Climate Policy

Great-power politics, order transition, and climate governance: insights from international relations theory

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Great-power politics, order transition, and climate governance: insights from international relations theory

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The complex politics of climate change cannot be properly understood without reference to deeper geopolitical trends in the wider international system. Chief among these is the growing resurgence of 'great-power politics' between China and the US, along with failures of socialization and enmeshment into global governance structures in relation to these two powers. Traditional theoretical frameworks have failed to adequately account for these developments. Nonetheless, this current great-power contestation is at the core of an order transition that has prevented the large-scale institutional redesign required to remove deadlocks in existing global governance structures, including climate governance. Examples from the 2009 Copenhagen Climate Change Conference provide ample evidence for these claims. The slow progress of the climate change negotiations are due not just to the politics of the issue itself, but to the absence of a new political bargain on material power structures, normative beliefs, and the management of the order amongst the great powers. Without such a grand political bargain, which could be promoted through a forum of major economies whose wide-ranging remit would go beyond single issues, the climate change regime is only ever likely to progress in a piecemeal fashion.

Policy relevance
Despite the achievements of the 2012 Doha Climate Change Conference, the climate negotiations are not on course to limit warming to 2 °C, and thereby avoid 'dangerous' climate change. Several factors have been invoked to account for such slow progress: notably, the nature of the climate change problem itself, the institutional structure of the climate regime, and lack of political will among key players. An alternative explanation is proposed such that the failure to seriously address climate change – as well as other global problems – reflects a resurgent meta-struggle between the 'great powers' of China and the US over the nature of the global order. Without such a broader understanding of the deeper dynamics underlying the stalemates of the climate change negotiations, there is little chance of turning those negotiations around.

Keywords: China; climate change negotiations; environmental governance; United States

1. Introduction

Why is progress in the climate change regime so painfully slow? This vexing question lies at the heart of many analyses of climate change politics, with several important contributions appearing in this Special Issue. One significant – but oft-neglected – source of insight consists of the more theoretically

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inclined international relations (IR) literature, with its focus on broader macrolevel trends in the international system. It can be highly instructive to engage with such deeper theoretical analyses in order to better understand the deadlocks that continuously plague the climate negotiations, and how these might be overcome. This contribution to the Special Issue seeks to do just that, focusing on the re-emergence of great-power politics between China and the US as a key underlying dynamic of the troubled climate change regime, and indeed global governance structures in general. Within this dynamic, it is explored here how theoretical frameworks that have predicted the 'socialization' of China into the Western order, and the 'enmeshment' of both great powers into international institutions and regimes, have proved inadequate. Notable analytical failures in this regard have been the neglect of both the continuing imperative of power and the importance of particularistic world views. The implications are profound, with continuing deadlocks reflecting the great-power contestation and absence of an accepted international order.

In Section 2, the context for the analysis is presented by examining empirical developments since the end of the Cold War, notably the rise of China–US great-power politics and the divergence between this and the predictions of dominant IR theoretical frameworks. In Section 3, it is explored why these theories have failed to account for China's non-socialization and the evasion of both the US and China from enmeshment in global governance structures. In Section 4, some deficiencies in the prevalent notions of power used by the dominant IR theories are highlighted. In Section 5, some of the deadlocks that result from the interaction of the great powers are investigated, as well as the importance of recognizing differing world views. Conclusions are drawn in section 6.

2. Setting the scene: the (unexpected) rise of great-power politics

The end of the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s/early 1990s was accompanied by a move away from the previously dominant theoretical view that state behaviour is essentially driven by the structurally induced anarchic fear of war (e.g. Waltz, 1979). In theory, as in the 'real world', there emerged instead a more optimistic global governance focus on the provision of global public goods and on collective action problems, not least environmental ones (Barnett & Sikkink, 2008). The new détente opened up political space for the proliferation of international – and indeed increasingly global – regimes to address such problems.[1] At the same time, the governance structure that had evolved from the 1970s onwards – with a strongly, if fragmented, institutionalized and norm-based character – was gradually complemented by attempts to codify international law, global legal regimes, and international organizations into one coherent body of law. Tremendously high expectations – both theoretical and empirical – were laid at the door of these (historically unprecedented) cooperative endeavours (e.g. Haas, Keohane, & Levy, 1993; Keohane & Ostrom, 1995; Young, 1994). Normatively, these efforts had a cosmopolitan connotation (Keohane, 2002; Mayntz, 2010; Zürn, 2010). While addressing individual collective action problems, the processes of liberal institutional enmeshment and norm-based socialization were also widely expected to expand the reach of the liberal Western order across the world, notably to emerging powers. Equally, it was assumed that such processes of institutional enmeshment would engage the US – as the hegemon (or unipole) coming out of the Cold War – more deeply into this assumed cooperative post-Westphalian setting. However, two developments have severely undermine the strength of this narrative.

