

Climategate (Part II)

A sequel as ugly as the original

Steven F. Hayward | The Weekly Standard

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Jon Golinski/ UN Photo

Delegates prepare for opening remarks at the UN Climate Change Conference in Durban, South Africa on Nov. 28, 2011.



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Article Highlights

- Climategate (Part II):
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the original

The conventional wisdom about blockbuster movie sequels is that the second acts are seldom as good as the originals. The exceptions, like *The Godfather: Part II* or *The Empire Strikes Back*, succeed because they build a bigger backstory and add dimensions to the original characters. The sudden release last week of another 5,000 emails from the Climate Research Unit (CRU) of East Anglia University—ground zero of “Climategate I” in 2009—immediately raised the question of whether this would be one of those rare exceptions or *Revenge of the Nerds II*.

Before anyone had time to get very far into this vast archive, the climate campaigners were ready with their critical review: Nothing worth seeing here. Out of context! Cherry picking! “This is just trivia, it’s a diversion,” climate researcher Joel Smith told *Politico*. On the other side, Anthony Watts, proprietor of the invaluable WattsUpWithThat.com skeptic website, had the kind of memorable line fit for a movie poster. With a hat tip to the famous *Seinfeld* episode, Watts wrote: “They’re real, and they’re spectacular!” An extended review of this massive new cache will take months and could easily require a book-length treatment. But reading even a few dozen of the newly leaked emails makes clear that Watts and other longtime critics of the climate cabal are going to be vindicated.

Climategate I, the release of a few thousand emails and documents from the CRU in November 2009, revealed that the united-front clubbiness of the leading climate scientists was just a display for public consumption. The science of climate change was not “settled.” There was no consensus about the extent and causes of global warming; in their private emails, the

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scientists expressed serious doubts and disagreements on some major issues. In particular, the email exchanges showed that they were far from agreement about a key part of the global warming narrative—the famous “hockey stick” graph that purported to demonstrate that the last 30 years were the warmest of the last millennium and which made the “medieval warm period,” an especially problematic phenomenon for the climate campaign, simply go away. (See my “Scientists Behaving Badly,” *The Weekly Standard*, December 14, 2009.) Leading scientists in the inner circle expressed significant doubts and uncertainty about the hockey stick and several other global warming claims about which we are repeatedly told there exists an ironclad consensus among scientists. (Many of the new emails make this point even more powerfully.) On the merits, the 2009 emails showed that the case for certainty about climate change was grossly overstated.

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--Steven F. Hayward

More damning than the substantive disagreement was the attitude the CRU circle displayed toward dissenters, skeptics, and science journals that did not strictly adhere to the party line. Dissenting articles were blocked from publication or review by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), requests for raw data were rebuffed, and Freedom of Information Act requests were stonewalled. National science panels were stacked, and qualified dissenters such as NASA prize-winner John Christy were tolerated as “token skeptics.” The CRU circle was in high dudgeon over the small handful of skeptics who insisted on looking over their shoulder, revealing the climate science community to be thin-skinned and in-secure about its enterprise—a sign that something is likely amiss. Even if there was no unequivocal “smoking gun” of fraud or wrongdoing, the glimpse deep inside the climate science community was devastating. As I wrote at the time (“In Denial,” *March 15, 2010*), Climategate did for the global warming controversy what the Pentagon Papers did for the Vietnam war 40 years ago: It changed the narrative decisively.

The new batch of emails, over 5,300 in all (compared with about 1,000 in the 2009 release), contains a number of fresh embarrassments and huge red flags for the same lovable bunch of insider scientists. It stars the same cast, starting with the Godfather of the CRU, Phil “hide the decline” Jones, and featuring Michael “hockey stick” Mann once again in his supporting role as the Fredo of climate science, blustering along despite the misgivings and doubts of many of his peers. Beyond the purely human element, the new cache offers ample confirmation of the rank politicization of climate science and rampant cronyism that ought to trouble even firm believers in catastrophic climate change.

In fact, the emails display candid glimpses of concern inside the CRU circle. Peter Thorne of NOAA (National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration), who earned his Ph.D. in climate science at East Anglia in 2001, wrote Phil Jones in a 2005 message, “I also think the science is being manipulated to put a political spin on it which for all our sakes might not be too clever in the long run.” An appeal to “context,” which the climate campaigners say is crucial to understanding why excerpts such as this one are unimportant, does quite the opposite, and only points to the problems the climate change campaigners have brought upon themselves by their tribalism.

