. Reagan finally made a decision to end the interagency bickering, but no one knows why. Just before an important negotiating session, UN Ambassador Richard Benedick received an ‘Eyes Only’ personal cable from the White House, in which “ignoring the advice of some of his closest political friends, the President completely endorsed point-by-point, the strong position of the State Department and EPA.” This “secret cable was deliberately not publicized”; “the decision was kept quiet”; there was an “injunction for secrecy” “not to reveal details of the presidential decision.”

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9 Ibid., 62.
10 Ibid., 66.
12 Parson, Protecting the Ozone Layer, 135-136.
“Whatever the complex of reasons, President Reagan's decision on ozone...confounded his traditional ideological allies.”¹³ The language used in descriptions of President Reagan’s decision is understandably obscure. President Reagan did not divulge his reasoning. There is even speculation that the decision was kept so secret as to “forestall further public embarrassment to those in the Reagan administration who had opposed a strong protocol.”¹⁴ The most reasonable hypothesis for this secrecy is that President Reagan did not want to publicize the decision because he did not want to make it.

There is only one reference to the Montreal Protocol in all of Reagan’s diaries, and it is not mentioned by name. The first paragraph of the entry in full is included here:

In at 8:45 & at 9 A.M went into the Press Room to make a statement about the 3 days of meetings between Geo. S. & Soviet F. Minister Shevardnadze. Took a few Q's & then turned it over to Geo. Back in office for NSC--we mainly talked about the meetings. Then at 10 A.M. Lee Thomas came in to brief me on [an] agreement we have negotiated with 23 nations to reduce fluorocarbons--in our effort to stop reducing the Ozone Layer. This is an historic agreement. At 11 A.M. an NSPG meeting--an update on Persian Gulf situation. There has been a great change in world thinking about that and there is general approval of what we are doing.¹⁵

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¹³ Benedick, Ozone Diplomacy, 66-67.

¹⁴ Ibid., 67.

Arguably the most noteworthy international environmental agreement in history receives a two-sentence mention of no distinction. The nonchalance of the reference indicates that the treaty was not of central importance to Reagan.

Benedick suggests that even though President Reagan was ideologically opposed to the Montreal Protocol, his personal experience with skin cancer made him support it. He “had, incidentally, undergone removal of two skin cancers in 1985 and one in 1987.”\textsuperscript{16} Perhaps it is possibly a coincidence that President Reagan, who later characterized the Montreal Protocol as a monumental achievement, had been operated on in recent months to remove skin cancers from his face. Only his dermatologist may know for sure.

Nonetheless, President Reagan is given credit for the success of the Montreal Protocol. It is likely that without his support the international agreement would not have come to fruition for many years. However, it seems clear that he provided little more than tacit consent. Barnes says “I am not surprised that there is not much indicating any personal involvement of President Reagan with the Montreal Protocol--as I do not believe there was much personal involvement.”\textsuperscript{17}

Reagan allowed his EPA Administrator and environmental ambassadors a degree of freedom over policy that precluded his opposition in 1987. They had clearance and permission, but Reagan would not have personally pursued their ozone policies. The U.S. had become the leader on ozone, unbeknownst to Reagan, but he could not abandon

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\textsuperscript{16} Benedick, \textit{Ozone Diplomacy}, 68.
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that leadership position at the time of finalization of U.S. policy and ratification. He felt compelled to uphold that mantle of leadership, though he had not approved it. If the U.S. position had not first been for a strong Montreal treaty, Reagan would have kept it that way, but because of the 1982-1983 fall-out; in 1987 he found he could not reverse the now established US position. Domestic support for the Montreal Protocol was too extensive for Reagan to ignore, especially once industry was largely convinced. The secrecy, speed, and finality of Reagan’s decision imply a grudging acceptance of an unavoidable fate that went against his ideological inclination. This topic requires more research on personal relationships with Reagan, particularly Secretary Shultz and Administrator Thomas, as they are the individuals most likely to have swayed the president. As human technologies approach scales capable of full-scale climate change, and pollution from one nation can easily affect the health of a neighboring nation, international agreements become increasingly crucial to protect the sovereignty of every country.

President Reagan ultimately signed the Montreal Protocol on September 16, 1987. As Reagan said after its ratification by Congress three months later on December 21, 1987, the “Montreal Protocol marks an important milestone for the future quality of the global environment and for the health and well-being of all peoples of the world.”

Although Reagan was never personally a big fan of the environment, in the end he is viewed as environmentally friendly due the ratification of the Montreal Protocol. For the

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U.S., the ultimate significance of the Montreal Protocol was the eventual ability of various domestic actors to achieve a consensus while the U.S. played a global activist role.
CHAPTER 3

GEORGE H.W. BUSH AND ENVIRONMENTAL FAILURE

In the early 1990s, the issue of global climate change became a major source of contention between developed and developing countries. Carbon dioxide emissions came to the forefront as a hot topic on the global scale. The level of global greenhouse gases emitted into the atmosphere reached dangerous levels. The global community needed to get together once again and the 1992 Earth Summit in Brazil became the forum to discuss this important issue. Essentially, the 1992 Earth Summit arose from the need to reach a modicum of understanding among the world’s developed and developing nations on the most serious environmental concerns of the era. The American President at the time, George H.W. Bush, and the United States had the attention of the world once again when it dealt with environmental issues. Ultimately, Bush and U.S. proved to be a weak participant when it was all said and done.

During the 1988 presidential campaign, George H.W. Bush dubbed himself the “Environmental President.”¹ Four years later, Bush was asked to put his environmentalist label on the line at the 1992 United Nations Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. As Time magazine noted in an article entitled “Summit to Save the Earth,” “the Earth Summit, more than two years in the making, will be the largest and most complex conference ever held- bigger than the momentous meetings at Versailles, Yalta, and

Potsdam.”² Despite these very high global expectations, the conference turned out to be a monumental failure especially from an American perspective.

The United States took the brunt of the frustration and anger over the failure of the conference. The United States, it was frequently reported, not only forced the “watering down” of one major agreement (the climate change convention), but remained the only industrialized nation in the world that refused to sign a second (the biodiversity convention). The denunciation of the United States in general and of President Bush in particular in the national and international press was overwhelming. The negative press actually compounded the damage, because the media focused on the U.S. positions and the reactions to them, rather than on the environmental issues themselves. Adam Rogers, for example, argued that “America-bashing” was considered “one of the few consistent activities during the Earth Summit.”³ A New Republic article even described the media atmosphere as exhibiting a “Satan America spin.” The United States was labeled as “the evil empire,” a “party pooper,” the “black knight of the green movement,” “the forces of darkness,” and the “prime villain” of the international environment, while Bush was called “the Antichrist,” “Uncle Grubby, the “Grinch who stole the eco-summit,” cranky Uncle Scrooge,” and eco-wimp.”⁴ Many in the U.S. mainstream media also condemned Bush’s lack of leadership and for making the U.S. look inept at dealing with international

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² Philip Elmer-Dewitt, “Summit to Save the Earth,” Time, 1 June 1992, 42.


⁴ Sussman, American Politics and the Environment, 28.
issues. Ian McCluskey of *Time* magazine was extremely harsh in saying that Bush at the Earth Summit was a “diplomatic disaster of epic proportions.”  

This section will examine President Bush’s weak leadership employed towards environmental policy. There will also be an evaluation of both his decision and this rhetoric surround and explaining his decisions. The most popular explanation of the significant gap between the “environmental president” of 1988 and the “eco-wimp” of 1992 simply charges Bush with acting out of political expediency. Bush’s environmental transformation is thus explained as an opportunistic change in electoral strategy: in 1988 Bushed pursued the environmental vote; in 1992 he evidently decided he did not need to or could not afford to court it. Bush administration officials dismissed such talk of election pressure and explained that the harsh criticism was due to a “failure of rhetoric” on the part of Bush and his advisers.”  

Many argued that Bush’s weak rhetoric and decision making regarding the Earth Summit and environmentalism resides in his philosophies of government and leadership. These philosophical principles worked against a proactive stance at the Earth Summit, and their influence was magnified when considered in conjunction with the structural constraints of the situation- namely, the uncertainty of global science, the economic recession, and the pending presidential election.

To get a better understanding of Bush and the lack of U.S. environmental initiatives, it is necessary to first re-evaluate the issues surrounding the Earth Summit.

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5 Ian McCluskey, “Poor Showing at Summit to Save the Earth,” *Time*, 1 November 1992, 17.

6 Ibid., 75-77.
The Earth Summit was considered highly critical because it brought together developed and developing countries, and provided a framework to confront the difficult issue of global warming as well as issues such as poverty and overpopulation. Leading up to the conference, the divide between the so-called developed North and the developing South was clearly evident. The difficulties of the North-South split are best exemplified through the issue of global warming. This issue is clearly a transnational issue that inflames passions as sovereign countries argued over the extent of the problem, who are to be blamed for it, who should be responsible for the solutions, and what those solutions should be. The North’s consumption patterns and industrial infrastructure are seen to be the main source of emissions, with the United States, despite having only 5 percent of the world’s population, contributing to 25 percent of the world’s emissions. As the countries in the South develop, the situation is likely to worsen. In the future, the developing countries—unless developed nations like the United States volunteered resources and clean technologies—would go through the same “dirty” economic phases the North passed through in decades past, and will then contribute a majority of the global pollution.  

With the concept of international sovereignty still in the earliest stages, the Earth Summit serves as a symbolic event. Because of this, organizers of the Earth Summit hoped to bring international environmental issues to the forefront of worldwide agendas. This was also seen as a great opportunity for President Bush and the United States to

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become the chief diplomat and set the standard for developing countries. Unfortunately, the necessary role was never embraced. Instead, the negatives of Bush’s lonely stand against global environmental concerns trumped it. Consequently, the spirit of cooperation that environmentalists hoped could have been fostered at the Earth Summit never developed. Indeed, the opposite message was sent to the world, and the dominant competitive, growth-based economic paradigm was simply reinforced as the world’s richest country argued that it would not make sacrifices that were seen to be necessary and critical.

The vehement attacks on Bush seem to imply that if only Bush had consented to the hopes of environmentalist, the Earth Summit, as well as the future, could have been very different. From the environmentalist perspective, the United States would have led the international community at Rio, and would have pushed its allies and the developing countries to make the necessary sacrifices for the environment. Bush would have been able to lead the American people and a worldwide audience to reconfigure the dominant economic, development, conflict paradigm to one focusing on the environment, sustainable development and worldwide cooperation.8

If Bush’s political ideology, environmental ethic, and rhetorical perspective are considered, the administration’s “failure to lead” at the Earth Summit could have been predicted. Bush was considered primarily a conservative, Tory-style politician who worked best reacting to problems rather than advocating proactive policies. As Bert

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Rockman wrote in an essay on Bush’s political style, “a Tory’s view of the world is imbued with skepticism about alterations to the status quo; it embodies the precept that doing nothing more likely is better than doing something.”9 This ideology did not fit well with environmental issues, which require a certain amount of faith and vision to address diplomatically, due to the numerous unknowns involved.

As an economic conservative, Bush was also very reluctant to jeopardize American jobs for uncertain causes. Like most economic conservatives who were extremely loyal to Republican Party interests, Bush was very optimistic about the power of the market to alleviate numerous problems concerning the environment. Bush initially believed that by releasing American ingenuity (and not restraining it with unnecessary regulations), new technologies could be developed to counter any ill effects of economic growth. Bush was thus able to tie together the economic, the scientific, and the environmental. For example, in 1991 Bush said, “Recent world events make it clear that free markets and economic growth provide the firmest foundations for effective environmental stewardship.”10 In Bush’s mind, the needs of the economy and the market prevailed over the needs of the environment, because eventually the economy would produce technologies that would fix the environment. This logic was evident in Bush’s Earth Summit address, when he explained: “Twenty years ago, some spoke of limits to growth. Today we realize that growth is the engine of change and the friend of the

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environment.” 11 From Bush’s perspective, economic growth and innovation were the means to the end of environmental progress; therefore, to convince him to agree to curtail economic growth through regulations for the sake of the environment was a very difficult sell.

