

**MAKING CLIMATE CHANGE RELATABLE: THE U.S. METAPHORS  
ON THE PARIS CLIMATE AGREEMENT**

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## **Abstract**

With the rising threats of climate change and the Trump Administration withdrawing the U.S. from the international Paris Climate Agreement, this thesis examines the metaphors both President Obama and President Trump use when framing climate change to their audience. Drawing from the constructivist lens, this thesis utilizes its framework to conduct a discourse analysis on Obama's and Trump's speech acts to analyze how they make meaning of climate change through the conceptual metaphors that they use when presenting their stance on the Paris Agreement such as by claiming that climate change is a war. This thesis also applies the theoretical frameworks of environmental politics to engage with the meaning and implications of the metaphors which both U.S. leaders use. As metaphors are heavily embedded into our language and shape the way society thinks towards certain concepts, this thesis argues that it is not only political discourse which needs to be less state-centric in its language but also the field of International Relations as climate change impacts everyone on the planet.

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## Introduction

The clock is ticking, the earth's temperature is continuously getting warmer. As human-induced activities have caused 1.0°C of global warming, in comparison to the 0.8°C to 1.2°C in pre-industrial times, the earth has undergone weather patterns never seen before. Storms are growing stronger, animal species are disappearing, and even glaciers are reducing to their watery forms.<sup>1</sup> As the temperature of the earth grows, so do the risks for all of human life and the ecosystem that surrounds it. According to the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (UNIPCC), climate-related risk includes water supply, economic decrease, food scarcity, health, and overall human security. In their latest report, the UNIPCC predicted that the world has 12 years remaining to limit climate change and to prevent global warming from making the earth unlivable. Through sustainable development such as substituting fossil fuels for renewable energy, one could cut the dangers of extreme heat, floods, and poverty caused by climate change if the temperature were to remain below 2.0°C.<sup>2</sup> In order to lessen the threat of climate change, however, an international effort must be made. According to the panel's report, with high confidence, "international cooperation can provide an enabling environment for this to be achieved in all countries and for all people in the context of sustainable development [...] international cooperation is a critical enabler for developing countries and vulnerable regions."<sup>3</sup>

With the raising stakes of climate change and the need for international collaboration led to the birth of the Paris Agreement, also known as the Paris Climate Accord, to address the problem at hand. Created by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

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<sup>1</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Global Warming of 1.5°C*, 2018, <http://www.ipcc.ch/report/sr15/>.

<sup>2</sup> World Meteorological Organization, "Understanding the IPCC Special Report on 1.5°C," 2018, 12.

<sup>3</sup> "Global Warming of 1.5°C: Headline Statements from the Summary for Policymakers" (IPCC, 2018).

on December 12, 2015, and officially ratified by its party members on November 4, 2016, the Paris Agreement is the largest legal agreement on climate change. With the ambitious goal of keeping the average temperature of the earth below 2.0°C and to limit its increase to 1.5°C by the year 2020, this agreement heavily relies on its party members to implement their set plan of reducing carbon emissions within their geographic region.<sup>4</sup> While the Paris Agreement may be the largest international arrangement combatting climate change, there are some controversies about the agreement as some critics state that the Accord provides too much flexibility and offers more favor towards developing countries.<sup>5</sup> However, despite these controversies, the Paris Accord is the most prominent environmental agreement in international politics and addresses to the entire world the urgency to address climate change.<sup>6</sup>

As of May 2019, there are currently 197 UNFCCC party members in the Paris agreement with each promising to uphold their deal to tackle and further prevent the ever-growing hazards of climate change. With signatories from nations all over the world, there is one country in particular who has chosen to leave the agreement. On June 1, 2017, President Donald Trump announced that the United States, one of the most influential nations in the world, would leave the Paris Accord making it the few countries in the world not in the agreement.<sup>7</sup> During his announcement, he justified his actions by stating that “the Paris Accord would undermine our economy, hamstringing our workers, weaken our sovereignty, impose unacceptable legal risks, and put us at a permanent

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<sup>4</sup> United Nations Climate Change, “What Is the Paris Agreement? | UNFCCC,” accessed May 6, 2019, <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/what-is-the-paris-agreement>.

<sup>5</sup> R. Makomere and K. Liti Mbeva, “Squaring the Circle: Development Prospects Within the Paris Agreement,” *Carbon & Climate Law Review* 12, no. 1 (2018): 31–40, <https://doi.org/10.21552/cclr/2018/1/7>.

<sup>6</sup> Maria Ivanova, “Politics, Economics, and Society,” in *The Paris Agreement on Climate Change: Analysis and Commentary* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2017), 17–26.

<sup>7</sup> UC Rusal, Sergey Chestnoy, and Dinara Gershinkova, “USA Withdrawal from Paris Agreement – What Next?,” *International Organisations Research Journal* 12, no. 4 (December 2017): 215–25, <https://doi.org/10.17323/1996-7845-2017-04-215>.

disadvantage to other countries in the world”.<sup>8</sup> While President Trump argues that the Paris Accord is a plot against the U.S., one of the main enforcers who greatly aided in the creation of the agreement was the previous U.S. President, Barack Obama (2009-2017).<sup>9</sup> Ironically enough, President Obama sought to make the Paris Agreement more flexible and ensure that it held no enforcement power so that he could swiftly sign an executive order allowing the U.S. to enter the agreement without any protest from Congress.<sup>10</sup> Within the past three years since the U.S. joined the Accord, the relationship between the U.S. and the Paris Agreement have drastically changed with the shift in presidents.

In contrast to what President Trump believes the main priority of the Paris Accord to be, President Obama claims that the agreement will “open up the floodgates for businesses, and scientists, and engineers to unleash high-tech, low-carbon investment, and innovation at a scale that we’ve never seen before”.<sup>11</sup> While both presidents may disagree about what outcomes would occur with the implementation of the Paris Agreement, both leaders highly emphasize how it would affect the U.S. economy when justifying their actions towards the Accord. Throughout the speech acts of both President Obama and President Trump, they fail to mention the actual scientific facts of climate change when making their argument as they pay more detail rather on how the legislation will solely affect the U.S. By comparing the discourses of both presidents, one will notice the amount of influence the president holds as they have the power to frame and manipulate

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<sup>8</sup> “Statement by President Trump on the Paris Climate Accord,” The White House, accessed March 18, 2019, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/statement-president-trump-paris-climate-accord/>.

<sup>9</sup> Donald J. Trump, “Remarks by President Trump at Make America Great Again Rally in Harrisburg, PA” (White House, April 29, 2017).

<sup>10</sup> Charles F. Parker and Christer Karlsson, “The UN Climate Change Negotiations and the Role of the United States: Assessing American Leadership from Copenhagen to Paris,” *Environmental Politics* 27, no. 3 (May 4, 2018): 519–40, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2018.1442388>.

<sup>11</sup> Barack Obama, “Remarks by the President on the Paris Agreement,” The White House, October 5, 2016, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/10/05/remarks-president-paris-agreement>.



any issue that they deem is important. Through the example of the U.S. perception of climate change, it shows how Obama and Trump take a scientific truth but alter it into a political construction. As both presidents stress the importance of the Paris Agreement towards the U.S. economy, they frame their argument in such a manner that is favorable to their political alignment along with something the overall public opinion can relate with.

While at first glance, President Obama's and President Trump's argument on the U.S. participation of the Paris Agreement may seem vastly different. However, while they may not share the same stance on the Accord, they both utilize the same metaphor when presenting their argument for/against the Paris agreement. In accordance with the constructivist viewpoint, metaphors reveal how politics are conducted through language. Through particular formations of certain words and phrases, this discourse creates new meanings and ways of interpretation for specific policy issues. For instance, the essence of a metaphor "is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another".<sup>12</sup> The usage of metaphors in political speeches allows politicians to further persuade their target audience. Relating their issue with another issue that their audience is more familiar with creates a frame of reference for them as they project their attitudes towards the more familiar topic to the topic that is being introduced. However, metaphors also have the ability to function beyond a tool of persuasion as through the language that the metaphor presents can shape society as a whole. According to political communication scholars, metaphors hold the power to "link the various parts of society together and allow them to function as an integrated whole" through its creation of mutual understanding.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago, IL, USA: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 5.

<sup>13</sup> Jeffery Scott Mio, "Metaphor and Politics," *Metaphor and Symbol* 12, no. 2 (June 1997): 113–33, [https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327868ms1202\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327868ms1202_2); Doris Graber, "Political Communication: Scope, Progress, Promise," in *Political Science: The State of the Discipline*, vol. 2 (Washington D.C., USA: American Political Science Association, 1993), 305–32.

When discussing whether or not the U.S. should be a member of the Paris Climate Accord, both President Obama and President Trump apply metaphors such as relating climate change to war when supporting their stance on the international agreement. On October 5, 2016, when President Obama officially added the U.S. into the Paris Agreement as one of its party members, in his speech he stated that it was “a historic day in the *fight to protect* our planet for future generations”.<sup>14</sup> Throughout his speeches on the Paris Agreement and climate change, he frames his advocacy to environmental issues as a battle between the U.S. and the perceived threats of climate change. While President Trump also frames his opinions on the Paris Agreement and climate change with war talk, he does so in an entirely different manner. During his announcement that the U.S. would be leaving the Paris Accord, he stated the agreement and its country members “*tied up and bounded*” the U.S. to attain “economic edge”.<sup>15</sup> Unlike President Obama who used war metaphors to display that climate change is a threat against the U.S., President Trump uses such military terms to dismiss the Paris Agreement and climate change as he views it as a weapon built against the U.S. While both U.S. leaders apply the similar types of metaphors in their speeches on the Paris Accord and climate change, they use it in different ways to alter the public’s opinion on whether or not the U.S. should participate in the international environmental agreement.

What makes the Paris Climate Accord unique as an environmental legislation is that it is the largest international effort against climate change.<sup>16</sup> However, as the Paris Agreement is fairly new, there has not been a lot of research done on the topic. As the Accord is an international agreement that stresses the urgency for the world to decrease its carbon emissions as a whole, it is

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<sup>14</sup> Trump, “Remarks by the President on the Paris Agreement.”

<sup>15</sup> “Statement by President Trump on the Paris Climate Accord.”

