



Talk Is Cheap: The UN's Doha Conference Strikes Out . . . Again

Jonathan A. Lesser

Last November, 10,000 delegates converged on Doha, Qatar, for the United Nations' annual conference on global warming/climate change/climate volatility. The Framework Convention on Climate Change is actually the 18th such UN conference, and proved to be as productive as the previous 17.

MAJOR AGENDA ITEM, EXPANSION, WENT INTO REVERSE

Since 2007, the conference has focused on the Kyoto Protocol, which was signed 15 years ago and committed developed countries (but not less-developed ones) to nonbinding greenhouse gas emissions reductions targets. Kyoto excludes developing countries, including China and India, where emissions are growing most quickly. For example, between 2006 and 2010, China's and India's carbon emissions increased over 40 percent, from 7,100 million metric tons to 10,000 million metric tons (see **Exhibit 1**). China and India now account for about one-third of world carbon emissions. In contrast, US emissions decreased by 5 percent, from 5,900 million metric tons to 5,600 million metric tons.

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Jonathan A. Lesser, PhD, is president of Continental Economics, Inc., an economic and litigation consulting firm, with offices in Washington, DC, and Albuquerque, New Mexico. He can be reached at (202) 446-2062 or at jlesser@continentalecon.com.

Although the main focus of the conference was supposed to be extending the Kyoto Protocol, Canada, Russia, and Japan all effectively abandoned the agreement. The United States never ratified it in the first place. Thus, for all intents, Kyoto has met its well-deserved demise.

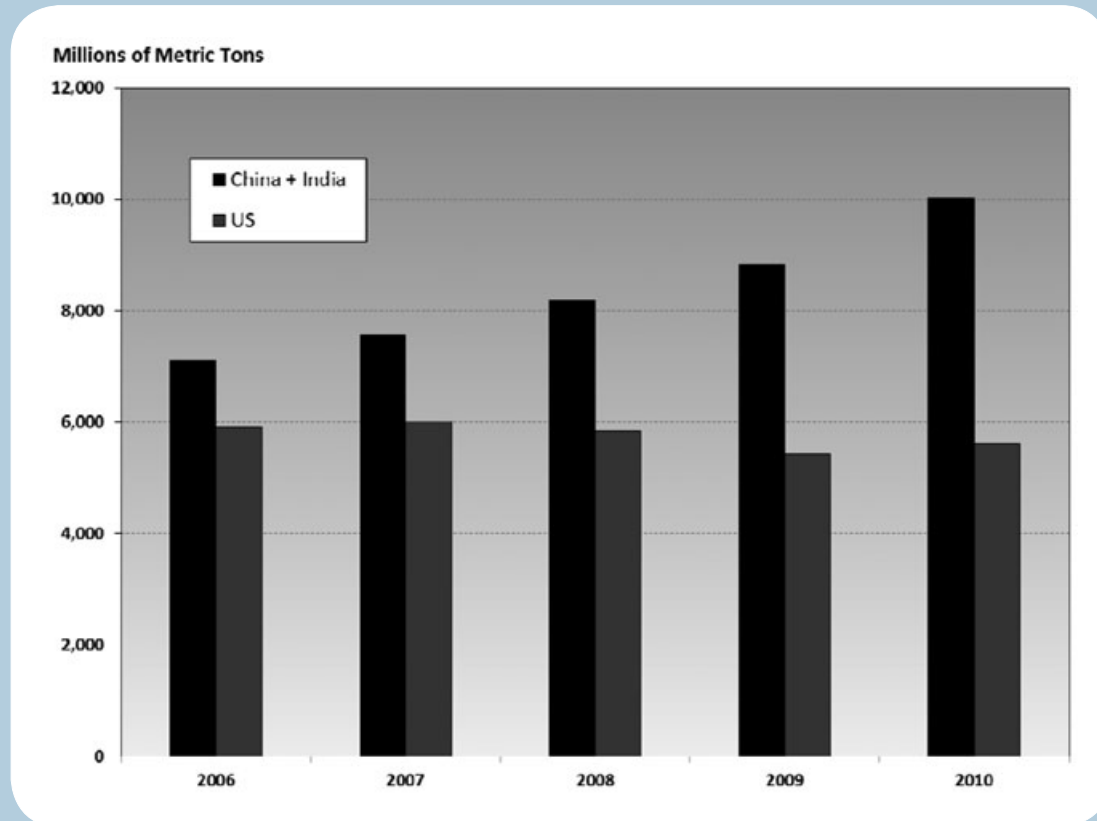
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INSTEAD, THEY TALKED ABOUT GETTING MONEY FROM THE UNITED STATES

Instead, the attendees focused on two other issues. First, they agreed to negotiate a new emissions control deal by 2015, which is supposed to take effect in 2020. This agreement will supposedly require all countries—developed and undeveloped—to reduce their carbon emissions. The likelihood of such an agreement being ratified, especially one that accounts for the rapidly growing emissions in developing countries, is vanishingly small. The real focus appears to have been wealth transfers from rich countries to poor ones, as “compensation” for the damage rich countries' greenhouse gas emissions are supposedly causing.

