

Canadas decision to withdraw from the kyoto protocol politics essay



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Canada's decision to 'leave' the Kyoto Protocol in 2011 resulted in countless debates and controversy in Climate Change discussions. This paper therefore aimed to provide answers to the ethical question whether Canada decision to withdraw from the Kyoto Protocol was a move in the right direction. To do that, the issues of moral responsibility, justice as well as Canada's interest in a global economy were analysed as it relates to the Kyoto Protocol. The research concluded that Canada should not have withdrawn from the Kyoto Protocol according to the moral obligations in reducing global greenhouse emissions as well as the financial burden to meet such a reduction in emission is relatively constant over time.

Keywords: Kyoto Protocol, justice, moral responsibility

INTRODUCTION

The Kyoto Protocol is an international agreement linked to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The major feature of the Kyoto Protocol is that it sets binding targets over a five-year period (2008-2012) for 37 industrialized countries and the European community. This was done to reduce greenhouse gas emissions causing global warming which sum up to an average of 5% compared to 1990 levels. While the Convention encouraged industrialised countries to stabilize GHG emissions, the Protocol commits them to do so, this being the major distinction between the Protocol and the Convention. Recognizing that developed countries are principally responsible for the current high levels of GHG emissions in the atmosphere as a result of more than 150 years of industrial activity, the Protocol places a heavier burden on developed nations under the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities". (UNFCCC).

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The Government of Canada officially notified the UNFCCC on December 15, 2011 that Canada would exercise its legal right to withdraw formally from the Kyoto Protocol. Canada was committed to cutting its greenhouse emissions to 6% below 1990 levels by 2012, but in 2009 emissions were 17% higher than in 1990. Environment minister Peter Kent cited Canada's liability to "enormous financial penalties" under the treaty unless it withdrew. In order to fulfil its obligations, the country would have to purchase a significant and costly amount of international credits using funds that could be invested on domestic priorities. (Government of Canada).

Canada's decision to withdraw from the Kyoto Protocol resulted in a lot of debate and controversy whether or not the Protocol is effective and provides the long-term solution the world seeks to the problem of Climate Change. Our goal in this essay is to analyse whether Canada decision to withdraw from the Kyoto Protocol was a move in the right direction. The responsibility of the government of Canada to take (in) actions on the treaty represents an ethical issue. To what extent is Canada obligated to other countries of the world as well as to current and future generations of mankind on global warming? Was Canada ethically right to withdraw from the treaty? Should Canada put aside its own interest in order to be more committed to the Kyoto Protocol and help solve the global issue of climate change?

In order to provide answers to these questions, a detailed analysis of the issues at hand has been carried out. Section two describes the role of Canada's responsibility as well as its moral claims in Climate Change negotiation. Section three discusses the issue of International justice as it relates to the Kyoto Protocol while section four assesses Canada's interest in <https://assignbuster.com/canadas-decision-to-withdraw-from-the-kyoto-protocol-politics-essay/>

global discussions on Climate Change. A number of concluding remarks based on the preceding precepts were provided in section five of this paper.

RESPONSIBILITY: ASSESSING MORAL CLAIMS IN INTERNATIONAL CLIMATE CHANGE NEGOTIATIONS

This chapter addresses the role of responsibility to climate change negotiations. The issue of how to measure and compare Canada's responsibilities to other countries in terms of climate change mitigation has been controversial, not least with respect to comparisons between the 'large emitters,' such as the US and China.

But, what really defines the term 'responsibility'? According to Ellermann et al., to be responsible for something harmful is to be worthy of blame for it (Ellermann, Höhne and Müller). Blame/responsibility in the context of climate change should be seen based on certain acts (i. e. emission of greenhouse gases) that cause global warming. For example, if someone smokes a cigarette in a closed room filled with people, and if the smoke emissions resulting from this act are deemed to be harmful to other people, then they may be judged to deserve unreserved blame just because the emissions are harmful or because they smoked voluntarily, in the full knowledge of the harmfulness of the emission. Such a person is considered to be morally responsible as opposed to be casually contributing. The key difference between being morally responsible and causally contributing is that the former causes the greatest harm to everyone and is to be blamed while the latter (Co₂ exhalation while breathing in the room) causes insignificant problems and should not be blamed. We can therefore infer that since

climate impacts are anthropogenic, it would inevitably have a large number of causes and actors, each either morally responsible or causally contributing to global warming. So, the question arises, ' Is Canada morally responsible or casually contributing to the problems of climate change?' To put in other words, ' Should Canada be among countries to be blamed from changes in the climate?'