<sup>16</sup> Yong-Xiang Zhang et al., “The Withdrawal of the U.S. from the Paris Agreement and Its Impact on Global Climate Change Governance,” *Advances in Climate Change Research* 8, no. 4 (December 2017): 213–19, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.accre.2017.08.005>.

ideal to study it further as it connects not only the discipline of International Relations but also environmental politics. The field of International Relations is best for analyzing the U.S. changing positions on the Paris Agreement as it highlights aspects of global politics. However, “as both a system of knowledge and institutional practice, it is undone by the reality of this planet” as it fails to account for the growing presence of climate change on both a political, ecological, and even worldly scale.<sup>17</sup> As International Relations is based largely on theories of state and power, there has been growing literature that this field of study needs to be more inclusive and adopt a planetary view of politics that includes not only human actors but also the ecosystem and the animals within it as climate change will affect everyone and everything in it.<sup>18</sup>

While there are those that want to promote inter-disciplinary studies between International Relations and the environment so that both the scientific and political aspects of climate change can be addressed, there is a lack of methodological discipline and overall research studies done in the field.<sup>19</sup> Through my research, I want to further explore how to apply a methodology that combines the theoretical frameworks from both International Relations and environmental politics such as by conducting a discourse analysis on the way which U.S. presidents construct climate change. The types of theoretical lenses I will be utilizing are social constructivism in IR, metaphors in political rhetoric, and environmental politics along with its relation to critical studies in IR. In order to create a study that merges all these frameworks, I will be analyzing the metaphors that

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<sup>17</sup> Anthony Burke et al., “Planet Politics: A Manifesto from the End of IR,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 44, no. 3 (June 2016): 501, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305829816636674>.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.; Audra Mitchell, “Is IR Going Extinct?,” *European Journal of International Relations* 23, no. 1 (March 2017): 3–25, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066116632853>; Stefanie Fishel et al., “Defending Planet Politics,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 46, no. 2 (January 2018): 209–19, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305829817742669>; Simon Dalby, “Environmental Geopolitics in the Twenty-First Century,” *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 39, no. 1 (February 2014): 3–16, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0304375414558355>.

<sup>19</sup> Burke et al., “Planet Politics.”

President Obama and President Trump use when discussing the U.S. membership in the Paris Agreement and climate change. Which then leads to my main set of research questions: what classifications of conceptual metaphors have U.S. presidents used when constructing the U.S. position towards climate change and the Paris Agreement? And what are the effects of such metaphors towards the climate change movement and the field of International Relations overall?

Through my metaphorical discourse analysis looking at how Obama and Trump construct climate change in their statements about the Paris Agreement, I will draw from the ideas of environmental politics and argue that one must expand beyond state-interest if one wishes to combat climate change.<sup>20</sup> The field of International Relations is too state-centric as one can see from the speeches that both U.S. presidents make when dealing with the Paris Climate Accord. Instead of placing emphasis on the international cooperation aspect of the Paris Agreement or the scientifically based facts of climate change, both leaders use metaphors to solely stress on how it will affect the well-being of the U.S. If International Relation scholars and politicians do not start taking to account that there are other national and environmental bodies that will also suffer from the consequences of climate change and work in corporation together, then the earth's temperature will only continue to get hotter.

Throughout my thesis, the first chapter will provide the theoretical framework of my research. It will include an outline of topics such as the constructivist school of International Relations, planet politics, and the discourse of metaphors. Afterward, in the second chapter, it will cover a further overview of the Paris Agreement and its importance along with the actual methodological approach of this analysis. Furthermore, in the third chapter, it will offer an account on the different metaphors President Obama and President Trump use in their political speeches

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

towards climate change and the Paris Climate Accord. While in the fourth chapter, it will pay closer attention to how both Obama and Trump utilized the war metaphor but in ways which gave different connotations towards their stance on climate change. Finally, the thesis ends with a discussion on the consequences of using such metaphors, suggestions on further themes to be researched pertaining to the topic, and other concluding remarks.

## Chapter 1-Theoretical Framework

Throughout this first chapter, I will present the theoretical framework for my research in order to understand how U.S. presidents construct metaphors in their arguments when dealing with foreign policy towards the environment and climate change, such as the Paris Climate Agreement. As the constructivist thought of International Relations emphasizes the social construction of world politics and society itself, I will utilize its ideas into my research as I am looking at how U.S. leaders construct the meaning of climate change.<sup>21</sup> It is also essential to add background information about metaphors in political discourse as through metaphors it creates a frame of reference of how the public audience should be thinking about a particular issue.<sup>22</sup> Lastly, this chapter will go over the study of environmental politics and its relation to critical studies. This literature is important as it will aid in my argument that politicians and the field of International Relations itself need to start expanding and considering the state of the environment and the science behind it rather than solely focusing on state power and security of climate change if they want to start making a change.<sup>23</sup> It is important to discuss all three frameworks in this section as I wish to merge some of the ideas from these theories together in order to create a strong foundation of my proposed case study. Through the presentation of these theoretical frameworks, it will further provide aid in answering my research question which looks what the types of metaphors Obama and Trump use when defining climate change to support their position towards the Paris Agreement.

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<sup>21</sup> Matt McDonald, "Constructivism," in *Security Studies: An Introduction* (New York, New York, USA: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>22</sup> Roland Paris, "Kosovo and the Metaphor War," *Political Science Quarterly* 117, no. 3 (September 2002): 423–50, <https://doi.org/10.2307/798263>.

<sup>23</sup> Burke et al., "Planet Politics."

### **1.1 Looking through the Constructivist Lens in International Relations**

The constructivist school was not founded until after the Cold War when political scholars sought an explanation for the occurrences that happened during the period as the traditional schools of International Relations failed to do so.<sup>24</sup> Unlike the other traditional schools of security such as realism or liberalism, constructivism focuses on transformative ideas such as identity and social construction. Its main argument is that the world is “established socially through intersubjective interactions as cultural, social, and historical factors encourage particular formations of certain meanings to arise”.<sup>25</sup> As constructivism draws from sociological approaches as well as critical theory, it provides a broad theoretical approach to the field of International Relations. This framework covers a variety of International Relations related issues such as security aspects, international systems, and even political economy.<sup>26</sup> The theories of constructivism are quite applicable to my research as I am looking at the ways in which U.S. presidents socially construct climate change and whether or not their construction perceives it as a security issue.

As constructivism places emphasis on looking at how meaning is created in a social context, the act of constructing something involves bringing into a being a subject that did not exist previously.<sup>27</sup> Based on this claim, constructivists scholars would argue that International Relations and politics is a man-made concept. However, one cannot simply create a concept and expect it to be automatically recognized by the public. As society is built on norms, “even speeches and press

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<sup>24</sup> Rita Floyd, “Towards a Consequentialist Evaluation of Security: Bringing Together the Copenhagen and the Welsh Schools of Security Studies,” *Review of International Studies* 33, no. 02 (April 2007): 327, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S026021050700753X>.

<sup>25</sup> McDonald, “Constructivism,” 61.

<sup>26</sup> Nicholas Onuf, *World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations* (Columbia, South Carolina, USA: University of South Carolina Press, 1989).

<sup>27</sup> Karen Fierke, *Critical Approaches to International Security* (Hoboken, New Jersey, USA: Wiley, 2015).

conference statements produced for specific purposes, in order to be taken seriously, must make sense and fit with what the general public takes as ‘reality’.”<sup>28</sup> For the public to accept a newly constructed topic then, it must fit into the society’s realm of expectations. For my case study, I will be using the topic of climate change as my exemplar of these constructivist ideas. Climate change is a controversial topic as its term and existence are not completely accepted by the public.<sup>29</sup> While President Obama advocates for the existence of climate change, the next U.S. leader after him, President Trump continuously insists that climate change is merely a hoax.<sup>30</sup>

While speech acts play a large role in the construction of political concepts such as what is considered a security issue and what is not, constructivism not only looks what is spoken but also what is performed.<sup>31</sup> As French Sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu classifies the social world as a place of struggle for defining what the social world actually entails, there a variety of ways in which meaning can be constructed. In accordance with Bourdieu’s ideas, one way of producing an idea into being is through symbolic power. Symbolic power is defined as “a power for constituting the given through utterances, of making people see and believe, of confirming or transforming the vision of the world and thereby, action on the world and thus the world itself.”<sup>32</sup> Through this power, politicians through their position of authority hold the ability to control what is and is not a part of their reality through the influence that they hold on the public. It is important to address such power as the international politics of climate change is a field of forces and struggles when

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<sup>28</sup> Roxanne Lynn Doty, “Foreign Policy as Social Construction: A Post-Positivist Analysis of U.S. Counterinsurgency Policy in the Philippines,” 1993, 303.

<sup>29</sup> Andrew J. Hoffman, “Talking Past Each Other? Cultural Framing of Skeptical and Convinced Logics in the Climate Change Debate,” *Organization & Environment* 24, no. 1 (March 2011): 3–33, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1086026611404336>.

<sup>30</sup> UC Rusal, Chestnoy, and Gershinkova, “USA Withdrawal from Paris Agreement – What Next?”

<sup>31</sup> Floyd, “Towards a Consequentialist Evaluation of Security.”

<sup>32</sup> Wacquant, 37.



determining what the meaning of it involves.<sup>33</sup> One could make the argument that as President Trump withdrew the U.S. from the Paris Agreement, he performed his symbolic power in a manner that would delegitimize climate change as by leaving the agreement demonstrates how he does not think that climate change is a security issue as it does not exist. While President Obama, on the other hand, entered the U.S. as a signatory of the Paris Agreement, to use his power to demonstrate how he finds climate change as an important security issue.

As the transformative ideas stemming from constructivism is quite different compared to the other schools of International Relations, there has been a lot of critique towards the approach as some International Relations scholars state that the approach is too vague. Through the constructivist lens, one could make the argument that all concepts are relative or are a social construct which then makes all aspects in the field lack any limitations or actual structure. It also then makes it difficult to determine which actors have the ability to securitize or de-securitize a topic.<sup>34</sup> While the constructivist approach of International Relations opens the realm of possibilities for the field as it explores the concepts of meaning-making and construction, the school still has its ways to go. As it is one of the many approaches in International Relations field, this perspective still tends to solely concentrate on traditional IR aspects such as security, international organization, and the state itself. When trying to find a solution to climate change, it still fails to account for the other aspects that also make up this earth such as the ecosystem.<sup>35</sup> Although the constructivist approach does provide a strong foundation for the framework of my thesis as it focuses on how meaning is constructed in society, its theories need to be more expansive

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<sup>33</sup> Hannah Hughes, "Bourdieu and the IPCC's Symbolic Power," *Global Environmental Politics* 15, no. 4 (November 2015): 85–104, [https://doi.org/10.1162/GLEP\\_a\\_00323](https://doi.org/10.1162/GLEP_a_00323).

