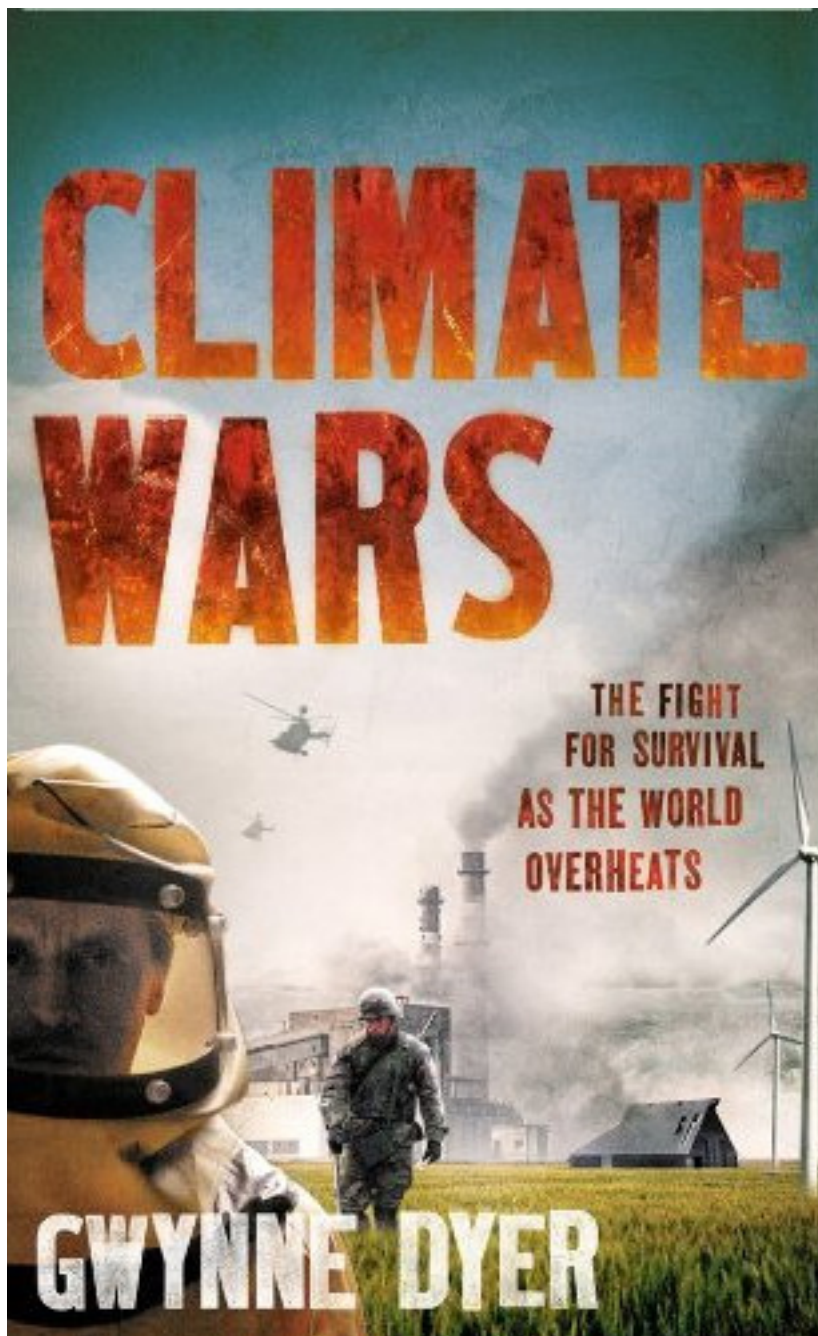


# Gwynne Dyer of CLIMATE WARS on C&C

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The rapidly industrialising countries have a large and entirely justifiable chip on their shoulders, because the extra hundred and ten parts per million of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere that have brought us to the brink of runaway climate change were put there over the past hundred-odd years by the old industrialised countries. They are being asked to contribute to the solution to somebody else's mess: if China and India had been the first countries in the world to industrialise, their emissions would not become a problem for a hundred years. So any deal that requires them to curb their emissions at this stage in their development will have to be a highly asymmetrical bargain, in which the older industrial countries make far deeper cuts in their own emissions and also heavily subsidise the cost of decarbonising the economies of the developing countries.

