

## FOREWORD

The new US Assistant Secretary for East Asia and the Pacific, Dr Kurt Campbell, is a distinguished security analyst. I was, therefore, surprised and impressed to hear him declare, at a conference last year, that the world's biggest security threat is global warming and climate change. This realisation is slowly dawning on security analysts, economists, politicians, public intellectuals and journalists. It is, however, not making any significant impact on public opinion in most parts of Asia.

The attitudes I have encountered among my friends are, on the whole, discouraging. The majority are ignorant and do not understand the problem. The threat of global warming and climate change is like an invisible enemy. It is not like a meteorite headed towards earth. The earth is warming slowly but progressively. We are like the proverbial frog in a pot of boiling water. We say to ourselves, the water is getting warmer but we are okay.

The second attitude is one of scepticism. Some very intelligent and well-informed friends of mine are not convinced by the science and the empirical evidence. To them, the reports of the IPCC represent only one point of view and have been challenged by some dissenting scientists. They regard Al Gore as a polemicist and Nicholas Stern as an alarmist. They are not convinced that, if the earth is warming, it is due to man's activities. They prefer to believe that it is cyclical as the earth goes through historic periods of cooling and warming. The anti-climate change literature spread by the dissenting scientists and public intellectuals have provided ammunition to the sceptics.

The third attitude is one I have encountered among some public intellectuals in Asia. They say that global warming and climate change is caused by the West and it is the responsibility of the West to substantially reduce their carbon emissions and cool the earth. Some

of my Indian and Chinese friends have argued, not without some merit, that on a per capita basis, their countries' emissions of CO<sub>2</sub> are substantially below those of the OECD countries and that it is both unjust and premature to ask them to reduce their carbon emissions when they are faced with so much poverty and backwardness. The Chinese and Indian intellectuals feel that this is their historic opportunity to catch up with the West and to become First World countries. They are not going to let the threat of global warming and climate change derail them from their historic quest. I can understand and, to some extent, even sympathise with this view.

When the world meets in Copenhagen in December this year, it is faced with a truly monumental task of negotiating a new consensus to replace the Kyoto Protocol which expires in 2012. Will we succeed or fail? At this point, I do not know. It will depend, in part, on President Obama's leadership and his skilful diplomacy. It will depend, in part, on whether the OECD countries can arrive at a compromise with China, India, Russia and Brazil. It will depend, in part, on whether the two biggest polluters, China and the US, can agree to cooperate with each other.

This volume makes an important contribution to the debate among Asian policy makers and intellectuals and between Asia and the West. There is no doubt in my mind that the West bears the historic burden. Asia, however, has the potential to prosper the world and to pollute the world. My hope is that Asia will catch up with the West, but will succeed in transiting to a low carbon economy. If Asia can succeed in embracing sustainable development and avoid the unsustainable model which the West has followed, then we can all heave a sigh of relief and say that there is still hope for planet earth. If Asia follows the path trodden by the West, then there is no hope for the future of human civilisation on our planet.

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