

# **Climate Change and Relative Gains in the Wikileaks Archive**

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## **Abstract**

Climate change is a secondary concern of the United States in the context of its relations with other global powers. This paper examines the cache of climate change-related diplomatic cables in the WikiLeaks *Cablegate* archive to test the hypothesis that relative gains concerns are a complicating factor in the engagement of the United States in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) negotiations. The paper is informed by Sevasti-Eleni Vezirgiannidou in her 2008 article entitled *The Kyoto Agreement and the Pursuit of Relative Gains*, which argues that relative gains concerns in relation to economic competitiveness were a major factor behind the decision of the US Congress to reject ratification of the Kyoto Protocol. Our article employs a content analysis methodology to examine the cache of climate change-related diplomatic cables in the WikiLeaks *Cablegate* archive. The paper finds that climate change was frequently mentioned as a corollary to the primary themes of cables in the archive that appeared to carry more immediate weight in relation to American competition with other global players. In particular, climate change was mentioned in the context of issues such as defence, energy security and the global financial crisis.

## Introduction

The international climate change regime based upon the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is comprehensive, even audacious, in terms of its scope and objectives. Nonetheless, it has been plagued by numerous problems related to compliance mechanisms and the flexibility of national emissions reduction targets. As the UNFCCC process approaches its day of reckoning at its twenty-first conference of parties in Paris in December 2015, binding commitments continue to prove elusive as negotiating parties bristle against the competing imperatives of greenhouse gas mitigation, economic competitiveness and domestic politics.

Climate change is an issue that has become of increasing concern to international relations scholars, environmental activists and members of the public. However, for the United States, climate change is treated as an issue of secondary importance in regards to its relations with other global powers which are broadly centred on trade and security. The focus of this paper was to study diplomatic cables related to climate change within the Cablegate archive released by WikiLeaks in 2010, so as to ascertain whether relative gains concerns played a part in the decision of the United States not to support the formation of binding emissions reduction targets under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The paper begins with a conceptual discussion of relative gains and its application to analyses of the UNFCCC in previous studies. It then outlines the research design of the paper and introduces the UNFCCC process before engaging in a narrative analysis of key cables from the Cablegate archive.

Our research found that climate change was not often the main theme of cables within the Wikileaks archive but was mentioned as an auxiliary theme or threat multiplier. Primary themes included defence, energy security and economic foreign relations. Despite the fact that climate change featured as a secondary subject, several cables in the dossier contained specific indications that the United States was reluctant to enter into binding emissions treaties due to the fear of the relative gains to be incurred by rival nations, particularly China. An upward swing in the number of cables in the lead up to the 15<sup>th</sup> Conference of Parties meeting (COP15) held in Copenhagen in 2009 shows that although climate change was increasingly on the radar of the United States and other nations, the content of the cables indicate that there was enormous tension between UNFCCC parties regarding who should be the first to commit to binding mitigation targets. The tensions evident in the Cablegate dossier stem, we argue, from concerns about relative gains,

## Relative Gains and the UNFCCC

Realists argue that multilateral negotiation is another venue for competition, where states use negotiations to get the best deal for themselves by leveraging their military and economic power and prestige. Multilateral agreements are the product of strategic bargaining that reflects the narrowly conceived geopolitical interests of participating states. This occurs because states in a competitive, anarchic system privilege relative power maximisation as the key to their survival. States look upon each other with fear, as competitors and fellow power maximisers. Consequently, states are likely to concern themselves with the relative distribution of benefits—relative gains—in a negotiating scenario, even in situations where all