<sup>34</sup> Floyd, "Towards a Consequentialist Evaluation of Security."

<sup>35</sup> Burke et al., "Planet Politics."

to voices that are not heard in the mainstream such as environmental politics and critical studies which I will discuss in a later section of this chapter.

## **1.2 The Influence of Metaphors in Political Discourse and Beyond**

Now that the background of the constructivist lens has been established in the previous section, this section will further draw upon its ideas by discussing political discourse and the impact metaphors embedded into our language and how that influences mean-making in society. Metaphors are figurative comparisons, it is a “phenomenon whereby we talk and, potentially, think about something in terms of something else”.<sup>36</sup> Through this rhetorical tool, one can conceptualize an unfamiliar idea to their audience by creating a comparison with it to another idea that unrelated to it but is more familiar for the audience to grasp upon. For instance, a common conceptual metaphor used is TIME IS MONEY.<sup>37</sup> Phrases one would use to depict this metaphor are “you’re *wasting* my time,” “this product will *save* you hours,” “waiting in the line *cost* me an hour,” “I don’t *have* any time to *give* you,” and “I’ve *invested* a lot of time.” By using terms one would use to typically describe money and applying it when discussing someone’s time frames the idea of time in a similar manner towards money as they both are limited and hold value.<sup>38</sup> Conceptual metaphors such as TIME IS MONEY exist in our everyday lives whether or not we notice it in our language. Through the usage of this linguistic device, it helps shape the way one thinks and acts in their society. Politicians can then strategically utilize conceptual metaphors in their discourse to reframe an issue that is more aligned to their stance on the particular topic.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Elena Semino, *Metaphor in Discourse* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008): 1.

<sup>37</sup> This formatting to present metaphors is adopted by Lakoff and Johnson and will be discussed more in Chapter 2

<sup>38</sup> George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago, IL, USA: The University of Chicago Press, 1980): 7-8.

<sup>39</sup> Brigitte Nerlich, “‘Climategate’: Paradoxical Metaphors and Political Paralysis,” *Environmental Values* 19, no. 4 (November 1, 2010): 419–42, <https://doi.org/10.3197/096327110X531543>.

As metaphors can be used to construct and re-construct concepts in a multitude of ways, there will be disagreements on the relevance of the comparisons made by such metaphors. One instance of this is presented by Paris's work on the types of metaphors used in the Clinton Administration when discussing how to deal with the conflict in Kosovo in the 1990s. One metaphor that was used repeatedly during their debates was the comparison of the U.S. war in Vietnam. One side used the Vietnam war metaphor to argue the U.S. should not intervene because similar to Vietnam it is a deep-rooted conflict that the U.S. has no role in. The other side of the argument, who interpreted the metaphor differently, asserted that the U.S. should mediate in Kosovo because the situation is similar to Vietnam, but the Clinton Administration is better organized for the task. There were also those, however, who completely rejected the comparison between the Kosovo conflict and the Vietnam War as they contended that the two events cannot be compared to one another. This example then demonstrates Paris' idea of the metaphor war which consists of two levels: the first deals with the applicability of the metaphor and the second deals with connotations of the metaphor.<sup>40</sup> From these two levels of the metaphor war, it not only displays the conflict society faces when trying to make sense of the shared experiences and relationships but it also demonstrates why it is important to study metaphors in general. The metaphors found in political discourse helps one better understand the political actor when they are trying to persuade their audience as it is not only important to look at what they are speaking but also what they are leaving out in their rhetoric.<sup>41</sup> Just as the metaphor war appeared in U.S. debates on the Kosovo conflict, this war on meaning-making also appears in others such as defining climate change and the legitimacy of the Paris Climate Accord.

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<sup>40</sup> Paris, "Kosovo and the Metaphor War."

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

While metaphors are a helpful rhetorical tool used to help make sense of abstract concepts, similar to the faults of the constructivist approach such as it lacks limitation as it can hold more than one interpretation as seen with the instance of the metaphor wars. As meaning is relative in this context, metaphors can also be dangerous as it limits what one notices and only highlights what the speaker wants the audience to see.<sup>42</sup> Politicians use metaphors as an instrument of persuasion and audience members must be conscious of that. As metaphors are so deeply embedded into our language today, they hold a lot of influence not only political discourse but also society itself. According to French philosopher, Paul Ricœur, “metaphor shatters not only previous structures of our language, but also the previous structures of what we call reality”.<sup>43</sup> Not only can metaphors shape the way one thinks about a particular concept but it can also transform the way in which society perceives it overall.

Metaphors are an extremely powerful device then when constructing meaning and the reality that we live in today. However, when using metaphors on political discourse about climate change, it brings more complication to the problem. As climate change is a science-related issue, metaphors cannot outrightly provide the scientific facts and numbers associated with the environmental issue. While metaphors are useful for helping understand issues, it fails to provide a factual substance such as to why the earth’s temperature is increasing as it can only state the relationships between one concept to another.<sup>44</sup> Just as how metaphors naturally occur in political discourse, this type of discourse needs to more explicitly state the scientific facts as well that will

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<sup>42</sup> George Lakoff, “Metaphor and War: The Metaphor System Used to Justify War in the Gulf,” in *Thirty Years of Linguistic Evolution* (Amsterdam, The Netherlands: John Benjamins, 1992), 481.

<sup>43</sup> Paul Ricœur, “Word, Polysemy, Metaphor: Creativity in Language,” in *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination* (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1991).

<sup>44</sup> Karen Litfin, *Ozone Discourses: Science and Politics in Global Environmental Cooperation* (New York, New York, USA: Columbia University Press, 1994).

address the true realities of the current condition of the earth with knowledge-based facts such as environmental degradation.

### **1.3 The Emergence Environmental Politics and Critical Studies**

After the rise transformative thought and ideas on meaning-making in the International Relations field, this sociologically-based approach has opened a new critical way of studying the discipline. The critical perspective was then introduced to IR and it expanded the study even further away from its traditional foundations. Critical scholars increase the scope of IR by engaging in concepts such as hard and soft power, along with state and non-actors in the global political system. Branching from the constructivist approach, the “critical security studies” is similar in the manner that it looks at world politics and the society that creates it in a transformative manner.<sup>45</sup> While both schools reject the rigid distinctions created by the traditional scholars of IR, Bilgin states that critical studies places more emphasis on human agency.<sup>46</sup> While theories are used to explain or predict concepts, the theories in critical studies function differently as they “tell us what possibilities exist for human action and intervention; they define not merely our explanatory possibilities but also our ethical and practical horizons”.<sup>47</sup> The critical study approach looks at IR in a whole new perspective as it considers the ethics in the political system. As climate change affects everyone and everything thing on this planet, international cooperation and understanding needs to be emphasized as it is a not only presents a risk domestically but also globally. With this emphasis on human morals, I want to expand on this approach and relate it to environmental politics throughout the rest of this section.

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<sup>45</sup> Pinar Bilgin, “Critical Theory,” in *Security Studies: An Introduction* (New York, New York, USA: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Steve Smith, Ken Booth, and Marysia Zalewski, *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Unlike other fields of political studies, environmental politics looks at political theories in relation to the environment. One concept heavily stressed in the field is the idea of Anthropocene which is a term used to describe human-induced climate change as it is the human species who dominate the environment.<sup>48</sup> As it is humans who determine the state of the environment, it is their responsibility as humans to also fix the harms that they have inflicted onto the environment. According to the political environment scholar Simon Dalby, who draws from the Anthropogenic ideas, states that we humans, “are collectively changing the basic parameters of the earth system, we have literally taken our fate into our own hands, and are determining the circumstances in which future generations will live.”<sup>49</sup> As humans are the cause of climate change, scholars in environmental politics are adopting the critical studies approach to argue that there needs to be an interdisciplinary field which accounts humans for the cause of the earth’s rising temperature and searches for a way to reverse this human-produced damage on the ecosystem.

As International Relations analyzes the global system and the actors within it, it provides the ideal foundation for studying climate change in a critical manner that political environment scholars have sought out for. These scholars call for a new perspective in politics that pays closer attention to “earth system governance” that holds the intentions to find innovative ways to improve the earth.<sup>50</sup> International relations can serve as a basis for this new field of discipline as it looks at politics at a larger scale and holds the potential to include aspects of environmental politics in its study as well. In “Planet Politics: A Manifesto from the End of IR ” (2016), it expands on the idea that IR needs to further reflect the reality of the earth’s current status.<sup>51</sup> While the present study of

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<sup>48</sup> Nerlich, “Climategate.”

<sup>49</sup> Dalby, “Environmental Geopolitics in the Twenty-First Century.”

<sup>50</sup> Frank Biermann, “The Anthropocene: A Governance Perspective,” *The Anthropocene Review* 1, no. 1 (2014): 57–61.

<sup>51</sup> Burke et al.

International Relations can provide one with political answers on how to achieve social change, it is too focused on concepts such as state security and authority that it does not cover enough about the fact the climate change will be the one that strikes tragedy upon us all. By providing a more planetary view in IR, however, it holds the potential to reduce the risks of climate change by expanding the way it sees the world, “a way that is entangled and plural with more than just *homo sapiens*”.<sup>52</sup> Humans are not the only ones that will be affected by climate change as it also alters the ways other animal and plant species live as well.

One instance in which International Relations could use this more environmentally-friendly framework is by studying topics that traditional scholars never sought to look at such as the extinction of the entire earth’s population. While the IR field looks heavily at the idea of survival of nations and the citizens within them, there is currently no framework on mass extinction. As it is a taboo topic due to its severity and harsh reality, scholars have avoided studying the topic.<sup>53</sup> However, if the field of IR wants to remain relevant and useful to those in society it must break the norms established within its study and engage with ideas it has never looked at before. Unfortunately, with the growing persistence of climate change and the little effort done on addressing it, mass extinction is now a possibility in the future which is why International Relations needs to start considering it more seriously to provide a solution before this problem becomes our reality.<sup>54</sup> By pushing the traditional boundaries of IR such as by looking at different actors and situations dealing with the environment, it could enhance the creativity in the field to find new innovative and efficient solutions to unprecedented issues such as climate change.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 513.