The conservative values of prudence and maintaining the status quo were also very important to Bush. These values call for leaders to be rational and careful with their decisions, to wait until enough evidence is presented, and to balance carefully all the available exigencies. The uncertainty of global science and various concerns about the Earth Summit agreements led Bush directly into the position of using the uncertain science as a justification for inaction.

Each of these factors worked against Bush providing the diplomatic, proactive leader that environmentalist had hoped he would exhibit. Each of these aspects of the Bush presidency would be considered deficiencies by some and positives by others (Republicans/conservatives). Indeed, Bush employed the party leader role over the chief diplomat role. His decision to be a conservative party leader affected his decisions surrounding the Earth Summit.

There are also several important structural realities that further explain Bush’s failure surrounding the Earth Summit. The economic recession and the 1992 Presidential election are two of these structural realities. During the summer of 1991, the United States was in the midst of a major economic recession. Considering that the environment and the economy are typically considered in competition, despite the notion of

sustainable development, the recession was obviously a deterrent to positive action by the
Bush administration. The recession and the rise in unemployment it caused, highlighted
the assumed negative effects of environmental policy on American industry and business,
and in many ways forced Bush to lean even more toward the economic side even though
he was leaning heavily towards it from the start.

It would have been understandably difficult for Bush to sell to the public during a
recession the notion of massive subsidies to developing countries and the sacrifice of
American jobs. Perhaps the American people wanted Bush to lead the world a the Earth
Summit and make strong rhetorical flourishes, but when it came to finding the funds to
support the treaties and enforce the regulations they required, Bush perhaps assumed the
support would likely wane. Bush saw himself making the necessary tough decisions to
protect the American economy.

The effect of the 1992 Presidential election on the thinking of the Bush
administration toward the Earth Summit has been discussed openly. Maurice Strong, the
organizer of the Earth Summit, was said to believe that “holding a high-profile
environmental gathering in an American election year would be advantageous.”
Organizers thus purposely scheduled the conference to correspond with the American
election, in the hope that the environmentally conscious public would force
environmental concessions. Unfortunately, the conference organizers did not consider
the possibility of a recession, combined with a three-party presidential race. As the
conference neared, organizers realized the strategy had backfired miserably. Tommy

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12 Sussman, American Politics and the Environment, 128.
Koh, the chair of the conference’s main working session, expressed his disappointment the day after Bush’s speech, saying that “this will teach the United Nations not to hold a conference in an American election year.”

The 1992 campaign represented a significant change from the 1988 campaign. In 1988, Bush had attacked his opponent on the environment, citing Michael Dukakis’s poor record as governor of Massachusetts, and had used the environment as an issue to win back more moderate voters. In 1992, the situation was very different. Bush’s opponent, Bill Clinton, was very vocal before and during the Earth Summit in expressing his support for more proactive environmental stance for the U.S. The decision to add Al Gore to the ticket officially made him part of the “green” ticket.

To make matters worse for Bush, Ross Perot was pushing for the conservative pro-business votes that Bush had been able to take for granted in 1988. Suddenly Bush had to shift his strategy and, according to the New York Times, cater more to “the political base of party loyalists and Reagan Democrats that swept two Republicans into the White House, and who are not being seduced by Ross Perot.”

The confluence of all these factors gave Bush little political incentive to be proactive at the Earth Summit. Even if Bush did personally believe he should have signed the agreement, he probably thought it would not have been politically viable for him to do so. Cynicism aside, Bush followed the theory that politicians must “save their

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13 Rogers, Earth Summit, 193.

seat” before they can “save the world.”

Interestingly enough, polling research is rather inconclusive regarding these issues. In a series of public opinion polls completed in June 1992, almost 60 percent of the respondents felt Bush should have signed the Earth Summit treaty, and almost 40 percent believed global warming was a “major threat to civilization.” Yet opinion poll research discussed within the Bush Administration revealed a high concern for environmental issues in general—even when compared to economic needs—but little application of this concern in voting decisions. So while the environmentalists had hoped the election would stimulate Bush’s environmentalism, it seems clear that in 1992 just the opposite occurred.

Bush’s invocation of American leadership was likely counterproductive to his many environmental critics. The Bush Administration chose to focus on the positive leadership, while the rest of the world was focused on either the general negative leadership or the complete abandonment by the Bush Administration by the summit. For example, when Bush mentioned America’s record being “second to none” during his conference address, a “ripple of laughter” was heard in the delegates’ room where the speech was being simulcast.” The overall impression of the United States environmental policy at the completion of the Bush presidency was extremely poor. The United States, under the leadership of President Bush, was seen as arrogant for not signing the Earth Summit agreement. How could the world’s biggest polluter do nothing to stop the

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15 Rogers, Earth Summit, 193.


environmental problems it is heavily responsible for? Indeed, President Bush left a negative mark on the American Environmental Record.
CHAPTER 4

A TALE OF TWO PRESIDENTS: GEORGE W. BUSH AND BILL CLINTON

The primary objective of the Kyoto Protocol in 1997 was to generate an overall reduction in CFCs of 5 percent to 1990 levels by 2012 for the developed countries with individual country variations. Although Kyoto was initially endorsed and supported by President Clinton, the fossil fuel industry and organized labor used considerable resources to influence U.S. Senate action against Kyoto. From this point forward, U.S responsibility towards the problem of global climate change became a bigger issue.

The Bill Clinton Presidency and the Environment

Bill Clinton entered his presidency in 1993 advocating an environmental-economic symbiosis, a relationship where success in both areas is inextricably linked. Inevitably, this strategy became a result of the political backdrop that the Clinton administration inherited.

Surviving twelve years of Republican presidential dominance, environmentalists and the U.S. public had more confidence in the Democrats and Bill Clinton concerning the environment than in the George H.W. Bush administration. Sixty-four percent of the electorate had more confidence in Clinton and the Congressional Democrats compared to 18 percent in the Congressional Republicans to handle environmental issues.¹ Clinton’s running mate, Senator Al Gore from Tennessee, gave environmentalists further reason to be hopeful. Gore had been a political leader in environmental issues and the two made it a central theme in their presidential campaign. Responding to Bush’s extensive use of

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environmental symbolism over substance, Clinton pronounced “the days of photo-op environmentalism are over.”

When Clinton took office in 1993, his administration inherited an array of specific and unresolved environmental issues. These included controversies over old-growth forest in the Pacific Northwest, the Everglades in Florida, mining and grazing reform in the West, funding and infrastructure problems in the national parks, and the Clean Air Act. Thus, Clinton was expected to perform in the milieu. High expectations, a public and presidential emphasis on the economy, and a host of unresolved environmental issues were passed down to the Clinton administration. Ultimately, his effectiveness in a leader-role garnered a sense of U.S. environmental prowess.

Clinton’s environmental philosophy is founded heavily upon a notion of stewardship. Essentially, Clinton believed that humans have the responsibility to take care of the Earth and all its inhabitants and considers the Earth to be a gift from God which the present generation holds in trust for subsequent generations. Take the following excerpt from Clinton as a good example:

All across the country, there is a deep understanding rooted in our religious heritage and renewed in the spirit of this time that the bounty of nature is not ours to waste. It is a gift that we hold in trust for future generations. Preserving our heritage, enhancing it, and passing it along is a great purpose worthy of a great people. If we seize the opportunity and shoulder the responsibility, we can enrich the future and ennoble our own lives.

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Perhaps the most significant plank in Clinton’s environmental platform is his proposed symbiotic relationship between a strong economy and a healthy environment. In a test to prove his political acumen, Clinton attempted to show to the business community and the public-at-large that success in one area does not have to preclude success in the other. According to Clinton, not only do a healthy economy and a healthy environment go “hand-in-hand,” but he also stated that “we cannot have one without the other.” 4 This is something the George H.W. Bush certainly did not believe.

Whereas in the past a healthy environment was associated with high regulation costs, job loss, and higher prices, Clinton did not embrace the anti-business argument. He believed that American had been given a series of false choices in the past and that success in both areas was possible:

For too long, we have been told that we have to choose between the economy and the environment; between our jobs; between our obligations to our own people and our responsibilities to the future and to the rest of the world; between public action and private economy. 5

In Clinton’s mind, protecting the environment would strengthen the economy and would also create new and badly needed jobs. Clinton stated that “environmental policy must not only protect the environment, but also promote economic growth and provide millions of new high-skill, high-wage jobs.” 6

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4 Ibid., 277.
5 Ibid., 279.
Clinton’s Council on Sustainable Development is a great example of his attempt to combine both environmental and economic interests. The Council, established in 1993 by Executive Order 12852, was comprised of leaders of industry, government, and environmental, labor, and civil rights organizations. Its primary responsibility was to develop new approaches for integrating economic and environmental policies.

A great deal of the Clinton administration’s balanced approach toward the environment was due to the work and influence of Vice President Al Gore. Gore’s influential book, *Earth in the Balance*, can be seen as a blueprint for “striking an environmental and economic symmetry.” In it, Gore proposes a variety of ways to solve what he sees as the impending environmental crisis. Many are based in faith and the free market, private motive, and entrepreneurship. Gore’s influence is heavily apparent, as Clinton attempted to frame the problem of the environment as a sort of challenge to America’s entrepreneurial spirit. For example, Clinton stated:

> If your company makes a product or offers a service that will protect the environment, all over the world you can find capital, customer, and expert advice. We Americans can do what we set our minds to do, including slowing down global warming without cooling down our economy.

The market-oriented approach to rectifying various environmental problems was at the heart of Clinton’s environmental strategy. Inherent in the approach was the belief that the creation of green jobs can help reinvigorate the economy and employ large numbers of people in such industries as wastewater treatment, energy efficiency, and the

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restoration of national parklands. Citing his $200 billion environmental technologies industry, Clinton believed that American could be able to “out-conserve and out-compete anyone other country on the planet.”

The Clinton administration went to work to fulfill its lofty goals, first by adopting the lead role in emphasizing the role of technology as it pertains to the environment. The Clean Car Initiative, the Climate Change Action Plan, and the Interagency Environmental Technology Initiative were all examples of this technological emphasis. Additionally, the Clinton administration’s publication Technology for a Sustainable Future: A Framework for Action proved to be a comprehensive strategy for advancing various environmental technologies and again illustrated the important role technology played in meeting Clinton’s environmental goals.

In regards to other aspects of his environmental political agenda, Clinton took the lead on what became his “green but not mean strategy” of environmental regulation. In moving away from the “command and control style” of regulation under Bush, Clinton advocated giving businesses, states, and communities more flexibility in creating environmental solutions. Clinton’s strong leadership style and flexibility resulted in better governmental relations and ultimately increased cost-effectiveness. In Clinton’s 1996 State of the Union address, he challenged American businesses by stating: “If you can meet even higher environmental standards, we will cut red tape and regulations, so

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9 Clinton, “Reaffirming the U.S. Commitment to Protect Global Environment,” 279.

10 Ibid., 280.
that you can find the cheapest and most efficient way to do it.”\textsuperscript{11} The Clinton administration’s recognition of the unnecessary red tape and unnecessary expense involved in complying with our environmental laws is an ideal illustration of Clinton’s moderate Democratic leader approach to environmental policy.

The Clinton administration also took a lead on recommending “cooperative federalism” between the federal and state governments. As a former state governor from Arkansas, Clinton understood that state cooperation was a must for effective environment policy. Thus, Clinton urged the states to play a positive role in the process. For example, Clinton used the Department of the Interior to implement more of a state role in clean air and endangered species initiatives.\textsuperscript{12}

Perhaps the biggest mark left by Clinton’s leadership role can be found in his internationalist approach towards environmental policy. By first pushing the North American Free Trade Agreement, it became apparent that the Clinton administration had clearly adopted a global approach to solving both domestic and foreign problems. According to Clinton, the U.S. was too interconnected with the rest of the world to adopt a solely unilateral environmental perspective. Clinton stated:

\begin{quote}
It is vitally important to protect the environment at home as well as abroad. In an era of global economics, and global environmental hazards, a central challenge of our time is to promote our national interest in the context of its connectedness with the rest of the world. Indeed, we share
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{12} Bruce Babbit et. Al Gore,“Press Briefing by the Vice President and Secretary of the Interior,” The White House, Office of the Press Secretary (September 22, 1995).
our atmosphere, our planet and our destiny with all the peoples of the world.¹³

As expected, the Clinton administration made a number of pro-environmental administrative appointments throughout his time as President. For example, Carol M. Browner, former director of environmental affairs for the state of Florida, became head of the Environmental Protection Agency, and Kathleen McGinty became head of the newly created White House Office on Environmental Policy. Both women were former aides of Vice President Al Gore and both had outstanding pro-environment records.¹⁴

Additionally, President Clinton used his office to help drive markets for more environmentally benign products and to set an example for the private sector. Recognizing the enormous environmental impact of governmental administration, Clinton tried to show how environmentally insensitive sector can “go green.” Such executive orders ranged from the creation of the Council on Sustainable Development to one on environmental justice.¹⁵

In continuing his steadfast leadership with regard to international initiatives, Clinton became heavily involved in the heated debate over global warming caused by the greenhouse gas emissions of industrialized nations. In 1997, with critical leadership from the Clinton administration, representatives of more than 160 nations agreed on the basic architecture of an international strategy to combat global warming.