parties win (Waltz 1979; Grieco 1988; Mearsheimer 1994-1995). If one party gains more from a cooperative agreement than another party, the difference in gains has the potential to alter the relative balance of capabilities and power between those two parties, a concern which grows in ongoing bargaining situations where a relative gains in one round accumulate to produce additional relative gains in later rounds (Matthews 1996). Using an iterated Prisoner's Dilemma model, Snidal (1991) has argued that relative gains considerations become increasingly irrelevant as the number of cooperating parties increases. Under this model, the zero-sum logic of bilateral negotiations tends to be mitigated by the broader distribution of gains across a larger number of parties, creating a preference for absolute gains among participants. In a multilateral bargaining situation, relative losses in one bilateral relationship can be ameliorated by gains across other relationships within the participant group, in effect cancelling out the relative gains concern (Grieco 1988; Matthews 1996). In addition, Grundig (2006) finds that relative gains concerns are more likely where gains are large enough to have security implications and impact on the balance of power.

Given that there are 195 parties to the UNFCCC, one would expect a preference for absolute gains to trump relative gains concerns in the negotiating process. In practice, however, the negotiating process within the convention does not operate under a large-n dynamic. For practical reasons, parties negotiate as blocs of countries with common interests, which dramatically reduce the number of nodes in the negotiating process. In addition, negotiating outcomes depend on the positions of the major greenhouse gas emitting states, the top twenty of which are responsible for over eighty percent of global emissions (Christoff 2010). The twin dynamics of negotiating blocs and key parties tend to foster fractious dynamics that tend to work against absolute gains calculations. In advocating "minilateralism", Naím (Naím 2009), for example, argues that the UNFCCC negotiating process is more likely to be successful with a small-n negotiating grouping featuring the smallest number of parties possible to facilitate agreement on the multi-faceted objectives of the Convention.

As Professor Ross Garnaut (2008, xviii) suggested in his authoritative *Climate Change Review* for the Australian Government, climate change is a "diabolical public policy problem" because it interacts with all facets of the human societies nested within the Earth system. International regimes established to govern international trade and finance have been designed to facilitate as much as possible the unrestricted conduct of commerce in order to maximise economic growth. Economic growth is seen almost universally among policy-makers as a desirable means of creating individual wealth, satisfying social goods and maximising national power. However, there is a clear correlation between gross domestic product, energy usage and greenhouse gas pollution. Economic activity necessarily consumes resources and produces a carbon footprint. In modern industrial economies powered by fossil fuels, this points to a clear correlation between economic activity and greenhouse gas emissions, the by-product of burning fossil fuels (Myhre *et al* 2013). Therefore, if levels of economic activity increase, then necessarily, the level of greenhouse gas emissions will also increase. Efforts to de-carbonise electricity generation systems through adoption of renewable energy technologies notwithstanding, it is incredibly difficult to completely wean industrial economies away from fossil fuels because fossil fuels are integral at key points across production chains (Yábar Sterling 2010). Not surprisingly, international efforts to coordinate the de-carbonisation of economic systems inevitably confront the obstacle of competing interests within those systems.

States have proven unwilling to sign up for greenhouse gas mitigation actions that may disadvantage their economic interests relative to their competitors. In a study of the American congressional debates related to the Kyoto Protocol, Vezirgiannidou (2008) argued

that relative gains concerns in relation to economic competitiveness were a major factor behind the decision of the US Congress to reject ratification of the Kyoto Protocol. For Vezirgiannidou, relative gains concerns are pertinent here because of the pre-existing contentious Sino-American relationship, economic payoffs to China from the Protocol that could translate into changes in the security balance, and the cumulative nature of economic gains available to China that could improve the nature of that balance vis-à-vis the United States over time. Roberts (2011) has similarly argued that the US position as spoiler of the UNFCCC negotiating process through the 2000s is rooted in a fear of decreasing economic competitiveness to China, India and other emerging economies, while for Christoff (2010), the Sino-American contest within the UNFCCC reflects broader aspects of their hegemonic contest, particularly in relation to economic competition, energy security and international political leadership. Similarly, Harris (2013) suggests that neither the United States nor China wishes to entrench an international climate agreement that could leave it weaker vis-à-vis the other in the longer term, regardless of the absolute gains on offer in the form of climate impact mitigation.

