> **“Although the dispute about climate change is overshadowed by the strain in European–American relations concerning war with Iraq, it may have been a factor in the growing level of distrust between the United States and Europe. Indeed, the dispute over global warming may mask a larger concern.”**

Climate Change Blues: Why the United States and Europe Just Can’t Get Along

JOSHUA W. BUSBY

On a host of issues—from the question of Iraq to global warming and the International Criminal Court—the United States and its European allies appear out-of-step with one another. Although September 11 has reminded the members of the West of their continued shared interests, it is not clear consensus will easily be achieved on other issues that divide America and Europe.

Of these, few are thornier than the concern over global warming. Because the response to global warming requires near universal action to reduce emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, reaching a settlement acceptable to all countries is especially daunting. The capacity for governments to agree is further complicated by the concerns of very powerful vested interests in the energy industry that are likely to face considerable costs should governments adopt policies to mitigate the problem.

JOSHUA W. BUSBY *is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Government at Georgetown University. This essay is adapted from a longer paper that was presented at the 2002 American Political Science Association conference in Boston, Mass.*

FROM SCIENCE TO POLICY

Despite almost a century of knowledge about the possibility of global warming, the issue only emerged on the radar of United States policymakers in the late 1980s. Hearings were held in 1988 to assess NASA scientist James Hansen’s claims that the earth’s surface temperature seemed to be rising in concert with man’s emissions of carbon dioxide. With that, the scientific community was (further) mobilized to determine the validity of this finding and the implications for humans and natural ecosystems. (Environmentalists had been concerned about the issue since the mid-1980s.) By the late 1980s and early 1990s, politicians had been made sufficiently aware of “global warming” (also referred to as the “greenhouse effect” or “climate change”) that they incorporated it into international environmental negotiations.[1]

The first international effort to reach agreement on steps to remedy or stabilize the problem was the Framework Convention on Climate Change, negotiated at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio, Brazil during the presidency of George H. W. Bush. Prompted by United States lobbying, however, no binding targets on carbon dioxide emissions were negotiated in Rio. Although the framework was an important first step, more difficult substantive commitments to address the problem were left for later negotiation sessions.

Subsequent studies produced near unanimity of scientific judgment that global warming was indeed a serious concern, providing added incen-

[1]The “greenhouse effect” is not the most appropriate term for anthropogenic-inspired climate change. The greenhouse effect is a natural phenomenon that warms the earth so that it is sufficiently habitable for life. The term refers to the atmospheric gas conditions around the earth that are transparent to incoming ultraviolet radiation but absorb large amounts of outgoing infrared radiation (heat), thereby trapping it in the atmosphere and raising ambient temperatures. Global warming thus refers to an enhanced warming effect resulting from increased concentrations of greenhouse gases that, in turn, keep even more heat in the atmosphere. Global surface temperature data show a 0.5° C increase over the last 100 years and a 30 percent increase in greenhouse gases in the past 200 years.

Downloaded from http://online.ucpress.edu/currenthistory/article-pdf/102/662/113/390838/curh_102_662_113.pdf by guest on 25 September 2020

tive for later negotiating rounds to reach agreement on specific commitments. In December 1997, at a meeting of more than 160 nations in Kyoto, Japan, these culminated in the Kyoto Protocol. Under the protocol, a number of industrial countries (so-called Annex I or Appendix B countries) committed themselves to reductions in carbon dioxide and five other greenhouse gases: methane, nitrous oxide, hydrofluorocarbons, perfluorocarbons, and sulfur hexafluoride.[2] For the three major greenhouse gases—carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide—Annex I countries pledged to reduce average emissions by 6 to 8 percent below 1990 levels between 2008 and 2012. The United States, the single largest emitter of world carbon dioxide emissions (23 percent), committed to a 7 percent reduction.[3]

Kyoto, however, left unresolved the mechanisms by which countries would attain those reductions and also excluded a number of developing countries such as China and India from mandatory carbon dioxide emissions reductions (the developing countries of Asia are projected to produce about 38 percent of world carbon dioxide emissions by 2020, with China topping United States carbon dioxide emissions by that time if neither country adopts reduction measures). Anticipating this, the United States Senate passed a nonbinding resolution (Senate Resolution 98, the so-called Byrd–Hagel resolution) by a vote of 95 to 0, indicating that the Senate's support for any climate change treaty was conditional on binding commitments from developing countries; the resolution also suggested the United States should not be a signatory to any global warming treaty that did "serious harm" to the American economy.