First, overambitious attempts to socialize rising powers into the existing order have largely failed (Buzan, 2011). Membership in international organizations and regimes has not implied compliance with the overall goals of the respective institution. Equally, an increase in Hirschman's so-called 'voice opportunities' has not precipitated a greater sense of loyalty to such organizations (Acharya, 2011; Hirschman, 1970). Conspicuously, although the importance of the socializee's agency has long been downplayed by conventional theories, it has now returned with a vengeance. Reflecting this, China's new assertiveness has been widely confirmed by its international behaviour since the high point of the financial crisis in late 2008 (Bader, 2012; Narlikar, 2010; Shambaugh, 2011).

In a second, equally important development – and contrary to the conventional theoretical wisdom that the unipole can operate almost without barriers in international politics – the US has had to acknowledge powerful veto-players, understood as actors 'whose agreement . . . is required for a change of the status quo' (Tseblis, 2002). The latter are 'in a unique position to simply say no' (Voeten, 2011, p. 128) to any US plans to reshape the world's institutional architecture in its own interest. Thus, while embodying the structural as well as liberal foundations of the order, the US has often refused to get more deeply enmeshed in institutionalized and norm-based governance structures. The climate change regime is but one example of this. This approach has also been spurred by US discontent with the decreasing effectiveness of the order and has reflected more traditional resistance to international governance by larger domestic constituencies. In this vein, the hegemonic power has – in keeping with its more revolutionary foreign policy tradition – applied power-based techniques in order to retain its freedom to act. In essence, the institutional enmeshment of the US has failed.

The result – characterized by the increasing salience of US–Chinese great-power politics – is a somewhat different empirical picture than that imagined by global governance accounts. First, a political and military competition between China and the US has occurred, even though their economic ties reflect a state of complex interdependence. For example, despite a dozen meetings between the US president and his Chinese counterpart in the Strategic and Economic Dialogue between 2009 and the end of 2012, the relationship has evolved from Chinese hedging and 'biding its time', US pivoting, and bilateral attempts to strengthen strategic trust, into an era of managing and controlling (as China's new leader Xi Jinping has put it) a 'trust deficit' (Cheng & Tan, 2012). The material underpinnings of this development have been enabled both by a still little understood, dialectic trend in which the early differentiation among developing countries and subsequent large-scale economic growth established China as the strongest rising power, and, beginning in the 1970s, the Western-led process of institutionalization. Although an unintended consequence, this development was initially facilitated by the US opening of the capitalist order to Beijing in 1971. This eventually enabled China to assume a system-saving role during the financial crisis of 2008–2009 (see Section 5.1). Essentially, China's economic policies have elevated it to the status of a *de facto* great power. Indeed, as David Miliband – the former UK foreign secretary – suggested after a G20 meeting in London in 2009 (with a rather unusual degree of outspokenness), China has become indispensable and one of the 'two powers that count' (Borger, 2009).

It is worth noting that the economic indispensability of both China and the US is mirrored, in the climate change context, by the emergence over the past decade of their 'carbon indispensability'. As late as 1990, China accounted for 'only' 12% of global emissions, significantly less than the countries of the EU combined and, of course, the US. Since 2007, however, China has overtaken the US as the world's largest aggregate CO_2 emitter. In 2011, these two 'carbon indispensables' made up 45% of

global CO_2 emissions, with the EU-27 accounting for only 11% (Oliver, Janssens-Maenhout, & Peters, 2012). This fact alone – combined with these countries' economic and technological power, which could drive the world towards or away from a low-carbon path – necessarily makes them the most influential actors in the international response to climate change. However, in contrast to the financial sphere, China has so far resisted assuming a 'system saving role' in the climate change regime.

Second, the US and China are involved in a process of reciprocal socialization (Terhalle, 2011); i.e. the two countries have come to mutually influence one another to the extent that they warily observe each other's behaviour towards international institutions and regimes (the climate change regime is no exception) and, subsequently, evaluate how it affects their own position in the global power hierarchy (Foot & Walter, 2011). As a result, this process has made the contest between the US and China central to world politics precisely because 'the global order and the attitudes and behaviour of these two important states are a mutually constitutive social phenomenon' (Foot & Walter, 2011, p. 29). Most conspicuously, this is reflected in a recent and substantial change in great-power hierarchies. Prantl (2012, p. 5) has noted, for example, that, while 'P-5 [the five permanent members of the Security Council] coordination is still substantial' at the UN Security Council, 'bilateral U.S.–China consultations outside the Council chambers have become far more important'. A similar trend can be seen in the climate change regime, in which the final stages of the Copenhagen negotiations of 2009 essentially descended into a bilateral deal between the US and China – itself at the helm of the BASIC[2] group – with UN officials and other major players, notably the EU and the Russian Federation, left waiting outside the room.