Rights to development are a primary point of contention in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change negotiating process. Global South states claim that because the developed powers of the Global North have been pursuing industrial development for over two centuries, the overwhelming majority of greenhouse gases emitted into the atmosphere over that period originated from developed states (CCTV News 2012). This view is enshrined within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (Article 3.1) and other international environmental treaties through the concept of *common but differentiated responsibilities*. The historic emissions burden of the Global North has created two major points of contention. First, Global South countries argue that developed nations should take the lead and bear a majority of the costs in the global effort to reduce emissions. Developing states want the living standards enjoyed by people the Global North. They argue that because the Global North had a long head start in industrialisation, in any global climate mitigation agreement the countries of the South should be given time to develop their economies (and therefore increase their carbon emissions) before they are bound by the same reduction targets as developed countries (Honkonen 2009). In addition, because Global North countries have had a head start in industrial development, they also possess the financial capacity and technical expertise to help Global South countries to reduce their emissions (Ibrahim 2009). India, for example, accesses capacity-building assistance from developed countries via the Global Environment Facility and Clean Development Mechanism (Government of India 2012). The Global South's under-development is a key factor undermining the ability of these countries to adapt to climate change impacts.

Second, representatives of developed states argue that the notion of common but differentiated responsibilities is out-dated because newly-industrialised countries like China and India are now industrial powers themselves, becoming the biggest contributors to gross annual greenhouse gas emissions. They argue that applying the historic burden of responsibility to the original industrial countries would put them at a disadvantage in the competitive global economy today, eroding the economic base of developed countries (Vezirgiannidou 2008; Pickering *et al* 2012). For the United States in particular, application of common but differentiated responsibilities could accelerate the shift in relative economic power that is already characteristic of the Sino-American hegemonic contest in East Asia. It is this context in which the American diplomatic cables contained in the Wikileaks Cablegate archive are most illuminating. In exploring the climate change-related documents in the Cablegate archive, we are looking for corroborating evidence of American relative gains concerns stemming from their participation in the UNFCCC process.

## Exploring Relative Gains in the *Cablegate* Archive

We have employed a method of qualitative content analysis (Holsti 2012) in our search for corroborating evidence of UNFCCC-related relative gains concerns contained in diplomatic correspondences of the *Cablegate* archive. Initially, we compiled a dossier of climate change-related cables from the archive using a list of search terms—climate change; global warming; United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; UNFCCC—relevant to our study. Cables in the dossier were then examined in order to ascertain their relevance to the US bargaining position in the UNFCCC and applicability to relative gains analysis. Cables in which climate change featured as a central and/or important secondary discussion point were then analysed in greater detail to assess their relevance as corroborating evidence of relative gains concerns. Where cables are found to be relevant, they have been included as corroborating data in a narrative of the UNFCCC negotiating process leading up to COP15 in Copenhagen in December 2009.

We are mindful that the Wikileaks *Cablegate* archive constitutes a raw data set that requires interpretation and cannot be taken at face value. The *Cablegate* archive is a cache of US Department of State diplomatic cables that were copied from internal *Secret Internet Protocol Router Network* (SIPRNet) US military intranet system by Private First Class Chelsea (Bradley) Manning. Most American diplomatic missions worldwide are connected to the SIPRNet and any embassy dispatches SIPDIS are automatically uploaded to the system, which can be accessed by any of the 4.2 million US military or State Department personnel with a security clearance up to the *Secret* level (The Guardian 2010; Miller 2011). The *Cablegate* archive contains over 250,000 cables dating from 1996 to February 2010 that are classified, in descending order of security, as *Secret*, *Confidential* and *Unclassified*, within the bounds of Manning's security clearance level. The *Secret* and *Confidential* classifications relate to information whose unauthorised disclosure could cause “serious damage” and “damage” respectively to US national security, as defined in Part I, Section 1.2 of *Executive Order 13526—Classified National Security Information*. We have chosen to analyse documents from the *Secret* designation only as the richest potential source of corroborating information for this study. Cables designated under the *Unclassified* and *Confidential* classifications are generally sourced from material from the public domain and are therefore likely to be of limited value, given the availability of other source material. In addition, the cables vary according to who wrote them, for what purpose and for what audience. The cables are written by ambassadors and consular officials, as backgrounders for high level official engagements, debriefings from intergovernmental meetings and reports from liaison with intelligence assets. Their content is highly subjective, based on the authors' own interpretation of the subject matter. With these caveats in mind, we have attempted to contextualise the material which has been cited from this dataset in our analysis. To compensate for weaknesses in the data set, we also cite alternative primary documentation and sources from the academic literature.