¹³ Clinton, “Reaffirming the U.S. Commitment to Protect Global Environment,” 288.


¹⁵ Ibid., 116.
This historic agreement became the Kyoto Protocol, and it set strong, realistic targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions from industrialized countries, establishes flexible, market-based mechanisms to achieve them as cost-effectively as possible, with binding legal consequences if countries fail to meet them. Through heated debates and negotiations, the Clinton administration worked with other nations to turn the treaty’s broad concepts into working realities and pushed for ratification. Clinton ultimately promoted broader engagement in 55 developing countries in this global effort, with impressive results in key countries such as China, India, Argentina, Bolivia and Kazakhstan.\(^\text{16}\)

In the end, although support for ratification was pushed hard by the Clinton administration, final ratification of Kyoto by the U.S. was ultimately turned down by the Senate. The Senate believed that the United States should not be a signatory to any protocol that did not include binding targets and timetables for developing nations as well as industrialized nations or "would result in serious harm to the economy of the United States."\(^\text{17}\) Although the Senate decided against ratification, on November 12, 1998, Vice President Al Gore signed the protocol as a symbolic gesture.

**The Clinton Legacy**

President Bill Clinton did not complete all the environmental initiatives he had planned, or all that environmentalists would have liked. Nonetheless, during his eight

\(^{16}\) Elizabeth DeSombre, *Domestic Sources of International Trade Environmental Policy*, 124.

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 136.
years in office, Clinton initiated or supported dozens of major environmental initiatives and fought repeatedly against attempts to undermine environmental protections. He regularly vetoed budget bills saddled by anti-environmental riders aimed at avoiding public scrutiny. With his strong leader and take-charge approach, he enacted many environmental protections, using executive orders to create 17 new national monuments, and expand four more, without Congressional approval. These monuments helped to preserve more than 4.6 million acres in the lower 48 states.\(^\text{18}\)

Clinton also chose to focus largely on developing alternative energy sources, rather than new sources of fossil fuels. His administration launched more than 50 major initiatives to improve energy efficiency and develop clean, renewable energy sources. In his final three years in office, Clinton secured more than $3 billion, which is a 50 percent increase in annual funding, to research and develop clean energy technologies, more than any other administration U.S. history has set aside.\(^\text{19}\)

When Clinton first took office in 1993, lethargic federal clean up efforts had left 88 percent of the worst 1,200 toxic waste sites and their communities polluted after 12 years of federal efforts, according to White House figures. Nearly 40,000 urban industrial sites sat abandoned with no federal strategy to redevelop them. Sixty-two million people lived in areas with drinking water below federal standards, and nearly 157 million people - 62 percent of the country - breathed air that failed to meet federal standards. The Clinton administration strengthened the Safe Drinking Water Act, requiring America's

\(^{18}\) Landy, *The Environmental Protection Agency*, 124.

\(^{19}\) Ibid., 124-125.
55,000 water utilities to provide regular reports to their customers on the quality of their drinking water. By the end of his presidency, more than 90 percent of Americans lived in areas served by drinking water systems that meet all federal standards.\textsuperscript{20}

Over the span of Clinton’s eight years in office, the EPA adopted the toughest standards ever on soot and smog, ordered major reductions in tailpipe emissions from cars, light trucks and sport utility vehicles, and mandated reducing the level of sulfur in gasoline by 90 percent. In the last year of his Presidency, Clinton targeted emissions from utilities and factories that darken the skies over national parks and wilderness areas, and announced a strategy to reduce harmful emissions of smog causing nitrogen oxides and particulate matter from heavy-duty trucks and diesel fuels by more than 90 percent. During the Clinton administration, three times as many Superfund sites were cleaned up as in the previous 12 years. Cleanup ultimately was completed at 92 percent of all Superfund sites.\textsuperscript{21}

The Clinton administration also took a strong stance against environmental crimes, aggressively prosecuting those who violated the nation’s environmental laws. In 1999, the EPA assessed a total of $228.3 million in civil and criminal penalties, the most ever assessed and $87 million more than in 1992. The EPA referred 241 criminal cases to the Justice Department in 1999, more than twice the number referred in 1992. More than 322 defendants were charged in 1999, and 2,500 total months of sentences were handed down, more than doubling enforcement activity in each category over 1992

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 124-126.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 126-127.
levels. Even the federal government became more environmental efficient, reducing its annual energy bill by $800 million in 1999 alone. The Clinton administration implemented new energy efficiency standards for heating and cooling equipment, water heaters, lighting, refrigerators, clothes washers and dryers, and cooking equipment.22

Without a doubt, many of the Clinton administration’s environmental initiatives worked to help reduce U.S. greenhouse gas emissions. In the end many regard the Clinton administration as one of the most environmentally friendly administrations, especially with regard to the global front. Unfortunately, Clinton’s inability to persuade the Senate to ratify the Kyoto Protocol may have ultimately prevented significant strides in the U.S. efforts to combat global warming. As narrated below, the next president of the United States came into office vehemently opposed to all mechanisms of the Kyoto Protocol.

**The George W. Bush Presidency and the Environment**

From the year 2000 forward, the U.S. was seen largely as ignoring Kyoto, culminating with the election of President George W. Bush. Indeed, one of Bush’s first major decisions was to reject the Kyoto Protocol. The Bush administration’s unilateral decision to withdraw from the protocol without first negotiating with the states of Europe, Japan, and other industrialized countries caught the world by surprise. The European Union responded angrily, calling the U.S. decision “irresponsible and wrong.”23 Leaders

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22 Ibid., 127.

of various EU member states joined together in pressuring Bush to rejoin the agreement. German Chancellor Gerhard Schroder asked Bush on behalf of the EU to reconsider his decision. Swedish Environmental Minister Kjell Larsson criticized the Bush administration’s position, responding that “The Kyoto Protocol is still alive,” and French President Jacques Chirac called the U.S. move “a worrying and unacceptable challenge to the Kyoto Protocol.”

Stung by the domestic international criticism that his withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol elicited, Bush tried very hard to reframe the climate change debate and portray his decision as forward looking. Bush’s first effort was to put the climate change debate into the context of the California energy crisis and U.S. energy security. In May 2001, an energy task force headed by Vice President Dick Cheney presented a national energy plan that described the growing U.S. demand for energy as a result of increased population and changing lifestyles. It noted that despite enhanced energy efficiency over the past decades, the U.S. appetite for energy was strong. To meet the U.S. need for energy in the future, Cheney’s plan argued, “New energy sources, including oil, coal, and possibly nuclear energy, will have to be developed.” There is also discussion of the need for energy conservation and potential for renewable energies to contribute to meeting future energy demands, but the report’s emphasis is clearly on developing traditional energy sources.

24 Ibid., 618-619.

The effort to refocus the environmental debate proved to be highly contentious. The energy policy plan was lambasted by the environmental community as being beholden to the fossil energy community. The Sierra Club successfully sued Vice President Cheney’s office under the Freedom of Information Act and won the release of thousands of pages of documents pertaining to the development of the report. Vermont Senator Jim Jeffords ultimately left the Republican Party over the Bush administration’s energy and environmental policies, turning control of the Senate to the Democrats. Although Jeffords registered himself as an Independent, the Democrats elected him chair of the Senate Environmental and Public Works Committee as a reward for his defection. In this position, Jeffords worked with many other colleagues in the Senate to defeat President Bush’s proposal to drill for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR).  

Another effort by the Bush administration to reframe the climate change debate emphasized the uncertainty of climate change science and importance of long-term technology development. In June 2001 in a press conference called by the White House, President Bush announced plans for a U.S. Climate Change Research Initiative to support scientific research on climate change and to determine priority areas for investment and a National Climate Change Technology Initiative to enhance research at universities and national laboratories related to technology that could reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

In February 2002, the Bush administration announced its plans to address climate

\[26\] Ibid., 315-316.

\[27\] Ibid., 319.
change domestically through voluntary conservation measures, some added support for renewable energy technologies, and additional research into the science of climate change and mitigation technologies. Consistent with this orientation in his State of the Union address in January 2003, Bush announced that the government would provide $1.2 billion in support for hydrogen fuel initiatives toward the development of commercially viable hydrogen-powered fuel cells.  

The Bush administration also shifted away somewhat from its initial portrayal of climate change science as being highly uncertain and recognized that climate change is partially manmade and will have impacts on the U.S. and other regions of the world. In fact, paralleling the EU ratification of Kyoto, the U.S. submitted its national climate report to the United Nations. This document, the U.S. Climate Action Report of 2002, indicated that the U.S. will be significantly affected by climate change. According to the report, the U.S. is likely to suffer more frequent and intense heat waves and to lose some ecologically sensitive natural areas. The Bush report, however, did not call for immediate action. Instead, it concluded that regardless of what is done to cut emissions, “it is too late to address several decades’ worth of greenhouse gases that have already been emitted into the atmosphere.”  

Essentially, Bush viewed climate change as a long-term problem, decades in the making, which could not be solved overnight. Bush firmly believed that economic

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development was the key to protecting the global environment; not fighting emissions based on the standards of Kyoto.

The Bush report goes on to note that based on a cabinet-level review and recommendations regarding climate change, the U.S. would commit to reducing its greenhouse gas intensity by 18 percent over the course of the next decade through voluntary measures, incentive schemes, and existing mandatory measures. According to the report:

This represents a 4.5 percent reduction from forecast emissions in 2012, a serious, sensible, and science-based response to this global problem—despite the remaining uncertainties concerning the precise magnitude, timing, and regional patterns of climate change.\(^{30}\)

Nonetheless, both U.S. environmentalists and the EU were quick to point out that this policy fell far below the commitments the U.S. made in the Kyoto Protocol under the Clinton administration. Reducing greenhouse gas intensity is not the same as reducing greenhouse gas emissions. According to the Pew Center on Global Climate Change, “reducing greenhouse gas intensity by 18 percent equates to allowing total U.S gas emissions to climb by 12 percent over the same period because of expected growth in the economy.”\(^{31}\)

The Bush administration clearly demonstrated that they believed the Kyoto Protocol was not the right approach. In a May 2002 meeting in London, the newly appointed chief climate negotiator for the U.S., Harlan Watson, stated that the U.S will

\(^{30}\) Ibid., 3.

\(^{31}\) Pew Center on Global Change, “Climate Change Activities in the United States,” (June 2002).
not participate in negotiations to establish emissions targets for the second commitment period under the Kyoto Protocol (the period after 2008-2012). “We want no part of that. The next time we take stock on climate change has been set by the president in 2012.”

The Bush administration also claimed it would cooperate with developing nations in the effort to reduce greenhouse emissions and maintaining economic growth. However, in June 2002 President Bush proposed reducing foreign aid to help developing countries lower their emissions. Bush cut one program by $41 million from the previous year’s $165 million, with the hopes that industrialization would do more to reduce greenhouse gas pollution in developing countries.

Thus the EU viewed this move as the U.S. trying to shift the burden to developing countries. President Bush declared, “I oppose the Kyoto Protocol because it exempts 80 percent of the world, including major population centers such as China and India.”

