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## The Secret History of Climate Alarmism

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The Weekly Standard

A very German story of power politics disguised as environmentalism

BY [John Rosenthal](#) <sup>[1]</sup> August 9, 2010, Vol. 15, No. 44

Changes in the earth's atmosphere, the additional greenhouse effect and the resultant changes in the climate .???. represent a global danger for humanity and the entire biosphere of the earth. If no effective counteracting measures are taken, dramatic consequences are to be expected for all of the earth's regions.

This warning will undoubtedly seem familiar, perhaps even mind-numbingly so. But if the substance sounds like the same-old same-old, the date on which it was issued might seem surprising. It was not in the run-up to the Copenhagen climate summit or indeed anytime in the last decade. The above passage is nearly two decades old. It comes from a resolution adopted by the German Bundestag in September 1991.

The resolution in question summarizes and endorses the recommendations of a parliamentary commission of inquiry on "Taking Precautionary Action to Protect the Earth's Atmosphere." The commission had been set up in October 1987. Appearing before the Bundestag some seven months earlier, Chancellor Helmut Kohl had warned that the "greenhouse effect" threatened to bring about "a grave pattern of climate change" and had called for the burning of fossil fuels to be limited, not just in Germany but "worldwide."

The June 1987 motion to form the commission envisioned "greenhouse gas" emissions producing "a global warming of from three to seven degrees Celsius" and called for counteracting measures to be taken even in the absence of scientific corroboration of the supposed threat—since otherwise, the document concludes darkly, "in a few decades .???. it could be too late."

The original impulse to take action had come from the German Physics Society, which in January 1986 published a "Warning of an Impending Climate Catastrophe." Just over six months later, in August, the newsweekly *Der Spiegel* popularized the German physicists' "warning" in a spectacular cover story headlined "The Climate Catastrophe." The image on the cover of the magazine depicted Cologne's historic cathedral surrounded by the waters of the Atlantic Ocean: a consequence of the melting of the polar ice caps, as was explained on the inside of the issue. Thus was the "global warming" scare born. In Germany, in 1986. In a report submitted to the Bundestag on October 2, 1990, the commission of inquiry laid out a veritable "roadmap" for concerted international action to combat "climate change." The commission called for CO<sub>2</sub> emissions to be cut by 30 percent by the year 2005 in all "economically strong industrialized countries." Germany itself was called upon to meet this goal. But the formulation "economically strong industrialized countries" was clearly tailored to fit Germany's major economic rivals: Japan and the United States. The report also calls for a

20-25 percent reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions among all the countries of the then European Community and a 20 percent reduction for all industrialized countries. "One needs to convince the other countries concerned of the necessity of such ambitious targets," the report explains, "and to arrive as quickly as possible at corresponding international agreements." The report declared it to be "urgently necessary" that a first international convention on "climate-relevant emissions" be adopted "at the latest in 1992 during the U.N. Conference on Environment and Development in Brazil."

And so it would come to pass. It was at the 1992 U.N. conference—more commonly known as the "Rio Earth Summit"—that a certain American senator began his career as would-be prophet of warming-induced gloom and doom. Al Gore's book *Earth in the Balance* was timed for release just before the summit began. It was also here that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change was opened for signature.

It would be wrong to say that the climate change convention was merely "anticipated" by the work of the German Bundestag's commission of inquiry. The commission's 1990 report contains a *full draft* of such a "framework convention." The proposed convention was supposed to be supplemented later on by a protocol establishing the concrete emissions reduction obligations of the parties. This would become the Kyoto Protocol.

The German commission stated that the protocol should "come into force by 1995 at the latest." In this respect, however, the international community was not able to keep to the schedule laid down by the German parliamentary commission. The Kyoto Protocol would first be adopted in 1997, and it would only come into force in 2005—as is well known, without the participation of the United States. Under the terms of the treaty, the assigned emissions targets are supposed to be met by the end of 2012.