<sup>53</sup> Audra Mitchell, “Is IR Going Extinct?” *European Journal of International Relations* 23, no. 1 (March 2017): 3–25, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066116632853>.

<sup>54</sup> Claire Colebrook, *Death of the Posthuman: Essays on Extinction Vol. I* (Ann Arbor, MI, USA: Open Humanities Press, 2014).

As the concept of Planet Politics and merging the ideas of environmental politics with International Relations is fairly new, there is a lot of skepticism that surrounds these ideas. In one critique against Planet Politics, scholars pointed out that one cannot simply break away from the traditional framework of International Relations and that the effort in trying to do so is futile.<sup>55</sup> Instead of placing all of one's efforts into changing one academic discipline, that effort should be placed into changing society itself. If one wants to improve the state of the earth, "we need a concerted assault on the systematic practices, institutions and imperatives of dominatory power which have contributed to a condition of crisis."<sup>56</sup> However, those in support of Planet Politics and the emergence of this new perspective in IR state that it is important that this field of study undergoes a transformation. By merging the ideas of environmental politics with IR, it changes the way in which the world system is currently perceived as it is currently too sociocentric. If IR were to adopt more of an environmental perspective more research could be done beyond just human behavior and towards the populace at large such as by looking at other species and climate processes.<sup>57</sup> While it is important that we hold the higher institutions who caused the earth's temperature to rise accountable, it is also critical to change the way we study IR and environmental issues to further increase the way it could be researched to find new solutions to repair the problem.

Overall, while International Relations is evolving as a field of study and holds strong foundational approaches such as constructivism, there are still improvements that could be made to make IR more applicable to the current problem of climate change. By further drawing onto the ideas of the critical studies approach, IR needs to realize that this is an issue of global ethics as it

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<sup>55</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (Lawrence and Wishart, 1978).

<sup>56</sup> David Chandler, Erika Cudworth, and Stephen Hobden, "Anthropocene, Capitalocene and Liberal Cosmopolitan IR: A Response to Burke et Al.'s 'Planet Politics,'" *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 46, no. 2 (January 2018): 207, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305829817715247>.

<sup>57</sup> Fishel et al., "Defending Planet Politics."



is not only humans involved but also the entire ecosystem.<sup>58</sup> If International Relations scholars want to keep IR from going extinct, along with the entire population of the Earth, they need to start updating the field with relevant studies that go beyond the traditional foundations of the field.

In chapter 2, I will present the details of my case study along with the methodological approach of my research to provide an example of how the field of IR can merge its ideas with that of environmental politics. I will need to utilize all three frameworks in order to conduct my study as I will need the constructivist lens to conduct my discourse analysis, and then I will need the concept of environmental politics to engage with the meaning/implications of the metaphors which Obama and Trump use to frame climate change when discussing the U.S. membership in the Paris Agreement. Through my findings, I hope to display the nationalist sentiment both Obama and Trump have when using these metaphors to define climate change and present the paradox in their state-centric approach as they are speaking about an agreement which is supposed to encourage international cooperation.

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<sup>58</sup> Burke et al., “Planet Politics.”

## Chapter 2- The Paris Climate Agreement and the Research Methodology

In this chapter, I will first provide the necessary background information on my case study concerning the Paris Climate Agreement and afterward, I will go over my research methodology that I conducted for my research. As previously mentioned in the last section, metaphors are a powerful rhetorical device that can help politicians frame their argument to be more persuasive to their audience members. While conceptual metaphors are advantageous in helping one understand an unfamiliar topic, one must acknowledge the fact that this figurative speech only highlights what the speaker wants the audience to know which then excludes certain details pertaining to the topic that might be of importance.<sup>59</sup> In this case, I will be demonstrating how U.S. presidents Obama and Trump use metaphors to overlook the scientific data of climate change when discussing the Paris Climate Agreement. Based on the ideas of environmental politics, I will argue that it is not only the field of International Relations that needs to be less sociocentric but also the discourse of the politicians on climate change. When comparing the speech acts of Obama to that of Trump, it is obvious that unlike Obama, Trump does not truly believe that the threats of global warming are severe. However, even if this is the case, it is still important to look the ways both presidents construct the concept of climate change, as it directly affects the future of this movement as both presidents hold high influential power in their country's politics.

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<sup>59</sup> Semino, *Metaphor in Discourse*; Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*.

## 2.1 An Overview of the Paris Agreement

On September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2016, the U.S. formally entered as a signatory in the Paris Agreement, also referred to as the Paris Climate Accord, which later went into force on November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2016.<sup>60</sup> Created by the UNFCCC, the international agreement deals with environmental topics pertaining to greenhouse-gas-emissions such as its mitigation, finance, and adaptation.<sup>61</sup> As the most prominent legislation on climate change, the main priority of the Climate Accord is to keep the global average temperature of the earth below 2°C and to limit its increase to 1.5°C. By maintaining the earth's temperature and preventing it from further increasing would decrease the effects and risks of climate change.<sup>62</sup> With a large number of participants in the Paris Agreement, this ambitious goal can be achieved if each country member actively partakes its aim. There are currently 197 UNFCCC parties including, the European Union, who have either entered the agreement as a signatory or have ratified the legislation.<sup>63</sup> While President Trump might have announced that the U.S. is withdrawing from the Paris Climate Accord, the U.S. is still technically apart of the agreement. According to Article 28 of the agreement, members cannot fully leave the Paris Accord until the agreement has been enforced for 3 years within the country so the U.S. submission to the United Nations to leave will not be effective until November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2019 the earliest.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Barack Obama, Barack Obama, "President Obama: The United States Formally Enters the Paris Agreement," whitehouse.gov, September 3, 2016, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2016/09/03/president-obama-united-states-formally-enters-paris-agreement>.

<sup>61</sup> "The Paris Agreement | UNFCCC," accessed March 26, 2019, <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement>.

<sup>62</sup> "What Is the Paris Agreement? | UNFCCC," accessed April 1, 2019, <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/what-is-the-paris-agreement>.

<sup>63</sup> "Paris Agreement." "United Nations Treaty Collection. August 21, 2016, [https://web.archive.org/web/20160821185911/https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg\\_no=XXVII-7-d&chapter=27&clang=\\_en](https://web.archive.org/web/20160821185911/https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=XXVII-7-d&chapter=27&clang=_en).

<sup>64</sup> "Reference: C.N.464.2017.TREATIES-XXVII.7.d (Depositary Notification)" (United Nations, August 8, 2017).

While the Paris Climate Accord is the largest international legislation combatting climate change, there is a lot of disputes about the structure of the agreement. The first prominent concern with the Paris Agreement deals with its enforcement. As the Accord is primarily a tool used to mitigate climate change, there are no mechanisms that exist within the legislation that ensures that all participants are following through with their said promises and plans on lowering their carbon emission use.<sup>65</sup> With the lack of higher authority in the Paris Agreement, it solely relies on the trust of its party members. Another concern about the Climate Accord is its main feature of nationally determined contributions (NDCs). Through NDCs it provides more flexibility to the structure of the Paris Agreement. This feature allows for participating nations to decide on their own what plans they should implement in 2020 to reduce its greenhouse emissions.<sup>66</sup> NDCs are the heart of the Paris Agreement and with it, countries should continue to set their targets higher than their previous ones in order to decrease their emissions more and more annually. As party members are allowed to create any type of environmental plan for their country as they please, their global responsibility is self-imposed rather than imposed by a higher regime. Through this feature, it allows for its participants to fight climate change in a manner that they are comfortable with without having to worry about any financial burdens they might face and also offers less discrimination towards developing and developed countries.<sup>67</sup> However, the main debate about NDCs is that it is a systematic risk to the Paris Agreement. By providing more freedoms to the parties to decide their environmental plans, it fails to endorse adequate transparency between the participant and other members of the UNFCCC. As there is also no enforcement mechanism in the

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<sup>65</sup> Meinhard Doelle, "Assessment of Strengths and Weaknesses," in *The Paris Agreement on Climate Change: Analysis and Commentary* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2017), 375–88.

<sup>66</sup> Marie-Claire Cordonier Segger, "Advancing the Paris Agreement on Climate Change for Sustainable Development," n.d., 37.

<sup>67</sup> "The Paris Agreement | UNFCCC."

Climate Accord, it also lacks the means of implementation as there is no punishment received to a nation if they do not reach their set NDCs.<sup>68</sup>

While the Paris Agreement calls for environmental change and creates a sense of urgency towards climate change, it is not the perfect piece of legislation that will direct climate change to its ultimate demise, which leads to why the U.S. chose to leave the Accord. If it was not for the efforts made by President Obama, the Paris Agreement may have never been born. It was through his actions and motivations to better the environment which made the U.S. one of the key players in the UN climate negotiations.<sup>69</sup> However, after his presidential term, the U.S. involvement in the Paris Climate Accord took a sharp turn as President Trump decided that the U.S. will withdraw from the agreement. Making claims on his Twitter account as such, “the concept of global warming was created by and for the Chinese in order to make U.S. manufacturing non-competitive,” President Trump saw climate change as a hoax to undermine the U.S. economy.<sup>70</sup> While unlike other international environmental agreements, such as the Kyoto Protocol, the Paris Agreement lessens the responsibilities of developing nations with its feature of NDCs which caused Trump to contest that this agreement would then give more advantages to nations such as China and India than the U.S. If one were to look at the actual outline of the agreement, however, nowhere in the international treaty does it state that additional fees would be placed on the U.S.<sup>71</sup> It is also interesting to note, however, that all 22 Republican senators who strongly insisted to Trump that he should leave the Accord have each received campaign contributions from fossil-fuel

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<sup>68</sup> Makomere and Liti Mbeva, “Squaring the Circle.”

<sup>69</sup> Parker and Karlsson, “The UN Climate Change Negotiations and the Role of the United States.”