This is despite these countries’ per capita carbon dioxide emissions being tiny compared with those in the U.S., which are at least 10 times those of China and 25 times those of India and their aggregate contributions to the problem being much smaller than that of the U.S. China and India’s combined twentieth-century carbon dioxide emissions were 9 percent of the global total, compared with the U.S.’s 30 percent. China reduced its greenhouse gas emissions in the late 1990s, despite its growing economy. Given the

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historical responsibility of the U.S. for enormous amounts of emissions, President Bush’s argument largely fell on deaf ears among the global community.\textsuperscript{35}

Essentially, President Bush sought to blame poor countries, particularly China, for greenhouse gas pollution and a failure to agree to firm commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions despite strong evidence that China and other poorer nations are restricting their emissions more than the U.S. Moreover, the Bush administration showed reluctance in allowing international rules to dictate its behavior, especially in sensitive areas in which it did not already decide to act. President Bush declared his opposition to requiring the U.S. to take on its share of the burdens associated with global environmental change. Unlike the EU, the Bush administration primarily blamed developing countries for global environmental problems and demanded that they clean up.

It the Bush administration’s line of thinking, it assumed that the Kyoto Protocol would collapse because continuation of the process without the US was unthinkable. However, with strong EU and other foreign support, we find that exactly the opposite has occurred. By 2005, Kyoto became fully operational. Moreover, the threshold for entry into legal force has been vastly exceeded. At the time of writing, 164 states deposited instruments of ratification. Only two states, the U.S. and Australia, have defected since Kyoto’s inception.\textsuperscript{36}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{36} John Depledge, “Against the Grain: The United States and the Global Climate Change Regime,” \textit{Global Change, Peace and Security} 17, no. 1 (2005): 20.}
Part of the Bush administration’s legitimization strategy was portraying itself as showing leadership in “going it alone,” in forging an alternative, more realistic and effective strategy for others to follow. For example, the Bush administration criticized the Kyoto targets for being unrealistic and it criticized European nations for failing to live up to their Kyoto commitments, claiming this as further evidence of the flawed nature of the Protocol. However, while the Kyoto targets adopted by most of the developed world are extremely modest when set against the scale of the problem, the Bush administration's efforts to pursue an alternative, mostly voluntary, technology-driven strategy that claimed to be more effective than the Protocol were even more modest.\textsuperscript{37}

More significantly, the climate change strategy was overshadowed by the Bush-Cheney National Energy Strategy, which was primarily concerned to step up oil exploration and drilling. The Bush administration's Energy Policy Act, passed in 2005, offered huge subsidies to the oil and gas industries to encourage exploration, along with additional subsidies, low interest loans and research grants for the development of nuclear power plants. The Bill also promoted increased use of ethanol and further investment in renewable energy sources such as wind power. However, there were no measures enacted to increase fuel efficiency standards for cars, trucks, or sports utility vehicles. Therefore, these measures can be seen as a very modest effort at environmentalism which ultimately benefited the oil and gas industries more than anything else.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 22.
On the international front, the Bush administration's strategy can best be described succinctly as creating 'bottom-up, ad hoc "coalitions of the willing" on specific issues'. This includes a wide range of bilateral and regional partnerships with individual countries. The most significant “environmental coalition of the willing” was the Asia-Pacific Partnership on Clean Development and Climate, with Australia, China, India, South Korea, and Japan. The six members of this pact, which were responsible for around half the world's carbon emissions, entered into a 'nonbinding agreement' to tackle emissions by promoting the voluntary technological development, deployment and transfer of existing and emerging clean technologies including research on carbon dioxide emissions. The pact certainly did not contain any mandatory timeframes, targets or compliance mechanisms and the focus was on reducing emissions intensity rather than aggregate emissions. Indeed, an Australian study prepared for the inaugural meeting of the partnership in January 2006 in Sydney showed that on a best-case scenario (assuming widespread global use of the new technologies promoted by the partnership), the initiative hoped to bring down global emissions by 23 percent by 2050 compared to a business-as-usual scenario.

In general, the U.S. under the Bush administration was not very successful in winning over detractors to its position by means of persuasion. Its core arguments were that the 7 percent cut in emissions negotiated by the Clinton-Gore administration at

38 Ibid., 26.

Kyoto would harm the US economy; and that the U.S. would not accept mandatory emission reduction targets unless developing countries also accepted mandatory targets in the same timeframe. This was a position that echoed the Byrd-Hagel Resolution adopted by the US Senate in June 1997. The Bush administration had also sought to question the science of global warming but ultimately it ended up effectively shelving this line of argument after it signed a communiqué at the Gleneagles G8 Summit in 2005 that acknowledged that “climate change is a serious and long term challenge” and that “we know enough to act now.”

During the final years of the Bush presidency, there remained scientific uncertainty about the precise timing, severity and regional impacts of global warming. It was very unfortunate to see that the Bush administration ultimately did very little other than signing the Gleneagles communiqué.

As to the economic harm argument the Bush administration worked hard to push, there was no doubt that any concerted effort to wean the U.S. economy from its heavy dependence on fossil fuels raised the price of energy in the U.S. and produced significant domestic and international economic repercussions, especially in terms of the competitiveness of U.S. exports. Yet the reasoning behind the Bush administration’s stance, which believed that climate change policies should be economically painless for Americans, ended up being a recipe for minimal action and it has been unconvincing to the rest of the world. It ignored the much greater long-term economic, human and environmental costs of not taking action, as well as the new wealth and employment

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opportunities that could have been generated from significant investment in low-carbon or non-carbon energy sources. Well before Kyoto, many European states, particularly in Western European, recognized that a strategy of ecological modernization, kick-started by stronger domestic environmental regulation, could act as a spur to further environmental/technical innovation, which would enhance national economic competitiveness and would force a virtuous cycle of continuous environmental improvement. This was something that the Bush administration poorly did not even consider.  

The Bush administration's insistence on developing country commitments illustrated that Bush was concerned that rapidly growing economies such as India, Brazil and, above all, China, would gain a significant competitive advantage over the U.S. China is the world's second biggest aggregate emitter and the U.S. had rightly argued that the Kyoto Protocol would remain ineffective without Chinese participation. Indeed, China is expected to overtake the U.S. as the world's largest aggregate emitter by 2020. Yet the Bush administration insisted that developing country commitments in the first commitment period was contrary to the principle of common but differentiated responsibility, which is now a cornerstone of the entire climate change regime. China has led in the effort of holding developed countries to the mandates made in the Kyoto

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41 Benjamin Hare, “Global Warming: The Ball is Now in the U.S. Court,” Global Change, Peace and Security 17, no. 1 (2005): 94.
protocol. Indeed, this has emerged as one of the biggest international stumbling blocks in the climate change negotiations.\(^{42}\)

The problem with the Bush administration's "developing country" argument is that while it has been quick to draw attention to China's high aggregate emission levels, it has conveniently and persistently downplayed the colossal size of its own aggregate emissions. These emissions are more than the emissions of the second (China), third (Russian Federation) and fourth (Japan) highest emitters in the world combined.\(^{43}\) The Bush administration had also ignored the huge disparity in the history of emissions, and in per capita emissions, between the U.S. and China. It is interesting to note that the average American emits around eight times as much carbon dioxide as the average Chinese.\(^{44}\) Moreover, carbon dioxide emissions intensity in China has been declining due to a range of initiatives such as retrofitting, energy efficiency savings and the diversification of China's energy portfolio.\(^{45}\) The Bush administration's refusal to recognize the disproportionately large carbon shadow it cast over the world further intensified anti-Americanism, especially in the developing world where the consequences of global warming are expected to be more severe.


\(^{43}\) Depledge, “Against the Grain,” 20.

\(^{44}\) World Resources Institute, “CO2: Emissions Per Capita,” (2002).

It is important to emphasize that the legitimacy crisis facing the U.S. in this policy field arises not simply from its rejection of the Kyoto Protocol, although this is certainly regrettable for all those who prefer multilateralism to bilateralism or unilateralism. Rather, it is also the ineffectiveness of the Bush administration’s proposed international and domestic policy alternatives. Had the Bush administration been able to demonstrate to the world that its approach was indeed more effective than the Kyoto Protocol, then the legitimacy tables would quite likely be turning now. That is, the greener states, NGOs and scientists would transfer their support from the Kyoto Protocol to the Bush administration's initiatives. In this policy domain at least, as public appreciation of the need for timely action grew through his administration, the effective provision of a global public good by unilateral means on the part of the U.S. would deliver more legitimacy (of the 'output' kind) than a much less effective multilateral initiative that rested only on 'input legitimacy'.

Even so, international condemnation of the Bush administration's climate policy did not lead to any major disempowerment because it was still able to act unilaterally in pursuit of its own preferred approach to tackling climate change. As the most powerful state in the world, the U.S. under the Bush administration had more material capacity than any other state to resort to bribery or coercion to get its way. However, this capacity was not limitless and it had not been sufficient to induce or coerce large numbers of states to conform to U.S. dictates. Material levers are cheapest and most effective when used to swing the votes of wavering parties in finely balanced negotiations. However, the

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46 Ibid., 861.
opportunity for strategic behavior of this kind passed and the Bush administration’s material preponderance could not stretch to coercing or inducing a mass defection from the Kyoto Protocol. The Asia-Pacific Partnership may be regarded as the most significant example of ‘adaptive behavior’ by the Bush administration, based mostly on material levers (in this case, the inducement of technology diffusion), but it did not pass muster as a more effective alternative to Kyoto. As an outsider to the Kyoto Protocol, the U.S. under the Bush administration was no longer able to influence directly the course of future negotiations, although it did remain a party to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Ultimately, the U.S.’s participation in the UNFCCC was seen as a waste by the European community, as it provided no feedback on new issues concerning climate change. Consequently, the best description to sum up the U.S. under the Bush administration was that the U.S. suffered from a chronic legitimacy crisis.

**The Tainted Bush Legacy**

The Bush administration was unmoved by international criticisms of its stance towards the Kyoto Protocol because it believed that a majority of Americans would not accept rising energy prices, and the U.S. had the material means to project its preferred climate change policy into the international arena by building up ‘coalitions of the willing’ rather than persuade Americans to change course. Yet the key to the resolution of the Bush administration’s chronic legitimacy crisis, as well as the Kyoto Protocol’s looming legitimacy crisis, is the fact that Americans needed to change course regarding environmental policy.
The fundamental problem of American environmental policy during the Bush administration was the fact that capitalism became dependent on cheap oil, made possible by significant subsidization of the oil and gas industries, and very low fuel taxes by comparison to most European countries. The Bush administration was preoccupied with stepping up domestic oil production and securing foreign supplies (including by force where necessary) rather than managing and reducing domestic demand. Congress during the Bush years blocked efforts to raise domestic oil prices, while the Executive branch played the major role in foreign petroleum policy, framing it as a matter of security and utilizing the full range of diplomatic, intelligence and military resources to secure an investment friendly climate in oil-rich countries.\textsuperscript{47} This supply-side rather than demand-side approach made compliance with its Kyoto targets extremely difficult.

In President Bush's 2006 State of the Union address, Bush stressed that “America is addicted to oil, which is often imported from unstable parts of the world.”\textsuperscript{48} Nonetheless, Bush’s responses to U.S. vulnerability was to source oil from elsewhere and generally step up research and development in energy sources across the board, including fossil fuels, bio-fuels, nuclear power and renewables, rather than target alternatives to fossil fuels. The strategy primarily was technology driven and concerned to secure-supply rather than reduce-demand in order to maintain a cheap energy supply for


America. Given that the U.S. is the world's biggest economy, the international repercussions of such an interlocking policy shift would have been enormous. It would have reduced the immense environmental and security costs associated with the U.S.'s heavy reliance on imported oil. Ultimately however, this strategy was narrowly defeated by the bipartisan Lieberman/McCain 'Climate Stewardship Act' introduced, which sought to introduce a modest national emissions cap and trading system.49

**What Went Wrong and What Could Have Been**

The pursuit of an interlocking domestic strategy of ecological modernization and ecological security would have made it possible for the U.S. to reassess its posture towards the Kyoto Protocol, and particularly towards China. It may have even facilitated a more general shift in security policy away from an excessive preoccupation with the possible threat posed by weapons of mass destruction, towards the more certain and widespread threat of global warming. However, the Bush administration failed to overcome its aversion to environmental multilateralism and rethink its self-serving notion of international environmental justice. This would have enabled the U.S. to ratify the Kyoto Protocol and take a major leadership role in the negotiations for the next commitment period. This also would have removed the major stumbling block in the way of international talks regarding developing country commitments. However in retrospect, it looks as though it was a bit too much to expect from the Bush administration. Indeed, global scale environmental challenges were never a top priority.

