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Pol S 203

Paper 3

Global Governance and Transnational Relations

In my last paper, I encouraged the United States under the Biden Administration to take drastic steps in reducing carbon emissions and contributing to the efforts of addressing climate change through international trade. However, upon further studies at the University of Washington, I have discovered that the international system is not as simple, nor straightforward, as my paper presumes. Climate change, as one example, is an issue that is inherently international, detrimental, and unfortunately, solvable. Although it has been an issue whose consequences have been understood for decades, meaningful action is still in the consideration phase. Why is this so? If the issue is so harmful, why can't states cooperate at the international level to combat global warming? Or better yet, why do they choose not to? In this supplemental essay, I address these questions by analyzing the various interests, interactions, and institutions of state and nonstate actors. The goal of this paper is to provide a better understanding of global governance and transnational relations. Through the issue of climate change, I consider the problems which arise through states' interests, interactions, and institutions, and argue for the solvability of these problems, laying the groundwork for future cooperation in addressing global environmental issues.

First, the simple desire to achieve self-interests prevents states from addressing global environmental issues. The fact is that the first question any policymaker will ask when discussing any policy is, "What's in it for me?" Obviously, states have their own agenda, with

social, political, and economic development goals. While it may share sympathy and solidarity with another state's struggles, it will always prioritize its own concerns before others. That is the state of the world. However, this becomes a problem when addressing environmental issues because the most straightforward solution may reside in a country whose interests lay in other concerns. Assuming an anarchical international system (where a state's sovereignty cannot be overruled), this state has the right to decide if it wants to use its resources to contribute to this environmental issue, and if it is not in their best interest, many times they will ignore the issue.[1] One reason for this interest imbalance is due to the winners and losers created from the environmental policy. Domestic industries in the United States, for example, lose out on the profits from production of goods that emit carbon dioxide.[2] Notably, these industries are worth hundreds of billions of dollars, so cutting down on emissions is more than a slap on the wrist for these producers. International winners, who tend to be developing countries threatened by desertification or melting arctic biomes, are not able to sufficiently compensate the losers to take these losses.[3] Thus, conflicting interests prevent progress from being made in regulating climate change.

Luckily, there are multiple ways to address these interest issues and encourage future cooperation in environmental policy. One way is to embed an understanding of the tragedy of the commons into the policymaking setting. The tragedy of the commons is a problem that occurs when a resource (in this case, carbon emissions) is open to all, and no one has a proper incentive to conserve their use of that resource.[4] As a result of many actors pursuing their self-interests, the environment (whose interests are ignored) suffers degradation, harming especially those who are

[1] Garner, "Lecture 17: Environmental Politics"
[2] Frieden, Lake, and Shultz, "World Politics: Interests, Interactions, Institutions," 557
[3] Ibid., 558
[4] Ibid., 543

not responsible for the damage. Only much later is it realized that *everybody* is worse off from environmental degradation. To avoid relying on this post-damage later realization, transnational advocacy networks (TANs) are created to persuade other groups and individuals to share their commitments in achieving some normative objective.[5] With climate change, TANs aim to alter the interests of their residing state by advocating for specific policy, economic and social justice, among other key objectives.[6] If a TAN's demands remain unmet, they may activate their network of international activists to pressure other countries in forcing the TAN's state to act (known as the boomerang model).[7] Here, we see how effective information spreading and activism in the international community can lead to the altering interests of states. While this does not resolve the issue of climate change entirely, it does bring us one step closer to achieving sustainable environmental policy in the long run.

Next, the interactions between states, and collective action problems that arise from global issues, further complicate the efforts to cooperate on environmental policy. It is important to note that collective action problems come from the fact that clean air and sustainable temperature (two products of efforts against climate change) are public goods.[8] As such, actors are incentivized to defect from any mutual agreement, similar to the prisoner's dilemma.[9] Since public goods are nonexcludable and nonrival, states knowingly contribute the bare minimum, yet receive the benefits of others' efforts.[10] This problem is known as free riding, and it is unfortunately widely used in the international system.[11] Another reason for the hesitation of cooperation between states is due to the lack of information on climate change. As a developing

[5] Frieden, Lake, and Shultz, "World Politics: Interests, Interactions, Institutions," 582
[6] Ibid., 483
[7] Ibid., 488
[8] Ibid., 546
[9] Garner, "Lecture 17: Environmental Politics"
[10] Frieden, Lake, and Shultz, "World Politics: Interests, Interactions, Institutions," 546
[11] Ibid., 544

issue, scientists have only begun understanding the impacts that climate change has on the world. Additionally, solutions are currently being researched by environmental scientists, which could affect a state's interests in reducing industrial carbon emissions, greenhouse gases, and the like. Even with externalities, fiscally measuring the effects of climate change is one endeavor that could either amplify international cooperation or halt it completely. States, therefore, interact with hesitation and uncertainty towards environmental policies due to free riding problem and the lack of complete information on climate change.