## The UNFCCC Process

The genesis of relative gains scenarios in the UNFCCC lies in the doctrine of *common but differentiated responsibilities* (CBDR), which is enshrined in Article 3.1 of the Convention as the adhesive principle that bonds the disparate interests of its large number of parties. The UNFCCC is a treaty framework of non-binding soft law commitments and guiding principles aimed at the long-term objective of solidifying national emissions reduction commitments into binding international law. Under the Convention, governments agreed to gather and

share information on greenhouse gas emissions, national policies and best practices, launch national strategies for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and cooperate in preparing for adaptation to the impacts of climate change (UNFCCC Secretariat 2014). The Convention divides signatory countries into three main groups: *Annex I Parties*, which include the industrialized countries that were members of the OECD in 1992, plus countries of the former Soviet Union designated as ‘economies in transition’; *Annex II Parties*, comprising the OECD members of Annex I, but not the economies-in-transition’ countries; and *Non-Annex I Parties*, inclusive of developing countries or countries recognized as especially vulnerable to climate change impacts. This division enshrined the concept of common but differentiated responsibilities.

Under the UNFCCC, an annual “Conference of Parties” (COP) meets to negotiate the strengthening of the UNFCCC principles (see Article 3 of the convention). The first conference of parties took place in Berlin in 1995. This conference adopted the *Berlin Mandate*, a plan to guide a two-year negotiating process with the aim of achieving a legal instrument to address emissions reductions for Annex I states, the developed countries, within the UNFCCC. The Berlin Mandate reaffirmed the doctrine of “common but differentiated responsibilities” and on this basis, after heated debate, concluded that only the developed Annex I countries should take on binding emissions reduction targets in the initial commitment period. The specifics of these commitments were to be the focus of the legal instrument to be negotiated over the following two years. The two-year negotiating period initiated at COP-01 in Berlin culminated at COP-03 in Kyoto, Japan, in 1997. Intensive, divisive and protracted negotiations resulted in the Kyoto Protocol, which outlined the emissions reduction obligations for Annex I countries, along with additional schemes including *emissions trading*, the *Clean Development Mechanism* and *Joint Implementation* to help facilitate emissions reductions. Most Annex I countries agreed to emissions reductions in the range of 6-8% below 1990 levels, during the first emissions budget period from 2008–2012. It was left to individual countries to choose their own method for achieving their targets, while on-Annex I countries took on no obligations under the Protocol (Christoff 2006).

Although it has its detractors, the Kyoto Protocol is widely regarded as an unprecedented achievement in international law, given the number of parties involved, the complexity of the issues, and the enormity of the challenges facing the negotiators. Its main criticisms were the non-binding nature of the emissions reduction commitments, the modesty of those commitments and the lack of enforcement mechanisms. The Protocol’s non-ratification by the United States, the world’s then-largest gross polluter, and Australia, one of the world’s largest per capita polluters, was a further drawback. Nonetheless, as Eckersley (2007) has noted, given the incentives for non-compliance with their targets, the acceptance of modest initial targets was interpreted as a better outcome than no mandatory targets, or even the outright failure of the negotiating process. The initial targets were understood merely as a first step in a permanent process of negotiation to strengthen the UNFCCC during the twenty-first century. The COP was to finalise the operational details of the Kyoto Protocol at COP4 in Buenos Aires in 1998, but negotiations continued until COP7 in the Moroccan city of Marrakech in 2001.