Canada's GHG emission in a global context

To assess the moral responsibilities of Canada to climate change, it is important to compare Canada's situation with other countries in term of greenhouse gases (GHG) emission. According to the International Energy Agency, Canada's CO₂ emission from fuel combustion in 2009 accounted for approximately 2% of global emissions (International Energy Agency). In other words, Canada is the 7th largest emitter of global emission in the world.

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Figure : Distribution of world carbon dioxide emissions from fuel combustion in 2009 (International Energy Agency)

Likewise, if comparison is made from the total CO₂ emission equivalent per capita, Canada is one of the world's largest per capita GHG emitters. Canada ranks 15th out of 17 countries for GHG emissions per capita and earns a " D" grade[1](The Conference Board of Canada). In 2008, Canada's GHG emission was 22 tonnes per capita, significantly higher than the 17-country average of 15 tonnes per capital. Between 1990 and 2009, Global emissions of CO₂

have increased by 38%, while Canadian CO₂ emissions have increased by less than 19% (Minister of Environment Canada).

Figure : GHG Emissions in 2008 – tonnes of CO₂ equivalent per capita (The Conference Board of Canada)

It can therefore be concluded from both figures that Canada is a major emitter of greenhouse gases causing global warming and is therefore morally responsible to the changes in the climate. One of the main reasons for its increase in GHG emissions has been the growth in exports of petroleum, natural gas, and forest products. However, there is great chance to substantially reduce Canada's GHG emissions by utilizing lower emitter technologies and increasing energy efficiency.

Assessing Canada's commitment to International Climate Change negotiations

Since it has been established that Canada is morally responsible to changes in the climate, to go ahead with a decision to be involved in global negotiations on climate change appears to be the next logical thing to do. When Canada ratified the Kyoto protocol on December 12, 2002, it firmly demonstrated its support for the UNFCCC process, as well as its commitment to meet specified targets under the treaty. Canada had committed to reduce its greenhouse gas emission by 6% over the 1990 baseline levels during the first commitment period from 2008-2012 (Minister of Environment Canada). This was considered to be an optimistic target for Canada as its GHG emissions steadily increased after Conference of the Party 3 (COP-3) to the extent that the 6% reduction from 1990 levels now translates into an actual

reduction of approximately 21% from 1990 based on current GHG emissions levels (UNFCCC).

However, in December 2011, Canada announced its withdrawal from the first implementation period (2008-2012) of the Kyoto Protocol. This was supported by a speech from Canada's Environmental Minister, Peter Kent:

“ . . . Kyoto Protocol- for Canada - is in the past. As such, we are invoking our legal right to formally withdraw from the treaty. This decision formalizes what we have said since 2006 that we will not implement the Kyoto Protocol”

This withdrawal aimed to avoid an estimated \$14 billion penalty as a result from Canada's failure to meet its emissions reduction targets when the Kyoto Protocol expires on December 31, 2012. Canada, however still remains a part of the UNFCCC process for negotiating the next implementation period.

After its withdrawal from the Kyoto protocol, Canada proposed a new strategy by committing to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions to 17% below 2005 levels, or 607 Mt, by 2020, under the Copenhagen Accord (Minister of Environment Canada). In order to achieve this goal and its ' renewed' commitment to climate change mitigation, Canada has introduced four major initiatives including: passenger automobile and light truck GHG emissions regulations, heavy-duty vehicle emissions regulations, regulations on coal-fired electricity generation, and regulations in other key sectors including oil and gas (Minister of Environment Canada).

