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Collective Self-Blockade? Why the UN Climate Conference in Paris Could Fail

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On 19 and 20 April 2015, the Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate took place in Washington, DC. Industrialised countries and emerging economies are meeting in multiple forums this year to explore their positions in advance of the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris in December.

Analysis

The preparations for an effective global climate change agreement at the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris in December 2015 are proving to be difficult. While the BRICS states, the United States, and the EU are verbally proclaiming their commitment, they often impede themselves as a group due to national interests. Against this backdrop, it is necessary to consider alternatives to a global but weak climate change agreement.

- Of the key countries and groups, only the EU, the United States, and Russia have submitted their intended nationally determined contributions to climate protection to the United Nations. The political approach taken by the emerging economies is being influenced by international expectations and national constellations.
- Due to their internal preferences, neither the United States nor China are interested in a strong, obligatory climate agreement at the global level. This makes a global consensus unlikely. Bilateral, public–private, and market-based solutions are easier to implement politically than a new global agreement.
- The renewed failure to reach a global climate agreement could lead to other options for action. Repeated and complicated negotiations at the global level will certainly not bring about the changes necessary to reach the 2°C goal on time.
- Three scenarios for the future are possible: The chaotic and multi-stakeholder international politics of climate change will continue. Climate clubs made up of key emitters will become trailblazers and will impose sanctions on non-members. A citizens' climate politics in the sense of the "Copenhagen Theory of Change" will supplement or replace the great transformation from above.
- The EU and Germany could use meetings such as the G7 or the Major Economies Forum to discuss the potential of climate clubs and could set the latter in motion should the UN Climate Conference in Paris fail.

Keywords: climate change negotiations, emerging economies, BRICS, climate club, United States, EU

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What Will Be Negotiated in Paris?

The climate carousel goes round another time. While global warming proceeds unstoppably, the gap between the negotiating positions of the developing and industrialised countries persists – despite the discursive optimism. The existing plans to reduce emissions would have to be increased by 8 to 10 per cent by 2020 in order to maintain the desired 2°C warming limit. Approximately two-thirds of the global carbon budget required for this goal has been used up already (UNEP 2014). The path to a global climate change agreement is marked by dispute on all of the central points, as the content of the Geneva draft text from February of this year demonstrated. During the negotiations in Paris in December 2015, governments will have to decide whether they want to conclude a new, legally binding global agreement. Who will be required to decrease emissions and whether this will be tied to financial measures remains to be seen. Will there be a "climate of various speeds" with different rules and paths for industrialised and emerging economies?

The principle of common but differentiated responsibilities for industrialised and developing countries has been in place since 1992. Even some emerging economies – for example, Brazil – now promote its dissolution, thus giving up their unrelenting support of the principle to date. The conclusion of a new global climate agreement will also depend on how the controversial question of financing climate policies in developing countries is dealt with. Yet even when there is a global agreement that is binding for all parties, will it be implemented? The key question is this: How can it be guaranteed that all the key emitters really *do* enough? Industrialised and emerging economies must introduce rapid and comprehensive solutions to stem climate change and avoid significant additional costs at a later point in time.

When it comes to global public goods such as the climate, the temptation to free-ride is great. Free-riding actors, who are supposed to each do their share, let others take the required action and bear the majority of the costs while deriving the benefits themselves. For countries that face high costs to convert their existing energy infrastructure, this temptation is particularly great. Once countries are locked into high-carbon development paths, energy system transformation becomes even more costly (Jakob et al. 2014). Getting many countries to cooperate without the use of sanctions is therefore difficult. Furthermore, immediate climate protection benefits future generations more strongly than current ones. These factors collapse the necessary equilibrium between cooperating countries – which is why the Kyoto Protocol was not implemented by all parties (Nordhaus 2015). A similar fate could await the Paris result.

The negotiation of a global but weak agreement takes up important time. Letting a weak agreement fail can open up windows of opportunity for action if, through shock, deeply ingrained patterns of action and structural barriers are broken down. Innovation theories, organisational research, and concepts of learning in the literature on socioenvironmental and sociotechnical transformation all emphasise the catalytic, creative function of such crises. To avoid resignation and a retreat from climate prevention, effective alternatives should be carefully prepared. For the mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions, climate clubs made up of larger countries represent an alternative.