<sup>70</sup> Donald J. Trump, “The Concept of Global Warming Was Created by and for the Chinese in Order to Make U.S. Manufacturing Non-Competitive,” Tweet, @realdonaldtrump (blog), November 6, 2012, <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/265895292191248385?lang=en>.

<sup>71</sup> Andrew Howard, “Voluntary Cooperation,” in *The Paris Agreement on Climate Change: Analysis and Commentary* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2017).

companies, making it questionable for the true reason why Trump pulled the U.S. out of the international agreement.<sup>72</sup>

While many see the U.S. withdrawing from the agreement as a great loss for fighting against climate change, some see this as an opportunity for other global powers to improve their own environmental policy as such emerging economies like China and India. With the lack of U.S. engagement, countries now have a chance to involve themselves and utilize more resources to combat global warming while simultaneously improving their own economy.<sup>73</sup> While the U.S. government no longer involves themselves in climate issues, other U.S. entities such as states, businesses, cities, NGOs, and even individuals have promised to stand by the Paris Agreement. The global climate governance has never had such a diverse set of participants.<sup>74</sup> While the history between the U.S. and the Paris Accord is complicated, it demonstrates how the one in power holds ultimate authority to how climate change is framed. By conducting a discourse analysis on the speeches both Obama and Trump used to convey the Paris Agreement will further establish how they view climate change in a state-centric manner.

## ***2.2 The Methodological Approach***

As the main priority of my thesis is analyzing how climate change is framed by U.S. presidents Obama and Trump and its consequences, my central research questions are what classifications of conceptual metaphors have U.S. presidents used when constructing the U.S.

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<sup>72</sup> “22 GOP Senators Want US to Pull Out of Paris Climate Accord - The New York Times,” June 3, 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/20170603183319/https://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2017/05/25/us/politics/ap-us-united-states-climate-change.html>.

<sup>73</sup> Zhang et al., “The Withdrawal of the U.S. from the Paris Agreement and Its Impact on Global Climate Change Governance.”

<sup>74</sup> Johannes Urpelainen and Thijs Van de Graaf, “United States Non-Cooperation and the Paris Agreement,” *Climate Policy* 18, no. 7 (August 9, 2018): 839–51, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14693062.2017.1406843>.

position towards climate change and the Paris Agreement? And what are the effects of such metaphors towards the climate change movement and the field of International Relations overall?

Drawing from the ideas of conceptual metaphors from cognitive linguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, I will be detecting for these types of conceptual metaphors used in the presidential discourse of Obama and Trump when shaping the meaning of climate change.<sup>75</sup> Highly based off of Paris' work on metaphor wars, which looks at metaphors in two different levels: the first being the relevancy of the metaphor and the second being the actual connotations being implied from the metaphor. When considering both of these levels, I will use a similar methodological approach when looking for the patterns of metaphors used when discussing foreign policy and whether the connotations of these metaphors used by both presidents align with one another.<sup>76</sup>

In order to attain my data, I will be utilizing the Lexis- Nexis Academic Universe database as well as the White House database to collect presidential statements from both President Obama and Trump. Such statements will include speeches, press conferences, as well as tweets from both presidents' personal twitter account. These speech acts will be collected from 2009 to 2019 as this timeframe includes the entirety of Obama's presidential term as well as President Trump's current term. In order to limit the scope of my data, I will only look at the statements both Obama and Trump haven spoken during their presidency. As I am looking at statements made directly by both U.S. presidents, I will mainly be using primary sources when looking for the metaphors they use to describe climate change and the Paris Accord. Unfortunately, as the topic of metaphors used in

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<sup>75</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*; George Lakoff, *Metaphor and the War: The Metaphor System Used to Justify War in the Gulf* (Amsterdam, The Netherlands: John Benjamins, 1992).

<sup>76</sup> Paris, "Kosovo and the Metaphor War."

U.S. presidential discourse about the environment has not been widely studied, there will be a limited number of secondary sources utilized in my research.

Similar to how Paris analyzed the metaphors that appeared in executive and congressional statements dealing with the conflict in Kosovo in the '90s, once I have attained all the statements dealing with the Paris Agreement or climate change, I will categorize each applicable statement into different classifications of conceptual metaphors.<sup>77</sup> To find and categorize these metaphors I will look for trigger phrases that shape the way one thinks about climate change. For instance, when President Trump claimed that the Paris Accord “*tied up*” the U.S., this trigger phrase would fall into the conceptual metaphor that Paris Agreement and climate change is a restricting the economic prosperity of the U.S.<sup>78</sup> When writing up my results I will format my findings in the same manner which Lakoff and Johnson do as I will capitalize the conceptual metaphors found in each presidents’ discourse and then I will italicize the trigger words and phrases associated with that particular metaphor. By comparing the types of metaphors Obama and Trump use to present their stance on the Paris Climate Accord, and climate change in general, I hope to demonstrate the effects and consequences that occur when shaping its narrative.

It is important that a discourse analysis is done on the presidential speeches about the Paris Agreement and the metaphors that have appeared in these statements as this type of research supports the idea that discourse holds vital importance when establishing social life.<sup>79</sup> The Paris Accord is a symbolic agreement that promotes international cooperation towards fighting climate change. By using metaphors to shape their position on the Accord, President Obama and Trump frame the way in which climate change should be perceived. As they both hold the highest

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Donald J. Trump. “Statement by President Trump on the Paris Climate Accord.”

<sup>79</sup> Rosalind Gill, *Discourse Analysis* (London, England: SAGE Publications, 2000).



authority as president of the U.S., they hold the most influence on how to define climate change. As leaders of the free world, it is critical to analyze the metaphors they use when shaping climate change as it could alter not only the entire social construction of climate change but it also entire future of the climate change movement.

## Chapter 3- Giving Meaning to Climate Change

Throughout Chapter 3, I will be describing the different metaphors President Obama and President Trump used to frame the concept of climate change. After reading through various presidential speeches and social media posts pertaining to their stance on the Paris Agreement, I found some reoccurring patterns in the types of conceptual metaphors both Presidents used when defining climate change. What was particularly interesting was the way in which both Presidents connected the Paris Climate Accord to the current state of climate change. While President Obama outrightly stated that the Paris Agreement's main priority was to combat climate change, not once did President Trump use the actual term climate change when discussing the Accord even though the entire Accord is only about that. From these statements, I have outlined two of the most prominent types of conceptual metaphors President Obama and President Trump used which will each be discussed individually throughout the first two sections of this chapter. It is important to first look at the different metaphors both presidents use as it will demonstrate how one concept can be framed in a multitude of ways. The different metaphors that derive from explaining one concept then draw on Paris' first level of the metaphor war dealing with the relevancy of the metaphors being applied to the concept.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Paris, "Kosovo and the Metaphor War."

3.1 Climate Change is a Highway

Figure 1:  
The Different Conceptual Metaphors and the Associated Trigger Phrases of Obama and Trump

OBAMA’S CLIMATE CHANGE IS A HIGHWAY	TRUMP’S CLIMATE CHANGE IS A ROBBERY
<i>“paves the way,” “on a course,” “accelerate,” “crossed,” “dodge,” “bridge,” “progress to pave,” “pave the way,” “trends are going,” “pace,” “long and sometimes difficult,” “cannot resist this transition, we must lead it”</i>	<i>“absorb the cost,” “draconian financial and economic burdens,” “very unfair, at the highest level,” “transfer those jobs out of America and the United States, and ships them to foreign countries,” “reserves under lock and key,” “taking away the great wealth of our nation,” “they took the money,” “greatest job theft in history,” “stolen away,” “pay large sums of money,” “it raises the price”</i>

As mentioned earlier in Chapter 1, a conceptual metaphor is “understanding and experiencing one kind of things or experience in terms of another.”<sup>81</sup> Similar to how Lakoff and Johnson broke down the conceptual metaphor of TIME IS MONEY, I will be breaking down the conceptual metaphors that President Obama and President Trump use when describing climate change in a similar manner. For the first section of this chapter, I will first be looking at the

<sup>81</sup> George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, “Conceptual Metaphor in Everyday Language,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 77, no. 8 (August 1980): 453, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2025464>.

metaphor CLIMATE CHANGE IS A HIGHWAY. While President Obama, never explicitly states that CLIMATE CHANGE IS A HIGHWAY, this statement can be inferred through the terms which he uses when discussing climate change and the Paris Agreement. As one can see from Figure 1, it shows both of the main conceptual metaphors I found in both of the presidents' discourse and the trigger phrases and terms related to them. On the column on the left, one can see that the trigger phrases and words that Obama use are all terms associated with highways. Thus, President Obama relates to climate change as a highway to further persuade his domestic audience to take action on preventing the risks of climate change from increasing.

At the COP21, otherwise known as the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference, President Obama made such remarks as “[h]ere, in Paris, let’s secure an agreement that builds in ambition, where progress *paves the way* for regularly updated targets.”<sup>82</sup> Throughout his discussion of the Paris Agreement and climate change, he frames these concepts using terms that are typically used with cars and roads. For instance in another statement his made during his announcement that the U.S. will formally join the Paris Agreement, he states “I said before the world that we needed a strong global agreement to accomplish this goal--- an enduring agreement that reduces global carbon pollution and sets the world on a *course* to a low-carbon future.”<sup>83</sup> By referencing the Accord and climate change as a road or highway, he perceives these issue as a journey in which the U.S. must take in order to further prevent the risks of global warming. In order to “*accelerate* the transition away from old, dirtier energy sources,” Obama urges that the U.S. must follow the guidelines set by the Paris Agreement and convert to clean sustainable energy

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<sup>82</sup> Barack Obama, “Remarks by President Obama at the First Session of COP21,” whitehouse.gov, November 30, 2015, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/11/30/remarks-president-obama-first-session-cop21>.