Canada also indicated its willingness to continue to engage in UNFCCC negotiations to support the establishment of a fair and comprehensive global

climate change regime as well as to contribute \$1.2 billion in new and additional climate change financing by the end of fiscal year 2012/2013. This is to assist developing countries' efforts to reduce GHG emissions and adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change (Minister of Environment Canada). However, Canada would not invest any money to the new Green Climate Fund until all major emitters accept legally binding reduction targets and transparent accounting of greenhouse gas inventory. In other words, this funding was taken from previously existing aid package (Kent).

Now, going back to the research question, "Should Canada have withdrawn from the Kyoto Protocol?" Based on the principles of moral responsibilities (as defined earlier), we believe Canada withdrawal from the Kyoto protocol was a wrong decision. According to a state responsibility principle of international law, every internationally wrongful act of a state constitutes the international responsibility of that state (International Law Commission). Furthermore, in the international environment law context, it stated that there is a state right to exercise exclusive sovereignty over the use of land, natural resources and the environment within its territorial boundaries. This right is not unlimited and must not violate on the rights of other states to the use and enjoyment of their environment. In the context of its moral responsibility to other countries, Canada's excessive GHG emissions (as discussed earlier) and its subsequent withdrawal from the Kyoto protocol leads to an internationally wrongful act. With an earlier commitment to the Kyoto obligation and a continuing non-compliance with its emissions targets, it is still linked to specific moral consequences as a breach to a morally binding treaty.

Furthermore, Canada's climate change strategy under the Copenhagen Accord has no global emissions targets for 2020 or 2050. The accord solely proposes listing the voluntary targets of developed and developing countries. Therefore, based on the current assessment of country pledges, it will put the world on a track toward 3.5 to 4 degrees of warming in 2020, which still causes higher warming and bigger threat to the global ecosystem compared to the studies of 2 degrees warming limit set by IPCC (Heinberg).

On the other hand, Canada did drop out of Kyoto just over a year before the end of the first commitment phase as they think that they would not meet Kyoto targets by the end of the first commitment phase. It was reinforced with the fact that the major emitters of GHG were not included in the Kyoto Protocol, such as China and India. Moreover, this could lead other countries facing their own economic problems to follow suit, and consequently weaken the only internationally ratified agreement in emissions reduction, making it more difficult for the next implementation period or even other future agreements to succeed, which, again, depends on the moral will of the nations that will sign the agreement. However, these views remain arguable.

In the next section of the essay, the discussion of Canada's withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol will be based on international justice; whether it was legally fair to the global community to withdraw from the Protocol.

JUSTICE IN CLIMATE CHANGE

The precise definition of the word "justice" in climate change is still a topic of debate. In general, justice is a term that is used interchangeably with

fairness. In principle it represents a concept of moral rightness. In this section, the concept of justice within the Kyoto Protocol will be discussed and how it influenced Canada's decision to drop-out of the agreement.

The Kyoto Protocol created a framework, built on the principles agreed to under the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. One of this principles state that: " The Parties should protect the climate system for the benefit of present and future generations of humankind, on the basis of equity and in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities. Accordingly, the developed country Parties should take the lead in combating climate change and the adverse effects thereof" (UNFCCC, Article 3, Principle 2). The goal of the Protocol is the reduction of greenhouse gases by developed countries (Annex I), while allowing developing countries (non-Annex I) space to increase their emissions. The Protocol also charts a path way for global cooperation via market-based regulatory instruments. Countries must meet their targets primarily through national measures according to the treaty. However, the Kyoto Protocol offers them an additional means of meeting their targets by way of three market-based systems: emissions trading (known as " the carbon market"), clean development mechanism and joint implementation. These mechanisms help parties meet their emission targets in a cost-effective way and help stimulate investment in renewable sources of energy (UNFCCC).

Figure 3: Kyoto Protocol Participation Map (UNFCCC)

Justice of the Kyoto Protocol and Canada

The Kyoto Protocol framework has two implications to international justice particularly relevant for any discussion involving a broad participation of countries in climate mitigation. They include grandfathering principle and the per capital approach. These two concepts would be extensively discussed in this section of the paper in relations to Canada.