Background to the Paris 2015 UN Climate Change Conference

The 1997 Kyoto Protocol made a strong distinction between industrialised countries, which were obligated to reduce emissions due to their historical responsibility, and the remaining states, which were to be supported on a more climate-friendly path through, inter alia, financial assistance and technology transfer. However, significant emitters among the industrialised countries have never joined the protocol (the United States), have not ratified it (Australia), have withdrawn (Canada, Russia), or have weakened their commitments (Japan). Many industrialised states have not fulfilled their commitments (UNEP 2014). The second phase of the Kyoto Protocol has only been ratified by 28 of the 192 parties to the contract.

Furthermore, Kyoto II is scarcely an effective instrument because it does not account for the significantly increased emissions of the emerging economies. An adherence to historical responsibilities would not reduce climate change by a suitable amount. China alone was responsible for approximately one-quarter of all global emissions in 2012 – 60 per cent more than the United States. In the same year, India contributed 6.2 per cent and Russia 5.1 per cent. While Brazil and South Africa on-

ly produce a small share of global emissions, their emissions per capita are very high. The poorer developing countries – particularly the threatened island states – as well as the United States and the EU are thus pushing for stronger emissions reductions in all emerging economies.

In previous negotiating rounds, it was agreed that all contract parties would, where possible, submit their planned national contributions to emissions reduction (intended nationally determined contributions, INDCs) by the end of March 2015. The INDCs are designed to serve the preparation of a new global climate change agreement from 2020 onwards but are independent of the legally binding character of the future agreement. They should contain quantifiable information on how the emissions have been calculated, a time frame for implementing the suggested measures, the sectors dealt with, and the monitoring process (Ray et al. 2015).

If the INDCs are reflected in the new climate change agreement, the character of the agreement could shift for everyone from the goal of global and binding reduction goals to "bottom-up" obligations in accordance with national abilities and interests. This trend has been gaining in influence since the conference in Copenhagen (2009). While this development corresponds to the interests of the United States, it reduces the probability that there will be clear, fair allocation rules in accordance with a global carbon budget. The budget approach is supported by many experts because it calculates already-used and still-possible emissions per country based on the starting point of "2°C warming" (WBGU 2014).

Whether the INDCs and thus the new agreement will focus on reduction or, instead, on adaptation to climate change, on the financing of a climate-friendly political transformation, and on the accompanying technology transfer is unclear. At the Lima Climate Change Conference in December 2014, the developing countries turned against an agreement centred primarily on reduction, while the industrialised countries supported it. The poorest states insisted on compensation for the climate damage to date and thus achieved at least a verbal success. The Green Climate Fund (GCF) has been in place since 2010 and is the source of financing for climate-related reduction and adaptation activities. To date, however, the GCF's funds have been far too limited. The industrialised countries agreed to contribute USD 100 billion in funding annually by 2020. To date commitments of 10 billion have been collected. The critical funding gap could significantly reduce many developing countries' motivation to deal with climate change policy.

It is certain that there will be no ex ante evaluation of the INDCs with respect to the attainment of the 2°C goal in advance of the Paris conference; thus, it cannot be guaranteed that the national contributions will add up to the necessary level. This course of action was supported by the EU, the group of African states, and the island states. China and India, however, spoke out against it, fearing interference in their national sovereignty (van Asselt et al. 2015).

National Interests and INDCs

Of the following closely considered countries, only the EU, the United States, Russia, and Mexico had submitted their INDCs to the UN by the end of the first quarter of 2015. Because each country is relatively free to decide on its method of calculation, content, and choice of mitigation strategies, it is unlikely that we shall see ambitious, comparable INDCs; this also applies to Brazil, China, India, and South Africa.

In Copenhagen in 2009, **Brazil** announced an ambitious, voluntary commitment to reduce carbon emissions from 36.1 per cent to 38.9 per cent of projected business-as-usual levels by 2020. This would be a reduction of 6 to 8 per cent relative to 2005 levels (La Rovere et al. 2014). The majority of the savings fall upon limitations on logging in the Amazon, thus there is no requirement for extensive new investment. The contribution of new sectors (energy production being the exception) is not specified. The deforestation rate has indeed dropped dramatically, but emissions from energy and agriculture have increased. President Rousseff is more focused on development and the economic crisis than climate policy, so ambitious targets broken down by sector in Brazil's INDC are not to be expected.