Third, and related to this, both China's failed socialization and the US interest-based selectivity regarding global governance structures have come at the expense of the post-Westphalian setting that has emerged since the 1970s and, more forcefully, after the end of the Cold War. As Keohane (2012, p. 134) has put it, 'what could have been seen in the mid-1990s as a progressive extension of international regimes, with stronger rules and larger jurisdictions, has been halted if not reversed'. This development has, in turn, further strengthened the great-power competition that has already ensued, by 'on balance . . . eroding the willingness of both [China and the US] to accept global normative frameworks as legitimate standards of appropriate behaviour' (Foot & Walter, 2011, p. 294).

Signposts of the evolution towards great-power-based politics can be observed in both countries. For example, China's scholarly research agenda is strongly committed to great-power relations. The highest grant for state-sponsored social science research was awarded to a Chinese university in November 2011 for '[s]tudies on the evolution of the international structure and great-power interactions in the twentieth century' (Liang, Xia, & Chen, 2012, p. 19). In the US, the National Intelligence Council's 2012 report for the new administration identified 'a world in which the slow dissolution of the existing postwar order gives way to the return of great power competition, albeit probably framed by patchwork multilateralism' (*Financial Times*, 2012, September 13).

The above observations lead to the central arguments explored in this article. In contrast to the more unilinear assumption of an increasingly cosmopolitan order, with its focus on the provision of global public goods, the resurgence of great-power politics has precipitated a new process of order transition. The great-power contest underlying this transition has prevented large-scale institutional redesign or readjustment intended to break up existing deadlocks precisely because of the absence of a new political bargain on material power structures, normative beliefs and the management of the order amongst the key players. In essence, the current order lacks systemic legitimacy. According to this analytical

framework, the deadlocks and impasses that have plagued the climate change regime, and others, not only reflect the inherent dilemmas of collective action problems, but also the great-power disagreements underlying the contestation of the Western order. This is confirmed by one broadly accepted view amongst leading global governance practitioners and scholars that 'existing institutions and arrangements are mostly deadlocked', albeit to varying degrees, 'in the attempt to solve some of the outstanding global issues' (Leifso & Brem, 2012, p. 28; see also Foot & Walter, 2011).

Although the attribution of the roles of the hegemon and the challenger in the different contested theatres might be clear-cut on the surface, both states need to be seen as revisionist powers, each pursuing an instrumental path to secure its sovereignty within a highly institutionalized and regulated world.

3. The failures of socialization and enmeshment

In this section, the liberal and constructivist theoretical frameworks that have attempted to explain major trends in international politics of the last thirty years are examined.

'Socialization' is here understood as referring to the process of 'taking on the identities and interests of the dominant peer group in international society' based on endogenous, suasion-induced identity change (Barnett, 2006, p. 268). Relatedly, 'institutional enmeshment' is a theoretical framework that aims to conceptualize a

> process of engaging with a state so as to draw it into deep involvement into international and regional society, enveloping it in a web of sustained exchanges and relationships, with the long-term goal of integration. In the process, the target state's interests are redefined, and its identity possibly altered, so as to take into greater account the integrity and order of the system. (Goh, 2007, p. 121)

The notion of enmeshment thus has strong similarities with the concept of learning in negotiation and regime theory in which access to common information, repeated exchanges over ideas and concepts, and intensive personal interactions among negotiators, are thought to lead to improved mutual understanding and the gradual re-evaluation of national interests and positions towards consensual goals (Haas & Haas, 1995; Spector, Sjöstedt, & Zartman, 1994).

Socialization and enmeshment theories have strong supporters. Ikenberry (2011, p. 161), for instance, has argued that the 'American-led open-democratic political order', offering 'public good provision, rule-based cooperation, and voice opportunities and diffuse reciprocity', has been the most successful source of enmeshment since the end of World War II (see also Ikenberry, 2001). In his recent work, he has refined the concept and applied it to China. Convinced that the US order is 'easy to join, but hard to overturn' (Ikenberry, 2011, p. 9), he has anticipated that countries such as China will demand more voice opportunities in some of today's critical organizations. In his view, the only way of getting there is enmeshment. Similarly, it has been argued by Depledge (2006) that collective learning among countries has been (wrongly) assumed to flow naturally from participation in regimes.