But a funny thing happened on the way to the Kyoto Protocol. The German plans to unite all the industrialized countries in a common effort to reduce "greenhouse gas" emissions gave rise to a treaty that placed the overwhelming bulk of the emissions reduction burden on the United States and, to a lesser extent, Japan.

American criticism of the protocol has typically focused on the pass given to major industrializing nations like China and India. The treaty creates no concrete obligations for so-called developing countries. Only the 39 countries named in Annex I of the framework convention are assigned emissions reduction or limitation targets. All other parties to the agreement got, in effect, a free ride. Indeed, some are even paid to ride. By participating in what is known as the Clean Development Mechanism, developing countries may actually earn revenue under the Kyoto arrangements by selling "carbon credits" to countries with treaty obligations.

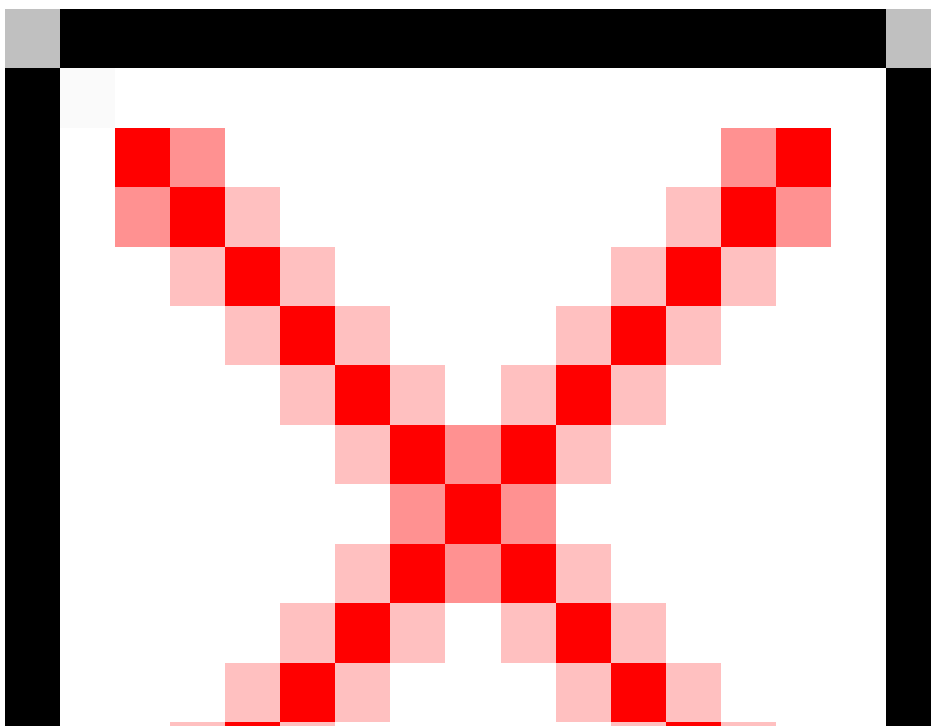
But the fact is that even many "Annex I" countries have no obligation to reduce their emissions under the Kyoto arrangements. Some are even expressly permitted to increase them. This group includes not only Australia and Norway, but also, thanks to an ancillary agreement, several EU member states. Others are only required to keep their emissions stable. Still others are assigned nominal emissions reduction targets, which, however, on closer inspection turn out to be de facto licenses to increase their emissions. Perhaps most remarkably of all, Germany—the would-be pacesetter in the global effort to reduce emissions—ended up having at most only a relatively trivial reduction requirement under Kyoto. To understand how this could be so—and, above all, how it could have been so widely overlooked—we should return to the German commission of inquiry's report and consider the date of its submission. October 2, 1990. One day later, German reunification took place. When the commission proposed its ambitious target of a 30 percent reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions for Germany and other "economically strong industrialized countries," the inevitable demise of East Germany's highly inefficient, enormously carbon-intensive industries was already underway. This is significant because the commission also proposed backdating the reference year for measuring emissions reductions to a year before the actual

coming into force of the treaty. The reference year that would finally be settled upon was none other than 1990.