This exchange between Thorne and Jones, along with numerous similar

threads in the new cache, is concerned with what should and shouldn't be included in a chapter of the IPCC's 2007 fourth assessment report—a chapter for which Jones was the coordinating lead author along with another key Climategate figure, Kevin Trenberth. The complete chapter (if you're keeping score at home, it's Chapter 3 of Working Group I, "Observations: Surface and Atmospheric Climate Change") lists 10 "lead authors" and 66 "contributing authors" in addition to Jones and Trenberth. One of Jones's emails from 2004 displays how explicitly political the process of assembling the IPCC report is: "We have a very mixed bag of LAs [lead authors] in our chapter. Being the basic atmos obs. one, we've picked up number of people from developing countries so IPCC can claim good geographic representation. This has made our task harder as CLAs [contributing lead authors] as we are working with about 50% good people who can write reasonable assessments and 50% who probably can't."

The final chapter was amended along lines Thorne recommended, but several other objections and contrary observations (one in particular from Roger Pielke Jr. about extreme weather events that has been subsequently vindicated) were scornfully dismissed. And appeals to context avoid the question: Is this "science-by-committee" a sensible way to sort out contentious scientific issues that hold immense public policy implications? Perhaps a politicized, semi-chaotic process like the IPCC is unavoidable in a subject as wide-ranging and complex as climate change; future historians of science can debate the issue. But the high stakes involved ought to compel a maximum of open debate and transparency. Instead, the IPCC process places a premium on gatekeepers and arbiters who control what goes in and what doesn't, and it is exactly in its exercise of the gatekeeping function that the CRU circle has shredded its credibility and trustworthiness.

One thing that emerges from the new emails is that, while a large number of scientists are working on separate, detailed nodes of climate-related issues (the reason for dozens of authors for every IPCC report chapter), the circle of scientists who control the syntheses that go into IPCC reports and the national climate reports that the U.S. and other governments occasionally produce is quite small and partial to particular outcomes of these periodic assessments. The way the process works in practice casts a shadow over one of the favorite claims of the climate campaign—namely, that there exists a firm "consensus" about catastrophic future warming among thousands of scientists. This so-called consensus reflects only the views of a much smaller subset of gatekeepers.

Beyond additional bad news for the hockey stick graph, is there anything new in these emails about scientific aspects of the issue? This will take time to sort out, but I suspect anyone with the patience to go through the weeds of all 5,300 messages and cross check them against published results may well discover troubling new aspects of how climate modeling is done, and how weak the models still are on crucial points (such as cloud behavior). Some of the new emails frankly acknowledge such problems. There are arcane discussions about how to interpolate gaps in the data, how to harmonize different data sets, and how to resolve the frequent and often inconvenient (because contradictory) anomalies in modeling results. Definite examples of political influence have emerged already from a first pass over a sample of the massive cache.

In the editing process before the IPCC's 2001 third assessment report, Timothy Carter of the Finnish Environmental Institute wrote in 2000 to three chapter authors with the observation, "It seems that a few people have a very strong say, and no matter how much talking goes on beforehand, the big decisions are made at the eleventh hour by a select core group." In this case, decisions at the highest levels of what specific figures and conclusions were to appear in the short "summary for policy makers"—usually the only part of the IPCC's multivolume reports that the media and politicians read—required changing what appeared in individual chapters, a case of the conclusions driving the findings in the detailed chapters instead of the other

way around. This has been a frequent complaint of scientists participating in the IPCC process since the beginning, and the new emails show that even scientists within the “consensus” recognize the problem. Comments such as one from Jonathan Overpeck, writing in 2004 about how to summarize some ocean data in a half-page, reinforce the impression that politics drives the process: “The trick may be to decide on the main message and use that to guid[e] what’s included and what is left out.”

