



## The New Pecking Order: A Post-Copenhagen Look At Climate Policy and World Order

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It has only been a few years since the Europeans – suffering under what they felt to be the yoke of George Bush – longed for a multipolar world. No one expressed this sentiment more eloquently than former French foreign minister, Dominique de Villepin. He envisioned a world in which the “international community” would direct all of its energy into building “a new world order.” Better than the unipolar order, this “world of cooperation” would help “every nation to mobilize” in the shared interests of all. At the most recent UN Climate Conference, the nature of this new world order became apparent.

In Copenhagen, multipolarity manifested itself as chaos. Climate protection has become the victim of global power projection. The world finds itself in geopolitical transition and it is no longer clear where exactly power lies. Currently, says Hans Joachim Schellnhuber of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research in Germany, there is simply “no global institution that can solve a global problem.” He has heard much “climate kitsch” in the world’s plenary, consisting of all kinds of save-the-world phrases. Behind the scenes, however, “not even the slightest concessions” were made.

*The world has changed, the UN process is overstrained*

In Copenhagen, the usual weaknesses of the UN process appeared. When 192 equals negotiate with each other, a blockade is never far. The anti-capitalistic rhetoric of a Hugo Chavez can be dismissed as folklore. But more importantly, the procedural tricks of the developing countries led to day-long standstills and with that, the pressure of time. Driven by their mistrust of the great powers, the developing countries wanted to ensure that all nations draft the final statement. Such a document of grassroots democracy cannot and will not ever exist. Thus, the traditional UN solution is to find a representative group of countries to search for a compromise. But to assemble an acceptable “friends-of-the-chair” group proves to be an art nowadays. The number of great powers has increased. Emerging countries have different interests than developing nations, and the group of developing nations (G-77) has become fractious. The world has changed, and the old classification of countries no longer mirrors the reality of power and interests. A new equilibrium is not in sight.

*Rejection of the European model*

When there is stalling in the plenary session, the leading powers usually have to take over. They must woo and convince, exert pressure and force deals. On the issue of climate change, Europe has been the leading power for the past fifteen years. On no other topic has Europe laid claim to global leadership and advanced its ideas to such an extent. In a future global agreement,

Europe wants to assert its values and norms: the climate regime should be borne by consensus and should represent a pinnacle of multilateralism; it should be led by a weak (perhaps limited or restricted?) and changing presidency; it should be based on rights and responsibilities; it should be top-down and highly regulatory in structure; and finally, national interest shall be subordinated to the greater global good. Ultimately, a system of social democratic redistribution on a global scale would help to balance the interests of the rich and the poor (nations). In short: a European designed climate treaty would resemble the European Union.

However, when push came to shove in Copenhagen, the Europeans did not convince the rest of the world with their postmodern vision of world order. Exemplary behavior proved not to be powerful enough. Even more down payments and even more exemplary behavior – as demanded by some in Europe – would not have swayed the rest of the world. In Copenhagen, Europe was rebuffed by national interests and the insistence on national sovereignty – phenomena that the European Union has been trying to constrain for decades within its own borders.

#### *Chinese resistance, U.S. interference at high cost*

China opposed even the most basic principle that is at the heart of any European concept of world order: the idea of mutual responsibility. China does not want to be bound by anything, and for this reason, opposes an agreement in which the world's emissions would be cut in half by 2050. But not even that was enough. China also does not want any other country to join any agreement. That is why the clause had to give way according to which industrial nations (to which China does not belong) should cut down 80 percent of climate gases. China fears coming under indirect pressure, should other countries unite and proceed. A few developing countries found pleasure in joining China and forming blockades. Thereby they undermined their own primary goal: to extract billions of dollars for climate protection from developed nations.

At the end, America stepped in. However, there was a high price to pay for President Obama's personal intervention. While he prevented a complete collapse of the negotiating process, the final Copenhagen Accord says nothing about future binding commitments. Instead, one finds a system of voluntary pledges. The other parties of the accord are to be made aware of national pledges, that is all. George Bush once proposed this system of "pledge and review" against the protest of the Europeans. Now Barack Obama has reintroduced it. Not out of free will, but out of necessity. A system of voluntary pledges seemed to be the only alternative to extended deadlock.

#### *Eroding global governance foundations and multi-multilateralism*

Since Christmas, a debate over reforming the United Nations has once again blustered. Everyone promises reform and wants to improve the structure and leadership of the climate negotiation process. That is certainly necessary. But the climate chaos is only a symptom of the tectonic shift that has been eroding the foundation of global governance since 1989. Economic power is moving eastward and transnational threats like terrorism, piracy, climate change or atomic proliferation are spreading. The global institutions, meanwhile, have barely changed.