To solve these collective action problems, we must first understand why they occur on a regular basis. With free riding, states are able to contribute little towards environmental policies because of the relevant number of actors in the international system.[12] While there are many states working to address climate change, one single room with all state actors is not an effective approach. Instead, a smaller number of actors would make free riding much more difficult to do because states are able to track others' contributions.[13] We see this new approach being done with environmental regulations added to regional agreements between the United States, Mexico, and Canada.[14] Other ways to address free riding include increasing iteration and linkage between states by encouraging states to take part in more internationalist, integrated policies.[15] When states have other agreements on the line in their negotiations, they will be more willing to show meaningful efforts to address policies which affect all members of the agreement, e.g. climate change. As for the problem of insufficient information, the best option is to increase financial support for the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), World Meteorological

[12] Frieden, Lake, and Shultz, "World Politics: Interests, Interactions, Institutions," 548
[13] Ibid.
[14] Redacción, "Commissions endorse agreement on environmental cooperation for T-MEC"
[15] Frieden, Lake, and Shultz, "World Politics: Interests, Interactions, Institutions," 548

Organizations, and other committees who are doing critical research on climate change.[16] Their work is what allowed for the Kyoto Protocol in 1995, and others doing similar work today are how this issue will be addressed in future environmental interactions.

Lastly, ineffective institutions are a crucial impediment to future cooperation in environmental policy. Institutions, here, are not meant to refer to the multilateral organizations like the UN, but the set of rules in which states can compete and cooperate with each other in the international system.[17] Often, these rules are meant to prescribe acceptable behavior and proscribe unacceptable, yet rules on environmental policies are much different. Since carbon emissions are so widespread and critical to the economy, banning them isn't possible. Since states gain from emitting carbon through the production of goods, they may choose not to reduce emissions even when prescribed (and even if they say they did, reductions are difficult to measure).[18] Customs to forbid environmental polluters are rarely followed by the heavy-polluter states, since they are not held responsible by any means.[19] This isn't to say that the rules have done nothing at all to advance efforts in climate change--- in fact we do see much more cooperation today than in 1995. But the issue is that they do not address the lack of cooperation from states with the highest carbon emissions.

A major proponent to this problem is summarized in a single fact: less than 10 percent of environmental agreements contain any clauses to punish noncompliance.[20] In other words, states are held on an invisible leash with these environmental treaties… and I think they know that. To reform international law and empower global governance, we must develop institutions which do

[16] Frieden, Lake, and Shultz, "World Politics: Interests, Interactions, Institutions," 572
[17] Ibid., 445
[18] Ibid., 574
[19] Ibid., 447
[20] Ibid., 472

a better job of holding states accountable for their actions. One way to do this is to implement efficient hard laws in environmental treaties. Hard laws, agreements which include repercussions if broken, must be mutually agreed upon, so it would not be efficient, or even possible, to designate hard laws on total carbon emissions.[21] It would be smarter to implement hard laws on things like fuel-inefficient automobile imports, trash-burning in developing countries, subsidies which result in unnecessary overproduction in domestic industries, and other second-hand drivers of climate change. With a high degree of obligation and precision, we are more likely to see carbon emissions *intentionally* cut, even if it is not the state's main interest to do so.[22] Further, a delegation of power away from these carbon-emitting countries could also help empower current global governance.[23] One idea could be the creation of an ad-hoc advisory panel made of economic and environmental advisors from developing nations highly impacted by climate change. This group would retain the right to vote on reinterpreting or rewriting specific sections of international law that they feel are insufficient in addressing state's noncompliance in climate change policies. This would hold actors accountable for writing meaningful, actionable policy that will work towards a solution rather than waste time, and if this panel finds in excess of a third rewrite that no progress is being made, the states included in writing these laws may be formally substituted through some third party court or arbitrator.

Despite these solutions, many argue that future cooperation in global environmental issues is largely unlikely. For one, they mention that international laws are at best "unrealistic and utopian" and at worst "reflections of state interest."[24] These scholars hold that states in any anarchical system will do as they please and no environmental issue will prevent that from

[21] Frieden, Lake, and Shultz, "World Politics: Interests, Interactions, Institutions," 471
[22] Ibid., 469
[23] Ibid., 470
[24] Ibid., 472

happening. Additionally, the laws they *do* implement are those that would have been acted upon anyways, whether the writing was there or not. To rebut these scholars, I would point to the proof in the pudding. Imagine that these said international laws were never put into existence to begin with. What do you hypothesize states' carbon emissions to look like? In general, international laws are rarely an effort to immediately resolve a long-term problem. They exist to create progress. Since the signing of the landmark Paris agreement, for example, we have seen carbon emissions plateau.[25] According to one Emissions Gap Report, the world is still heading for a temperature rise in excess of 3 degrees Celsius this century.[26] However, if we compare that number to the expected temperature rise that was predicted before the Paris agreement, or before the Kyoto Protocol, we would find much more frightening numbers. Thus, international laws *do* constrain state actors and show progress towards addressing climate change. Similarly, these laws only come to fruition through international cooperation, and results are achieved when all states do their part.

In summary, although states' interests, interactions, and institutions cause many problems which deter international cooperation on environmental issues, these problems also come with solutions, and these solutions aren't too far out. By understanding why states act in their interest, we can develop countermeasures to address the tragedy of the commons and international winners and losers. By pointing out the mechanisms which lead to ineffective interactions, we can promote regional agreements and scientific research to resolve problems of free riding and information insufficiencies. By focusing on the weaknesses in our international law, we can develop new institutions which hold states accountable for noncompliance and promote future cooperation in addressing global environmental issues.

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[25] Lee and Pearce, "The Stakes in the Paris Climate Deal"
[26] Hausfather, "UNEP: Net-Zero Pledges Provide an 'Opening' to Close Growing Emissions Gap"

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