Grand Fathering Principle

Firstly, the Kyoto Protocol uses the grandfathering principle by recognizing the 1990 emission levels of developed countries as a basis for determining emission limitation targets. This limits the ability of the Protocol to include the participation of developing countries in the future (Aslam, 175).

Compared to the current emissions of developed countries, developing countries have very low emission levels. However, there seem to be a gradual yet rising trend of emission levels among developing countries particularly Indian and China. From the perspective of the government of Canada, this is one of the setbacks of the Kyoto Protocol. Developing countries which are not bound to cut emissions will be the major pollutants in the future, while present industrialized nations are required to reduce emission levels. This translates into an economic cost for developed countries which would result in unequal economic positions. Also it raises the question of why Canada should bare more responsibility compared to developing nations with rising emission levels, knowing that in the near-future it will no longer be one of the major players in climate change. Grandfathering enabled national targets to be negotiated without any

discussion of a long-term, environmentally sound, collective target for all countries-both developed and developing nations.

Secondly, no clear rule was created to help differentiate targets between Annex I countries (Aslam, 175). This can be translated in the fact that while in 1990 (the reference year for Kyoto Protocol emission levels), Canada had already taken up some actions to reduce Green House Gases, other countries of Annex I (for example former Soviet Union countries) did not take any measures to reduce greenhouse gases. Thus, the Kyoto Protocol creates a certain injustice towards countries like Canada which has taken some action in the past, but which is not taken into account in the protocol.

This lack of capacity within the Kyoto Protocol's to involve developing countries in order to have any future success represents the greatest problem of the treaty. Also, the Protocol fails to differentiate between Canada and the rest of Annex I countries and fails to take into account future major climate change contributors. This increases the burden on the present day developed nations like Canada and creates a lack of fairness between the agreements of participating parties. This resulted in a number of proposals which have the purpose of expanding participation while also honouring the Climate Convention principle of " differentiation" among nations. One of the most controversial approach focuses on equal per capita entitlements (Aslam, 176).

Per Capita Approach

The " per capita" approach implies dividing the total greenhouse gas emission (in mega tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent) of any country

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equally among the number of people living in that country. It is a key indicator to represent, for example, the economic output or emissions of each individual in a particular country. This is used to determine how much each country should be allowed to emit in relation to its population size. The 'per capita indicator' helps evaluate emission discrepancy among countries (Aslam, 176). It can also help facilitate an acceptable emissions-related burden-sharing agreement among countries of different population size. Although some concerns exist regarding the application of the per capita approach, it remains very "difficult to ethically justify any unequal or disparate claims to a global commons, such as the atmosphere" (Aslam 184).

In the context of climate change, "the greatest efficiency gains in the design of a Green House Gas tradeable permit policy stem from utilizing the low-cost mitigation options of developing countries (even if no additional mitigation is forthcoming from this group itself) and then from requiring emission reductions from developing countries at some future date" (Rose and Stevens, 359). Using such a per capita allocation system in climate change negotiation, when compared to other approaches, causes developing countries generally to gain more in terms of relative benefit. This should be fine to all parties involved-both developed and developing countries because as discussed in the section of moral responsibilities, most developing nations are casually causing as opposed to morally responsible for climate change. It follows that such a system would encourage more developing countries to join global agreements and thus attract an earlier possible entry to the

negotiation table. Such a scheme should result in emissions trading to maximizing the benefits.

Furthermore, owing to the nature of climate change and its associated complexities and uncertainties, any effective approach needs to be flexible to incorporate future scientific developments as well as accommodate variations among countries. A 'suitable' per capita approach is one that is able to tighten or relax yearly contraction on emission budgets, as well as realign its overall reduction trajectory to respond to any change in GHG concentration target. However, the per capita approach's flexibility to account for the differing national circumstances is limited. Quantified emission levels, such as the ones used for the per capita approach, do not account for the social quality of these emissions-that is, it cannot clearly distinguish between "luxury" and "survival" emissions (Agrawal, 1). Also, there is a big impact on the disparity of emissions among nations by factors such as geographical or climatic conditions and the structure of the respective economy and energy supply, which such simplified indicators simply fails to take into consideration(Aslam, 190).

