

# U.S. Climate Policies

Johannes Urpelainen  
Department of Political Science  
University of Michigan, Columbia University

Towards a New Climate Regime?

5.5.2009

# Introduction

**Climate policy in the United States is at a turning point, but the details remain to be seen.**

- ① Four key issues in international negotiations:
  - ① Participation of key developing countries;
  - ② Pace of domestic emissions reductions;
  - ③ Financial aid and technology transfer;
  - ④ National security.
- ② President Obama needs the support of the U.S. Congress:
  - ① The United States can only sign and ratify an international climate treaty with short-term and medium-term goals acceptable to a majority of the U.S. Congress.
  - ② The political debate is at early stages, so the position of the United States in Copenhagen is uncertain.

## Developing Countries

“Even if the developed countries succeed in making draconian cuts in their emissions – 80% or more by 2050 – the major developing countries are still going to have to make extremely large reductions of their own to reach acceptable concentration levels within that time frame.”

“There may be all kinds of different ways to express or reflect that concept in an international agreement; there may be different time frames at which the requirement to act decisively kicks in; and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities must be respected. But absent strong action at scale by the biggest emerging economies, we simply can't get there from here.”

Todd Stern, U.S. Special Envoy for Climate Change, Bonn 4.3.2009

## Domestic Emissions Reductions

“An equally important engine of recovery can be investment in reducing our energy vulnerability and our contribution to climate change. That is why the Recovery and Reinvestment Act provided for doubling renewable energy and weatherizing 75 percent of federal buildings. It is also why the President’s budget points toward strong action to implement a market-based cap-and-trade system, after the economy recovers, beginning in 2012.”

Lawrence Summers, Director of National Economic Council, Brookings Institution 13.3.2009

We need to be very mindful of what the dictates of science are, and of the art of the possible. It’s not possible to get to that kind of number. It’s not going to happen.”

Todd Stern on targets for industrialized countries sought in the Bali Action Plan

## Financial Aid and Technology Transfer

“Congress could, for instance, authorize immediate assistance for capacity-building in developing countries, with assistance for technology deployment to be made available upon U.S. ratification and entry into force of a climate agreement. Similarly, Congress could set aside allowance auction revenues to be made available on entry into force for emission reductions overseas above and beyond a U.S. domestic target.”

Congressional Testimony by Elliot Diringer, Vice President for International Strategies at Pew Center on Global Climate Change, 4.2.2009

# National Security

“Climate change can act as a threat multiplier for instability in some of the most volatile regions of the world, and it presents significant national security challenges for the United States. Accordingly, it is appropriate to start now to help mitigate the severity of some of these emergent challenges. The decision to act should be made soon in order to plan prudently for the nation’s security. The increasing risks from climate change should be addressed now because they will almost certainly get worse if we delay.”

*National Security and the Threat of Climate Change (2007)*

# The Political Situation

- 1 The Obama Administration cannot implement ambitious climate policies without broad support in the U.S. Congress.
- 2 First and foremost, Representatives and Senators promote the interests of their States.
- 3 Recent legislative initiatives emphasize underlying disagreements.

## Towards Copenhagen

- 1 The emissions reductions targets promoted by the European Union are difficult for the United States. Democrats in the U.S. Congress probably cannot reach an agreement on burden sharing, so a compromise is needed.
- 2 Another major challenge is to combine financial aid to developing countries with credible commitments to feasible climate policies. The U.S. Congress cannot accept an international climate treaty in which the developing countries have no meaningful goals, or that increases foreign aid by hundreds of billions of dollars.
- 3 To reach a grand bargain, the United States must prepare domestic legislation that is compatible with the international climate treaty.
- 4 This requires forging a strong link between the two and could require continuing negotiations in 2010.