

The Breathtaking Arrogance of Two Statesmen



By [Jeffrey Tucker](#) from [Beautiful Anarchy](#)

There is an element of absurdity in the press flurry this morning. The [headlines](#) announced how "the U.S." and "China" had come to a "historic agreement" concerning carbon emissions and therefore climate change. The heads of state both agreed to "set targets" that are 15 years away, a time when neither are going to control anything. And whether either controls anything now is yet another question.

I really do wonder if, in the entire history of preposterous displays of despotic statecraft, there has been anything so ridiculous as two men on opposite sides of the world, two men with a weak hold on power, two men who can barely claim to represent anyone, signing a piece of paper that purports to control the global climate by tightening the regulatory noose around the respective population's neck sometime in the next 15 years.

It's times like this when the regular news really does read like the Onion.

As for the policy and science behind the idea, consider how much these two masterminds do not know. The following just gets us started. They don't know for sure in what way the climate is changing in departure from normal patterns, whether that change is on net a bad thing overall, whether and to what extent human activities are causing the change, the precise relationship between cause and effect, the precise kind of policy response that is required to reverse the change, whether the benefits of that policy will exceed its costs even if there were a way to measure it, whether that policy is actually realizable and enforceable, and whether there is any real test available to discern success from failure regarding this new policy.

They know none of this. No mortal truly can. True science is hard enough in the laboratory where human choice is not part of mix of what's being studied. Make the entire world the lab and the human choices of 7 billion people, stretched out over a 15 or 30 year future, part of the control set and you are really entering into the realm of total fantasy.

But let's say that I'm wrong on the principle that these people can't possibly know what their policy presumes to know. It doesn't matter because I'm not representing a global superpower with weapons of mass destruction that is plotting to impose energy rationing on the whole planet. I have no plan to impose on anyone. I'm happy to let people live their lives and trade to their mutual benefit, letting people work out problems for themselves in a process of experimentation that draws on localized and testable knowledge that emerges in a changing world.

The whole burden of all scientific proof is entirely on the heads of those who want to regiment and rule the world by force " and this proof must run from soup to nuts, establishing every casual relationship along the way.

Don't be shocked but this is not really about science and human welfare. It's about politics and public relations. It's a desperate

attempt to seem somehow relevant, to save the idea of a state-managed world from its destiny in the dustbin of history.

If as heads of state, these people want to control their own carbon emissions, that would be wonderful. The U.S. military is one of the world's [greatest polluters](#). Obama could actually do something about that, but apparently this is not even considered when calculating U.S. emissions data.

No, there will be no curbs on tanks, bombers, and presidential motorcades. Instead the curbs only pertain to you and me. And in the end, that's what's really going on here. It's about seeming to be powerful.

The world does indeed face a serious threat: the policy emissions from people like Obama and Xi.

For more, see: [The Pretense of Knowledge by F.A. Hayek](#)