



Climate talks as sausage-making

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If you believe in the importance of [shifting to a low-carbon economy](#), reading through the WikiLeaks' [US embassy cables](#) about climate change conjures up the quote (misattributed to Otto von Bismarck but actually spoken by [US poet John Godfrey Saxe](#)) about laws and sausages:

“Laws, like sausages, cease to inspire respect in proportion as we know how they are made.”

If you didn't much respect the accord that emerged out of last year's climate talks in Copenhagen before, you'll respect it even less after reading the leaked cables.

Among the Wikileaks revelations:

- The US took a nearly no-holds-barred approach to pushing for its preferred climate agreement — the non-binding accord that emerged out of Copenhagen — over a more Kyoto-like treaty. The gripe with the Kyoto Protocol (which the US never ratified)? It commits the world's developed nations (the historically largest polluters) to cutting emissions while not placing limits on fast-developing countries like China (which has now surpassed the US as the world's top carbon dioxide emitter).
- In officials' eyes, politics trumps science, with US delegates working actively — and, ultimately, successfully — to prevent the election of an Iranian scientist as co-chairman of a key working group of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. US officials worried that having Mostafa Jafari share group leadership with the US's Christopher Field would be “problematic.”
- Developing and vulnerable countries that agreed to support the US-backed accord were enticed with offers of financial assistance, while opposing countries like Bolivia and Ecuador

saw their aid cut off. [One cable](#) speaks of Deputy National Security Advisor for International Economic Affairs Michael Froman agreeing on the need to “neutralize, co-opt or marginalize” unhelpful countries like Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador, Nicaragua and Venezuela.

More than anything, the leaked cables speak volumes about why global efforts on climate, carbon and energy aren't proceeding nearly as quickly as needed. It's because the fate of sustainable society is taking a backseat to political self-interest. And that realisation becomes even more worrisome when you recognise the extent to which [politics can influence corporate policy](#), for better or for worse.

For companies looking to establish themselves as sustainability leaders, it's clear the political and legislative environment — now and into the future — is murkier and more fraught with challenges than it appears on the surface.



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