This represents a big problem for Canada due to its vastness, cold climate and the economy which is focused on energy production. In comparison to developing countries, adopting such a system forces Canada to the losing end of the rope. The per capita emissions rights as a defining concept of justice in Climate change discussions causes the world's largest nations- such as China and India- to be significant net gainers, while principal losers would be the nations now having high per capita emissions-Canada would lose a great deal (see Figure 2).

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Also, as a follow up to the preceding argument, the notion that larger states tend to be poorer makes the per capita approach very attractive. But this can result in a crude and even arbitrary way of redistributing wealth as not all large states are poor and not all small states are rich. Also the distribution is made to both greenhouse gases winners and losers as some rich or poor states will face much more serious consequences due to climate change while others are far less vulnerable. This is a drawback to this scheme as the per capita system fails to take this into consideration (Posner and Sunstein, 12). Another serious drawback for states like Canada is the fact that with the per capita system, governments that would adopt policies to promote economic growth would have to face penalties due to the fact that such policies would increase Green House Gas emissions leading to more warming of the climate(Posner and Sunstein, 13).

The proposed per capita system seems even less attractive from the perspective of Canada compared to the grandfathering principle. Thus, one of the reasons for Canada's withdrawal from the agreement is that it fails to agree with the concept of justice as defined and implemented by the Kyoto Protocol. Due to the different responsibilities of carbon emission between developed countries and developing countries (as is shown in Figure 3) and also the differences within the developed countries (United States, Japan, and Canada), a lot of effort has to be made to redefine the concept of justice within the Kyoto Protocol. From the year 2009 to 2012, United Nations Climate Change Conferences held annual conferences to strengthen the effect of justice among other issues within the protocol and at the same

time, reach more agreements. However, little progress has been made during these processes.

For developed states like Canada, the concept of justice within the Kyoto Protocol still remains elusive. However, respecting the emission targets of the Protocol would represent a heavy financial burden to the government of Canada, to meet the demands would result in a conflict with its own interests.

CANADA'S INTERESTS IN CLIMATE CHANGE NEGOTIATIONS

Climate change has a price tag and it could be very expensive. Cutting the emissions by amounts agreed by the Kyoto Protocol in little more than a decade requires a massive financial cost to the government of Canada. In this section of the essay, we hope to look into Canada's interest in respecting the emission targets of the Kyoto protocol. To do this, we hope to answer two questions: What is the total financial cost to the government of Canada to respect the emission targets of the Kyoto protocol? More importantly, are these costs justified? Secondly, how important is Canada's relationship with the United States with respect to climate change negotiation?

Canada: Financial cost of respecting emission targets of the Kyoto Protocol

Respecting the emission targets of the Kyoto Protocol represents a huge cost to Canada. But, what exactly is the financial cost? It was estimated by the Canadian Chamber of commerce that the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol will cost about \$30billion, or 2. 5% of the Canada's GDP by 2010

(Montreal Economic Institute). It was also estimated by the Liberal cabinet in 2002 that a loss of 200 000 jobs and a decrease of 1. 5% in the Canadian GDP was inevitable (Böhringer).

The cost of climate change for Canada could rise from roughly \$5 billion per year in 2020 to between \$21 billion and \$43 billion per year by the 2050s (National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy Canada). This cost depends upon a combination of factors: the growth of global emissions and the economic and population growth of Canada. However, global mitigation leading to a low climate change future reduces costs to Canada in the long term. This reinforces the argument that the world would benefit environmentally and economically from a post-2012 international climate arrangement that systematically reduces emissions from all GHG emitters - including Canada - over time.

On the contrary, if firm measures are not taken when it is still possible to do so, no one can accurately predict the weight of the consequences that can happen. We believes that abiding to the Kyoto Protocol will cost much less than the possible consequences of climate change problems, such as the increase of extreme meteorological phenomena. We also believe that the progress in adopting the Kyoto Protocol will reduce greenhouse gases as it will become costly to pollute and easier to adopt best environmental practices.