Although developing-country participation was not incorporated at Kyoto, the United States successfully pressed for flexible market mechanisms (including an emissions trading system) to achieve reductions at the least cost.[4] It was again left for later negotiations to specify the precise form of these tradable permits and the details of the other flexibility mechanisms. Having achieved agreement, at least theoretically, on such mechanisms, the Clinton administration signed the Kyoto Protocol on November 12, 1998 but indicated that it had no intention of sending the treaty to the Senate for ratification until it was altered to include "meaningful participation" by developing countries.

Ultimately, negotiations that would have settled the questions from Kyoto foundered in a November 2000 summit at The Hague. Moreover, despite an indication during the 2000 United States presidential campaign that he would promote mandatory carbon dioxide emissions reductions, newly elected President George W. Bush, on March 13, 2001, abruptly overruled the pleas of his Environmental Protection Agency administrator, Christine Todd Whitman, that he honor his campaign pledge. The Bush administration soon announced its intent to repudiate the Kyoto Protocol, even though it had never been sent to the Senate for advice and consent (and could not conceivably in its form at that time secure the necessary two-thirds majority).

By the end of 2001 the rest of the world had negotiated more specific commitments in Marrakech, Morocco to uphold Kyoto with some slight modifications. In 2002, European countries, despite the resistance of the United States, took the lead in ratifying and encouraging other key signatories to ratify the Kyoto Protocol. On May 31 the 15 member states of the European Union ratified the protocol, followed by Japan on June 4. As of January 22, 2003, 103 countries had ratified or acceded to the protocol—close to but still short of the number necessary for the treaty to enter into force. Without the United States as a participant in the process and with developing countries excluded, it is unclear how successful the effort will be.

THE ORIGINS OF THE CONFLICT

Why have the United States and its European allies been unable to reach agreement on a response to global warming? An obvious reason is the importance of domestic political considerations. The Clinton administration endorsed a deal it thought the

[2]Annex I countries, named after an annex in the Framework Convention, are the 38 industrialized countries, plus the European Union.

[3]In 1990, United States carbon emissions were estimated to be 1,337 million metric tons (MMT) carbon equivalent. According to a 1998 Business Roundtable estimate, United States emissions would rise to 1,803 MMT without a change in energy consumption patterns. The 7 percent reduction would have required a reduction to 1,243 MMT, 41.9 percent lower emissions than the 2010 projection. Projections of carbon dioxide emissions by other studies suggest reductions necessary to meet the Kyoto Protocol vary from 21 percent to over 30 percent from "business as usual" 2010 emission levels.

[4]It may be more expensive for certain firms and countries to comply with Kyoto reductions targets. Thus, where it is inexpensive for one firm (or country) to reduce emissions and expensive for another, emissions reduction should occur where it is cheapest to do so. Through trading, the firm (or country) for which emissions reductions is expensive can purchase emissions credits from the other and thereby reduce total abatement costs.

Downloaded from http://online.ucpress.edu/currenthistory/article-pdf/102/662/113/390838/curh_102_662_113.pdf by guest on 25 September 2020

American public supported—even though his administration did not have congressional support for the protocol. But after the Kyoto commitment was made, the domestic ratification process in the United States became unhinged. Because of the Senate resolution requiring any agreement to include developing countries, President Bill Clinton never submitted (or intended to submit) the Kyoto Protocol for ratification, no doubt hoping that a subsequent Congress might be more favorable to the treaty.

Europeans increasingly saw international action as inevitable and internalized Kyoto as a new status quo. Moreover, the additional scientific information that global warming was real and as serious, if not more so, than previously believed, led to a strengthening of the European commitment to Kyoto. A particularly important moment was the September 1998 victory of German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder's coalition of Social Democrats and Greens over the Christian Democrats. Given the influence of Germany in Europe, this leadership change most likely reinforced the position of Europeans favorable to more ambitious carbon dioxide reduction efforts. (As it happened, the lead negotiators for Germany and France at The Hague summit were Greens.)