This reference year assured Germany a substantial carbon savings windfall from the phasing out of East Germany's obsolete industrial infrastructure. According to official statistics, from 1990 to 1995 CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in the eastern German states fell by a whopping 44 percent. Germany was, moreover, not the only country to benefit from its statistical good fortune. A little-known feature of the Kyoto agreement permitted Germany to "share" its windfall with other European countries. The Bundestag's commission of inquiry had called on the German government to establish a common emissions reduction target with its EU partners. The actual individual contributions of each of the countries could vary and were to be decided amongst themselves. Article 4 of the Kyoto Protocol is clearly designed to accommodate such an arrangement—known as a "bubble" among Kyoto *cognoscenti*.

Thus, under the terms agreed in Kyoto in 1997, each of the 15 countries that then comprised the EU is nominally committed to reducing emissions by 8 percent from 1990 levels. But, thanks to their formation of a "bubble," in reality the "EU-15" are only committed to *collectively* reducing their emissions by 8 percent. The real individual commitments of each of the countries were agreed upon prior to their ratification of Kyoto in 2002. It should be noted that, in keeping with yet another German initiative, the emissions reduction targets concern not just CO<sub>2</sub>, but rather a bundle of "greenhouse gases" of which CO<sub>2</sub> is the most important component. The addition of the other gases further improved Germany's emissions record. Germany agreed to a 21 percent reduction in emissions. This was a far cry from the 30 percent reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions alone that the commission had recommended. It was also less than a 25 percent emissions reduction goal that the German government had set for itself. Nonetheless, a 21 percent reduction seems on first glance to represent a very generous contribution.

This impression is, however, deceptive. The graph below illustrates the evolution of German carbon dioxide emissions. It has been adapted from a 2010 textbook on Renewable Energy and Climate Change by Volker Quaschning of Berlin's University of Applied Sciences. As the blue curve shows, even if we consider just CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, the country has already met its Kyoto target. But as the other two curves in the graph make clear, this seemingly impressive achievement is largely just a statistical byproduct of the precipitous fall in eastern German emissions in the early 1990s. The evolution of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in eastern Germany is represented by the green curve. The red curve represents the evolution of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in western Germany. As can be seen, on Quaschning's calculations, they have barely diminished from 1990 till today.



To the degree that Germany has recorded any additional decline in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in recent years, incidentally, it would appear mostly to be due not to the development of renewable energy sources, but rather to a simple shift away from coal—the most carbon-intensive of the fossil fuels—to oil or natural gas. The United Kingdom recorded reductions in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions due to the same pattern of substitution.

On closer inspection, Germany thus got off with what is in fact a remarkably light emissions reduction “burden.” Thanks to the sharing of the German emissions windfall, other members of the EU-15 were let off the hook altogether.

For instance, France. In his victory speech in May 2007, president-elect Nicolas Sarkozy lectured the United States on the fight against “global warming.” “A great nation like the United States has the obligation not to obstruct the struggle against global warming,” Sarkozy intoned, “but, on the contrary, should take the lead in this combat, since what is at stake is the fate of all humanity.” It was easy for him to say. Many commentators have noted that France covers by far the greater part of its electricity needs with nuclear power and hence has only a limited dependence on fossil fuels. Less well known, however, is the fact that under the EU “bubble” arrangement France has no obligation to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions at all. It is only supposed to hold them steady at 1990 levels.

All told, seven of the 15 EU member states forming part of the EU “bubble” have no emissions reduction requirement. Five members of this group are indeed permitted to increase their emissions. Greece, for example, is permitted to increase its emissions by 25 percent; Portugal by 27 percent. According to the European Environmental Agency’s 2009 report on “Greenhouse gas emission trends,” of the eight EU-15 members that accepted reduction targets, only Germany and the U.K. are on track to meet them.

As for the 12 current EU member states that were still just candidates for EU membership at the time of Kyoto’s adoption, these countries got even better deals. Cyprus and Malta were simply left out of Annex I. The other countries, all of them “post-Communist” Eastern European states, were assigned reduction targets of either 6 percent or 8 percent. But they were classified as “Economies in Transition” and as such permitted to opt for a year other than 1990 as their base year or to use the average over a period of years.