<sup>83</sup> Obama, “President Obama.”

rather than that of coal or fossil fuels.<sup>84</sup> As the future of the U.S. depends on how the U.S. shapes its actions now, Obama frames climate change as a road one must follow and overcome the obstacles that lie ahead on it.<sup>85</sup>

Through his political discourse of relating climate change to a highway, President Obama urges the U.S. to further provide support to the Paris Agreement as it will allow for the U.S. to “officially *cross* the threshold,” and take action upon combatting global warming.<sup>86</sup> Through the construction of this metaphor, it demonstrates how conceptual metaphors, in general, can create inferences on attitudes and beliefs on certain concepts.<sup>87</sup> As Obama closely relates climate change to a highway, he believes that fighting it will be an enduring long process. However, through the symbolic power of the Paris Agreement which brings nations together to promote international cooperation in lowering global carbon emissions, it will help the road ahead move a little quicker towards its end destination of a cleaner earth.<sup>88</sup> One can then assume that as CLIMATE CHANGE IS A HIGHWAY, Obama constructs climate change as something that is a process but is manageable as long as the U.S. follows the right path in tackling the issue. This metaphor then affects the way his audience, mainly domestic, perceives global warming. By framing climate change as a highway, the U.S. must embark on this movement together. In Obama’s point of view, he sees Americans as a vehicle who must take the wheel and drive towards a better future.

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<sup>84</sup> Barack Obama, “2016 State of the Union,” [whitehouse.gov](https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sotu), December 1, 2015, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sotu>.

<sup>85</sup> Obama, “President Obama: The United States Formally Enters the Paris Agreement.”

<sup>86</sup> Obama, “President Obama: The United States Formally Enters the Paris Agreement.”.

<sup>87</sup> Matthew S. McGlone, “What Is the Explanatory Value of a Conceptual Metaphor?,” *Language & Communication* 27, no. 2 (April 2007): 109–26, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langcom.2006.02.016>.

<sup>88</sup> Doelle, “Assessment of Strengths and Weaknesses.”

Overall this metaphor portrays Obama's optimism in the climate change movement as he still has hope in the U.S. to take the opportunity to reroute climate change. While this metaphor motivates those to take action, it only focuses on the perspective of U.S. citizens, not on the international community or the species that are also affected by the ecosystem. Political environment scholars would then criticize the use of this metaphor for its lack of inclusivity, which I further provide detail at the end of this chapter.<sup>89</sup>

### **3.2 Climate Change is a Robbery**

As the metaphor CLIMATE CHANGE IS A HIGHWAY, is used to portray Obama's positive stance on the Paris Agreement, this metaphor does not show up in Trump's rhetoric when discussing climate change and the Paris Climate Accord. Instead, one of the main trigger words and phrases that appeared throughout his discourse dealt with the metaphor CLIMATE CHANGE IS A ROBBERY. As he is constantly emphasizing "America first," he is appealing toward his domestic audience by claiming to make rational decisions that are most advantageous for them, and for him, the Paris Accord does not fall into this category. Before and after the ascendance of his presidency, Trump has either spoken about climate change in a manner which shows that he does not believe that it an urgent manner or has not mentioned about the topic at all in his presidential speeches.<sup>90</sup> By framing the Paris Agreement as a scam against the U.S., it displays his belief that the idea of climate change is also related to this hoax thus continuously presenting CLIMATE CHANGE IS A ROBBERY in his discourse.

During his announcement that he would be withdrawing the U.S. from the Paris Climate Accord, Trump stated that the agreement was "very unfair, at the highest level," as it placed more

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<sup>89</sup> Burke et al., "Planet Politics."

<sup>90</sup> Douglas Kellner, "Brexit Plus, Whitelash, and the Ascendency of Donald J. Trump," *Cultural Politics* 13, no. 2 (July 2017): 135–49, <https://doi.org/10.1215/17432197-4129089>.

favor in developing countries such as India and China.<sup>91</sup> However, as mentioned earlier in Chapter 2, the agreement is not more advantageous to these countries as the conditions are self-imposed by the country and places no further financial burdens on the U.S.<sup>92</sup> Making claims such as the Accord would have American “jobs *stolen away* and *shipped far away* to other countries,” and “*raises the price* of energy,” this international agreement is a costly expense towards the U.S. economy.<sup>93</sup> If the U.S. were to continue being a part of the Paris Agreement it would be “*taking away* the great wealth of our nation”.<sup>94</sup> By shaping the idea that the Paris Agreement is an economical burden towards the U.S. as it provides no benefits to the nation, Trump is also framing climate change in a similar manner as he believes that the U.S. rather spend its energy on building up its economy.<sup>95</sup>

As Trump’s metaphors CLIMATE CHANGE IS A ROBBERY contrast with Obama’s metaphors on climate change, it impacts the way in which the American citizens view climate change. For instance, in a study done on his Twitter, it found that his Tweets about the environment always increased the about of overall Tweets about environmental issues that day. While his Tweets dealing with the environment stimulates public discussion on the topic, the way in which he changes the framing of climate change is making more difficult for those to find consensus on

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<sup>91</sup> Donald J. Trump. “Statement by President Trump on the Paris Climate Accord.”

<sup>92</sup> “Paris Agreement.”

<sup>93</sup> Trump, “Remarks by President Trump at Make America Great Again Rally in Harrisburg, PA”; Donald J. Trump, “I Am Glad That My Friend @EmmanuelMacron and the Protestors in Paris Have Agreed with the Conclusion I Reached Two Years Ago. The Paris Agreement Is Fatally Flawed Because It Raises the Price of Energy for Responsible Countries While Whitewashing Some of the Worst Polluters....,” Tweet, @realDonaldTrump (blog), December 4, 2018, [https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1070089365995642881?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweet%7Ctwterm%5E1070089365995642881&ref\\_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.france24.com%2Fen%2F20181209-france-yellow-vests-erdogan-trump-protest-tax-macron-climate-change](https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1070089365995642881?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweet%7Ctwterm%5E1070089365995642881&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.france24.com%2Fen%2F20181209-france-yellow-vests-erdogan-trump-protest-tax-macron-climate-change).

<sup>94</sup> Donald J. Trump. “Statement by President Trump on the Paris Climate Accord.”

<sup>95</sup> Donald J. Trump. Ibid.

the topic.<sup>96</sup> As his claims towards the Paris Agreement are not entirely factual, such as by stating CLIMATE CHANGE IS A ROBBERY, this is dangerous towards the climate change movement as his supporters are believing in something that is not scientifically evidence-based.<sup>97</sup> Through this example of Trump's metaphor usage, one could argue that in order to better address the growing risk of climate change one must find the balance between political statements and scientific-based facts.<sup>98</sup> Through this type of discourse, it will differentiate one's opinion from the actual reality of the situation.

### **3.3 Climate Change is Transformative**

While there was plenty of other conceptual metaphors which President Obama and President Trump utilized in their discourse towards the Paris Climate Accord, these two contrasting metaphors were the ones that appeared most in throughout their speech acts. Both metaphors overall best summarized both president's stances on the agreement and presented the way in which both would frame the concept of climate change no matter the metaphor they choose to use. In President Obama's case, he related climate change to a highway to portray it as a self-empowering journey which the U.S. must embrace in order to improve itself.<sup>99</sup> President Trump, however, shaped the concept of climate change much differently as he portrayed it as a scam. By claiming the Paris Agreement would only provide "*draconian financial and economic burdens*"

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<sup>96</sup> Sojung Claire Kim and Sandra L. Cooke, "Environmental Framing on Twitter: Impact of Trump's Paris Agreement Withdrawal on Climate Change and Ocean Acidification Dialogue," ed. Ioannis N Daliakopoulos, *Cogent Environmental Science* 4, no. 1 (October 22, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311843.2018.1532375>.

<sup>97</sup> Jonathan M. Samet, Thomas A. Burke, and Bernard D. Goldstein, "The Trump Administration and the Environment — Heed the Science," ed. Debra Malina, *New England Journal of Medicine* 376, no. 12 (March 23, 2017): 1182–88, <https://doi.org/10.1056/NEJMms1615242>.

<sup>98</sup> Litfin, *Ozone Discourses: Science and Politics in Global Environmental Cooperation*.

<sup>99</sup> Obama, "President Obama: The United States Formally Enters the Paris Agreement"; Obama, "Remarks by President Obama at the First Session of COP21."



in the U.S., he assumes that the Accord is used as an instrument produced by other nations to ruin the U.S. economy.<sup>100</sup>

With these two strikingly contrasting views towards the Paris Climate Agreement and climate change, it makes it difficult for the public to determine which of these perspectives holds the truth. According to Lakoff and Johnson, the “theory of truth is dependent on understanding: a sentence is true in a situation when our understanding of the sentence fits our understanding of the situation.”<sup>101</sup> As truth is relative, it is up to the public to decide which stance to take on the climate change movement based upon their own judgment and knowledge of the situation. However, in order to provide more information on the topic, it requires that the public is not only aware of the political effects on the Paris Agreement and climate change but also the scientific evidence behind it.<sup>102</sup> By offering the public all the concrete facts about the situation and the reasoning behind it, it gives the public an opportunity to make a fair judgment based on their opinions and values as they are given all the tools needed to do so. While metaphors are useful rhetorical devices in helping one better understand a concept by relating it to another, metaphors are biased as it only narrows down on one piece of the concept rather than giving the complete view of it as it lacks in factual truth.<sup>103</sup>

With lack of science involved in the presidential rhetoric towards the Paris Accord, and instead replaced with rhetoric emphasizing the well-being of the U.S., some scholars would argue that U.S. citizens cannot reasonably decide their stance on climate change as they do not have

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<sup>100</sup> Trump, “Remarks by the President on the Paris Agreement.”

<sup>101</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, “Conceptual Metaphor in Everyday Language.”

<sup>102</sup> Samet, Burke, and Goldstein, “The Trump Administration and the Environment — Heed the Science.”

<sup>103</sup> McGlone, “What Is the Explanatory Value of a Conceptual Metaphor?”

enough information to do so.<sup>104</sup> Furthermore, by drawing on this idea, it is not only presidential discourse in need of expansion towards science but also the field of International Relations as it shapes the way in which we think. Climate change is not only a political matter but also one of science, which is why these two fields must work together in order to find a solution to this growing problem.<sup>105</sup>

While at first it may look like President Obama is the only one who stresses the importance of climate change in his discourse, it is also critical to note that while President Trump dismisses climate change as a security issue it is still a significant topic as he makes the effort to still talk about it rather than just choosing to ignore it. Even months after his announcement that the U.S. will leave Paris Climate Accord, the international agreement is still being tweeted about on his Twitter account.<sup>106</sup> Whether or not one supports that the U.S. should participate in the Paris Agreement to combat climate change, it is a prominent political topic in today's society and perhaps it is also time for the field of International Relations to also study this topic more seriously.<sup>107</sup> Perhaps Obama's metaphor for climate change is more applicable than as climate change is not only a transformative journey for U.S. politics or economics but also the field of International Relations itself.