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49 John Depledge, “Against the Grain: The United States and the Global Climate Change Regime,” 11-12.
or even close to a major issue during the Bush administration.\textsuperscript{50} This truly was a remarkable failure. Unlike trade and monetary policy, environmental policy was never central to the Bush administration’s attempts to create an international order. It seemed as if national security was the dominant theme that could not be taken out of focus by any other policy, regardless of international acceptance.

We now have a better idea of how the U.S. could have been more adept in response to its own legitimacy crisis under the Bush administration. The European Union could have done more as well. As the self-appointed green leader of the climate change negotiations, the European Union should have played a bigger role in paving the way for developing countries to move towards a low carbon economy.

As we look back at the development of global environmental initiatives during the time of the Bush administration, we find a disconnect between the Kyoto Protocol's norms and goals, and its policy measures and outcomes, which raise important questions about the capacity of multilateralism. The system of sovereign states is designed to serve, to grapple with complex, global environmental problems such as human-induced climate change. Solving environmental problems requires moving beyond traditional multilateralism's liberal norm of state indivisibility, equality and reciprocity, to a rule-making framework that recognizes the vast discrepancies in the vulnerabilities, institutional capacities, and responsibilities of the world's 192 states.

The failure during the Bush years was that the modest efforts to produce multilateralism were resisted by the U.S. because of Bush’s inept decision making. In its foreign, climate change, and energy policies, the U.S. under the Bush administration acted unilaterally as a powerful state rather than multilaterally as a hegemon. Indeed, the Bush’s energy policy was ultimately quasi-imperialist insofar as the U.S denied and overrode the agency of other states. Ironically, the Bush administration sought to legitimate its rejection of the Protocol by enlisting the rhetoric of reciprocity (as against the Protocol’s norm of common but differentiated responsibility), by refusing to commit to mandatory targets in the absence of similar commitments from developing countries. Indeed, this was widely regarded as a fig leaf to preserve the Bush administration’s relative advantage in the world economy, especially vis-à-vis a rapidly growing China.51

During the Bush years, there was never any recalibration in understanding between the U.S. and the Kyoto parties over the principle of common but differentiated responsibility; it became impossible to overcome the Protocol’s legitimacy crisis which could have been averted. One way that this impasse could have been averted was if the U.S. under Bush worked towards a more nuanced understanding of the principle of common responsibility. As one of the world’s largest aggregate carbon polluter, and China also failed by deferring for too long, a commitment to mandatory targets. Given its growing economic capacity and its role as leader of the developing world, China could not regard its position as a developing country as equivalent to Burkina Fasa or

51 Barry Rabe, *Statehouse and Greenhouse*, 100.
Bangladesh.\textsuperscript{52} Indeed, if the U.S. under Bush took on more of these commitments, it could have become possible for the U.S. to have directed attention to the all-important principle of common but differentiated responsibility. This should have been applied within the developing country world by distinguishing between stronger and weaker economies. This would have provide a principled basis China taking the lead in the developing world by accepting responsibility for phasing in mandatory targets to stem emissions in Kyoto’s second commitment period.

One reason the Bush administration claimed it had to be wary of the common but differentiated responsibility principle was that it claimed that addressing environmental problems would have made it hard for powerful states to determine collective outcomes. Bush claimed that the wealthiest states are invariably expected to make the biggest financial commitment, which meant that they lose discretion for unilateral aid and development assistance as the density of environmental regimes increases. As the sole superpower in the post-Cold War world, the U.S. has taken full advantage of its greater range of exit options than any other state to avoid entanglement in these demanding and ever-growing international processes of consensus formation and compromise. This was most clearly evident during the Bush administration.\textsuperscript{53}

The idea that great powers have great responsibilities, including the provision and protection of global public goods, has more or less been prevalent for over two centuries, and powerful states have often seen things in this manner. However, the Bush

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 11.

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 12.
administration, like many great powers, preferred to reserve for itself the right to decide what global public goods are worth defending without serious dialogue with other states. The problem for the U.S. under the Bush administration, however, was that the social sources of power came to progressively transcend state borders in a globalized world and U.S. unilateralism also became increasingly challenged by a combination of the functional demands of interdependence, longer-term power calculations, intensifying anti-Americanism and, ultimately, “ecological blowback.”

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54 Bob Hare, “Global Warming: The Ball Now in the U.S. Court,” 87-88.
“Well, I don’t believe that climate change is just an issue that’s convenient to bring up during a campaign. I believe it’s one of the greatest moral challenges of our generation,” declared Barack Obama during his presidential campaign.¹

Even though it is very early in his presidency, Barack Obama is seen to have taken a strong stand on fighting climate change. The leadership role Obama assumed was planted early on in his political life. While he was a member of the United States Senate, Obama was a primary sponsor on the Sanders-Boxer Bill with its target of 80% below 1990 emissions levels by 2050, with the proceeds of the bill going to the development of clean energy, energy efficiency improvements and addressing transition costs. During his presidential campaign, Obama promised to “re-engage” and “work constructively” with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Rather than an “E8”, he called for a “Global Energy Forum, which includes all G-8 members plus Brazil, China, India, Mexico and South Africa –the largest energy consuming nations from both the developed and developing world. The forum would focus exclusively on global energy and environmental issues.”²

Obama promised much more money than even his Democratic Presidential primary opponent Hillary Clinton for alternative energies, in particular bio-fuels, an important topic in Illinois, where he hails from. Obama pledged $150 billion over 10

² Ibid.
years to advance the next generation of bio-fuels and fuel infrastructure, accelerate the commercialization of plug-in hybrids, promote development of commercial-scale renewable energy, invest in low-emissions coal plants, and begin the transition to a new digital electricity grid.\(^3\)

He made promises to “double science and research funding for clean energy projects including those that make use of our bio-mass, solar and wind resources.” Obama also made a pledge to accomplish a goal of 25% renewable electricity by 2025. As president, one of his first statements towards energy dealt with low carbon coal technology, although he was until recently unabashedly in favor of coal liquefaction technologies. It is only after blowback from the press that he has modified his comments to say that he favors them only when they have a carbon benefit. He is from a coal state, Illinois, and it will be interesting to see how this could affect future environmental actions in office. Regarding nuclear energy, Obama declared: “I believe future federal support for any technology must be carefully measured in the context of two key goals of energy security and environmental stewardship.”\(^4\) Obama holds a firm belief that technology offers a perfect answer, and no technology should be rejected outright. With this being said, Obama further made the point that additional federal support for one

\(^3\) Ibid.

technology must be weighed carefully with the risks or benefits of federal support foregone for other technologies.\textsuperscript{5}

So at this point one may ask the question, where do we stand today as a nation when it comes to climate change? As of October 2009, the only legislation progressing in the U.S. Senate is the “Clean Energy Jobs and American Power Act”, introduced by Senators John Kerry and Barbara Boxer and given the full support of President Obama on September 30, 2009; which many have heralded for its forward-thinking strategy to create clean energy jobs, reduce pollution, and protect American security by enhancing domestic energy production and combating global climate change. The bill’s primary objectives are to cut carbon pollution and stimulate the economy by creating millions of jobs in the clean energy sector. Even with praise coming from the environmental community, what will matter the most to the Obama administration’s environmental plans are the future negotiations between himself and the Senate. Its arrival at the end of September comes little over two months before the major UN climate conference in Copenhagen. How the Boxer-Kerry Bill fares will be crucial for the Copenhagen negotiations. In addition, it’s a way in which the world can get a sense of how serious the U.S. is in tackling climate change and what level of effort it's ready to undertake. The manner in which Obama handles this in getting the bill passed in the Senate will go a long way in proving his effectiveness as an environmental leader. “Obama must get Congress to work in a bi-partisan fashion and must become a master negotiator for the

\textsuperscript{5} Ibid., 25.
Democratic Party and the environmental community at-large." Indeed, Obama and the Democrats will not be able enact a strong new climate law without the help and support of his Republican colleagues. Having Democratic control of Congress certainly sets the stage for Obama to enact real climate, but he must get some support from the other side of the aisle to see far reaching policies put in place.

It is important to note that Republicans have also said they would not support any Democratic bill that does not include money to expand the nuclear industry, which is something opposed by many Democrats and environmentalists. In the first year of the Obama administration, there is also disagreement over the involvement of other countries in any potential market and how best to help developing nations build up clean technologies. Despite all those issues, it is still possible that a climate bill could reach the legislative finish line before health care. There is a broad consensus on Capitol Hill that something needs to be done, and Republicans like John McCain and Lindsey Graham are anxious to get a bill passed as quickly as possible. And while the Obama administration has not held an energy summit as it did for health care, Obama has had an easier time hiring and confirming staff on the environmental front than on the economy or health-care fronts. “There is more action and emphasis on global climate change in the past year than we've ever seen before," says Phyllis Cuttino of the Pew Environment Group's

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Domestic Climate Campaign. "We've seen more commitment from this Congress than we have ever before on global warming."  

In the eyes of U.S. environmentalists still smarting from the Bush Administration's pullout from the Kyoto Protocol, this is a pivotal time in history where the opportunity for dramatic action must not be wasted. Indeed, majority support for climate change is most likely in the near future as Democrats have control of both houses, and key positions are held by supporters of climate change legislation. Democrats have organized several hearings on global warming, in contrast to Republicans who assigned the issue to a lower priority when they were in the majority. Also, several states have recently announced plans to cut greenhouse gas emissions. The Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) went into effect January 1, 2009, capping emissions from all power plants in ten northeast states. The RGGI has established an important policy precedent by requiring nearly 100% auctioning of emissions allowances. Its objective is a 37% emission reduction by 2019. The western states have also launched a climate agreement modeled after the RGGI in March 2009.

Seeing the current shift in political power to the Democratic Party, groups such as the United Steelworkers and the Sierra Club have commissioned a series of new reports highlighting the economic opportunities that could come from a serious investment in clean, renewable energy.  

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The U.S. and the European Community: Necessary Partnership and Cooperation

With all the considerations surrounding current circumstances, where does the U.S. currently stand in the minds of the international community, especially those European states that have played such a pivotal role in global environmental policy? While there has been a convergence of views between the U.S. and Europe, substantial differences still remain. Before getting too optimistic, European Union leaders have several questions in mind concerning global environmental policy over the coming years. Another thing to consider is how the U.S public perceives the fight against global climate change. U.S. public opinion has clearly been moving in the right direction, as it has elsewhere in the world. Nearly everywhere you look today, people agree to strong action on climate change.

A fall 2008 BBC poll found that 65% of Americans agreed to “increase the cost of the types of energy that most cause climate change, such as coal and oil, in order to encourage individuals and industry to use less.” However, these results should be taken with a grain of salt. The reason for this is not because the methodology is flawed, but because people react differently when their pocketbook is actually affected through increased prices and taxes. For instance, in the latest Euro-barometer poll on the subject, 75% of the Europeans surveyed said they would be “ready to buy” more expensive green goods, but a mere 17% actually did so in the month preceding the survey. An analysis of the polls quoted above show that a majority of U.S. citizens are opposed to increasing
taxes to encourage conservation. Also, support for climate change action remains relatively recent in the U.S. With the U.S. in a current state of recession, policies affecting people’s purchasing power may become distinctly unpopular.

Another factor to consider is how the current European Union configuration and the U.S. will affect climate policy. One must remember that the EU’s paramount interest today is to ensure successful negotiations for a new global climate change treaty. After all, the U.S. and Europe represent together some 40% of world greenhouse gas emissions. A primary objective is to maintain “leadership” in the fight against climate change by acting internally, as a strategy to encourage global action. Current EU Environment Commissioner Stavros Dimas recently stated that by implementing the most ambitious set of climate and energy targets anywhere in the industrialized world Europeans are once again “demonstrating the European Union’s leadership in addressing climate change.” This is crucial as the international community heads into negotiations on a new global agreement. Another important objective is to reduce the impact on competitiveness for EU industry. Fortunately, however, the promising trends described above look to serve up an unprecedented opportunity to form a transatlantic alliance to lead efforts to fight global warming. Climate change can now be seen as a common cause for the EU and the U.S, rather than an issue that pits both sides of the Atlantic

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11 Ibid., 12.
against each other. There is the possibility to help drive the world towards an international agreement that seriously tackles the issue of global warming in the near future.