In Copenhagen **China** announced a reduction in the emissions intensity of its growth compared to 2005 levels from 40 to 45 per cent by 2020. At a meeting between the Chinese and US governments in November 2014, China additionally promised that its emissions would peak in 2030 and thereafter decline. Various economists believe that China will actually reach that point in 2020 because

the coal percentage in its energy production has already peaked (Green und Stern 2015). This would be typical of China's strategy to behave conservatively at the international level to avoid the risk of embarrassing itself. Domestically, however, the government is pursuing diverse mitigation programmes – also with the goal of presenting itself to the Chinese public as an active climate protector. Despite the new promises, China's emissions will likely increase on the whole until 2030, so that they will absorb 40 per cent of the remaining global carbon budget for the 2°C warming. Even if China reaches its goal, there will only be a very small amount of leeway for other countries.

In 2009 **India** announced it would reduce the emissions intensity per unit of its GDP by 20–25 per cent (on 2005 levels) by 2020. This savings target will most likely be achieved without any great effort, as the corresponding mitigation programme was already underway. At the moment, there are no new mitigation commitments on hand. Thus, the Indian government is once again confirming its traditional, strict negotiating position: for them, development and fighting poverty take priority, and both involve higher emissions. It is therefore unlikely that a reduction in emissions will occur within the next 30 years. The government has announced, however, increased efforts to promote public transport, solar energy, and reforestation. The goals for the generation of renewable energy have been raised (for solar energy, from 20 to 100 gigawatts by 2022), and carbon taxes have been doubled to promote these energy sources (Ray et al. 2015). Nevertheless, the government is also planning to double its coal production by 2019 as well as to relax environmental regulations for numerous public and private investment projects. This would result in a significant increase in emissions. India's climate policy thus has two faces: on the one hand, within the governmental and private sectors there is strong interest in renewable energies and energy efficiency, which means that more climate protection is possible through market mechanisms and public–private partnerships; on the other hand, India tends to put the brakes on during climate negotiations, which has now led to its isolation within the G77.

South Africa is strongly guided by previously published action plans. Its voluntary commitment at Copenhagen (an emissions reduction of 34 per cent by 2020 and 40 per cent by 2040 compared to an unabated emissions path) was attached to the condition of a fair, ambitious, and effective global climate agreement. The current national INDC process suggests that South Africa will aim for a high reduction goal with flexible intermediate goals until 2050. National climate protection, however, lags behind the country's goal to peak emissions between 2020 and 2025. The South African government was keen to provide a positive picture of its climate protection efforts to the international audience at the 2011 climate negotiations in Durban. In recent years, however, the respective efforts have slipped. While renewable energies are being further developed and the consistently postponed carbon tax shall be implemented in 2016, the country in fact remains far from converting to a green economy. Economic problems and high unemployment levels make it improbable that the government will choose to strictly regulate the coal and mining industries.

Mexico was the first emerging economy to submit its INDC. The government announced that greenhouse gas emissions would peak in 2026 and that it would reduce CO_2 emissions by 22 per cent and soot emissions by 51 per cent by 2030 compared to business-as-usual levels. These goals are no longer attached to financial help for technology transfer and adaptation measures, as was still the case in Copenhagen. According to its national INDC, Mexico's emissions could actually drop by 40 per cent if international funds were made available, technology transfer were to take place, and – in Paris or later – a global price for coal were established. The coal tax introduced in 2014 was set at a modest USD 3.50 per tonne, meaning that it hardly had any effect in reducing emissions. In fact, Mexico's emissions have been increasing considerably for years despite the commotion caused by its announcement.

The **United States** released its greenhouse gas reduction targets on 31 March 2015. According to these, 26–28 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions are expected to be saved by 2025 compared to 2005 levels (equivalent to a 14–17 per cent reduction on 1990 levels). Individual sectors, however, will not be assigned any specific target values. Furthermore, it is unclear how goal achievement will be verified and whether Congress will pass the necessary implementation legislation. The US government therefore has a strong interest in developing an alternative climate protection format which does not require approval. Indeed, the expansion of fracking has increased the pressure to

act in the area of renewable energy development, which itself stems from increasing international oil prices. Pioneer states like California and President Obama's executive order of 19 March 2015 (requiring a 40 per cent reduction in emissions by 2025 across/within federal agencies compared to 2005) reveal the United States' preference for national-level, as opposed to UN-level, approaches to climate protection. Building on existing cooperation formats with China, India, and the EU in the area of energy, the integration of climate protection and trade cooperation in a climate club could offer the United States significant benefits – namely, a financial gain of up to USD 44 billion (Nordhaus 2015).