Two inter-related issues were the main stumbling blocks to progress: flexibility in meeting CO<sub>2</sub> reduction targets and the inclusion of carbon sinks as a substitute for emissions reduction. These were advocated strongly by several developed countries, including Australia, to allow them to meet their reduction targets while minimizing harm to their national economies. These ideas were incorporated into an amended Kyoto text negotiated at COP-07 in Marrakech in 2001, known as the Marrakech Accords. After the Accords were

negotiated, several more countries agreed to sign the treaty, the most notable exceptions being the US and Australia. COP-07 in Marrakesh also saw the emergence of a two-track process within the UNFCCC (Yamin and Depledge 2004). The first track—Ad Hoc Working Group on Further Commitments for Annex I Parties under the Kyoto Protocol (AWG-KP)—featured continuing efforts to strengthen the Kyoto Protocol for its initial compliance period between 2008 and 2012. The second track—Ad Hoc Working Group on Long-term Cooperative Action Under the Convention (AWG-LCA)—focused on producing a post-2012 successor agreement to succeed the Kyoto Protocol after the expiry of its initial compliance period. The two-track process came about because of nagging problems with the Kyoto Protocol itself, which did not include the US and China, the largest gross polluters, and up until 2007, one of the largest per capita polluters in Australia. It emerged that less than 20 countries were on track to meet their Kyoto targets, twelve of which were post-communist countries who scraped under their targets because of economic contraction, rather than concerted mitigation efforts (Christoff 2006).

COP-13 in Bali produced the Bali Action Plan, a significant outcome for the advancement of the climate regime. The conference dragged on an extra day and reached a dramatic conclusion when the Papua New Guinea delegation pointedly criticised the American position, leading the US delegation to make an abrupt about-face and join the consensus. The Bali Action Plan was established in wake of the US back flip. Under the Bali Action Plan, all Parties confirmed their intention to proceed with the Kyoto Protocol negotiations and institutionalise the parallel negotiating track to formalise a successor agreement to the protocol (UNFCCC Secretariat 2007). Together, the two negotiating tracks under the Bali Roadmap ensured that all global emissions would be covered through the negotiation of mitigation commitments for all countries. More importantly, the roadmap sign-posted COP15 in Copenhagen in 2009 as the deadline for producing a binding post-Kyoto international emissions reduction treaty, merging the two parallel negotiating tracks. This is why COP15 in Copenhagen was built up as such a momentous event.

## **Analysing the *Cablegate* Climate Change Dossier**

Climate change is cited in numerous contexts across the dossier. For example, a debrief of Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg's 29 September 2009 meeting with Chinese Vice Foreign Minister He Yafei ostensibly about relations with Iran and North Korea specifically mentions the Copenhagen conference and the fear that climate change negotiations could overshadow US – Chinese other joint interests during a visit from the President of the United States (09BEIJING2963). Defence partnerships (10KABUL85) and counterterrorism were presented as major themes across the dossier, namely in relation to the containment of North Korea and Iran. Specifically, the threat of nuclear proliferation in North Korea was discussed with nations including Japan fearing future attacks (07TOKYO5491). These new threats often intensify existing issues and therefore fundamentally affect the national security of states. For example, climate change and deforestation has been linked to tension and conflict in parts of South America. The deforestation of the Amazon Rainforest has been connected to the trafficking of narcotics in Colombia which is leading to heightened conflict in the region. According to one cable, "Replacing rainforest with coca crops harms the environment, and narco-trafficking is not only a problem for Colombia but for its neighbors as well" (10BOGOTA201).