With all things considered, the Obama administration has a great opportunity to help reach a cohesive international agreement. At the present time, two striking observations can be made regarding the global environmental situation. First, for the first time, legislative proposals seeking to address climate change happen to be under discussion in parallel on both sides of the Atlantic and may come in the near future. Second, while there are real similarities between U.S. and EU plans, the United States may possibly go further than the EU on a number of aspects, and vice versa. The opportunity is thus ripe for Europe to engage the United States in climate policy deliberations and for EU discussions to benefit from the current U.S. administration’s plans. A very important item that must happen is for Europe to engage the Obama administration actively on the climate issue.¹²

In addition, the American mainstream is fast becoming aware of the climate problem and could benefit from learning of Europe’s experience in tackling the issue. A Democratic U.S. president with the backing of a Democratic Congress sets the stage for global climate change policy to take shape. This is also a crucial time for both U.S. and EU policies to trend towards harmonization and integration, especially for the functioning of carbon markets. Therefore, at this present stage, the European Union, the United States, and the world would benefit from a closer alignment of climate policies across the

¹² Ibid., 12.
Atlantic. Efforts should be focused on finding common legislative ground, so as to increase the likelihood that the U.S. outcome can work with the EU regime, and vice versa.\textsuperscript{13}

After examining the current situations in the U.S. and Europe, one may ask where do U.S- European negotiations need to go from here? Undoubtedly, the U.S. and Europe needs to build an environmental bridge together. As was discussed previously, that bridge must be built on Europe’s historic role as a leader on the issue, and must take advantage of U.S. Democratic president and Congress’ more accommodating attitude towards environmental issues. With this being said, there needs to be some support from Republican members of Congress in order for far reaching global initiatives to be passed in the Senate. If this is to happen, it would set the state for the U.S and Europe to build a strong environmental bridge and would ultimately help convince developing and emerging nations to a cooperative global environmental pact. Progress towards creating this bridge must start in December 2009 at the global climate negotiations in Copenhagen and it needs to be seen as a cooperative discussion.

**Steps to Improving the U.S. Environmental Record: Ending U.S. Reliance on Foreign Oil and Creating the Path to Clean Energy**

Over the last forty years, American politicians have talked about ending U.S. dependence on foreign oil with little results to show along the way. Nevertheless, during the campaign and since his election victory Barack Obama has made it clear that he finally intends to change the way America powers itself.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 13.
Just as he did from the start of his presidential campaign, in informal town hall settings and in nationally-noted speeches, President Obama has repeatedly stressed his determination to switch from fossil fuel to clean energy. The Obama administration goal is simple: fix, once and for all, the problem that started America’s economic emergency.

Obama stated in an interview for 60 Minutes on November 16, 2008 as follows:

We go from shock to trance. Oil prices go up. Gas prices at the pump go up. Everybody goes into a flurry of activity. Then the prices go back down and suddenly we act like it’s not important and we start filling up our SUVs again. As a consequence, we never make any progress. It’s part of the addiction that has to be broken. Now is the time to break it.  

He went on to discuss his energy plan, which would cut oil imports, create jobs, and reduce the pollution causing global warming. “Now is the time to confront this challenge once and for all,” Obama said. “Delay is no longer an option.”

If there is one truly audacious idea that Obama rode to the presidency, it’s the notion that the U.S. can produce a new era of prosperity by changing how it powers itself.

The basic details of his New Energy for America plan – a 10-year, $150 billion investment in wind, solar, bio-fuels, energy efficiency, transit, and conservation to create five million jobs – became one of his campaign’s core messages and really got the attention of environmentalist worldwide. Never had environmental principles played such a prominent role in a winning campaign for the American presidency.

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15 Ibid.
Some may argue that during a presidential campaign, there is no shortage of rhetoric that a candidate will use in order to get elected. And certainly, energy security and alternative energy have periodically risen, and then just as quickly disappeared, in campaigns since the early 1970s. Many recall a moment in November 1973, when President Nixon told a country anxious about gas lines his message for an independent energy future. Nixon stressed that the national goal should be that by the end of the 1970s, the U.S. should be developed with the potential to meet its own energy needs without depending on any foreign energy source.\textsuperscript{16} Over thirty years later, oil tops $50 a barrel, the price of gasoline hovers around $3.00 a gallon, and the U.S. seems more dependent on foreign oil than ever. President Obama has pledged to break the U.S. old practices by creating an energy plan that will invest in new technologies and alternative fuels so that “no American will ever be held hostage to our dependence on oil from the Middle East.”\textsuperscript{17} However, these are seemingly tough promises to keep looking back at U.S. history and its reliance on foreign oil.

There is also no shortage of skepticism that Obama can chart a new course for the U.S. economy that veers away from oil. Republican Senator James Inhofe of Oklahoma, who during the 2008 presidential campaign questioned whether the Obama “really loved his country,” snarled after Obama’s Presidential Inauguration and stressed that the

\textsuperscript{16} Marc K. Landy, \textit{The Environmental Protection Agency: From Nixon to Clinton}, 4.

\textsuperscript{17} Barack Obama, interview by Steve Croft, \textit{60 Minutes}. 

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“Senate would not be an easy place for the administration to pursue its clean energy agenda.”

Nonetheless, even with all this being said the Obama administration is seemingly on a different path than past administrations. Since his election, Obama has consistently emphasized two points that have convinced him that the transition from fossil fuel to clean energy is not just an economic and environmental necessity, it’s also politically practical.

The first is that a convergence of history, economics, technology, and deteriorating environmental conditions is steadily pushing the nation to switch fuel sources. Eighteenth century America was powered by oats and wind; the 19th century by wind and coal; the 20th by coal, oil, and nuclear power. Clean energy, a nearly $30 billion industry in the United States, is the nation’s fastest growing industrial sector and has had little help from government other than federal tax credits. A sizable national investment would accelerate the clean energy industrial development.

According to Democratic Representative Jay Inslee, a member of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, the evidence is much clearer right now for action on energy. “With gas prices and climate change and the middle-class crisis, many more people understand how these things are tied to energy.”

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18 Michael Buffer, “A Green Scheme,” 12.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
Just as crucial is Obama’s insistence that the moment to act is right now.

Throughout the 20th century, one of the basic underlying principles of the American economy was that the more fossil fuel we used, especially oil, the wealthier the U.S. became. Clearly, that is no longer the case. “The more fossil fuel the U.S. uses the poorer, more diminished, and more endangered it becomes.” This new fact of American economic life is due not just to the security risks fostered by the U.S. petro dollar imports, or to the climate weirdness made worse by U.S. coal and oil pollutants. It’s also that U.S. fossil-fuel, drive-through economy of convenience has crashed through market barriers that few anticipated.  

The extent of the damage is more than breathtaking. On September 4, 2008, for the first time in history, the National Highway Trust Fund, which finances highway construction, was empty, the consequence of Americans driving billions of fewer miles each month and paying less in gas taxes that replenish the fund. Two days later, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, the largest holder of mortgages for suburban home and office development, announced they were insolvent.

Though Congress quickly passed legislation to temporarily fill the highway fund, and rescue the mortgage banks, the significance of what occurred was quickly recognized by world financial markets. The three most important national accounts for building the gas-guzzling, highway-dependent, suburban, cul-de-sac, shopping-mall car culture that has been the American economy since the 1950s, were insolvent.

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America’s dispersed patterns of habitation, made possible by the market trends of the 20th century, especially cheap energy, were crashing. New homes in distant suburbs made sense when government was rich enough to build the highways, incomes were rising, and homeowners could commute long-distance in expensive cars using cheap fuel. But rising gas prices the last two years made the personal math more difficult. Incomes stagnated. That extra $200 to $300 a month that paid for fuel was the money homeowners really needed to pay the mortgage. The mortgage crisis erupted first and worst in the newest and most distant suburbs, and the tide of foreclosures swamped Wall Street.

In September 2008, Lehman Brothers, which held nearly a trillion dollars in assets connected to bundling bad mortgages, collapsed. Two days later the U.S. government poured $85 billion into AIG, the world’s largest insurer. Two days after that, on Sept. 19, the White House proposed a $700 billion financial rescue plan.

It did not end there. By early November 2008, General Motors, once the signature industrial institution of America’s drive-through economy, said it was close to collapse, and the Big Three U.S. automakers (Ford, Chrysler, and GM) said they were in need of a $25 billion bailout.

Even as Republicans and the Bush White House signaled their opposition, Obama who was a Senator at the time and Democratic Congressional leaders made it clear they wanted to rescue the industry and the way to do that was to help them fund a new “green economy.” Environmentalists subsequently took the side of Obama and the Democratic members of Congress. Since the 1960’s, environmentalists have well understood how economic principles influenced the environment. Economic development produced
growth, pollution, toxins, and ill-advised construction and sprawl that threatened species, babies, wild lands, and communities. The Obama administration has carefully studied these developments is planning to turn this 40-year-old frame around. President Obama has outlined a cleaner and more prosperous world made possible when environmental principles influence the economy. The old economic order is crashing. A new economic development strategy is needed and the Obama administration is ready to put it in place.\textsuperscript{22}

As Obama himself has stated, “We simply cannot pretend that we can drill our way out of this problem,” Obama said in introducing his New Energy for America plan in August. The Obama administration has made it clear that the U.S. needs a much bolder and much bigger set of solutions. As he has stated, “we have to make a serious, nationwide commitment to developing new sources of energy, and we have to do it right away.”\textsuperscript{23}

**Agenda and Priorities: Obama, Health Care, and U.S. Environmental Policy**

In addition to the poor state of the U.S. economy, the health care overhaul is also consuming Washington. Some worry that once again, the U.S. is at risk of seeing the issue of climate change displaced from the national agenda. Therefore, even if the U.S. Senate manages to pass the historic Kerry-Boxer climate Bill introduced in September 2009, will the congressional leadership and the Obama administration have enough political capital to steer two economy-transforming bills to passage at once?


\textsuperscript{23} Emily Badger, “Cautious Optimism for Obama,” 14.
Many expect any climate change bill that survives this high-stakes moment to be weakened to the point that it will not achieve the scientifically grounded objective of avoiding dangerous global warming. Chief among the concerns is that the bill’s emissions reduction targets won’t be steep enough. After all, the bill’s targets were weakened by the horse-trading that enabled its passage, and many expect the Senate to weaken them further. Yet tucked away in the bill is a little discussed, but ultimately crucial, provision informally referred to as the “scientific look-back.” And that measure, strengthened by a nascent idea to create something environmental experts call the Global Climate Change Index (GCCI), could put teeth back into the legislation that will limp across the line in Congress.\(^\text{24}\)

The so-called look-back provision calls for the Environmental Protection Agency to report to Congress in 2013 on the latest scientific developments and emissions-reducing solutions. The National Academies of Science would review those findings one year later. These reviews would be repeated every four years, assessing whether the U.S. climate program is on track to hit its emissions targets and whether those targets should be altered. The Obama administration could then recommend changes to Congress, but given the track record of congressional inaction on this issue, it’s anyone’s guess whether Congress would again act to tighten emissions targets. So the look-back provision, as it now stands, must be substantially strengthened in the bill being debated in the final months of 2009. Otherwise it will mandate an impressive succession of reports, but no real action to keep our emissions targets and other action in line with the latest science.

This is a gap a well-designed Global Climate Change Index would fill. A group of top scientists would be charged with devising a continuously updated index of measurable climate change impacts to inform policy makers, business people, and the public at large about the severity and pace of climate change, and to provide guidance on whether caps on carbon should be raised or lowered. This should be thought of as a kind of Dow Jones Index for global warming.

