the global environment and US foreign policy

pols 425 US foreign policy
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CO2 Spiral: shows the growth of CO2 emissions between 1950 and 1998 (source: worldprocessor.com)
foreign policy and the global environment: background timeline

- 1988: first meeting of IPCC
- 1989: G. H.W. Bush announces US support for climate change negotiations
- 1992: UN Framework Convention on Climate Change is presented to the Earth Summit
- 1994: The FCCC becomes law
- 1997: The US Senate passes the Byrd-Hagel Resolution (95-0) opposing US acceptance of any climate change commitment that excludes the developing world or would “seriously hurt the US economy”
- 1997: Clinton signs the Kyoto Protocol
- 2001: Bush declares the Kyoto Protocol “dead” and announces US withdrawal from negotiations
### Foreign Policy and the Global Environment: Background

#### Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>EU and Japan ratify the Kyoto Protocol; Canada joins six months later.</td>
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<td>2002</td>
<td>Russia ratifies Kyoto Protocol, which enters into force three months later.</td>
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<td>2004</td>
<td>CA becomes first US state to restrict greenhouse emissions.</td>
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<td>2007</td>
<td>US Supreme Court rules that CO2 is a pollutant.</td>
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<td>2009</td>
<td>By a 219-212 vote, the House passes the Amer. Clean Energy and Security Act.</td>
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<td>2009</td>
<td>The Copenhagen summit concludes with a non-binding US agreement with China, India, and other nations establishing a 2 degree (c) limit on future warming.</td>
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foreign policy and the global environment: background

now let’s view a backgrounder video
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discussion

let’s consider some basic questions …

- how should we—how can we—explain twists and turns of US foreign policy with regard to global climate change?

- is there a clear-cut theoretical approach we can use to “best” explain the nature and direction of US policy over the years?

what do the theoretical approaches tell us?
discussion

global climate change and theories of foreign policy

- does realism/neo-realism have anything to say on this issue? Or is realism entirely silent on the politics of the global environment?

quick answer. realism does not have a great deal to say on the issue, but it is not entirely silent either …
applied to the climate change issue, an international relations neorealist would look to the distribution of **power** among the world’s states in order to assess the prospects for cooperation on issues such as global climate change.

*a core assumption* in the realist view is that cooperation occurs only when it is in the interests of the most powerful states to cooperate: in this view, significant international action on global environmental problems remain *very unlikely*, albeit not impossible.
realism and neorealism

so, in the realist view, when is “cooperation” or action on global environmental issues most likely?

answer: only when it is in the interest of major power—especially the major power—to push an agreement forward
why does cooperation on the global environment require the active participation of a dominant power or hegemon?

answer: the hegemon can compel through both sticks and carrots, the participation of other states (re the “free rider problem”); conversely, the hegemon can block or veto any decision it does not like
realism and neorealism

so, does neorealism explain the course of the climate change negotiations under various US administrations?

to answer, we need to review the stances and outcomes of US climate change policy under various administrations…
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realism and neorealism

- what were the positions of the Clinton, Bush, and current Obama administrations? what were the most significant outcomes under these three administrations?

consider, too: how was US policy decided?
key point: we know that the lack of US participation did not de-rail international action on global climate change. Other countries signed and ratified the Kyoto Protocol (the US is the only signatory that has not yet ratified the treaty)—once 55 countries ratified the agreement, the Treaty went into force (after a 90 day lapse period). As of November 2009, 187 countries and one regional organization have ratified the Treaty.
now, let’s consider the issue briefly from a Marxist perspective …

- **what** is the focus of Marxist or neo-Marxist analysis?
  - who are the **key actors** and what are the key **forces** and processes?
  - what **expectations** on climate change would be generated by radical or Marxist approaches?
why do states cooperate? historical materialism

- understanding the historical materialist perspective is straightforward: begin with the key actors (transnational corporations), identify their interests (profit), and trace their actions (efforts to stop national and global agreements on climate change)

- also, take account of their economic power and influence, and the primary means by which they exercise that power and influence: direct lobbying

is there support for the Marxist position?
in the historical materialist view, the backlash against international (and national efforts) to curb climate change is predictable: corporations use their economic muscle and control over state actors and mainstream media to challenge the science and undercut, prevent, or delay efforts at effective action. “capital” has been very good at rewriting the script on climate change (to the point that most Americans—contrary to the scientific consensus—no longer believe it to be a real problem).
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historical materialism

the upshot? capital plays a decisive role in each type of decision …

- wars (for oil in particular) are in the interests of capital, while “wars” against climate change threaten the interests of capital (consider, on this point, that the Iraq war was supported by all major western powers—an their oil companies)
the expectations generated by historical materialism, therefore, is partly **consistent with the evidence**—other pieces of evidence, however, are **not** as consistent for example …
historical materialism

- the interests of capital do not consolidate to the extent suggested by theorists; even among oil companies, there are differences.

- in addition, we can find marked differences among (capitalist) countries: e.g., Western European countries, in general, have embraced a very different position than the US …
now, let’s consider the issue briefly from a liberal perspective …

- does the liberal view offer a better way to explain or understand the twists and turns of US policy on global climate change?
- what do liberals focus on? what is the basis of liberal analysis?
points to consider (from reading) …

- during the Clinton years, domestic politics and Congress seemed to play a key role in preventing the administration from moving forward on commitments to any real emissions reduction (recall the 95-0 vote in the Senate)

- under Bush, Exxon Mobil played a key role (Exxon Mobile emits more CO2 than all but five countries): the Bush administration sought the company’s “active involvement” on climate policy, and there is evidence that Bush rejected Kyoto in part based on input from a group funded by Exxon Mobil
points to consider (con’t) …

- at the same time, while Bush declared Kyoto “dead” members of Congress pursued legislative means to limit US greenhouse emissions (there were 511 bills, resolutions, and amendments between 2001 and 2008)

- even more, states, cities, and other sub-national entities started to work independently to address climate policy—California was a leader in this regard

- eventually, Bush called global climate change a “serious challenge,” and US corporations began to play a less obstructionist role
now, let’s consider the issue briefly from a cognitive perspective …

- do cognitive factors play a role in US decision making? if so, what is the evidence?
summing up …

- generally, what does the issue of climate change tell us about the nature of US foreign policy?
- how might we bring all the various explanations together into a cohesive, integrated explanation of US policy on climate change?