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<sup>104</sup> Kim and Cooke, "Environmental Framing on Twitter."

<sup>105</sup> Dalby, "Environmental Geopolitics in the Twenty-First Century."

<sup>106</sup> Donald J. Trump, "The Paris Agreement Isn't Working out so Well for Paris. Protests and Riots All over France. People Do Not Want to Pay Large Sums of Money, Much to Third World Countries (That Are Questionably Run), in Order to Maybe Protect the Environment. Chanting 'We Want Trump!' Love France.," Tweet, @realDonaldTrump (blog), December 8, 2018, [https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1071382401954267136?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1071382401954267136&ref\\_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.vox.com%2F2018%2F12%2F8%2F18131757%2Ftrump-france-riots-paris-agreement](https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1071382401954267136?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1071382401954267136&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.vox.com%2F2018%2F12%2F8%2F18131757%2Ftrump-france-riots-paris-agreement).

<sup>107</sup> Fishel et al., "Defending Planet Politics."

## Chapter 4- The War on Climate Change

In this final chapter of my thesis, I will be comparing and contrasting the conceptual metaphor of war which both President Obama and President Trump use in their discourse when discussing the Paris Climate Agreement. Unlike the other metaphors mentioned in Chapter 3, the metaphor CLIMATE CHANGE IS A WAR is used by both presidents and is the most repeated conceptual metaphor to appear in both of their speech acts. Through the analysis of this metaphor, one will be able to identify how both President Obama and Trump construct the Paris Agreement as a security issue. According to David Campbell, “nothing is a risk in itself; there is no risk in reality [...] danger is an effect of interpretation [...] danger bears no essential, necessary, or unproblematic relation to the action or event which it is said to derive.”<sup>108</sup> As threats are a social construct created by members of society, throughout this chapter it will look at ways which Obama and Trump frame the concept climate change and shape it into a threat through the usage of war metaphors.

As this chapter will further discuss how the differences in which Obama and Trump use this type of conceptual metaphor, it will draw on the ideas of Paris’s second level of war metaphors that highlights the dispute between the multiple conflicted connotations that arise in a metaphor and which one holds the clearest interpretation.<sup>109</sup> While there may be different connotations in the metaphor CLIMATE CHANGE IS A WAR in both of the presidents’ discourses, this metaphor overall demonstrates the fact that both leaders focus too much on their statehood rather than stressing the main mission of the Paris Agreement which is to promote international cooperation

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<sup>108</sup> David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1992): 1-2.

<sup>109</sup> Paris, “Kosovo and the Metaphor War.”

towards combatting climate change.<sup>110</sup> After analyzing the war metaphors between Obama and Trump, the end of this chapter will conclude on how these findings could also be applied in International Relations.

#### 4.1 Obama's War on U.S. Public Interest

**Figure 2:**

The Associated Trigger Phrases of Obama's and Trump's War Metaphor

OBAMA'S CLIMATE CHANGE IS A WAR	TRUMP'S CLIMATE CHANGE IS A WAR
<i>"Protect our planet," "play by the rules," "poses a greater threat to future generations than climate change," "poses immediate risks to our national security," "to combat climate change," "to protect the one planet we've got," "confront a threat," "sit on the sidelines," "a powerful signal," "important mission," "urgent challenges," "dispute," "entrenched," "our security," "political hot air," "act of defiance," "marshalling," "one of the enemies that we will be fighting," "deploy," "let's send that signal," "fight to protect our planet," "role to play in combatting climate change," "best possible shot," "respond to the threat"</i>	<i>"fighting," "my solemn duty to protect," "effectively blocks," "risk of brownouts and blackouts," "tied up and bound down," "raided," "terminated," "highest obligation and greatest honor to protect," "serious obstacles," "removed the shackles," "war on beautiful, clean coal," "level playing field," "punishes," "self-inflicted major economic wound," "a level playing field against other nations"</i>

<sup>110</sup> United Nations Climate Change, "What Is the Paris Agreement? | UNFCCC."

Throughout all of President Obama's speech acts speaking about the Paris Climate Agreement and climate change, he has reiterated the idea that the U.S. must "*fight to protect* our planet."<sup>111</sup> In order to "*respond to the threat*" of climate change, Obama urges the American public to follow his lead and support the U.S. membership in the Paris Agreement.<sup>112</sup> With the large of influence the U.S. holds in the international system, the U.S. participating the Climate Accord would send "*a powerful signal*" to other nations to also join the fight against climate rather than simply "*sit[ting] on the sidelines.*"<sup>113</sup> As seen in Figure 2, by utilizing trigger phrases relating to the idea of war, Obama uses the conceptual metaphor of CLIMATE CHANGE IS A WAR to demonstrate the need for the U.S. to take action and to reduce the growing threats of climate change. While at first President Obama's statements on the Paris Agreement may seem like it is appealing to the idea of international collaboration in combatting climate change, if one were to take a closer look at his speeches he is actually using these war metaphors to emphasize how fighting global warming would be advantageous for the U.S. economy and national security. One instance of this can be seen in his 2015 State of the Union speech where he first introduces the idea of the Paris Agreement, "[t]he Pentagon says that climate change poses immediate risks to our *national security* [...] [w]e should act like it."<sup>114</sup> Another instance in which he highlights economic promise through combatting climate change is when he states that the Paris Agreement

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<sup>111</sup> Obama, "President Obama."

<sup>112</sup> Barack Obama, "Inaugural Address by President Barack Obama," [whitehouse.gov](https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/01/21/inaugural-address-president-barack-obama), January 21, 2013, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/01/21/inaugural-address-president-barack-obama>.

<sup>113</sup> Barack Obama, "Statement by the President on the Paris Climate Agreement," [whitehouse.gov](https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/12/12/statement-president-paris-climate-agreement), December 12, 2015, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/12/12/statement-president-paris-climate-agreement>.

<sup>114</sup> Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President in State of the Union Address | January 20, 2015," [whitehouse.gov](https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/01/20/remarks-president-state-union-address-January-20-2015), January 20, 2015, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/01/20/remarks-president-state-union-address-January-20-2015>.

would allow “scientists and engineers and entrepreneurs to *deploy* clean energy technology and the new job and new opportunities that they [would] create.”<sup>115</sup>

By utilizing war metaphors Obama is trying to persuade his domestic audience that the Paris Agreement is overall good for the nation as through it the U.S. could join the battle on climate change which would then open opportunities to economic prosperity through new innovations on clean energy.<sup>116</sup> However, this type of framing which solely focuses on the statehood of the U.S. is detrimental to the climate change movement. By only emphasizing the how the U.S. would benefit from fighting global warming, Obama fails to widen the scope of climate change by not stressing on the aspect that it is in human morals and values to protect the environment in which they live in.<sup>117</sup> By making it out as an economic and security opportunity for the U.S. to fight climate change as it would provide the nation with benefits, it only gives a short-term reason for why the U.S. should join the movement. If one really wants to see results on reducing the threats of global warming, the U.S. needs to stop thinking only for themselves but rather start thinking about the entire international population who will be affected.<sup>118</sup> As it was stressed in the IPCC’s latest report, the most effective way of reducing the Earth’s temperature is through international cooperation.<sup>119</sup> The U.S. current motivations for combatting climate change is not strong enough to actually make a change as their values are too nationalistic, to make an environmental impact they must reshape their identity to one that appeals to environmental ethics which would account for all of Earth’s inhabitants.

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<sup>115</sup> Obama, “Remarks by President Obama at the First Session of COP21.”

<sup>116</sup> Obama, “President Obama: The United States Formally Enters the Paris Agreement.”

<sup>117</sup> Brett Bricker, “Salience Over Sustainability: Environmental Rhetoric of President Barack Obama,” *Argumentation and Advocacy* 48, no. 3 (January 2012): 159–73, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00028533.2012.11821761>.

<sup>118</sup> Burke et al., “Planet Politics.”

<sup>119</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Global Warming of 1.5°C*.

## 4.2 Trump's War on Other Nations

While President Obama frames climate change as a war, President Trump follows suit but instead declares that the war on climate is not between the U.S. and the growing environmental risk but rather it is between the U.S. and other nations. Trump usage of the metaphor CLIMATE CHANGE IS A WAR, is quite similar to his other metaphor CLIMATE CHANGE IS A ROBBERY as both frame climate change as a hoax. Throughout his speech acts about withdrawing the U.S. membership from the Paris Climate Accord, he has phrases common in military talk such as by stating the Paris Agreement would increase the “*risk of brownouts and blackouts*” on U.S. businesses.<sup>120</sup> He has also mentioned the Climate Accord would negatively impact “*the war on beautiful, clean coal*” which would also be detrimental to the nation’s economy.<sup>121</sup> As Trump swears to his domestic audience that it is his “solemn *duty to protect America*” he perceives the Paris Agreement as a trap as it does not give “Americans a level playing field *against* other nations.”<sup>122</sup> As Trump frames the Paris Agreement as a weapon created by other nations to put the U.S. economy at a disadvantage, he is also implying that climate change is also a social construction against the U.S.<sup>123</sup>

Through Trump’s usage of the conceptual metaphor CLIMATE CHANGE IS A WAR, he uses this war metaphor to demonstrate that there is a competition, or war, of the U.S. versus the rest of the world. Through his construction and perception of the Paris Climate Accord and climate change, he persuades his audience to believe that both of these concepts are used as tools made other nations to fight against the U.S. Through this sort of discourse, it makes his stance stand out

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<sup>120</sup> Trump, “Remarks by the President on the Paris Agreement.”

<sup>121</sup> Trump, “Remarks by President Trump at Make America Great Again Rally in Harrisburg, PA.”

<sup>122</sup> Trump, “Remarks by the President on the Paris Agreement.”

<sup>123</sup> Trump, “The Concept of Global Warming Was Created by and for the Chinese in Order to Make U.S. Manufacturing Non-Competitive.”

against the rest of the political discourses on the same topic as “no metaphor is more powerful than competition and the idea of the competitive market as a winner-takes-all, no-holds-barred dogfight.”<sup>124</sup> With the usage of these war metaphors, Trump states that other nations wish to economically “wound” the U.S. in order to make them less competitive.<sup>125</sup> By creating this impression that there are a winner and a loser in this competition, he tries to make the U.S. public agree with his stance on climate change as if the U.S. were to join the international climate agreement then it would make the U.S. the losers. Thus, for him, CLIMATE CHANGE IS A WAR but unlike Obama’s interpretation, it is a war between the U.S. and the other nations who seek to steal the economic influence from the U.S.