Despite these changes, drastic reform is not to be expected. Stewart Patrick of the Council on Foreign Relations has summed up the reasons in *The Washington Quarterly*. Most importantly, the United States lacks supremacy. It was only the unipolar moment after World War II that enabled the United States as the world's dominant power to lead the world to the establishment of the United Nations. Also, the world (beyond nation states) is no longer ungoverned. Between 1951 and 1999 the number of intergovernmental organizations increased six fold, from 955 to 6076. The number of multilateral agreements grew from 100 to more than 700. The result is "multi-multilateralism." It consists of overlapping mandates and members. Whoever wants to reform in the middle of this institutional forest, will quickly get lost in the underbrush.

### *Economic power and guns translate into power*

The rules are not easy to rewrite like many demanded during the economic crisis of 2008 and 2009. At the G-20 Summit in London, President Obama experienced just how limited the freedom of movement is within the system of existing global rules. The U.S. President reminisced about Bretton Woods and said: "Well, if it's just Roosevelt and Churchill sitting in a room with a brandy, that's an easier negotiation. But that's not the world we live in." To simply expand the current institutions by adding the emerging powers represents limited progress. The global bodies will indeed become more representative, but also more ineffective. Yet, it is the goal of every reform proposal to fight ineffectiveness, Copenhagen proves the point. Notice Barack Obama's sheepish remark: "Everybody wants the smallest possible group," said Barack Obama, the "smallest possible organization that includes them."

Somewhat paradoxically, the Copenhagen Conference has also shown that the world can adapt. There is a photograph that forestalls the future: Barack Obama and Wen Jiabo are pictured at an oval table, sitting across from each other, surrounded by Mr. Singh, Mr. Zuma and Mr. Lula. The picture shows the negotiations of the United States with the BASIC countries: Brazil, South Africa, India and China. They are the carbon-superpowers of today and, more importantly, of tomorrow. Whoever emits more has the greater clout. Unfortunately, this measure of power represents a classical perverse incentive. But it also corresponds to the reality of a world in which economic power and guns translate into power.

It is worth noting who is absent in the picture, Russia's President Medvedev for example. Only a few years ago, Russia belonged to the club of BRICs, or the countries with the largest growth and the highest growth projections. Brazil, India and China still belong to it. The world financial crisis has made Russia's weakening apparent: a one-dimensional economic structure, failure to invest, corruption, authoritarian leadership, and declining population. Europe is also absent in the picture. It is not a member of the group of carbon-superpowers. Instead of the carbon equivalent of overkill capacity Europe bring its post-fossil idealism to the table. That does not make it a member of the club of decision-makers. Where tomorrow's super-polluters meet, any agreement will necessarily represent the smallest common denominator. But at least it is an agreement.

### *A group of five and a group of twenty-five*

With its postmodern carbon reduction ambitions, Europe can only be part of the next largest circle of world politics, the group of 25, in which all world regions and interest groups are represented. What the chaos of Copenhagen has produced – a group of 5 and a group of 25 – is nevertheless consistent with a current trend. Multilateral cooperation requires multiple preliminary consultations in minilateral settings. Sometimes these smaller groups need to charge ahead. Europe has experience with this process. The Schengen Agreement (about the abolition of all border controls between some, but not all EU countries) is a case in point. During the terror crisis a coalition of the willing emerged, in the financial crisis a coalition of the able, and in the carbon-crisis a coalition of the sinful. Such groupings can only be successful if they avoid what George Bush did: using small coalitions to divide the world. On the contrary, such pathfinders of nations need to strive for global consensus or at least large majorities. Only a commitment to consensus can make the variable geometry of changing, overlapping, and sometimes even competing institutions productive. For this reason, in this phase of the geopolitical transition, forums with limited numbers of participants and limited goals are evolving: G8, G8+5, G20, Major Economies Forum. Countries are chosen, and countries chose themselves, to whichever forum best fits their current preferences and interests and sectoral power. Richard Haass, formerly Head of Policy Planning at the U.S. State Department, called this “multilateralism à la carte.” The climate conference in Copenhagen has accelerated the process towards such a system of global governance.

### *Europe needs America, the West needs the BASIC countries*

Once again Europe’s largest economy, Germany had to learn just how small it is. Like all nations it needs power in order to protect its interests and norms. The European Union lends such power. In Copenhagen Europe appeared to be unusually united, but nonetheless achieved little. Only together with America does Europe have leverage. But in Copenhagen, America had minimalist goals, the goals of a carbon superpower. In the future the alliance with America will not even suffice. The countries of the West will need global partnerships, especially with the BASIC countries. But not all BASIC countries are equal. Copenhagen showed that values matter. The form of government proved to be important, maybe decisive. China categorically rejects international verification of climate protection measures on its own territory. To verify the compliance of a future agreement means to infringe upon the sovereign rights of nations, China claims. That is exactly the way authoritarian regimes think.

It is always worth looking at the world how it actually is, rather than as it ought to be. Like under a burning glass, the Copenhagen Conference highlighted the state of global governance in an age of transition. Certainly there is no alternative to the United Nations. But one should be under no illusions.

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