



Climate Change in World Politics

A book review by Jessica Lucinda Amprako

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Climate change has become a well-known topic of global discussion. Scientists have expressed serious concerns about global warming as a result of human activities. Environmentalists have also embarked on several campaigns to spread awareness about climate change to political leaders and common citizens. Yet the issue of climate change remains unsolved and has created political controversies surrounding the approach to its rectification. Even definitions of the cause of the canker remain vague.

John Vogler is a Professorial Research Fellow of International Relations at Keele University in the United Kingdom. He has been the chair of the British International Studies Association's working group on the environment. He is a member of the ESRC Centre for Climate Change, Economics and Policy, and has conducted a great deal of research on environmental topics.

Vogler's book *Climate Change in World Politics* addresses the issue of climate change from an international governmental perspective by marrying the ideas of different school of thoughts, such as the concerns of the green activists, naturalists and scientific experts with the social scientists' and economists' point of view. The book asks questions about why the problems caused by climate change are addressed in isolation from socio-economic drivers of global warming.

Climate change poses a threat to natural resource availability for future generations. It will have a negative impact on the environment, society, and the economy of all nations in one way or another. Factors that are in play are associated with increases in emissions of greenhouse gases (GHG) due to changes in consumption patterns as well as population growth. Some measures that were taken to solve this crisis were the establishment of conventions and creation of mutual agreements to curb activities that lead to climate change. However, these suggested policies and measures

have not effectively solved the problem due to bureaucracy and limitations in the decisions and policies, as described by some members of the sovereign states (Vogler, 2016).

The proceeding chapters of this book cover the following topics: framing and fragmentation, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) regime, interests and alignments, the pursuit of justice, recognition and prestige, and finally, structural change and climate politics. The book provides a rich contrast between policies that have been developed to help mitigate GHG emissions and the strategies that have been adapted to pursue the course. Vogler, in his research, discloses how climate change interventions have been inhibited by power, prestige and norms of member states. Several linkages have been drawn to find a balance between the scientific approach and political structures in an international context. In the section regarding framing and fragmentation, Vogler tries to define the problem of climate change by considering diverse factors, such as globalisation, consumption and territorial emissions. Globalisation has increased the emissions of GHGs that arise from international aviation and transportation of goods by sea. Some of these emissions are the result of the import of goods from the developed world to developing countries and the transport of tourists from developed countries to the developing world. These factors, however, are not discussed by the UNFCCC.

However, the role of developed countries in this instance is vital as they must be the frontliners in the reduction of emissions and can influence others to do same. Monckton (2011) argues that the UNFCCC and the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change are only using the threat of global warming and the guise of saving the planet as a scare tactic to cover up their extravagant spending and self-enrichment. This is evident as the UNFCCC is growing more powerful and bureaucratic over the years, as



they have taken huge sums of money and power from the Western nations without giving a concrete and transparent account of the science and the economics of the climate change (Monckton, 2011).

Concerning the approach mechanisms adopted by different nations, Vogler (2016) analysed how these parties defined the causal factors that have led to climate change from the perspective of developing and developed countries. He argues that the ideologies of the responsible states suit their personal benefits. For example, Saudi Arabia, whose economy depends solely on fossil fuels, and China, an emerging super-power which is undergoing rapid industrialisation, have their own interpretations regarding the contributing factors to climate change (Vogler, 2016).

Some critics are of the notion that the western world is complacent in the climate debate in order to prevent the developing world from using fossil fuels as the West itself has (Monckton, 2011). Sustainable energy options, such as solar, wind and biofuels, are not as sustainable as they might seem since they require large tracts of land and reduce the production of food crops, which will only allow developing countries to advance slowly (Monckton, 2011).

Regarding structural change and climate politics, there is a contentious debate regarding what kind of power is suitable to regulate the actions of other nations which contribute to the emissions of GHGs. In this chapter, two types of power are discussed: relational and structural power. Both kinds of power are effective in changing the actions of others. However, the first type of power tends to use violence and strong economic capacity to suppress and manoeuvre other countries to facilitate change (Vogler, 2016). In the context of a delicate issue like climate change, the use of force may not be the best option.

However, adopting a diplomatic stance where negative human actions (burning of fossil fuel, population growth, deforestation) are linked to the occurrence of natural phenomenon (Asian tsunamis, the melting of the ice fields that cover Antarctica and Greenland, or the release of methane, a potent GHG, due to the melting of the frozen peat bogs in western Siberia and Canada) can serve as a precaution to countries who are contributing greatly to GHG emissions (Giddens, 2009). This form of power is defined by Vogler as structural power.

There is also the need for an international power structure. Most cooperation to sustain international economic regimes requires hegemonic leadership from a dominant actor such as the United States of America (Vogler, 2016). Social and economic determinants reveal the inequity between the developed and developing worlds regarding the mismatch between accountability for and susceptibility to

climate change (Vogler, 2016). The problems of the climate regime are due to economic growth of nations, breached promises of aid, and the requirements of participating in Western-dominated international economic institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization (Vogler, 2016). In this section of the book, the importance of a structural analysis in the context of the climate regime is well-dissected and explained.

In this book, a vast range of policy issues have been raised regarding the limitations of the international system as well as the possible solutions to climate change. I am of the view that promoting green taxation will preserve and enhance social justice and help reveal and mitigate indulgence in activities that contribute to the GHG emissions. I believe good policies and a concrete scientific account of the current state of the climate will help convince states to reduce their emissions. However, a major conflict of interest is our urgent need to protect the environment and our growing demands for energy, which will be expensive and challenging to meet with renewable alternatives like wind and solar.

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