

### DEBATES & SOLUTIONS

#### Beyond Kyoto: what's next?

The next few years could make or break the global mission to deal with climate change. Kyoto's first compliance period expires in 2012, and as of this writing there is no consensus on what to do next. In December 2005 the largest meeting of climate diplomats in nearly a decade took place in Montréal. While many developing countries were ready to start work, the US resisted up to the last minute, and the chief American negotiator walked out of a midnight discussion. In the end, the diplomats managed to eke out an agreement for a two-year round of non-binding talks under the UNFCCC that "will not open any negotiations leading to new commitments" (as the official wording says).

The next phase began with a meeting in Bali in December 2007, with the pressure on to develop firm commitments that pick up where the initial Kyoto period leaves off. Earlier in 2007, G8 members agreed to "consider seriously" the goal of reducing global emissions by at least half by 2050. Meanwhile, US president George Bush promoted an Asian-Pacific consortium that's considering long-term emissions reductions separately from other players (see below). While meeting in Sydney in September 2007, Asian-Pacific leaders endorsed "aspirational goals" to reduce carbon intensity 25% by 2030 – although this wouldn't necessarily imply any drop in actual emissions (see p.42). Critics noted that the plan is based on targets that are entirely voluntary, and it remains unclear how this strategy will mesh or conflict with the larger UN-based approach.

Much will depend on the American political climate as the decade draws to a close. A new president will take office in 2009, and the victor will likely be more amenable to binding greenhouse targets than was the Bush administration. Moreover, the US Congress moved from Republican to Democratic control in 2007 – a key shift that sparked a diverse set of proposed legislation, with goals ranging from modest to ambitious. If these trends in US politics continue, it's possible that the nation may throw considerable momentum behind post-Kyoto planning from 2009 onward.

Over the Atlantic, there's powerful momentum from the EU as a whole – and from industries that expect to be heavily involved in carbon trading – for a post-Kyoto emissions plan. A big question is what shape such a plan might take, and there's been no shortage of suggestions on the table. A 2004 report from the US Pew Center on Global Climate Change summarized more than forty ideas, with names that range from the grandiose

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(“Orchestra of Treaties” and “Climate Marshall Plan”) through the humble (“Broad but Shallow Beginning” and “Soft Landing in Emissions Growth”) to the droll (“Keep it Simple, Stupid”). The main points in question include:

► **Should there be a single global plan or an array of decentralized alliances?**

As noted above, the US has teamed up with Australia, China, India, Japan and South Korea to form the Asia-Pacific Partnership on Clean Development and Climate. Thus far the alliance – whose members generate half the world’s carbon emissions – is focused on non-binding actions such as sharing technologies for renewable and reduced-carbon fuel sources. With an eye toward boosting this technology-driven approach, the US held a meeting of the world’s fifteen largest emitters in September 2007. However, most of the participants reiterated their support for binding targets. “I think that the argument that we can do this through voluntary approaches is now pretty much discredited internationally”, said UK representative John Ashton.

► **What’s the best time frame to consider?** Some plans are focused on the second Kyoto commitment period (2013–2017), while others extend all the way out to 2100.

► **What type of commitments should be specified?** There is a whole array of possibilities, from emission targets by nation or region to non-emission approaches such as technology standards or financial transfers.

► **How should the burden of climate protection be shared among developed and developing countries?** This remains a key sticking point, as was the case from the very beginning.

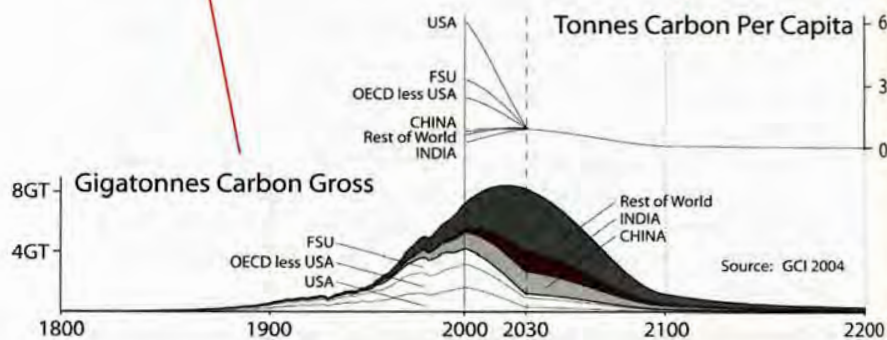
► **How does the world make sure that commitments are enforced?** It’s an issue that many say Kyoto hasn’t fully addressed.

Among the most intriguing plans offered to date is the **contraction and convergence** (C&C) model developed by the Global Commons Institute, a British group headed by Aubrey Meyer. It was introduced by the Indian government in 1995 and adopted by the Africa Group of Nations in 1997 during the run-up to Kyoto. The plan has also received votes of support from the European Parliament and several UK and German advisory groups. The two principles at the heart of C&C are:

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► **Contraction:** the need to reduce overall global emissions in order to reach a target concentration of CO<sub>2</sub>, with a commonly cited goal of 450 parts per million.

► **Convergence:** the idea that global per-capita emissions, which now vary greatly from country to country, should converge towards a common amount in a process more or less parallel to contraction.



From the Global Commons Institute C&C briefing document, available at [www.gci.org.uk/briefings/ICE.pdf](http://www.gci.org.uk/briefings/ICE.pdf)  
FSU is the Former Soviet Union

In short, C&C calculates how much carbon the world can emit in order to reach its target, then apportions that total equally among the world's residents based on population. It's an elegant concept that moves the process towards a climate-protected future that virtually everyone recognizes as fair. As ecologist and author Tim Flannery put it in a 2006 speech, "In

**"In the politics of climate change, the Kyoto Protocol is the equivalent of kerb-crawling. It is utterly inadequate and doesn't provide the legal framework we need."**

Aubrey Meyer, Global Commons Institute

some ways C&C is an ultra-democratic variant of the Kyoto Protocol."

Some critics of C&C point out that it could provide developing countries with an anti-incentive for birth control, since it allocates emissions rights based on population. And many activists feel that the C&C plan lets developed nations off the hook for their hundred-plus years of creating our current predicament. A competing plan, the **Brazilian Proposal**, uses the historical pattern of emissions as a starting point.