Global warming never was completely isolated from other aspects of foreign policy, and its significance becomes clearer as ties between the United States and Europe are strained.

Europeans generally share the belief that the United States is profligate in its energy use. The typical statistic cited is that the United States has only 5 percent of the world's population but uses between 20 and 25 percent of the world's energy resources. (Reactions by European newspapers to the Bush decision to repudiate the Kyoto Protocol emphasized this statistic.) The gas-guzzling sports utility vehicle is a focal point, indicative of American gluttony. As the science of global warming has confirmed fears that earth's surface temperatures are rising, these anti-American attitudes have only hardened. With left-of-center governments in power in much of Europe, mass public and politician positions on global warming were largely in sync.

As time dragged on without agreement, it became increasingly clear that few countries would be able to reduce emissions to 1990 levels in the Kyoto timeframe. Yet European leaders found themselves constrained to renegotiate Kyoto on terms more favorable to the United States and with lower emissions reduction targets. While European leaders conceivably might have been more willing to strike a deal that would allow some implementation to proceed, other elements in European society suggested that the Kyoto Protocol already was a compromise from which further concessions were anathema. Talk of market mechanisms, emissions trading, and carbon sinks for United States forests struck many in Europe as permission for the United States to avoid bearing the costs of responding to global warming. Europeans believed success would require that Americans feel the pain of high gasoline prices, something Europe had long known. Lower emissions reductions than Kyoto would not be tolerated.

As we have seen, the story does not end there. A moderately supportive President Clinton was replaced by a more skeptical, even hostile, George W. Bush. Clinton had hoped for modest concessions by the Europeans to reduce the costs of United States compliance with Kyoto. He also probably had hoped that his named successor, Al Gore, would face a more favorable Congress in 2000 and 2002, which would make domestic ratification of Kyoto easier.

Whereas Clinton had been cautiously optimistic about the general Kyoto framework, George W. Bush assailed the architecture as fundamentally flawed. Although other issues, namely developing-country participation, remained unaddressed, Bush suggested that the costs for the United States economy were too great. Consequently, the American position locked on the pre-Kyoto status quo, and the European position locked on the Kyoto agreement. For Europe and the United States, there was no going forward and no going back.

LOCKED IN

Why was the framework in Kyoto adopted at all and why has it been such a durable failure? The reasons date to the manner in which the issue was framed in the late 1980s and early 1990s: the need to avert an "environmental disaster." Activists know that necessity is the mother of invention and therefore try to invent necessity by seizing on new information or events to dramatize their perspective. Thus, in the late 1980s, with some of the hottest summers on record, activists used evocative language to make the issue viscerally compelling to policymakers. Images abounded of coastal cities

Downloaded from http://online.ucpress.edu/currenthistory/article-pdf/102/662/113/390838/curh_102_662_113.pdf by guest on 25 September 2020

and islands inundated by rising seas, crops and lawns burnt to a crisp, and huge tempests and floods wreaking havoc. In so doing, advocates enhanced the sense of impending doom if immediate action were not taken; short-term emissions reductions were seen as the first line of defense against imminent disaster.

Emissions reductions appeared to be a sensible strategy to attach to the problem in part because of the success of international efforts to deal with the ozone hole. Because ozone had been handled through a swift timetable for the phase-out of chlorofluorocarbons, advocates seeking models of successful international environmental efforts seized on this approach in outlining of how to deal with global warming. While the first Bush administration vigorously fought against binding emissions reductions in the 1992 Rio treaty, the stage was already set in the language of the Framework Convention for emissions reductions targets. Thereafter, no serious efforts were made to develop other approaches. Kyoto ultimately entrenched the commitment to specific emissions reductions in treaty language.[5]

Gradually, the international community became committed to a program of binding emissions reductions. This program of action ultimately was difficult to implement. Where United States domestic political interests believed the reductions to be too deep and too fast, Europeans saw the cuts as necessary first steps. Both positions foreclosed compromise. With no going forward or back, the Europeans, for the time being, have decided to go it alone.

NOT JUST ABOUT GLOBAL WARMING?

Although the dispute about climate change is overshadowed by the strain in European–American relations concerning war with Iraq, it may have been a factor in the growing level of distrust between the United States and Europe. Indeed, the dispute over global warming may mask a larger concern.