Energy security and oil in particular were major themes in many of the cables. Europe's dependence on Russian energy has been cited as concerning and methods of energy



independence are being explored by nations such as Italy and Germany (08ROME454). As one particular cable states, the Italian government has been hesitant in confronting Russia over various issues due to the nation’s reliance on Russian gas. This has lead Italy to push for a European Union policy that addresses the regions energy security issues. An increase in renewable energy was highlighted as a possible strategy for Europe to achieve this goal. Although coal, oil and gas presented as a major theme in the Wikileaks archive, discussions surrounding nuclear energy as well as renewable technologies were often used as a secondary theme to discuss responses to climate change and peak oil. For example, although the major theme was energy security, climate change was mentioned as an issue which was seen to be exacerbating the problem. Renewable energy was often described as solution to both energy security concerns and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. The notion of energy efficiency was also stressed in various cables as well as the need to diversify energy sources. Although Australian diplomats expressed reservations in regards to nuclear energy, this idea has been continually brought up in various cables as a possible method of reducing the nation’s high per capita emissions (08CANBERRA671).

There are however many cables that refer specifically to the UNFCCC negotiating process. It is in these cables within the dossier that we find evidence of American relative gains concerns. Interestingly, the dossier illustrates a visible upward trend in cable traffic related to climate change from 2005, culminating in a high of 80 cables in 2009 (see Figure 1), which coincides with the pivotal UNFCCC COP15 held in Copenhagen, Denmark in December of that year.

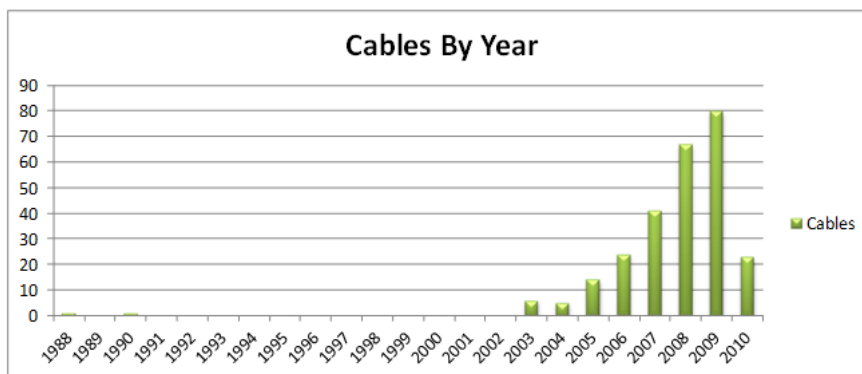


Figure 1: Chronological distribution of climate change-related cables in our dossier from the Cablegate archive.

Three major cleavages emerged within the UNFCCC process. Developed and developing countries continued to disagree over the specifics of “common but differentiated responsibilities.” A scene-setter for Secretary of State Hilary Clinton’s state visit to India in July 2009 documents the Indian position which rejects greenhouse gas reduction commitments for Non-Annex I countries, on the basis that primary responsibility for greenhouse pollution lies with developed countries and as such, India is entitled to an equal per capita share of the “global carbon space” in pursuit of economic development (09NEWDELHI1464). This disagreement was highlighted most starkly by the diverging positions of the United States and China. Despite not having ratified the Kyoto Protocol, the US consistently argued that the price of its ratification would be the inclusion of binding targets for newly-industrialised Non-Annex I countries including China and India (Pickering and Miller 2012). The Chinese argued for differential non-binding targets, in line with “common but differentiated responsibilities.” This rift was evident even within the G8, where disagreement over the Chairman’s Summary of the 30 May 2008 G8 Environmental Ministerial Meeting exposed this rift within the G8 itself. Japan expressed the position that developed countries would need to move on emissions reductions before developing

countries, in divergence with the US position (08TOKYO1496). In his debrief of a meeting between Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman, Senator John Kerry, US Ambassador to India David Mulford documents Senator Kerry's desire for India to "join in efforts to control climate change on a more accelerated basis" (08NEWDELHI3165). Reading between the lines, Kerry's India visit in December 2008, in the immediate aftermath of COP-14 in Poznan, Poland, highlight American efforts to get India to commit to binding emissions reduction targets, in line with the adoption of binding targets by non-Annex I states such as India as the precondition for US support for a post-Kyoto deal. This position is reiterated by US Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg during his 28 September 2009 meeting with Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak, during which Steinberg emphasised that "all countries needed to contribute to the solution" (09KUALALUMPUR859).