Globally, the **European Union**'s emissions reduction target of 40 per cent by 2030 (compared to 1990 levels) is the most ambitious goal yet. Given that emissions were down by almost 15 per cent in 2012, this reduction target is not completely out of the question. The different interests and reduction capacities of its member states have so far prevented the EU from being even more proactive. Given France's leadership role at the upcoming UN Climate Conference in Paris and Germany's role as a trailblazer in renewable energy and an advocate for more climate protection efforts in the past, these two countries currently bear particular responsibility for the emissions reduction issue. In the event that the Paris summit fails, a climate club could help both countries to preserve their positive roles as pioneers.

On 1 April 2015 **Russia** announced a reduction in greenhouse gases of 20–25 per cent by 2030 on 1990 levels. If the forest sector is included, this represents a de facto reduction of just 6–11 per cent compared to 1990 levels in the industrial sector and an increase of 30–38 per cent compared to 2012 levels. The Russian INDC is characterised by a lack of concrete information about sectors, measures, and the monitoring of measures; only the adoption of necessary laws is publicised. Russia is not actively pursuing any climate protection strategies, because emissions are currently approximately 50 per cent below 1990 levels due to the collapse of the industrial sector. Under President Putin, the Russian government has contributed very little to bringing about an international climate agreement.

The above summary shows that the content and implementation speeds of concrete activities in individual countries are hugely varied and thus render set global targets out of reach.

The Link between INDCs and Climate Performance

The announcements made on the international stage do little to suggest that the above-mentioned states' efforts in energy and climate policy will achieve the 2°C goal. This can be seen by comparing the commitments under the Kyoto Protocol with actual greenhouse gas emissions.

Evaluating the success of climate negotiations in the area of mitigation is possible on the basis of the development of individual economies' energy and emissions intensity or the complex rankings of energy and climate performance. In the past, a weak global green civil society, limited financial leeway for active national climate policy, and the relative importance of fossil energy were cited as explanatory factors for the weak climate performance of emerging economies (Never und Betz 2014). A good indicator of success is the change in energy intensity per unit of GDP (in tonnes of oil equivalent per USD), which captures energy-saving activities as well as (indirectly) CO_2 emissions. The biggest reductions in the energy intensity of production for the period 1990–2013 are accounted for by China (-4.1 per cent per year), India (-2 per cent), and Indonesia (-1.2 per cent). Mexico (-0.9 per cent), South Africa (-0.8 per cent), and South Korea (-0.4 per cent) all witnessed slight decreases, whereas Brazil (+0.3 per cent) experienced a minimal increase. With respect to emissions intensity, there is virtually no change in this order – only Indonesia drops down significantly and India moderately, in both cases due to deforestation.

In terms of investment in renewable energy, the image of emerging economies as climate-policy inflexible is being turned on its head: in 2014, for the first time, these countries invested almost as much in renewable energy sources as did industrialised nations (USD 131.3 billion versus USD 138.9 billion). These nations' investments also demonstrated – as in previous years – significantly higher growth (36 percent versus 3 percent). Here, the undisputed leader was China (which invested USD 81 billion in wind energy, followed, at a great distance, by the United States, Japan, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Canada). The investment volumes of Brazil (USD 7.4 billion), India (USD 7.1 billion), and South Africa (USD 5.5 billion) were considerably smaller than China's – due to the difficult economic situations faced by these economies (Frankfurt School-UNEP 2015).

Moreover, China, Brazil, India, and South Africa are taking the first steps towards converting their economies to green economies. For now, they are focusing on feasible mitigation options that offer co-benefits between development and mitigation. These countries thus not only have ambitious expansion plans for renewable energy sources, they are also promoting these through attractive feed-in tariffs and obligations. Standards for the use of household appliances, motor vehicles, and the insulation of public buildings have also been stipulated, but the concrete implementation thereof has proven difficult. Carbon taxes have been introduced or raised (China, India, South Africa), and market-based instruments designed to reduce emissions have been employed (China, India). In addition, China has shut down inefficient, contaminating power stations and companies. These steps primarily aim to improve energy security and limit local air pollution or the local effects of climate change. If, however, the expected self-interest gained from these measures also benefits the global climate, what is wrong with that?