No amount of context can possibly exonerate the CRU gang from some of the damning expressions and contrivances that appear repeatedly in the new emails. More so than the 2009 batch, these emails make clear the close collaboration between the leading IPCC scientists and environmental advocacy groups, government agencies, and partisan journalists. There are repeated instances of scientists tipping their hand that they’ve thrown in their lot with the climate ideologues. If there were only a handful of such dubious messages, they might be explained away through “context,” or as conciliatory habits of expression. But they are so numerous that it doesn’t require an advanced degree in pattern recognition to make out that these emails constitute not just a “smoking gun” of scientific bias, but a belching howitzer. Throughout the emails numerous participants refer to “the cause,” “our cause,” and other nonscientific, value-laden terms to describe the implications of one dispute or another, while demonizing scientists who express even partial dissent about the subject, such as Judith Curry of Georgia Tech.

Since the beginning of the climate change story more than 20 years ago, it has been hard to sort out whether the IPCC represents the “best” science, or merely the findings most compatible with the politically driven climate policy agenda. Both sets of emails have lifted the lid on the insides of the process, and it isn’t pretty.

A good example of how the political-scientific complex works hand-in-glove to tightly control the results comes from May 2009, when the IPCC authors were working on a “weather generator,” which they hoped would produce climate change scenarios tailored to localities, so as to promote favored adaptive measures (sea walls, flood control, drought readiness, etc.). This is a small but hugely controversial aspect of climate modeling, and one where politicians and advocacy groups (the World Wildlife Fund was especially keen to have this kind of work done) may well be asking scientists to do the impossible. But there’s research money in it, so scientists are only too happy to oblige. Kathryn Humphrey, a science adviser in Britain’s DEFRA (Department of Environment, Forestry, and Rural Affairs—Britain’s EPA) wrote a worried note to Phil Jones and several other scientists involved in the project about criticisms of the cloistered working group behind the weather generator scheme, noting, “Ministers have also raised questions about this so we will need to go back to them with some further advice.” Jones tries to reassure Humphrey that he’s got the working group under control: “As I’ve said on numerous occasions, if the WG [working group] isn’t there, all the people that need [the weather generator] will go off and do their own thing. This will mean that individual sectors and single studies will do a whole range of different things. This will make the uncertainties even larger!” What Jones is referring to are numerous independent scientific efforts to “downscale” climate models to predict local impacts, and the fact that the results of these separate efforts have been chaotic, rather than demonstrating consensus. Hence the need for someone in authority to marginalize uncertainties and contradictary results. But this is properly called politics, not science.

Humphrey wrote back: “I know this is extremely frustrating for you and completely understand where you are coming from. This is a political reaction, not one based on any scientific analysis of the weather generator. We did the peer review to take care of that. *I can’t overstate the HUGE amount of political interest in the project as a message that the Government can give on climate change to help them tell their story. They want the story*

to be a very strong one and don't want to be made to look foolish." (Emphasis added.) Even putting the most charitable possible construction on this exchange—namely that Humphrey really thought the criticisms of the weather generator lacked solid scientific foundation—other messages in the emails make clear that many scientists understand that their models really aren't up to it, despite Jones's attempts at reassurance.

In a 2008 email from Jagadish Shukla of George Mason University and the Institute of Global Environment and Society to a large circle of IPCC scientists, Shukla put his finger squarely on the problem: "I would like to submit that the current climate models have such large errors in simulating the statistics of regional [climate] that we are not ready to provide policymakers a robust scientific basis for 'action' at a regional scale. . . . It is inconceivable that policy-makers will be willing to make billion- and trillion-dollar decisions for adaptation to the projected regional climate change based on models that do not even describe and simulate the processes that are the building blocks of climate variability." Despite this and other cautionary messages from scientists, Jones, DEFRA, and the IPCC charged ahead with the weather generator anyway.

Other problems with climate modeling are more -subtle and less easily discerned from the emails. In particular, there is much discussion about the political pressure to tune the climate models to isolate and emphasize the effect of carbon dioxide only, even though there are other important greenhouse gases and related factors highly relevant to a complete understanding of climate change. Carbon dioxide was emphasized because it is the variable that the policymakers made central to their monomaniacal mission to suppress fossil fuels to the exclusion of other policy strategies, such as "geoengineering," that might be considered in the event of drastic climate change. Here and there Jones and his compatriots complain about this constraint, but go along with it anyway. But it's another case of policy-driven science, and not science-driven policy, which we are constantly reassured is the mission of the IPCC.