Canada's relationship with the United States

United States represents Canada's strongest ally within the North America. But, what is the relationship on the issue of Climate Change? Interestingly,

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Canada follows the same path with both past Bush and current Obama's administration of the United States (Ljunggren).

Canada was widely criticized for withdrawing from the Kyoto Protocol. Some were of the opinion that Canada ends a decade-long saga that began in earnest when George W. Bush walked away from the global climate treaty in 2001. Others continue to argue that the close links between the two countries meant that Ottawa ultimately felt it had to follow Washington's lead and ignore the diplomatic fallout.

Furthermore, the plan Canada will follow instead of the Kyoto Protocol is almost identical to Barack Obama's plan for the United States. The Canadian government's current plan, which would cut emission by 17 per cent of 2005 levels by 2020, is almost identical to the strategy of the government of the United States. Both countries are committed to pursuing a practical and sustainable plan to address the Climate problem (Minister of Environment Canada).

Canada fully acknowledges the problem of global warming and the well-being of the earth is also an important issue to North America. However, the cost to respecting the Kyoto Protocol can be justified. Although, the goals of the Protocol were established not by science, but by political negotiation but they do provide the long-term solution the world seeks to the problem of climate change. Furthermore, Canada argues that the Kyoto Protocol could have potentially significant repercussion for the global economy and is therefore arbitrary and ineffective. It goes on to say the Protocol is fundamentally flawed and is not the correct vehicle with which to produce

real environmental solutions. However, finding another workable solution to the problem of global warming do not represents the way forward as the cost to Climate change mitigation is likely to be constant over time.

CONCLUSION

The Climate is changing due to anthropogenic causes; hence, the goal of the Kyoto Protocol is to protect the climate system for the benefit of present and future generations of humankind. Canada's decision to 'leave' the Kyoto Protocol in 2011 resulted in countless debates and controversy in Climate Change discussions. It argues that the Kyoto Protocol do not provide the long-term solution the world seeks to the problem of climate change. It however remains committed to pursuing a practical and sustainable plan to address the problem of global warming.

The purpose of the essay was to analyse whether Canada decision to withdraw from the Kyoto Protocol was a move in the right direction. This analysis involves the moral responsibility of Canada to climate change negotiations, justice as it relates to the Kyoto Protocol as well Canada's interests in a global economy. A number of arguments based on these concepts were considered and documented in this essay.

Based on the principle or moral responsibility, we believe Canada withdrawal from the Kyoto protocol was a wrong decision. As discussed in the essay, the increase of Canada's GHG emission is strongly related to the problem of global warming and apparently has a strong negative effect on other countries in terms of the usage of the environment. Canada's decision to withdraw from the Kyoto Protocol - the only internationally ratified

agreement in emissions reduction shows that it may violate the right of other states in the near future.

The Kyoto Protocol framework (as it relates to international justice) has two implications particularly relevant to any discussion of broad participation in climate mitigation. They include the grandfather principle and the per capita system. The failure of the Protocol to address emission cuts by developing countries-the major pollutants in the future, clearly reflects its setback. Thus, one of the reasons for Canada's withdrawal from the agreement is that it fails to agree with the concept of justice as defined and implemented by the Kyoto Protocol. Due to the different responsibilities of carbon emission between developed countries and developing countries, a lot of effort has to be made to redefine ' justice' within the Kyoto Protocol.

Finally, Climate change has a price tag and cutting the emissions by amounts agreed by the Kyoto Protocol in little more than a decade requires a massive financial cost to the government of Canada. However, the cost to respecting the Kyoto Protocol can be justified. Although, the goals of the Protocol were established not by science, but by political negotiation but they do provide the long-term solution the world seeks to the problem of climate change. Furthermore, Canada argues that the Kyoto Protocol could have potentially significant repercussion for the global economy and is therefore arbitrary and ineffective. However, finding another workable solution to the problem of global warming do not represents the way forward as the cost to Climate change mitigation is likely to be constant over time.