The high-stakes nature of the Copenhagen negotiations are borne out by evidence of espionage, perpetrated both on behalf of and against the US negotiating team. Evidence emerged of a cyber-security threat against US State Department computer systems as Sino-American talks advanced during COP15. A phishing email was detected targeted at departmental personnel involved in the UNFCCC negotiations. While the source of the phishing scam remains unknown, its likely purpose was to collect intelligence on the US bargaining position in the negotiations (09STATE63860). In addition, an NSA document divulged by American whistle blower Edward Snowden in 2013 reveals American spying signals intelligence espionage against competing delegations at COP15, which proved to have had a significant impact on the course of the negotiations, particularly in relation to the leaked Danish text (Dagbladet Information 2014).

In addition, a rift developed between the US and the EU, who lobbied strongly for the US to ratify the protocol and adopt a stronger unilateral emissions reduction position, independent of the inclusion of Non-Annex I countries (Roberts 2011). This divergence between the American and EU positions is evident in preparation briefings for high-level US-Swedish meetings in 2007-2008, in which US Ambassador to Sweden Michael Wood documents the Swedish government's desire to help shepherd the US, China and India toward a post-Kyoto Protocol successor agreement at COP15 in Copenhagen, during the period of Sweden's EU Presidency in 2009 (07STOCKHOLM506; 08STOCKHOLM368). Cable traffic also notes strong French criticism of the United States for lagging behind other parties in advance of COP15, noting in particular the failure of US Senate to pass the Waxman-Markey carbon pricing bill in advance of the Copenhagen summit (09PARIS1233).

The advancement of the Bali Action plan was slowed by the emergence of the global financial crisis of 2007-2008. The crisis is cited in a number of cables as a hindrance to global climate change action as the since it was the primary focus of many nations to get their economies' back on track (09ATHENS1719). This contrast, however, with the German perspective as communicated by *charge d'affaires* John Koenig in a briefing for President Obama's visit to Germany in June 2009, which highlights the German view that reducing American greenhouse gas emissions below 1990 levels is the key to engaging the Non-Annex I economic powers such as China in a constructive negotiating outcome (09BERLIN624): Energy security and oil in particular were major themes in many of the Wikileaks archive cables. This also tied into relations between states and their cooperation regarding mining and energy security. Not surprisingly, the Middle East was the focus of several cables regarding energy and oil interests. However, many cables also featured negotiations concerning the exploitation of resources in other parts of the globe including the natural gas fields in Russia and the drilling of the Arctic Circle. Europe's dependence on Russian energy has been cited as concerning and methods of energy independence are being explored by

nations such as Italy and Germany (09BERLIN624). Indeed, as US Ambassador to Italy Robert Spogli articulated in a 2008 cable, Europe's reliance on Russian energy reserves is sighted as a potential source of leverage over the EU bloc in the UNFCCC negotiating process (08ROME454).

The long-awaited Copenhagen conference culminated two years of intense negotiations launched with the 2007 Bali Roadmap. Yet from its outset, COP15 was characterised by a lack of trust, bitter divisions, confusion and setbacks. In addition to the long-standing US-China, US-EU and Global North-Global South divisions, the conference was shaken by the leaking of a draft text that was unacceptable to *Non-Annex I* countries, who were effectively frozen out of the negotiating process (Vidal 2009). The conference also saw open squabbling among the typically unified developing countries in the Group of 77. Many developing countries were now uncomfortable with China's leadership role of the Group of 77, arguing that as an economic powerhouse, China's interests no longer coincided with their own.