For example, one of the newer and more novel claims (discounting previous speculation about alien civilizations eradicating the earth because of climate change)¹ is that global warming means the “end of pasta.”² Specifically, according to this view, rising temperatures, extreme storms like Hurricane Sandy, and drought will mean the end

Exhibit 1. Annual Carbon Emissions, US vs. China + India



of wheat, leading to the “end of pasta.”³ (As is well known, the storm surge caused by Hurricane Sandy caused severe damage in the Midwest states. Also well known is that global warming causes hurricanes to strike at high tide when there is a full moon.)

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Second, developing countries want rich countries to hand over at least \$100 billion annually to compensate for the “damages” that developing countries supposedly have experienced from rising sea levels, extreme weather, and every other ill that can (and has been) attributed to climate change. Of course, it is the United States that these nations are focused on for climate “reparations,” because until 2006, the United States had the largest carbon emissions. The fact that the United States is the largest provider

of aid to developing countries apparently does not factor into the reparation demands. Thus, like so many other UN efforts, the annual climate conference has simply devolved into unadulterated money-grubbing.

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There is little chance that the United States and other developed nations will agree to huge wealth transfers and emissions reductions, which will further hobble their already struggling economies, especially when emissions of developing countries’ emissions are rapidly increasing. Whether through the imposition of carbon taxes or even greater subsidies for wind and solar energy, the increase in energy costs will simply add to the economic misery. Apparently, the extended hands of developing

nations apparently fail to understand that economic misery will flow “downhill”: damaging “rich” world economies will further damage the developing nations’ own economies. Moreover, why will developing nations wish to deny their own citizens the fruits of economic development, including greater energy use?

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

Although some see the Doha conference as a rousing success,⁴ what Doha reveals is the folly of continued efforts to prevent climate change. After two decades of “end of days” predictions by climate alarmists, climate models still fail to capture past climate behavior. Moreover, the efforts by some to manipulate the scientific process to further their aims, such as the “Climategate” emails reveal, as well as efforts to demean those who dare question the “certainty” of the climate science as cave-dwelling Troglodytes, reveals not scientific inquiry but naked politics.

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Environmentalism has always been a luxury good. Individuals in the poorest countries are focused on having enough food to eat and clean water to drink; they are not worrying about the effects of a changing climate in the decades ahead. If the climate is changing—and it always has—the solution has always been adaptation.

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However, environmentalists resist adaptation because it challenges the “doom and gloom” narrative that is required to maintain funding. For example, cheap and plentiful natural gas, made possible by advances in hydraulic fracturing, is allowing us to heat our homes and generate electricity far more efficiently than with coal, and to reduce carbon emissions. Nevertheless, environmentalists continue to fight fracking,⁵

as well as emissions-free nuclear power, with a vengeance.

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As for damages caused by extreme weather, it is not impossible to link individual weather events to climate change; the damages are the result of human behavior. Hurricanes have caused increasing damage to coastal areas because people build there and because subsidized flood insurance causes them to rebuild over and over. Eliminating subsidies that encourage behavior that exacerbates exposure to the effects of weather is a first step toward reducing damages. Embracing technology that provides lower-cost, cleaner energy, without endless subsidies, is another.

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However, as long as environmental gabfests like Doha continue, real progress will be elusive. After all, why search for real solutions when you can blame scapegoats? ☪

NOTES

1. See my January 2012 column, Global warming, climate change, er, climate volatility: 2012 and beyond. *Natural Gas and Electricity*, 28(6), 22–24.
2. See Hertsgaard, M. (2012, December 10). The end of pasta. *Newsweek*. Retrieved from <http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2012/12/09/bakken-oil-boom-and-climate-change-threaten-the-future-of-pasta.html>.
3. Yield data for wheat published by the US Department of Agriculture shows that per-acre yields have more than doubled since 1960, and all the while global temperatures have increased. See http://www.ers.usda.gov/datafiles/Wheat_Wheat_Data/Yearbook_Tables/US_Acreage_Production_Yield_and_Farm_Price/wheatyearbooktable01full.pdf.
4. See Hedegaard, C. (2012, December 14). Why the Doha climate conference was a success. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2012/dec/14/doha-climate-conference-success>.
5. See my December 2012 column, Frack attack—Environmentalists and Hollywood renew attacks on hydraulic fracturing. *Natural Gas and Electricity*, 29(5), 30–32.