Asymmetrical deals are particularly hard to negotiate, although the basic principle that must underlie this one has been clear for some time. It is that each person on the planet has an equal right to pollute

the atmosphere, including an equal right to emit carbon dioxide. In some circles, it is seen as a radical notion even now. Twenty years ago, when four men meeting in musician Aubrey Meyer's house in Walthamstow, North London, first formulated the principle, it was revolutionary.

*"In 1988, I was looking for the subject of a musical, and I came across this report on the murder of Chico Mendes [the Brazilian campaigner for the protection of the Amazonian rainforest], and my initial reaction was 'Oh, great! This is a human interest story, drama, Latin American music, this is perfect!' So I couldn't find out much about him, but I found out about the issues, and within a matter of two weeks, I was crawling around the floor of the flat in tears, thinking 'Jesus, we're completely stuffed. This is deadly serious.'*

*So I took a mad decision and just thought: 'Fiddling while the planet burns is a waste of time. You've got to try and do something.' Within a year, we'd set up the Global Commons Institute. The formula addressing climate change and global collapse was very simple: equity and survival. You couldn't untie that. Not even quantum physicists could untie it. It was obvious. You had to make a deal counting everyone in as equals. The fundamental principle of 'contraction and convergence' is equal rights to emissions under the overall limits that save us. To stabilise concentrations in the atmosphere you, by definition, have to have a deep contraction in emissions. It's like turning off the tap in a bath. You have to turn the tap right off to avoid it overflowing.*

*It's non-negotiable. You've got a little wiggle-room with the plug, but the plug, in this case-the natural carbon sinks-is blocking up, so we've got to get on with it. And then the issue is: inside that bath, whatever the very unequal shares have been historically till now, the only conceivable way to sort this is on the basis of an equal share on everybody's account to use the atmosphere, which is a common resource for everybody. 'Convergence' to equality is a way of just softening that, because to try and do it overnight would be a bigger wrench in the system than any of us could possibly organise. But you can program the system to go to there-it's not the best option, it's the least worst. What's the alternative?"*

Aubrey Meyer, co-founder, Global Commons Institute

There is no alternative, because human beings care intensely about fairness - more, sometimes, than about their so-called real interests. It is simply inconceivable that Chinese and Brazilians and Indians and South Africans, as their economies develop and their emissions increase, will accept the notion that the old industrialised countries can permanently retain a bigger per-capita right to emit greenhouse gases. There must be convergence towards equal shares for all, or there will be no deal.

The idea behind 'Contraction [of emissions] and Convergence [of rights to emit], is now mainstream and, like all successful ideas, it now has many would-be fathers, but it was Aubrey Meyer and his Global Commons Institute who took it to market and sold it. This notion that equity demands a global transfer of resources from those who pollute more to those who pollute less, on condition that those resources are used to minimise the growth in emissions as those poorer countries grow economically, is now at the basis of almost all serious negotiations between the countries of the North and the South on Kyoto-related topics, even if the Northern side is still not very comfortable with it.

Moreover, no deal will be worth the paper it's written on if it does not tie the cuts that are negotiated to a clearly defined target of how much carbon dioxide we can tolerate in the atmosphere.

The Kyoto tradition of seeking proportional cuts to existing emissions, with no reference to any scientifically based target, is what prompted Aubrey Meyer, in my interview with him, to say, rather frankly, that: 'If the Kyoto Protocol is the best that the evolutionary process can provide as an example of the survival of the fittest, the very clear deduction is that we're not fit to survive, and we're not going to. We have so lost our way.'

If we must never exceed 2 degrees Celsius warmer than the pre-industrial average global temperature, and that equates to an upper limit of 450 parts per million of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, then any post-Kyoto deal that does not promise to achieve that goal in a timely fashion is worse than inadequate. It might even be worse than no deal at all, because it could lull people into a false sense of confidence that 'something is being done'.