The basic terms of an agreement called the *Copenhagen Accord* were brokered directly by President Obama and a handful of key developing country leaders from the BASIC bloc on the final day of the conference, capping two weeks of harsh rhetoric and procedural warfare. The Copenhagen Accord provided for explicit emission reduction pledges by all the major economies – including, for the first time, China and other major developing countries – but charted no clear path toward a treaty with binding commitments. Under the accord, Annex I countries committed to implement economy-wide emissions targets by 2020 and jointly mobilise US\$100 billion a year to facilitate technology transfer and capacity building in *Non-Annex I* countries. For their part, *Non-Annex I* countries vaguely committed to “implement mitigation actions.” We should note that the Copenhagen Accord was a political, as opposed to a legal, agreement. Formal decisions under the UNFCCC are taken by consensus. Because many countries opposed the accord, the Conference of the Parties only “took note” of the accord and did not technically accept the text. Overall, COP15 was a great disappointment. The lofty expectations built up since COP-13 in Bali were deflated by the Copenhagen Accord, which fell well short of the binding agreement envisaged by the Bali Roadmap. The divisions that contributed this outcome are obvious in the cables from our climate change dossier taken from the Cablegate archive.

## Conclusion

Realist scholars contend that multilateral negotiations such as the UNFCCC process provide an avenue for competition between states. This competition leads to nations leveraging their power and prestige against one another in order to avoid rival states achieving gains that would put them at a relative disadvantage and sway the balance of power. Given that China is classified as a Non Annex I Party within the UNFCCC negotiations, it is not required to commit to binding emissions reduction targets that are subject to developed nations such as the United States, in line with the doctrine of *common but differentiated responsibilities* enshrined in the Convention. As such, the United States has been reluctant to enter into binding emissions reductions commitments which would place it at an economic disadvantage relative to China and other emerging nations.

This article has analysed diplomatic cables contained in the Wikileaks Cablegate for evidence that a fear of relative gains has prevented the United States from engaging fully in the UNFCCC negotiation process. Given that the Wikileaks Cablegate archive is made up of cables written by various diplomats about a variety of topics and agendas, it is thus subject to

the interpretation and it was often necessary to read between the lines in order to interpret the cables insights and meanings. As such, several primary sources have been cited so as to give strength to the findings evident within the archive. In saying this, it is important to mention the strengths of using a content analysis research method including the fact that it has allowed the researchers to study sensitive documents in an unobtrusive manner and gain insights into the inner workings of US diplomacy.

Several cables that we examined were found to provide evidence supporting our hypothesis that relative gains concerns played a part in the decision of the United States not to support the establishment of binding emission reduction targets under the UNFCCC. It was found that although cables were generally centred on themes other than climate change, rich insights regarding the United States stance on the issue could be gained. There are indications in several cables that the United States strongly believed that it should only be obligated to sign on to compulsory emission reduction treaties if emerging nations such as China and India are also required to do so. As the paper illustrates, it is this fear and tension between nations that has ultimately led to washed out international climate agreements such as the Copenhagen Accord as well as a stalled negotiation process.

The Wikileaks Cablegate archive proved to be a fascinating research tool which provided several interesting insights into the US policy on climate change and the nation's fear of relative gains within the UNFCCC negotiation process. Using this method of unobtrusive research, we were able to look closely at government documents and examine the interactions of diplomats to explore various censored perspectives on climate change. Essentially, the findings of this research indicate that international climate negotiations have come up short due to nations including the United States fearing that entering into a binding emissions reductions agreement would place them at a disadvantage relative to other nations. Although further research on the topic is needed, the Wikileaks Cablegate archive supports existing research pinpointing relative gains concerns as an obstacle to effective progress in regards to the mitigation of dangerous climate change.

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