Why have these theories failed to reflect developments in the real world? To begin with, the still 'dominant' IR theories of the 1990s and 2000s (Hurrell, 2006, p. 6) became preoccupied with the

question of how norm- and institution-based theories could account for the socialization and institutional enmeshment into the Western order of the former Warsaw Pact states. The differences between 'leverage over weak and developing states' in Eastern Europe after the demise of the Soviet Union, on the one hand, and over rising great powers in the developing world, on the other hand, were thus not taken into account (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998, p. 900). This occurred despite the increasingly visible structural inequalities between the two groups due, for instance, to China's much earlier embrace of capitalism in the 1970s. Partly as a consequence of adopting the same frameworks for the analysis of both sets of states, mainstream theories mistakenly predicted the successful socialization of rising powers such as China, India, and others into the existing order. This also reveals the extent to which earlier, but still pervasive, understandings, derived from dependency/world-systems theories, presumed that great powers exist only in the Western world and, thus, 'unavoidably reflect a culturally determined view of what is important in international relations' (Smith, 1996, p. 109).

More specifically, constructivist theories have been characterized by assuming a large degree of passivity on the part of the socializee (Terhalle, 2011), which both explains the lack of agency attributed to them and, relatedly, the underlying assumption of unilinear norm development. This is ironic in the case of social constructivism, which, since the end of the Cold War, has ontologically argued for a greater role of agency in IR theory. Wendt (1992, p. 397), for example, has argued that 'actors acquire identities – relatively stable, role-specific understandings and expectations about self – by participating in collective ... meanings'. Wendt's 'participating' in international organizations does not anticipate, however, that agents might at first accept the norms put in front of them because they have no choice or for instrumental reasons, but then (possibly after an increase in material power) change their identity without showing the expected and self-sustaining signs of socialization. China's evolution from the 1970s to 2012 appears to reflect just such a case (Narlikar, 2010): arguably, it first strived to become a member of international organizations and regimes, then partly internalized some of the prevailing norms, and eventually became much more powerful such that it is now in a position to choose what (and what not) to internalize. This view was confirmed in an interview by the author of a senior, top-ranking, Western diplomat in March 2011, who suggested that

> the strong Chinese nationalism that has re-occurred has not emerged from a post-colonial or poverty-driven attitude decrying injustice in the world. Much rather, its powerful re-assertion of its own comeback points to the forceful process of re-establishing a status in the international system that, in effect, belongs to China naturally.

The question also arises about how open the 'unusually integrative' order really is (Ikenberry, 2011, p. 9). In this regard, Ikenberry (2011, p. 250) fails to provide an answer to a critical question that he nonetheless accurately poses, namely 'who precisely is the international community'? In fact, Ikenberry – and with him most of the West – takes the existing order too much for granted and sees it as beyond critique. What his account conceals, therefore, is that '[b]ehind the conventional law ... there is a whole world order, a system of empowering some and disempowering other institutions' (Koskenniemi, 2011, p. 324).

The 2009 Copenhagen Climate Change Conference provides a fitting empirical case that illustrates the fallacy of the theoretical arguments surrounding socialization and enmeshment. China, drawing on its increased confidence and material power, was essentially able to dictate the terms of its agreement in a deal with the US to the rest of the world. Eyewitness accounts suggest that China insisted on the removal from the final document of multiple references to long-term objectives – including text that referred only to developed countries – that would almost certainly have been adopted otherwise (Lynas, 2009). In effect, what drove the Chinese to largely ignore everyone else was their determined and perceived interest in furthering their coal-driven economic growth, based domestically on so-called '"no-regrets" reductions' (Conrad, 2012, p. 446).[3] Continued economic growth is key to the security of China's regime, so concerns relating to domestic social stability and poverty reduction clearly also played into this decision. This was the essential reason why the Ministry of State Security with its 'more nationalistic […] officials', rather than the 'pro-détente' Foreign Ministry or the Environmental Ministry, was leading the negotiations in Copenhagen (*The Economist*, 2010, December 4). At the same time, China has always shown the greatest reluctance – like the US – to allow any kind of international interference in its sovereignty and therefore its own domestic policy agenda. China may be an implacable supporter of the UN climate change regime, but its institutional enmeshment within it is of the loosest kind.

For its part, the US, never hesitant to apply its revolutionary foreign policy tradition to preserve its sovereignty, has resisted the processes of enmeshment (Hurrell, 2007) in order to retain its freedom to act and, thus, to maintain the conditions that facilitate its world view. To this end, it has amply exploited common great-power practices such as unilateral disengagement, creating new institutions, switching its allegiance to an alternative regime, and informalizing international organizations. In the climate change context, for example, the George W. Bush administration explicitly set up the Major Economies Meeting in 2007 as an alternative forum for discussing and coordinating climate change issues within a select group of major emitters. This initiative was widely criticized by the EU and many developing countries for allegedly seeking to bypass the UN process. The Meeting was relaunched and rebranded in 2009 by President Obama as the Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate (MEF), with essentially the same participants. Although it is just a discussion forum at present, the US has made clear its increasing frustration with the UN-based climate change regime, putting forward barely veiled threats since Copenhagen that it would concentrate its efforts in other arenas, notably in the MEF (Goldenberg & Vidal, 2010; Nelsen, 2012). In many ways, Chinese resistance to institutional enmeshment echoes that of the US. It remains, however, a strong supporter of the UN, and notably the UN climate change regime, as the only legitimate forum for taking international action on the issue. Presumably, this is because China feels secure in the influence it can wield over that forum to ensure that the emissions cuts it delivers are on its own terms. As a developing country, China enjoys far more lenient rules under the current climate treaties than developed countries.