The United States and Europe differed in the early days of the current Bush administration on a variety of issues: missile defense, land mines, chemical weapons, and small arms. Skeptical of Bush because of his inexperience as well as his administration's announced position on missile defense, Europeans were seeking signs of a pattern by which they could judge how the Bush presidency would unfold. Bush's March 2001 renunciation of the Kyoto Protocol was the strongest corroboration of their worst fears, and Europeans sought to warn Bush that this kind of attitude was unwelcome.

Yet European concern predated the Bush administration, which suggests deeper-rooted and more serious problems. The Clinton administration had sparred with the Europeans on many sensitive topics, including genetically modified foods, bananas, beef, and sanctions against firms that invested in Cuba. Moreover, the failure by the Clinton administration to pay UN dues, coupled with disputes over the attempt to ban land mines and the negotiations on the creation of the International Criminal Court, confirmed for many Europeans that the United States was an unreliable partner and unwilling to play by the rules of international law. Some argue that the rift between the United States and Europe stems from their different power positions, which give rise to conflicting preferences over instruments (international law versus unilateralism) as well as different priorities over ends.

Despite the rallying effect of September 11, there is still a broad undercurrent of anti-Americanism in Europe and general concern about United States unilateralism. This is true regarding possible conflict with Iraq and the conduct of the American intervention in Afghanistan, as well as United States actions in other spheres, namely America's withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and last-minute efforts to derail enforcement of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention in December 2001. As Ivo Daalder of the Brookings Institution has written, "the reality is that the partners mean less to each other than they once did, and their interests and priorities are diverging."[6]

While this speaks to the context, what else would demonstrate that this dispute is about more than global warming? If global warming were the focus, then we might have seen European countries undertake some domestic reforms that would reduce global warming emissions despite the lack of United States participation. But most countries in Europe have not. The Marrakech agreement suggested they may be willing to do so, and subsequent efforts to

[5]Although Kyoto left for later negotiation considerable detail on implementation mechanisms, the initial creakiness of the framework has never been revisited, partly because considerable sunk costs have been invested in trying to set it in motion. Although it may be generally acknowledged that the modest emissions reductions Kyoto envisions will do little to ameliorate the problem, it is expected to lead to technological change (full compliance with Kyoto would only reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 0.39 percent compared with projections for 2010 without Kyoto). Bruce Yandle, "After Kyoto: A Global Scramble for Advantage," *The Independent Review,* Summer 1999.

[6]"Continental Drift: The Atlantic Alliance," *San Jose Mercury News,* June 24, 2001.

Downloaded from http://online.ucpress.edu/currenthistory/article-pdf/102/662/113/390838/curh_102_662_113.pdf by guest on 25 September 2020

ratify the treaty have given a stronger indication of the depth of European sentiment; the real test is to come when a number of states have to make potentially wrenching adjustments in energy and transport policy to meet their Kyoto commitments.

At the same time, European political leaders have been able to take advantage of United States intransigence for domestic political gains.[7] Smaller powers may use policy disagreements with hegemonic states to assert their differences and independence. Since hegemonic powers may gain more from the order than smaller states, they may be forced to tolerate some behavior they otherwise would not. This is the price of dominance. For smaller states, there may be reasons to bind their opposition to the hegemonic order. Balancing may be undesirable because the gains of being part of the order outweigh the costs. Alternatively, as William Wohlforth has argued is the case in the post–cold war world, United States power is so great that balancing has become almost unthinkable. The barriers to entry are so high that states see no advantage in vigorously opposing the United States through the traditional instruments of balancing, such as external alliances or internal military buildups.

But rhetorical objections to hegemonic leadership may net political gains at home. A state may seek to differentiate itself from the most powerful state in the way that France has had an on-again/off-again ambivalent relationship with NATO. In the current climate, secondary powers may serve as the moral guardians of the Western order in a division of labor. With the United States providing the security umbrella and demonstrating (until recently) overwhelming economic strength, European countries may see defense of social democratic gains and humanitarian internationalism as their distinctive contribution to the Western order. Although this may have advantages when courting the developing world, the primary gains may be for domestic audiences, anxious in the face of regional integration and globalization to have a cover of legitimacy for activities that bind them internationally to their peers. This may explain why the United States and Europe differ in so many areas, both in terms of substantive disagreements over policies as well as conflicts over unilateralist and multilateralist decision-making processes.