The GCCI could be used to obligate the Obama administration to tighten greenhouse gas emissions targets if climate change impacts intensify, without requiring elusive future legislative action by Congress. The index’s objectivity would help ensure that future changes in climate policy would be rooted in scientific data, and as much as possible in a democracy insulated from political calculations. Businesses, for their part, would have no grounds to complain about unanticipated toughening of emissions targets because they, too, would be able to continuously monitor the GCCI.\(^{25}\)

Among the data that could be used to compile the index and related sub-indices are the atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases, average global temperature, length and intensity of extreme heat days, frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, extent and thickness of sea ice and glaciers, changes in ice sheet volume, rate of sea level rise, incidence of climate-sensitive disease, ocean acidification, incidence of drought and flooding, and extent of permafrost thawing. Scientists would need to design the index to winnow out variables prone to misleading, short-term oscillations. However, based on preliminary consultations with scientists, there appear to be enough reasonably

stable indicators to choose from, especially if global averages are used, to smooth out much of the geographic variability.

The GCCI would have a timeliness lacking in the reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The IPCC produces voluminous reports every six years that are summarized for policy-makers and briefly contemplated by the public, but have patently failed to mobilize policy action commensurate to the threats they document. “The GCCI would create a middle ground” between the massive, episodic, and often-impenetrable texts like the IPCC report and the oversimplified news stories about the latest ice bridge collapse in Antarctica that lack context on the overall climate change problem.26

Some may argue that monitoring the new index would impose an additional burden on businesses in an area in which they have little experience. However, this is precisely the point. Executives in today’s economy currently track dozens of macroeconomic indicators and government reports on the health of the economy, such as GDP, consumer prices, payroll numbers, housing starts, exchange rates, and interest rates to inform their planning and investment decisions. This GCCI would eliminate the fiction that environmental indicators are ancillary or separate from our economy, and instead treat it as a core measure. In fact, as global warming intensifies, climate change is unfortunately going to impinge much more directly on business decisions, and smart executives are going to have little choice but to enhance their scientific literacy.

26 Ibid.
This proposal for a GCCI is distinct from the recent call by the director of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Agency, Jane Lubchenco, to create a National Climate Service (NCS). Now included in the bill before the Senate, the NCS would translate climate impacts down to the regional and local level to help government officials, communities, and businesses react to climate impacts, such as whether to harden a power plant against weather disruption or where to site a wind farm. The GCCI would focus instead on global and national trends and would be primarily used to determine whether our national climate policies should be more or less stringent.

In initial consultations, some scientists have expressed legitimate concerns that reducing mounds of complex climate change data to a single number runs a serious risk of oversimplification and misuse. They point out that it will also be difficult in the short term to distinguish climate change impacts from natural variability in weather. There is no substitute, they argue, for the interpretive lens of a scientist as a guide to decision-making. This concern reinforces the importance of not having the GCCI mechanically drive future adjustments of emissions targets, but rather create a guide to action that could be modified by supplement expert information.\textsuperscript{27}

It should also be noted that climate change scientists have so far confronted society with an opposite and equally insidious problem. In their scrupulousness to accurately reflect the complexity of climate change when communicating with the public and decision makers, scientists have overwhelmed many people, who have tuned out the

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
science and relegated climate change to a matter of ideological opinion rather than fact information.

Some argue that the GCCI would be intrinsically out of date, given that climate change impacts are always a time-lagged response to earlier emissions. This could be addressed by including in the index not only current indicators of global impacts, but also average projections from a carefully chosen set of authoritative climate models — for example, the latest estimates of temperature sensitivity to a projected doubling or tripling of atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases over pre-industrial levels. In addition to the GCCI, we should develop a mechanism to communicate its significance to the general public, helping people grasp the evolving risk of climate change and the rationale for carbon caps that will affect the price of energy.\textsuperscript{28}

One related idea could be similar to the seven-story electronic “carbon-counter” that Deutsche Bank erected in June 2009 in New York City. The counter displays the amount of carbon dioxide in the earth’s atmosphere, with 800 tons being added per second due to our industrial activities. The whirring numbers are a tangible way of driving home to the public the ceaseless momentum with which we are emitting planet-warming gases. This is a big contribution to public understanding, but it portrays only the cause, not the consequences, of global warming.\textsuperscript{29}

To fill that “consequence gap,” the U.S. could display the GCCI by installing massive “global warning clocks” in major city squares worldwide. Such clocks would

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 28.

\textsuperscript{29} Michael Buffer, “Time to Make Alternative Arrangements,” 14.
include numerical counters of greenhouse gas emissions, perhaps for that city and
country, as well as globally, and juxtaposed above these numerical displays would loom
the arresting centerpiece of the installation. There could be a large, slowly rotating three-
dimensional globe depicting planet Earth and real-time images, including satellite
photographs, of the climate change impacts associated with each the GCCI.\(^{30}\)

The globe could also display computer simulations of past and future climates
under different emissions scenarios. Few simulations are more sobering than watching
the Arctic ice cap, a vital planetary air conditioner; largely disappear, as it is expected to
do this century, while the interior of North America becomes a dark red, reflecting
extreme temperatures and drought. This visualization of a future of unabated climate
change would carry some urgent motivational power for those who observe it.\(^{31}\)

Innovations like the Global Climate Change Index and global warning clocks can
help society confront the scientific truths that are writing our destiny. It is a good sign
that the Obama administration is embracing such innovations, which can only help him
get important legislation through Congress. Indeed, innovations such as the global
warning clocks should be utilized to tap the full spectrum of human motivations.

Perhaps the best way for the U.S. to pave the way in combating global climate
change is to work on these innovations with foreign governments, especially those
foreign governments who are also on the list of world’s greatest carbon emissions
producers. The Obama administration could do something as simple as convincing


\(^{31}\) Ibid.
foreign leaders to install global warming clocks in their respective major cites. Imagine China installing these clocks in cities such as Beijing and Shanghai, which are two cities that produce more carbon emissions than many countries.\(^{32}\) Knowledge and awareness is a powerful weapon that has the potential to produce significant results. With a major global climate summit fast approaching in December 2009, now is the time for the U.S. to brainstorm fresh ideas and innovations with fellow global polluters; especially China.

CHAPTER 6
THE TREMENDOUS IMPORTANCE OF CHINA AND THE U.S.

Undoubtedly, China will play a primary role in the global environmental future. China is now without question a true 21st century nation that has broken barriers economically and has become a major force that plays a paramount role in all aspects of U.S. international policy, especially with regard to the environment and climate change. The U.S. and China, who sit currently the world’s two largest emitters of carbon dioxide, truly have no choice but to work together to tackle climate change.

While it is true that China is still a country with many authoritarian characteristics, it is also one with which U.S.’s fate is inextricably entwined. As was previously stated, one way in which the U.S. and China are deeply linked is around the issue of the environment and climate change. And what both countries increasingly have in common is the huge quantity of greenhouse gases each country now discharges into the atmosphere. At the present time, China and the U.S. account for nearly half of all global CO$_2$ emissions.$^1$

If the world is to find a way to successfully confront the challenge of global climate change, the U.S. and China must not only begin collaborating, but start leading the multilateral effort. Although they are only beginning to become aware of the connection, both nations are part of an unspoken partnership, whose hallmarks to date have been mutual irresponsibility and neglect rather than constructive collaboration. The

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current challenge before the U.S. and China is to transform this still environmentally abusive relationship into a collaborative one where both sides begin to cooperate on finding new solutions.

When it comes to the issue of global climate change, the interests of the U.S. and China are demonstrably similar. Indeed, one atom of carbon emitted into the global atmosphere from China is the same as one atom emitted from the U.S. Additionally, the consequences of rapidly escalating emissions from both nations are now beginning to be increasingly evident in such phenomena as melting glaciers, changing weather patterns, and the loss of Arctic sea ice.\(^2\) Whatever else may divide the U.S. and China, and there is much, they will be unable to escape the consequences of each other’s actions on climate change.

China’s share of global greenhouse gas emissions has risen from 13 percent in 2000 to 24 percent in 2008. In 2009, for the first time in history, scientists estimated that China is producing more CO\(_2\) than the United States, which is hardly surprising, given that China’s energy consumption doubled from 2000 to 2008.\(^3\)

According to the U.S. Department of Energy, if both China and the U.S. proceed on the current course, China’s annual CO\(_2\) emissions are estimated to grow from 5.3 billion tons in 2005 to 12 billion tons in 2030, while U.S. emissions are estimated to grow from around 6 billion to 6.9 billion tons. This is an indication that, without taking major

\(^2\) Ibid.

remedial actions, China by 2030 will have accounted for more than 40 percent of global growth in energy-related CO₂ emissions.⁴

The biggest problem, as described by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, is that for the world to stay in any semblance of equilibrium, heat-trapping atmospheric gases must be reduced some 50 percent below 1990 levels before 2050. However, before we conclude that China is the main culprit, it is worth pointing out that when one calculates the total historical burden of CO₂ emissions from energy consumption since the industrial revolution began, China ends up having contributed only 8.5 percent, while the U.S. has contributed 28 percent. Moreover, while the U.S. currently has only 5 percent of the world’s population, we are nonetheless emitting approximately the same amount of carbon as China, which has over four times our population.⁵ This means that the per capita emissions of an average American are roughly five times larger than that of the average Chinese.

Given this historical and per capita imbalance, it is hardly surprising that China argues that in any future partnership, the U.S. must not only be prepared to take the lead, but that there must be an apportionment of responsibilities. In the eyes of the Chinese, because of the U.S.’s past and current wastefulness, the U.S. should assume more responsibility and make a greater economic contribution to any solution. This very


principle has been endorsed by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change as “common but differentiated responsibilities.”

In both the U.S. and China today, the largest source of CO\textsubscript{2} emissions comes from the burning of coal. This is largely because both nations are endowed with abundant coal reserves. China claims 13 percent of global coal reserves, from which it now derives some 80 percent of its electrical energy, while the U.S. claims 27 percent of the world’s coal reserves, from which it currently derives about 50 percent of its electrical energy. Thus, with the cost of oil rising, neither country is likely to kick the coal habit as a primary energy source any time soon. In this sense the two countries are quite similar in their energy profiles.

Fascinatingly enough, China’s industrial sector, which is largely coal-fired, now consumes 70 percent of the country’s energy production, while in the U.S. the industrial sector consumes only 33 percent of our energy. Although U.S. labor unions lament the export of U.S. jobs abroad, few Americans seem to realize that, by outsourcing many of our most polluting industries, the U.S. has also managed to export a good deal of pollutants to China as well.

Conventional pollutants, such as mercury and sulfur dioxide, tend to have more localized effects, and thus harm Chinese far more than Americans when emitted in China. However, when it comes to CO\textsubscript{2} emissions, the U.S. and China are in a common situation

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{6} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{7} "Carbon Dioxide Capture and Storage," Report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2009.
\item \textsuperscript{8} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
in which there is no gain to exporting carbon emissions because their effects are global. Even though the U.S. and China are the largest producers of CO$_2$, neither nation has at the present time agreed to any defined limits on emissions. China has signed the Kyoto Protocol, but as a developing country, which means that it is not obliged to meet any absolute limits for greenhouse gas emissions. The U.S., as we all know, initially signed the Kyoto Protocol under President Clinton which was later repudiated by President Bush as one of his first acts as President.\footnote{Ibid.
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As a result, neither the U.S. nor China, the world’s two largest users of coal and emitters of CO$_2$, are currently in the game, at least in terms of agreeing to accept defined limits on greenhouse gases. China has been working assiduously, however, toward greater energy efficiency, the most logical place for a developing nation to begin diminishing greenhouse gas emissions without adding excessive costs to their continued development.\footnote{Dan Verano, “China and the Control of Emissions,” 4.
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China’s 11th Five Year Plan, promulgated in 2005, called for a reduction of 20 percent in energy intensity per unit of GDP by the year 2010. In addition, a Renewable Energy Law, which went into effect in 2006, calls for 30 percent of China’s total electrical generation capacity to be renewable by 2020.\footnote{“Carbon Dioxide Capture and Storage,” Report, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2009.
}
In recent years, what has weighed against significant new levels of joint action by China and the U.S. is an incomplete appreciation of the gravity of the problem. Insufficiently alarmed by the growing climate crisis, leaders in each country have sought to hide behind the inaction of the other. Thus, relatively little has been accomplished to move these two titanic players toward meaningful collaboration.