Another interesting feature of the failure of great-power enmeshment in the climate change regime is how both countries, at least in their rhetoric, have insisted that any greater enmeshment is dependent on that of the other country. It is well known that the US has consistently claimed, for economic reasons, that it will not sign up to legally binding commitments that do not also apply to other 'major emitters' (i.e. China). Likewise, China is well versed in the refrain that developed countries (i.e. the US) bear the most responsibility for the cumulative emissions in the atmosphere, and thus must take the

lead in addressing the problem before developing countries (i.e. China itself) take on stronger obligations. Enmeshment – or the lack of it – thus becomes a mutual process. The current stalemate in the climate regime probably suits both countries perfectly well.

This situation is, however, also hugely ironic, and inexplicably at odds with the tremendous promise that both countries would seem to hold for assuming effective hegemonic positions on climate change. The US has a historically high reputation for technological innovation, pioneering large-scale projects, and creative entrepreneurialism, which are precisely the drivers that would underpin effective climate change action. The Chinese form of capitalism has features that would seem useful in facilitating a decisive shift towards a lower-carbon path, notably the strong and prominent role played by the state and sub-national state actors in domestic development. Notions of limiting and reorienting consumption to benefit the common good also broadly chime with the philosophy of the ruling Communist Party (see Harris, 2013). The tragedy is that these positive national traits – in both countries – seem to have been distorted in favour of a mutual negative enmeshment (for more on the US case, see Depledge, 2005).

4. Power

Thus far, the analysis has revealed the failure of the theoretical notions of socialization and enmeshment to explain the behaviour of the US and China. To some extent, this reflects some general disciplinary shortcomings concerning notions of power.

First, the conceptions of power used by many (non-neorealist) scholars have been shaped by Waltz's (1979) focus on military capabilities. After the Cold War, when the probability of a great-power war decreased substantially, it was a foregone conclusion that the concept was of little use in the 21st century.[4] For example, the attention of many scholars shifted away from the state-based focus on military security to human and environmental security (Barnett & Sikkink, 2008; Matthew, Barnett, McDonald, & O'Brien, 2010; Teitel, 2011). The natural exploration of new theoretical grounds thus initiated the withdrawal of 'explicit and systematic attention to power […] from […] analyses of global governance' (Barnett & Duvall, 2005, p. 7), while 'the alternative view was sidelined', that is, 'seeing governance as [still] concerned with the ordering and preservation of power and with answers to the question who exercises power, on whose behalf and to whose detriment' (Hurrell, 2010, p. 7). However, these insights precisely reflect many of the power-related concerns of the US and China about global politics today.

Second, although often neglected by conventional theories, neorealism's understanding of material power remains critical. It is precisely because economic globalization has increased existing inequalities that China and other emerging powers have benefited from it; consequently, their impact on global politics has grown extensively (OECD, 2010). Based on its structural power, China's new role as a powerful veto-player reflects its interests, which in turn are based on the influence of domestic constituencies and their non-Western world view. As for the US, although it embodies the system of liberal values underlying the current order, its structural power, domestic resistance against deeper enmeshment, and the perception of its competition with China have contributed to the failure of the theoretical predictions. Finally, reducing the socializee's agency to a minimal degree has neglected the

criticism put forward by post-structuralists, who have noted that the embedded passivity of the socia-lizee reveals a status quo bias (Brown, 2012; Epstein, 2012).

5. Consequences of the failures: deadlocks reflecting a contested order

5.1. The financial crisis of 2008

Nowhere can the signs of a new order, and the resurgence of great-power politics, be seen with greater clarity than in the case of the 2008 financial crisis. IR theory has long assumed that the position of the hegemon (or hegemons; see Clark, 2011), in the present case the US (whether or not it acts self-interestedly or as a genuine provider of collective goods), is a steady one. However, what if the provider were – even temporarily – incapable of materially underpinning the order? What would this mean for the status of other actors that can step in and save the order from collapsing? This is precisely what occurred in the autumn of 2008. With China spending some CN¥4 trillion (about US$600 billion)[5] as domestic stimulus, its economic policies assumed systemic importance and therefore prevented the world economy from crumbling (Noesselt, 2012).