Do the significant differences on both substance and process signify that the consequences of the clash are potentially serious for United States interests on matters the administration really cares about, such as terrorism? If the issue of global warming were considered in isolation, the answer is no; the fallout from the dispute is not significant. Environmental issues in the United States tend not to win or lose elections. Instead, the dispute between the United States and Europe on global warming may be preferable for both parties since the conflict can be blamed on the other's intransigence, with neither side having to make the hard choices required to actually deal with the problem.

However, as mass publics become increasingly convinced that global warming is a real phenomenon that demands attention, efforts to blame other actors will incur political costs, as Bush discovered early in his administration. Moreover, since the issue of global warming is a proxy battle over the way in which the United States exercises its power, significant domestic difficulties may prevent European partners from contributing meaningfully when the United States desires. Indeed, barring a major terrorist event on European soil, Europe is likely to lack the same sense of vulnerability and threat that has motivated America's vigorous prosecution of the war in Afghanistan and beyond. Such domestic opposition is clearly true with respect to Iraq. While empathy was significant in the days following September 11, the long-run commitment by Europeans to the project depends on the sense of shared norms, which must mean something other than the fight against terrorism. A positive set of values not merely reducible to democracy must motivate the collective sense of mission.

In a recent volume on American hegemony, a number of prominent scholars—Stephen Walt and Joseph Joffe among them—see the European and United States conflict over global warming as indicative of a larger disconnect between the two parties.[8] With European cooperation on the war on terrorism needed, Walt counsels that the Bush administration would be wise to make policy concessions on climate change to reward allies on issues over which they have quarreled. Again, concessions on other issues Europeans care about—global warming, chemical weapons—are seen as the price of hegemony.

As policy prescription, this scenario fails to give guidance on when such policy concessions are

[7]See Joseph Joffe, "Defying History and Theory: The United States as the 'Last Remaining Superpower,'" in G. John Ikenberry, ed., *American Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).

[8]G. John Ikenberry, ed., *American Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).

Downloaded from http://online.ucpress.edu/currenthistory/article-pdf/102/662/113/390838/curh_102_662_113.pdf by guest on 25 September 2020

more costly than nonagreement. Cooperation may not always be a good thing. As Amity Shlaes, a columnist for the *Financial Times,* recently noted, there is a danger that the process will become an end in itself: "The trouble with multilateralism is that it has become a game—a game for its own sake. Multilateral institutions are, after all, only as good as the goal they serve."[9]

SELF-ENCIRCLEMENT

In terms of global warming, there is obviously room for disagreement between those who see ratification as the point of finally getting to implementation and those who view it as a reprieve from a death sentence. If global warming were merely one issue over which the United States and Europe were in conflict, it might be reasonable for the United States to wait for Europe to make the first move in the same way Britain has watched the euro unfold. Although it may be inevitable that the United States will join the effort (and Britain the euro), that will happen only when its domestic politics are in order and the ill-conceived aspects of the framework are discarded.

Global warming never was completely isolated from other aspects of foreign policy, and its significance becomes clearer as ties between the United States and Europe are strained. Although it may make sense for the United States to oppose particular agreements on substantive grounds, blanket rejection of all multilateral initiatives does not. Even if balancing is no longer the primary worry, noncooperation or foot-dragging in an area where European support is needed could render ineffective efforts such as tracking terrorists and their sources of financing.

American noncooperation will most likely generate domestic constraints in Europe that contribute to a division over the sense of shared values—and mutual threat. Thus, even where elite leaders in Europe may want to cooperate fully with the United States, they may feel vulnerable to domestic polities increasingly upset with their governments for allying with the United States yet receiving no apparent reciprocity. The net result of United States noncooperation may be self-encirclement.[10] ■

---

[9]"Fighting Terrorism First, Multilateralism Second: While Europe Fusses about Biological Weapons Treaties and the Rights of Terrorists, America Is Acting," *Financial Times,* November 27, 2001.

[10]On self-encirclement resulting from overexpansionist foreign policy, see Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

Downloaded from http://online.ucpress.edu/currenthistory/article-pdf/102/662/113/390838/curh_102_662_113.pdf by guest on 25 September 2020