### **4.3 The Real War on Climate Change**

While President Obama and President Trump both utilize war metaphors to define climate change in accordance to their political stance on the topic, they use it in such a manner that makes their connotations conflict with one another. For Obama, climate change is a war as it is the enemy which could harm the U.S. economy and national security. While for Trump, he would also agree that climate change is the enemy for the same economic and security reasons, but it is not a war between the U.S. and climate change but rather the U.S. and the rest of world. Unlike Obama, Trump utilizes the idea that climate change as his own political leverage by referencing as a weapon that is socially constructed by other nations to threaten the U.S. Even though both presidents’ war metaphors seem to agree that climate change is a menace to the well-being of the U.S., they both identify different enemies in the situation.

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<sup>124</sup> Ann E. Cudd, “Sporting Metaphors: Competition and the Ethos of Capitalism,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 34, no. 1 (May 2007): 52, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00948705.2007.9714709>.

<sup>125</sup> Trump, “Remarks by the President on the Paris Agreement.”



The conflicting interpretations that arise from CLIMATE CHANGE IS A WAR then exemplifies Paris' second level of the metaphor wars as it not only about the relevance of the metaphor itself but also the applicability of its interpretation.<sup>126</sup> Through this instance, it not only shows the complexity of the types of conceptual metaphors used in our daily language but it also demonstrates "society's struggle to understand its own experiences and the surrounding world."<sup>127</sup> Through the political construction of climate change, Obama and Trump are able to utilize their power and influence to transform the meaning of climate change in any frame that best matches their political position. The effects of their authority on meaning and language can be seen in their usage of war metaphors as they have the ability to even change the connotations of the metaphor itself and it will still be received by the public. The different connotations between Obama's and Trump's conceptual metaphor of war also demonstrate the struggle of understanding scientific truth and the political truth that both leaders present to their domestic audience.<sup>128</sup> These struggles then further demonstrate how "every metaphor is the tip of a submerged model," as this rhetorical device fails to provide the entire context of a particular concept.<sup>129</sup> It is then up to the audience member to choose how to interpret the metaphor and what actions they should take based on their own judgment.

The metaphor CLIMATE CHANGE IS A WAR used by both Obama and Trump also depicts the dangers in using a nationalist and sociocentric approach on the climate change movement. Throughout both of their political discourses, they both focus on how climate change

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<sup>126</sup> Paris, "Kosovo and the Metaphor War."

<sup>127</sup> Paris, 449.

<sup>128</sup> Mary E. Pettenger, *The Social Construction of Climate Change: Power, Knowledge, Norms, Discourses* (New York, New York, USA: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>129</sup> Max Black, "More About Metaphor," in *Metaphor and Thought* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

would affect the U.S. failing to recognize that climate change would be an international disaster that would affect everyone and everything on the planet. In order to reduce the risks of climate change, the U.S. must stop its mentality of only thinking for themselves. They need to start abiding by the mission set by the Paris Agreement which is to promote international cooperation towards fighting against climate change.<sup>130</sup> This war is not only about the U.S., “taking on climate change requires deep transformation of the culture,” and it needs to be “about sustaining lives — *all* lives — instead of profits and existing systems.”<sup>131</sup> In order to start making a positive change in the climate change movement, it should begin by looking at the way in which climate change is framed as it is too state-centric as seen in Obama’s and Trump’s metaphors. By changing the language on the topic, it will alter one’s understanding of climate change to one that is more inclusive and collaborative.

As these war metaphors used by Obama and Trump both demonstrate the emphasis on national self-interest in political discourse, the argument that their rhetoric needs to expand away from statehood could also be applied to the field of International Relations. It is time for scholars in the field to make a choice, a choice “between insecurity and security, uncertainty and certainty, non-traditional and traditional threats.”<sup>132</sup> If these IR scholars want this study to be relevant to the changing geopolitics of today’s society, they must shift their frames to a more critical approach which would recognize climate change as an ethical dilemma made by humans.<sup>133</sup> IR must also realize that climate change will not only impact these nation-states but the planet as a whole. In

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<sup>130</sup> Doelle, “Assessment of Strengths and Weaknesses.”

<sup>131</sup> Rupinder Mangat et al., “Climate and Wartalk: Metaphors, Imagination, Transformation,” *Elem Sci Anth* 6 (August 2, 2018): 58, <https://doi.org/10.1525/elementa.313>.

<sup>132</sup> Mark J. Lacy, *Security and Climate Change: International Relations and the Limits of Realism* (New York, New York, USA: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>133</sup> Dalby, “Environmental Geopolitics in the Twenty-First Century.”

order to alter the culture around climate change, it is not only the presidential discourse that needs to be changed but also academic fields such as International Relations.

## Conclusion

With only 12 years left to avoid climate change from raising the earth's temperature to a point where our planet is no longer livable, there need to be momentous changes made to the way society perceives climate change.<sup>134</sup> As one can see from the findings presented in this case, nations such as the U.S. takes on a state-centric approach when discussing an environment agreement whose main priority is to promote international cooperation between nations to work together and lower the carbon emissions being admitted into the Earth's atmosphere. From this nationalist discourse, both Obama and Trump form conceptual metaphors which shape the idea of climate change from the U.S. perspective only. As both leaders fail to acknowledge in their rhetoric on the Paris Agreement the fact that climate change is not only a domestic problem but a global problem, they do not account for the other populations that will also be affected by this environmental disaster. It is essential that we analyze the different types of conceptual metaphors that appear in political discourse as it not only used a tool for persuasion, but it also shapes the way one views society itself.<sup>135</sup> Through the usage of metaphors, it is constantly creating and re-defining concepts by relating it to something else, which then constantly changes the meaning of the original concept and even the reality that we live in.<sup>136</sup>

This transformation can directly be seen with President Obama and President Trump's political discourse on climate change and the Paris Climate Agreement. While both leaders may have power over the same nation, Trump was able to completely flip the narrative on climate change originally set by the Obama Administration within a year he was in office mainly by

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<sup>134</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Global Warming of 1.5°C*.

<sup>135</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, "Conceptual Metaphor in Everyday Language."

<sup>136</sup> Ricœur, "Word, Polysemy, Metaphor: Creativity in Language."

withdrawing the U.S. from the Paris Accord but also by using metaphors to change the language and meaning of climate change. Through the usage of Obama's metaphor, he shaped the concept of climate change as an opportunity which would lead the U.S. into economic prosperity if they were to address the conflict. However, through the usage of Trump's metaphor, he made a sharp contrast by shaping climate change as a hoax which would destroy the U.S. economy. While both President's hold contrasting views on climate change and the Paris Agreement, their rhetoric is surprisingly similar as they both speak from a nationalist viewpoint as they stress only about the well-being of the U.S. rather than the well-being of the entire planet itself.

It is not only the discourse of politicians that need to be more inclusive, however, as in order to change the way in which society perceives climate change, academia must also shift its lens such as the field of International Relations. While IR studies the international system, one cannot help but reiterate Wendt's question "What is International Relations for?"<sup>137</sup> If it is looking to predict solutions and find causes to political problems happening around the world then why with "the biosphere collapsing [...] IR's scholars, diplomats, and leaders [...] have not engaged with the *planetary* real?"<sup>138</sup> If International Relations wishes to remain relevant in world politics, it must not only be inclusive of other actors besides the nation-state but also expand the study geopolitics beyond state authority. As climate change is a political and environmental risk, IR must take into account that in this instance science and politics are unavoidably interconnected.<sup>139</sup> In order to include all aspects of climate change, one could merge the ideas stemming from theoretical

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<sup>137</sup> Alexander Wendt, "What Is International Relations For? Notes Toward a Postcritical View," in *Critical Theory and World Politics* (Boulder, Colorado, USA: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001), 205–24.

<sup>138</sup> Anthony Burke et al., "Planet Politics: A Manifesto from the End of IR," 501.

<sup>139</sup> Dalby, "Environmental Geopolitics in the Twenty-First Century."

frameworks like constructivism and environmental politics which could provide new perspectives to an issue one is already familiar with.

As my research provides an instance in which one could study both constructivism and environmental politics simultaneously, as it conducts a metaphorical discourse analysis on the U.S. presidents' framing of climate change in their foreign policy, there are multiple ways in which this study could be expanded. One way is by further utilizing the constructivist and critical lens by looking at the ways in which other actors frame climate change beyond those in control of state power. One instance of this is raise of activism from citizens especially those of the youth who claim that climate change is directly impacting their future, it would then be interesting to look at the way climate change is shaped from a non-traditional actor.<sup>140</sup> One could also look at the way climate change is delivered through different channels besides presidential statements such as through news and media outlets. For instance, there are news outlets, such as *The Guardian*, who are completely changing their terminology when referring to climate change in their stories. Instead of using the term climate change, they are now replacing it with “climate emergency, crisis, or breakdown” to create a higher sense of urgency on the topic.<sup>141</sup> While it is important to look at how country leaders are narrating climate change within their country, it is also necessary to look at how other actors perceive climate change as they both contribute to the environmental movement. As these actors present multiple ways which climate change can be framed, it also demonstrates the constant struggle in society to find meaning that everyone could relate too.

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<sup>140</sup> Hassard Jack, “Citizen Diplomacy to Youth Activism: The Story of Teh Global Thinking Project,” in *EcoJustice, Citizen Science and Youth Activism* (New York, New York, USA: Springer, 2015), 397–421.

<sup>141</sup> Damian Carrington, “Why the Guardian Is Changing the Language It Uses about the Environment,” *The Guardian*, May 17, 2019.

Overall, metaphors may at first seem like a simple rhetorical device, however, these persuasive tools are embedded into our everyday language and can impact the way in which one understands their own reality by constantly alternating the relationships associated with different concepts. While climate change is perceived in a nationalist manner right now in the U.S., it does not have to remain this way. By changing the ways which one studies and thinks about climate change, there is still hope that the Paris Agreement can still achieve its goals of promoting global governance which combats climate change as an international effort.

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