It is fascinating to compare the two crises in the financial and climate systems. As was the case in the 2008 financial crisis, the US has shown itself incapable of fulfilling its position as the natural hegemon to provide another key global collective good – a stable climate system. Unlike its role in the financial crisis, however, China has not assumed hegemonic leadership on climate change in place of the US, despite having the material capacity to do so. Of course, the two crises are not fully comparable: the financial crisis had immediate consequences, whereas climate change is a more long-term problem, which, to humanity's detriment, is unlikely to ever face such a decisive crisis point. Nonetheless, the contrast is striking and, to some extent, potentially encouraging. A pro-active and positive China would be the ideal climate hegemon to push the world onto a low-carbon path (Harris, 2013). If China chose to assume the hegemonic mantle of the US on finance, could it do so on climate change too? The prospect is exciting.

5.2. Staking claims

Regardless of whether or not China acted for reasons of domestic regime security, ultimately, ensuring the financial system's survival equalled China's tacit recognition as a great power (Buzan, 2004). Tacit recognition on a specific issue, however, does not necessarily flow through to broader recognition across the international sphere. So when, and how, can a new great power stake its claims effectively and permanently? Conventional wisdom largely assumes that wars are the most important expressions of 'turning points' (Nye, 2011, pp. 215–216). It has therefore been widely taken for granted that the absence of a war and, accordingly, 'no general meeting of states to remake the institutions of public life' (Kennedy, 1994, p. 334) – a so-called ordering moment – imply that there is no need to renegotiate the basic rules of the system. However, the near dysfunction of the system and inability of the incum-bent hegemon to fulfil its responsibilities can be seen as the functional equivalent to the end of a major war. It is therefore suggested that the maintaining of the system by an actor other than the incumbent or perceived hegemon needs to be viewed, in analogy, as a turning point. The lack of effective voice opportunities traditionally provided at peace conferences and which sometimes follow turning points – that is, first-order negotiations concerning 'the basic rules of the system and whether or

not these are still legitimate or effective' (Gamble, 2011, p. 36) – have since led to China's new asser-tiveness throughout the international arena. Ignited by the financial crisis, powerful demands for rene-gotiating the international order can thus be discerned in various US–China deadlocks. Effectively, what is currently contested (and is most tangible at the regime level) is the underlying economic, finan-cial, and environmental governance structure of world politics, such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the rules of the climate change regime, albeit within a capitalist framework. Equally, a great-power competition for key political spheres of influence has ensued (e.g. Association of Southeast Asian Nations, East/South China Sea [ASEAN]).

5.3. World views

At the same time, opposing exceptionalist world views reflect a highly intricate search for common sets of values, a theme often overlooked by mainstream IR scholars.[6] Looking at the deadlocks in the inter-national arena, liberal rationalist theorists readily admit that their theories of institution/regime-based cooperation have reached their limits. Referring back to underlying power structures, they claim that the key explanation for today's central problems can be found in 'a greater divergence of interests, weighted by power' (Keohane, 2012, p. 125), on the basis that, 'as the distribution of tangible resources [...] becomes more equal, international regimes [...] weaken' (Keohane, 1989, p. 78). In short, changes in material power alone can account for the current deadlocks. *Prima facie*, this appears persuasive, and yet, the underlying notion of material power is too narrow to account for why China shows only limited engagement with the obligations of some of the institutions and regimes of which it has been a member for some time. The climate change regime is by no means the only example: in the cases of the WTO and IMF, for example, even though Beijing has been offered more voting rights in these institutions, it has not changed its rather minimally cooperative attitude towards them. A more satisfactory answer needs to invoke the concept of a world view, reflecting the distinct histor-ico-cultural value set that underpins the nature of China's agency or, at least, its predominant narra-tive. The concept of world view is here understood as 'actors' understanding of international politics and the ways in which these understandings have been gathered into intelligible patterns, traditions, or ideologies' (Hurrell, 2007, p. 17).

The notion of a world view permeates – implicitly or explicitly – all global public goods debates. In the case of the climate change regime, paradigmatic clashes over the normative framework that should guide action tend to dominate over substance, with notions of responsibility, fairness, compensation, equity, efficiency, justice, rights, and so on all entering into the rhetorical equation. Indeed, it can often seem to observers that climate negotiations are about everything but the practical question of how best to respond to climate change. Tellingly, one Chinese delegate noted candidly that the politics of the negotiations in Copenhagen were 'much more important' to China than the climate regime itself (*The Economist*, 2011). In other words, the historico-ideological backdrop against which the nego-tiations have evolved is crucial. Based on the widely shared historical narrative of the 'Century of Humiliation', beginning with the Opium Wars of the 1840s, Chinese officials and (a majority of) Chinese scholars constantly 'worry that the US has a hidden agenda to prevent China from rising as a peer power' (Suisheng, 2008). In the climate change context, it translates to a fear of a rich-world con-spiracy to slow down its development (Watts, Carrington, & Goldenberg, 2010). While such a prop-osition could also be read as a classic realist argument of defending one's interests, what

distinguishes it from such a reading is that Beijing has moulded its historical experiences into its approach to world order. Perhaps this helps explain why a perceived (but wholly inadvertent) snub to the Chinese Premier, Wen Jiabao, in Copenhagen, hours before the final talks, was taken so seriously that he apparently felt compelled to stay away from the late night negotiations and send his Deputy Foreign Minister to negotiate with President Obama and other world leaders instead (Dnaindia, 2010).[7] This obviously soured the atmosphere, reduced China's willingness to compromise, and made negotiations logistically more difficult, as the Deputy Foreign Minister kept suspending negotiations to liaise with his Premier over the telephone.

