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Trends. The Kyoto Protocol: Emissions on Trading or Purchasing Emissions Rights

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According to The New York Times, the Asahi News, and the Times of India, a provision enabling industrialized nations to trade or purchase emissions rights--the amount of carbon dioxide and five other heat-trapping gases that can be legally emitted--was deleted from the Kyoto Protocol. Protocol negotiators from the United States (US) stated that trading or purchasing emissions rights was the cheapest and most efficient way to cut emissions--for some countries--and that it might be impossible for the US to otherwise meet its Protocol emissions limits.

Negotiators from the People's Republic of China, India, and Saudi Arabia appeared to be significant opponents to the industrialized countries' quest for trading or purchasing emissions rights. The rationales for this opposition suggest that little has changed in international political cognition--even if the Protocol is a positive landmark in environmental protection.

So, why is the purchasing or trading of emissions rights worthy of being opposed? Objections and counters to objections follow.

Objection 1. It could lead to shifting the environmental burden to developed countries. But, if the governments of developed countries can negotiate an appropriate deal, what's wrong? The money or other assets-- e.g., technology--received may be used for still further environmental initiatives or for other projects deemed significant for a developing country's needs.

Objection 2. It might allow developed countries to buy their way out of their obligations. Sure, but only if another developed or a developing country agrees. Regardless, economic assets are going to be expended in dealing with environmental protection--e.g., through government to government transfers of tax money, increasing the overhead of industry, joint public and private initiatives.

Objection 3. It is a loophole in attempting to prevent global warming. No, there is not a loophole. Each obligated country would merely have a greater number of options to meet obligations.

Objection 4. It has too many technical difficulties to implement. Well, fine. If it does, it won't be implemented. Countries cannot meet their obligations by not meeting their obligations.

Objection 5. It is a threat to or violation of human rights. Certainly, an environmental threat to the world may be considered a potential infringement of human rights. Attempting to meet the threat in a noncoercive manner? Perhaps, if the opponents deem developing countries unable to act in their best interests. Any takers?

Objection 6. Purchasing or trading emissions rights should be allowed only between developed countries. The logic of this escapes the IBPP Editorial Board unless it's an indicator of a not-so-hidden agenda that may permeate all the above objections.

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This agenda seems to include: (a) making the industrialized countries pay for being economically ahead and for real and perceived present and past injustices; (b) constraining industrialized countries to more difficult choices in balancing environmental protection and their continued economic success, and (c) getting a "free ride" in handling a global problem. To support this agenda, opponents of purchasing and trading emissions rights argue that industrialized countries have and still are contributing to global warming more than other countries. However, some developing countries, e.g., China and India, will soon take over this dubious distinction. Moreover, this argument typifies what has to change in political cognition if global problems are to be successfully dealt with. There can no longer be "we" and "they" in confronting issues of global security--economic, environmental, and political. The purchasing and trading of emissions rights won't solve the problem at hand, but it will help--all of us. (See Hiroyukiishi. (December 11, 1997). COP3 represents small step forward: An analysis. Asahi News, <http://www.asahi.com>; Ottens, A.J. (1995). The role of abductive logic in understanding and using advanced empathy. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, 34, 199-211; Snyder, M. (1995). "Becoming": A method for expanding systemic thinking and deepening empathic accuracy. *Family Process*, 34, 241-253; Stevens, W. K. (December 11, 1997). Agreement is reached in Kyoto on greenhouse gases. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Wisenfeld, E. (1996). The concept of "we": A community social psychology myth? *Journal of Community Psychology*, 24, 337-346; Williams, B. (December 12, 1997). Vital treaty to curb greenhouse emission passed amidst acrimony. *Times of India*, <http://www.timesofindia.com>.)