The Future of Climate Governance

The likelihood of the Paris climate conference's success is questionable given the interests demonstrated and the central actors' lack of willingness to commit to concrete goals. Consequently, the climate summit could fail, or a new agreement without binding commitments could be concluded. Because time is running out for a cost-effective limitation of climate change, alternatives to a global regime need to be discussed. Several models for this are already circulating. The following three scenarios make clear that the global community does not need to remain incapable of action. On the contrary, new options could bring about better results than a new global agreement catering to the lowest denominator.

1. Chaotic Polycentrism: International, regional, and local agreements of various relevance continue to exist, which, in the ideal case, could put in motion an upwards spiral of climate-policy ambition (Ostrom 2012). The climate change goals could be reached through such a process, even without a global agreement. But the variety of activities could also lead to climate governance "*al gusto*," which ultimately would not achieve the 2°C goal. In this scenario, the (weak) global climate regime would remain one of many initiatives of varying orientation. The missing sanctioning power in a weak global agreement could be decried publicly to a certain extent (media and civil society) and thus gain in weight. In comparison to a strong, comprehensive contract with a consistent price for greenhouse gas emissions, multiple agreements and initiatives would be less cost-effective but more likely to be implemented (Barrett and Toman 2010). In this scenario, industrialised and emerging economies would not only have almost all possible opportunities for proactive climate protection but would also have many opportunities to take the path of least resistance. Thus, the option "chaotic polycentrism" would most likely not reduce global emissions enough or in time.

2. Copenhagen Theory: The great transformation does not come "from above," but many small steps "from below" add up. Voluntary citizen engagement can lead to change in the face of a shock, as many initiatives on the part of churches, cities, and civil society organisations show. Social pressure could achieve comprehensive measures in the sense of a global citizens movement (Wagner and Weitzman 2015; WBGU 2014). The state creates incentives for this through campaigns or sustainable infrastructure. The drawback of this approach is that such a transformation will take a long time, be geographically limited, and scarcely impact emissions-intensive economic sectors. The probability of success in initiating larger transformation processes only from below in emerging economies is clearly also limited, because it is precisely in these countries that civic engagement is less common or suppressed. Despite the presence of an environmental awareness in many states, it is likely difficult to transmit the link between individual responsibility and sustainable consumption patterns to citizens. Thus, Scenario 2 can always function as a catalyst for a climate agreement but will not have a global impact.

3. Climate Clubs: Large countries determined to act move forward with an agreement, found clubs, and subsequently force latecomers or the unwilling to participate through trade sanctions (on climate-damaging products or the entire range of exports) (Nordhaus 2015). Climate clubs can only operate effectively when they are dominated by the key players (the United States, China, and the EU).

The current climate governance architecture consists of multiple forums and agreements. Here, in-

dividual governments and civil society agree on a joint approach. Some of these constellations have already been analysed using the concept of club governance. Nordhaus's (2015) much-discussed model examines the stability of such coalitions: Without sanctions against non-members they tend to be unstable and only reduce emissions in a limited way. If, in contrast, important states impose trade sanctions on less influential countries with high emissions, a small climate club comes into being through these sanctions. This could lead to a stable coalition that significantly reduces emissions. If the price of USD 50 per tonne of CO_2 were implemented, emissions could be decreased notably. Within such a club, the EU, the United States, and China, for example, would profit most from joining and would thus naturally have a strong impact on the reduction of global emissions (Nordhaus 2015).

What is problematic is that the trade sanctions clash with current WTO agreements. Exemptions would need to be negotiated, something which may not be that unlikely given the current trend towards more regional trade agreements. The advantage of climate clubs is that, depending on how the measures are developed, fewer hindrances to ratification exist. The lower number of conflict parties would function positively, particularly when businesses were more strongly integrated. In the event of a failed or weak Paris climate agreement, a first step could be a coalition of the willing made up of several industrialised countries and some developing countries or emerging economies. These developing countries would have to be offered the possibility of concrete financial, technological, or trade-related help. The advantage of climate clubs over a weak agreement that does not achieve the 2°C goal is the possibility of sanctions and of a thematic focus.

In all three scenarios, the United States, the EU, and Germany – as well as China, Brazil, India, and South Africa – could take on a central role. For scenarios 2 and 3, a global climate agreement is not mandatory. Exogenous shocks or crises can unleash transformative change when old path dependencies are broken down and new windows of opportunity are utilised. To date, only very slow, step-by-step change in climate protection has taken place. With skilled negotiation by an important group of countries such as the EU, Scenario 3 could gain the support of the United States and possibly China, whereas Scenario 1 can be seen as the lowest common denominator for all parties.

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