China sees itself as a 'global moral pole leading the people of the world in a better direction' precisely because the prevalent view in China is that it has been a victim of Western great powers (Friedman, 2011, p. 19). Hence, China constantly reminds other countries, including the US, that they are deeply committed to the G77 states. Overall, as the US has condensed its founding experience and the principles underpinning its constitution into its own notion of exceptionalism[8], China has attached a morally superior world view to its foreign policy. Moreover, as is the case with the US, China's sheer size has led it to having a large degree of insularity and exhibiting dismissive behaviour towards smaller states. This was clear at Copenhagen, despite China's avowed solidarity with the G77. It was China alone, for example, who demanded the weakening of references to a possible 1.5 °C cap on a global temperature rise in the final text, despite impassioned entreaties from the most vulnerable small-island states (Lynas, 2009).

Finally, and again similarly to the US, the Chinese view of world order equates its own interests with the global public goods propelled by notions of supreme Chinese virtue and harmony (Davies, 2007). At Copenhagen, the more nationalistic forces that ultimately determined China's position were echoed, among others, by Ma Xiajun, Professor of Strategic Studies at the Communist Party's central committee. He stressed that Copenhagen was mainly about what the 'leadership' and the overall shape of the 'new political and economic world order' should look like (SWP, 2010, pp. 1–2). His views are part of a powerful Chinese discourse that 'is not simply a scholarly debate because Sino-speak is heavily promoted by government officials, state media, and official intellectuals in China' (Callahan, 2012, p. 50; Noesselt, 2010). Indeed, as Callahan (2012) writes:

> While the Asian century looked to Asian values to explain the region's growth, Sino-speak takes economic strength for granted and looks to culture to explain war, peace, and world order. (Callahan, 2012, p. 51)

Fusing together Chinese 'civil and military values', Sino-speak 'discards the network-based logic of globalization […] to assert a sharp geopolitical vision of the world instead' (Callahan, 2012, p. 51). From this view, the

> Sinocentric neo-tributary system [is] now challenging the Westphalian system to rewrite the wrongs of China's Century of National Humiliation (1840–1949). Likewise ... the China model challenges the American dream in grand civilizational competition. ... Eurocentrism is replaced by Sino-centrism, Westernization is replaced by Easternization, and American exceptionalism is replaced by Chinese exceptionalism. (Callahan, 2012, p. 51)

Once again, these seismic changes have been felt in the climate change regime. As the German magazine *Der Spiegel*, commenting on Copenhagen, put it:

> As if viewed through a magnifying glass, the contours of a new political world order become visible, one shaped by the new self-confidence of the Asians and the powerlessness of the West (Rapp, Schwägerl, & Traufetter, 2010)

It appears, therefore, that international politics is not only experiencing a power-related contestation in a material sense, as rationalist theorists argue, but it is also about meshing non-Western world views into a ground that is traditionally embedded in most IR mindsets as Western, universal, and without competitors. Essentially, the idea behind it boils down to there being 'ultimately only one path to modernity – and that is [...] essentially liberal in character' (Ikenberry, 2009, p. 93). Ikenberry echoes here official US narrative, which speaks of 'a single model for national success' (United States National Security Council [USNSC], 2002, quoted in Clark, 2005, p. 174). Reflecting this mindset's undiminished endurance, several members of the Obama administration have repeated this claim. For instance, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton (2011, October 11) tellingly stated that 'We cannot and do not aspire to impose our system on other countries, but we do believe that certain values are universal'.

The assumption that Western values are universal, and pursuit of a Cold War-inspired search for a possible counterset of (again) universal values, have inherently prevented theorists from recognizing the importance of distinct (but not universal) world views. From a historical perspective, however, it could be argued that that which the Islamic Republic of Iran unsuccessfully tried to achieve through its 1979 revolution may have been accomplished by China's 'unsuccessful modernization' (Westad, 2006, p. 33): the spread of a powerful message of 'national particularism, international ideological pluralism, state sovereignty, strong-state involvement, and indigenous cultural development' (Gat, 2010, p. 82). This is why, as the Chinese debate shows, its underlying world view cannot be ignored. In turn, this development points to two exceptionalist world views – from China and the US – that both contain some antagonistic potential.