According to Dr. Mark D. Levine, Senior Staff Scientist and China Energy Group Chairman at Berkeley National Laboratory, as long as China does little to reduce growth of greenhouses gas emissions, or appears to be doing little, it will be “politically difficult for the U.S. to sign a binding international treaty that commits to a serious cap on emissions.” From this, we can see that for the longest time it seems that as long as the U.S. does little, or appears to be doing little, it is impossible to imagine China committing to cap its own emissions.¹²

We have been trapped in what Levine describes as “a vicious circle in which neither country will act boldly unless the other acts first, and neither appears willing to act first.” Levine believes that the previous administration’s most grievous failure was that it wasted eight critical years without addressing the gathering problem of climate change, especially with regard to the U.S. relationship to China as the world’s two biggest polluters.¹³ Indeed, the Bush administration did not aggressively engage China in a common partnership to solve the daunting challenge of global climate change.

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¹³ Ibid.
Now is an opportune time for the Obama administration to make up for the past failures with regard to the virtual non-discussion in forming a Sino-U.S. alliance on climate change. Unlike that of the past administration, President Obama has made an active effort to launch a major national discussion. As of November 2009 the Obama administration is actively pursuing negotiations with China, in the effort to win a commitment to fight global warming. The Obama administration hopes a new commitment will breathe more life into the hopes to seal a global treaty on climate change in Copenhagen in December. Such a bilateral deal may strengthen any Copenhagen agreement. Obama himself plans on visiting Beijing at the end of November 2009 to negotiate the framework of the December 2009 Copenhagen Summit. Obama strongly believes that a bilateral agreement with China is the key to reaching an agreement in Copenhagen. This current administration is looking at the visit to Beijing as a way to produce concrete commitments from China on how it would reduce its large and rapidly rising emissions. Chinese President Hu Jintao announced at a UN summit in October 2009 that China would reduce energy intensity by "notable margins." Most environmental experts agree that a deal between the U.S. and China on reducing rising emissions could make or break the global negotiations at Copenhagen.¹⁴

Before getting too excited about a successful negotiation with China, one must remember that China is also extremely sensitive about being told what to do, especially to be asked to do something that may affect its economy just as its moment of economic

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ascendancy has arrived. This will most certainly not be an easy task for the Obama administration. Nevertheless, the reality is that the U.S. is in a completely new paradigm. The U.S. has no choice but to try and collaborate with this unlikely ally. If the Obama administration can successfully work cooperatively with China to reduce CO₂ emissions, the world stands a far greater chance of reducing the threat of global climate change. If the Obama administration fails, it is difficult to see how China will do it alone.¹⁵

Looking towards Copenhagen, there are a few things that both the U.S. States and China should look at as a mutual benefit for successfully reaching a bilateral agreement. Firstly, one should look to the simple fact that both the U.S. and China are undergoing unprecedented economic challenges and have recognized the importance of using the present economic downturn to transition to sustainable economic development paths through significant investment in energy efficiency, renewable energy, and other green infrastructure. This would create a unique window to create millions of valuable “green jobs” in each country, which will enable the U.S. and China to lead the world in the creation of new, green industries and clean technologies. Developing green jobs and industries will also strengthen the energy security of each country by reducing reliance on imported fossil fuels.¹⁶

The economic stimulus packages of both countries include potentially promising “green” components. China disclosed a U.S. $585 billion stimulus package that proposes at least U.S. $51 billion for biological conservation and environmental protection.

¹⁵ Ibid.

China’s Ministry of Environmental Protection has announced that the stimulus will “not be spent in the energy- and resource-intensive industries or high-pollution industries” and will benefit the renewable energy and pollution control industries. President Obama has also proposed a stimulus package that, in part, creates green jobs through business incentives for alternative energy sources and environmentally friendly technologies.\textsuperscript{17}

The potential for green innovation in China’s economic stimulus package in fact far exceeds what has explicitly been announced, but only if environmental criteria are extended to the whole package. China could, for example, develop criteria to ensure that the 280 billion Yuan (Chinese currency) proposed for housing projects is spent only on green building projects that save water and energy and are located using smart growth principles. The 1.8 trillion Yuan proposed for transportation and the power grid could focus on public transit rather than highways, and should ensure that transmission lines are located in areas that will enable China to tap its abundant renewable energy resources. In addition, research and development and innovation projects should focus on clean energy, advanced transportation, and energy and water efficiency technologies. The stimulus package could also include funding for a comprehensive program of skills development and worker placement to train unemployed workers for green jobs, such as industrial energy auditors and building energy code inspectors.\textsuperscript{18}

Similar efforts could be made to incorporate green innovation into many aspects of the U.S. stimulus package. Environmentalists at the Pew Institute for Climate Change

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
have proposed, for example, a more than $30 billion U.S. energy savings plan that includes energy efficiency retrofits, construction of an improved electricity grid, strengthened energy efficiency standards, policy reforms, training, and more efficient power plants.\footnote{19}

Ultimately, the U.S. and Chinese economies are inextricably intertwined, so any hope of economic recovery requires joint action. There are enormous opportunities for both the U.S. and China to cooperate in the development of strategies that will jump-start the global economy and create green jobs. One can only hope that both countries see this leading up to Copenhagen. Undoubtedly, the December 2009 climate summit provides the potential for monumental strides towards a unified Sino-U.S. front. It would most certainly bring tremendous benefit, not only to the U.S. and China, but to the entire world and the future of the planet.

\footnote{19} “Carbon Dioxide Capture and Storage,” Report, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2009.
CONCLUSION

OBAMA, COPENHAGEN, AND THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL FUTURE

Without a doubt, if crucial climate negotiations later this year in Copenhagen are to succeed, the U.S. must be aggressive. To do that, President Obama needs to act boldly. Obama will undoubtedly face one of the most important moments of his presidency in December 2009 in Copenhagen, and he needs his entire cabinet to help him prepare for it over the final stretch. December 18, 2009 is the final day of the global climate meetings in Copenhagen, a day that will signify whether the world community has finally mustered the will to rein in soaring greenhouse gas emissions. That fixed date, combined with escalating scientific urgency and unparalleled political opportunity, make 2009 the do-or-die year for comprehensive federal climate action.

Rajendra Pachauri, chairman of the Nobel Prize-winning Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, says that emissions must be stabilized by 2015 and in decline by 2020 for the planet to maintain sustainability. Science, in its rightful place, can tolerate no further delay. For Obama, the political winds at his back are now as favorable as they will ever be. He is in a position to seize 2009 and do three things to meet the climate challenge: properly educate the American public about climate change and the need for immediate action; exercise the full might of his executive powers and regulatory discretion under the Clean Air Act to jump-start action; and spend freely from his enormous store of political capital to lead the government to enact comprehensive federal
climate legislation.\textsuperscript{1} If he does, the United States will reclaim the mantle of global leadership when it takes its seat in Copenhagen.

After eight years of U.S. inaction on climate change, American leadership offers the greatest hope of success. President Obama must carry with him some weight and credibility to the promise he made in his inaugural address to “roll back the specter of a warming planet.” In Copenhagen, his inspiring ways of giving a speech alone will not be sufficient. Indeed, Obama must demonstrate how science has been restored “to its rightful place” in America in strong climate regulation and law.\textsuperscript{2}

For almost a decade, Americans have been purposefully led astray about the reality of global warming and about the positive relationship that exists between sustainable economic prosperity and environmental stewardship. The Obama administration must use the bully pulpit to provide quick and remedial education.

Obama has been very wise in creating his scientific team led by John Holdren, the White House science adviser; Jane Lubchenco, the head of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; and Energy Secretary Steven Chu. Obama must do whatever he to empower them and other government scientists to speak loudly, unequivocally, and frequently to the American public about the true science of climate change and the urgency of our present circumstances. The latest science only


\textsuperscript{2} Ibid.
underscores the need for immediate action, given the acceleration of global ice melt,
extreme weather events, dangerous feedback loops, and potentially irreversible changes.\(^3\)

President Obama must also instruct his cabinet to clarify the impact of global climate change on each of their respective portfolios. Global warming has been crammed into a “green” box for the sake of political expediency. Instead, it must be appreciated for its crosscutting immensity, it is fundamental to national security, global commerce, economic recovery, energy security, public health and safety, agricultural policy, land-use planning, and environmental protection.\(^4\)

As a suggestion, Obama may want to plan to make a televised address on national television to the U.S. public about the climate crisis and the need for immediate action and U.S. global leadership. Such a speech, with his great oratory skills, would send a clear signal to the American public and the political establishment and prepare them to come together with the nations of the world in Copenhagen to meet this grave challenge.

Simultaneously, the president must travel to Copenhagen with real regulatory achievements. Signs are good that Obama genuinely means business. He is talking frequently about energy and climate change, and his economic recovery package makes important commitments toward green jobs, clean energy, and energy efficiency, some $54 billion worth. This is more than a third of the $150 billion he promised over the next 10 years for clean energy investments, so if the package survives its passage through Congress, he will be ahead of schedule on that score. By itself, however, this investment


\(^4\) Ibid.
inside a trillion dollar package merely colors the economic recovery. It is not an energy and climate plan, and Obama will still face heavy regulatory and legislative lifting to turn promise into reality.\(^5\)

Regardless, expectations are high that Obama will exercise all his executive authority to achieve some quick victories in Copenhagen and put pressure on Congress to act boldly. With former EPA Chief Carol Browner heading up his White House climate team, Obama has tapped the talent he needs to implement a powerful regulatory strategy. As expected, the EPA’s first order of climate business is already moving forward, which is granting a long-delayed waiver to California to allow the state to impose more stringent auto emissions rules. This is what 13 other states are poised to adopt as well. Manufacturers will soon have to deliver higher mileage vehicles on an accelerated schedule. By approving the waiver after a formal review process, EPA administrator Lisa Jackson will guarantee steep future emissions reductions from the transportation sector, and allow the thorny bailout of Detroit to proceed without any doubt as to where the industry must head, despite currently low fuel prices.\(^6\)

The boldness of Obama’s regulatory strategy, however, may hinge greatly upon the fate of coal-burning power plants. Since the Supreme Court affirmed in Massachusetts v. EPA that carbon dioxide could be regulated as a pollutant under the law, it has become an open question as to how existing coal plants and permits for new ones will now fare under the act. The EPA plainly has the right to control CO\(_2\)


emissions, and the real issue is how aggressively the law will be applied. In the short
term, the question of coal rests largely in Obama’s hands, and he has the authority to stop
new dirty coal plants cold. He proved it his first week in office when the EPA revoked
an air permit for the Big Stone II coal plant in South Dakota, the largest such coal plant in
the U.S.\textsuperscript{7}

If that first signal gets amplified, it will certainly change the tone of what happens
with coal in Congress longer-term, where powerful lobbies have held science hostage.
The president’s executive action on coal may invigorate Copenhagen and will help bring
seriousness to bilateral discussions with China, which is widely known as the world’s
coil juggernaut. At his direction, the U.S. can jump-start climate action by speeding
aggressive federal standards for building and appliance efficiency and placing limits on
other carbon-intensive sources of pollution, which include steel mills, cement plants,
other heavy industries, and shipping.\textsuperscript{8}

Coming to Copenhagen with the necessary credentials is essential to Obama’s
success. It would not hurt the Obama administration to also strengthen energy efficiency
incentives and clean energy tax credits, adopt a mandatory federal renewable energy
target, and increase investment in a clean energy grid.

To secure his crowning achievement, Obama must expend political capital in
Congress and work with leaders there to complete passage of such bills as the Kerry-
Boxer Bill, which includes science-based federal legislation capping greenhouse gas

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{8} Ibid.
emissions. The legislation must be signed into law as quickly as possible, as delay into 2010 will wreck it on the shoals of mid-term elections, a time when political courage disappears. There will not be another political opportunity as ripe as now and there may never be another financial context more sensitive to a strong new signal. As the global economy starts to rise from collapse, it must do so with a price on carbon as part of its cure.⁹

The current possibility of a real American accomplishment, brought by President Obama to Copenhagen, may help set the stage for passage of a comprehensive international treaty to slow and ultimately stop global warming. Now is the precise time for President Obama to act, while the window of opportunity is open. Indeed, the future of the planet may be depending on it.

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