These are only a few of the many problems with the climate models on which all of the predictions of doom decades hence depend. It will take months of careful review to sort the wheat from the chaff, but there is enough evidence already to support the conclusion that the climate science establishment has greatly exaggerated what it knows. One of the stranger aspects of all of these emails is how much they are concerned with statistical refinement of climate models, and how little work there seems to be on basic atmospheric physics. There are curious exchanges over the impact of changes in solar activity on global warming. The effect of fluctuations in the sun have been consistently downplayed in the climate models and IPCC reports, despite a steady stream of science journal articles—most of them peer reviewed—that argue for a more substantial weighting of solar factors. As with so many parts of climate science, the empirical basis of solar factors is controversial and incomplete.

For example, a 2003 email from Michael Mann of Penn State summarily dismisses one variation of the solar story: "I'm now more convinced than ever that there is not one single scientifically defensible element at all [in this]—the statistics, supposed climate reconstruction, and supposed 'Cosmic Ray Flux' estimates are all almost certainly w/out any legitimate underpinning." And yet the basis for the idea he dismisses was largely vindicated a few months ago in a major study from CERN, the European lab that is behind the Large Hadron Collider, which found a significant role for cosmic ray flux in cloud formation. The imperatives of climate orthodoxy came immediately into view when Rolf-Dieter Heuer, the director of the CERN lab, told a German news-paper, "I have asked the colleagues to present the results clearly, but not to interpret them. That would go immediately into the highly political arena of the climate change debate. One has to make clear that cosmic radiation is only one of many parameters."

As all the new emails are dissected and analyzed, no doubt Jones and the CRU circle will be able to claim to have been misinterpreted or wrongly besmirched in many instances. But between their boorish behavior, attempts to conceal data and block FOIA requests, and dismissal of dissent, the climate science community has abdicated its credibility and done great damage to large-scale scientific inquiry.

It is worth revisiting one of the most infamous statements in the climate change saga, which came in 1989 from the late Stanford environmental scientist Stephen Schneider (who turns up in many of the emails in both Climategate features):

On the one hand, as scientists we are ethically bound to the scientific method, in effect promising to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but—which means that we must include all the doubts, the caveats, the ifs, ands, and buts. On the other hand, we are not just scientists but human beings as well. And like most people we'd like to see the world a better place, which in this context translates into our working to reduce the risk of potentially disastrous climatic change. To do that we need to get some broad based support, to capture the public's imagination. That, of course, means getting loads of media coverage. So we have to offer up scary scenarios, make simplified, dramatic statements, and make little mention of any doubts we might have. This "double ethical bind" we frequently find ourselves in cannot be solved by any formula. Each of us has to decide what the right balance is between being effective and being honest. I hope that means being both.

Schneider used to complain correctly that his critics omitted the last line in his statement—*"I hope that means being both"*—but the lesson of the Climategate saga is that scientists who become advocates, or allow themselves to become adjuncts to an advocacy campaign, damage science and policy-making alike. They end up being neither effective nor honest. One of the poignant revelations of the new emails is that some of the scientists seem to grasp this. Tommy Wils, a British climate researcher at the University of Swansea, wrote in a 2007 note to a large list of recipients: "Politicians like Al Gore are abusing the fear of global warming to get into power (while having a huge carbon footprint himself)." About Michael Grubb, a prominent climate campaigner in Britain, Tom Wigley (a prominent figure in U.S. climate research circles) wrote in 2000: "Grubb is good at impressing ignorant people. . . . Eileen Claussen [then-head of the Pew Climate Center] thinks he is a jerk. . . . Basically he is a 'greenie'; and he bends his 'science' to suit his ideological agenda." Did any of the leading climate scientists ever say this publicly, or call out environmental activist organizations for their reckless distortions of climate change? Had the climate scientists been more honest about their doubts, and more willing to discipline their allies, they might not be going through the present agony of having their dirty laundry exposed.

If Climategate II does poor box office, it won't be because the various internal reviews exonerated the CRU from the narrow allegations of fraud in Climategate I, but because the whole show has become a crashing bore. The latest U.N. climate summit that opened last week in Durban, South Africa, is struggling to keep the diplomatic circus on life support. Yet there is one more tantalizing detail that has been largely overlooked in the commentary so far. According to "FOIA," the online name of the hacker/leaker behind the release of these emails, there are another 220,000 emails still out there, blocked by a heavily encrypted password that "FOIA" vaguely threatens or promises to release at some future date. Stay tuned for -Climategate III.

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