

Climate change: a policy-maker's perspective

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Abstract —

THATCHER'S RULE, "You have to get the big ones right", applies with the greatest force to those fields of policy where wrong decisions could kill millions. The international community too often gets the big ones wrong, and kills tens of millions, and does not care much. When HIV appeared 20 years ago, governments understandably but disastrously shrank from testing entire populations, isolating carriers, and eradicating the disease. Result: 25 million (and counting) needlessly dead; 40 million dying; sub-Saharan Africa devastated; US prevalence very close to unstoppable epidemic. When the same lobbies that now demand action on climate change did so on DDT 35 years ago, they got the science as wrong then as now. Instead of restricting DDT to interior spraying of dwellings, they had it banned outright. Result: 40 million (and counting) needlessly dead of malaria. Dr. Arata Kochi of the WHO, announcing the end of the DDT ban in 2006, said that too often politics predominated: now it was (and is) necessary for the science and the data to prevail.

With climate change, politics regrettably predominates. This time, there is a dangerous complication: politicized science. The surprisingly small group of scientists who started and still stir the "global warming" scare have undesirably close financial links (now at last under investigation by the public authorities) with politicians and corporations. Yet the notion that "global warming" is so severe a threat that it demands major increases in taxation and regulation, coupled with deep, strategic cuts in the Western economies, would only be defensible if all of the following propositions were true –

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| 1. "The scientists, politicians, and news media behind 'global warming' are honest": | They are not; |
| 2. "The debate is over and all credible climate scientists are agreed": | It is not; they are not; |
| 3. "Temperature today has risen exceptionally fast and above natural variability": | It has not; |
| 4. "Changes in solar activity do not significantly impact today's global warming": | They do; |
| 5. "Greenhouse-gas increases are the main reason why it is getting warmer": | They are not; |
| 6. "The fingerprint of anthropogenic greenhouse warming is clearly present": | It is absent; |
| 7. "Computer models are accurate enough to predict the climate reliably": | They cannot be; |
| 8. "Global warming is to blame for present and future climate disasters": | It is not; |
| 9. "Mitigating climate change will be cost-effective": | It will not; |
| 10. "Taking precautions, just in case, would be the responsible course": | It would not be. |

Each of these ten conformist propositions, every one of which must be shown true before substantial policy changes can be considered advisable, is demonstrated to be questionable at best, false at worst. There has been serious, serial scientific dishonesty, misrepresentation, and exaggeration. Increasing numbers of peer-reviewed papers are expressing open doubts about all of the main points of "global warming" theory. Today's temperature is well within natural climate variability. The Sun's activity is now declining from the recent 70-year-long solar Grand Maximum, during which it was more active, for longer, than at almost any similar previous period in the past 11,400 years. Climate models have exaggerated the effect of all greenhouse gases on temperature, and have also increased the feedback multiplier by more than half in a decade, without explanation or justification. The models do not accurately represent major features of the climate, and it has long been proven impossible to predict the long-run evolution of any mathematically-chaotic object, such as the climate, unless one knows the initial state of the object to a degree of precision that, with the climate, is in practice unattainable. Politicians and the media have flagrantly exaggerated the imagined effects on the climate of the comparatively mild warming to be expected as a result of anthropogenic greenhouse-gas enrichment. Sea level, for instance, will rise not by 20ft imminently, as a notorious film presenter has suggested, but by about 1ft over the next 100 years. Economically, adaptation to changes as they slowly occur is many times more cost-effective than attempts at mitigation, which – for powerful political as well as scientific reasons – are doomed to fail. The "precautionary principle" – regulate now, just in case – has killed tens of millions in the recent past, and is both scientifically and economically unworthy of the name "principle". Conclusion: the climate may grow warmer, though much or all of the warming may be offset over the coming century by a very substantial decline in solar activity that is confidently predicted by the solar physicists; but the relatively small amount of warming to be expected will be generally beneficial. Climate change is a non-problem, and the correct policy response to a non-problem is to have the courage to do nothing. There are many real environmental problems: climate is not one of them. And there are many real political problems, not the least of which is the imminent scarcity of fuels, minerals, and other essential commodities, nearly all of which are already increasing rapidly in price.

Finally, the moral dimension is crucial. The policies advocated to mitigate climate change would condemn the Third World to remain abjectly poor, for unless all other countries cut their carbon emissions atmospheric concentrations will continue to rise even if the entire West shuts down and goes back to the Stone Age, but without even the ability to light fires. If the poorer countries remain poor, their populations will paradoxically continue to increase and, in the medium term, the global carbon footprint of humankind will be greater than if mitigation had not been attempted. It is the poor who have been the victims of unscientific but fashionable political decisions in the recent past: it is they who will die in their tens of millions if, yet again, an unscientific but fashionable political decision is taken by us and inflicted upon them. We must get the science right or we shall get the policy wrong. We have failed them before. We must not fail them again.