The choice of 1990 was already sufficiently advantageous for many of these countries, but, unsurprisingly, some of them opted to employ a base year or period upstream of 1990 when their still Communist-era industries were pumping out the maximum amount of CO<sub>2</sub>. It is thus likewise no surprise that almost all of these countries will meet their targets without any difficulty. Miceal O’Ronain has calculated that by the end of 1998, Romania’s CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, for example, had fallen by a whopping 56 percent from its emissions levels in its Kyoto base year of 1989. This means that Romania’s nominal “obligation” to reduce emissions by 8 percent was in reality a license to increase them by more than 100 percent. Despite the fact that the Kyoto Protocol requires little of Germany and its EU partners—or perhaps, more to the point, precisely *because* it requires so little of them—the EU has become the major promoter of climate alarmism and Kyoto-style solutions to the ostensible problem. From 2002 through 2009, the European Commission awarded nearly 300 million euros in support to European and international research projects on “climate change” and “climate change mitigation.” (The disgraced “climate scientists” of the University of East Anglia were beneficiaries of no less than 12 such grants.) The EU also provides regular operating subsidies to NGOs engaged in “climate activism.”

Russia is another country greatly favored by the 1990 Kyoto base year. The protocol merely requires Russia to hold its emissions steady at 1990 levels. Given the collapse of Soviet-era industry, it was and is far below those levels. Thus, the nominal “obligation” in fact guaranteed that Russia would have a vast reservoir of phantom emissions to sell on the international “carbon credits” market.

Other industrialized countries also received what amount to special indulgences. Australia was not only given the benefit of a positive target. By virtue of what is referred to in the literature as the "Australia clause," it was also allowed to include emissions from land clearing in the calculation of its emissions total for the 1990 base year. The effect of this was massively to inflate its 1990 emissions total—on some estimates, by as much as 30 percent—thus rendering its real allowance even greater.

But perhaps the most revealing example of how eager Kyoto's promoters were to swell the ratification registry—and thus isolate the United States—is provided by the case of Israel. For the purposes of the Kyoto protocol, Israel is somehow treated as a "developing" country. Consequently, it incurs no obligations under the treaty.

The United States, by contrast, neither drew any benefit from the choice of the 1990 base year nor received any other sort of indulgence. Its 7 percent reduction target means 7 percent. In light of all the legerdemain employed to render the nominal commitments of other countries meaningless, it is hardly surprising that according to the calculations of Yale economist William Nordhaus, the United States alone was slated to bear some two-thirds of the total costs of the treaty and four times the costs borne by the EU-15.

It should not come as a shock that German negotiators sought to advance German interests in the Kyoto negotiations. A curious detail about the Bundestag's commission of inquiry sets in relief the amalgam of Green idealism and brass-tacks pursuit of national interest that has characterized Germany's pushing of the "climate protection" agenda. The chairman of the commission was one Bernd Schmidbauer. In December 1991, Schmidbauer would be named the chief coordinator of all German intelligence agencies. He would hold the position for the next seven years.

The real questions that Americans need to ask concern their *own* negotiators. How could they have permitted the United States to be boxed into such an obviously prejudicial corner, and why did neither they nor the Clinton administration as such do anything to expose the ruse? Of course, that was long ago and the persons responsible have undoubtedly moved on to other things. Take Todd Stern, for instance, who led the American negotiating team at Kyoto. Nowadays, Stern is the Obama administration's "Special Envoy on Climate Change." In this capacity, he is again America's chief negotiator in the current round of talks on a Kyoto follow-up treaty.

*John Rosenthal writes regularly on European politics and transatlantic relations for both old and new media. His detailed analysis of the EU's funding of "climate science" is available in the August/September issue of Policy Review. More of his work can be found at [www.trans-int.com](http://www.trans-int.com)*<sup>[2]</sup>.

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