6. Conclusions

It has been argued here that the governance-related processes of institutionalization and norm diffusion have failed to socialize rising powers (notably China) into the existing order, while at the same time failing to enmesh both 'indispensable' great powers (China and the US) into global governance structures. In doing so, they have neglected the impact of changes in the balance of power and of diverging normative world views. Instead of a more cosmopolitan order, a politico-military, and even economic, competition between China and the US has ensued, despite their interdependence. A process of order transition has emerged in which the material power structures and the normative beliefs underlying the Western order have been contested, with real repercussions for global governance regimes, notably on climate change. Owing to the broad great-power disagreement, global governance structures have become partly dysfunctional, and have encountered obstacles and deadlocks.

Both climate researchers and policy makers need to better understand that regime-level perspectives have largely failed to identify the core obstacle to further progress on climate change, which is not solely attributable to the collective action or 'super wicked' (Levin, Cashore, Bernstein, & Auld, 2009) nature of the problem. Instead, the desperately slow pace of the negotiations – to the extent, arguably, of their 'ossification' (Depledge, 2006) – represents part of a larger disagreement on how to shape key understandings of a new international order. This is why negotiations at the regime level can be expected to advance only in a piecemeal manner, with agreement only on limited subsets of items rather than a forging of any kind of grand political bargain, one that would trigger the paradigmatic change needed to truly set the world's economy onto a low-carbon path that can avoid dangerous climate change. Only by viewing the problem as being embedded in a broader contestation and, thus, an issue that cannot be solved at the secondary (regime) level, might it be possible to break through the deadlocks.

One option might be for climate policy makers to help establish a common forum of major economies, including BASIC members, to thrash out issues that may start with climate change, but then go beyond even this titanic struggle. The remit (perhaps implicit) would be no less than the reordering of the international system. Some climate commentators, frustrated at the deadlocks in the climate regime, have already advocated such smaller forums (Haas, 2008; Victor, 2007). Typically, however, their focus would be issue-specific (that is, on climate change)[9], as would the general thrust of similar proposals for 'minilateralism'[10] in other issue areas. By focusing on the frustrations and high transaction costs of global forums, notably the climate regime, such proposals grasp only part of the problem. The need is indeed for a more exclusive forum of great and emerging powers. However, the debate must go far beyond climate change, the financial crisis, internet crime, or indeed any other pressing global issue to invoke the most inclusive of topics: new forms of normative and policy coordination within a restructured world order.

Lacking a traditional peace/international order conference, the fact that such wide-ranging (perhaps informal) negotiation might further undermine existing institutional structures should be viewed not as a problem, but as a sound development that might evolve into a more broadly accepted global order. In turn, the fact that such a path might encounter even more contentious politics at an *ad hoc* level needs to be seen as a necessary complement. Achieving the dramatic socio-economic and technological reorientation needed to avoid dangerous climate change may demand nothing less than a similarly seismic political transition. The problem, as ever, is time. Political transitions cannot be hurried (although they can snowball dramatically once started). This one may well turn down several dead ends before resolution. And, unfortunately, time is precisely what is lacking in the climate change context. This contribution to the Special Issue is therefore necessarily inconclusive. However, although the dilemma of how to rescue the deadlocks in the climate negotiations has not been solved, it is hoped that we have at least begun to show that the problem lies not simply in the climate regime itself, but rather in the broader contestation and recontestation of powers in which it is located.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. Chasek and Wagner (2012, pp. 2–3) note how, since 1972, the number of environmental regimes has risen from 200 to over 1000. Moreover, most of the early (pre-1990) regimes were bilateral or limited in scope.
2. The BASIC countries are Brazil, South Africa, India, and China.
3. In total, 70.4% of China's energy needs are accounted for by coal and 17.7% by oil (Tellis & Tanner, 2012).
4. The concept of power is a recurring, often controversial, theme in the IR literature. For more recent authoritative accounts, see Barnett and Duvall (2005), Finnemore and Goldstein (2013), and Nye (2011).
5. By comparison, the entire German Federal Budget for 2009 stood at only around $450 billion.
6. By contrast, English School theory provides a framework that reconciles power- and world view-related aspects of first-order negotiations (Buzan, 2004; Hurrell, 2007).
7. Premier Wen felt excluded when he had not received an invitation to a forthcoming meeting, which he had heard about from another world leader over dinner. It turned out that China was (of course) on the list of invited countries, but the written invitation had not yet reached the Chinese Premier (probably because they were being distributed in alphabetical order).
8. On US exceptionalism, see Ignatieff (2005), Foot, Gaddis, and Hurrell (2003), and Malone and Khong (2003).
9. See Eckersley (2012) for a discussion of such proposals.
10. See Naim (2009) for an overview of minilateralism.

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