

Analysis: Climate talks a halting step toward goal

Editor's Note: In the wake of [Climategate](#) [1] and Al Gore's [snafu](#) [2] regarding the polar ice caps, I pray that we won't rush into expensive, binding legislation.

(AP) -- The Copenhagen climate conference "failed" long before it even opened. It may not "succeed" until long after it ends. For the moment, then, negotiators must satisfy themselves with something in between, an "outcome," one whose shape Thursday was in the hands of the United States and China.

A pivotal meeting in Bali, Indonesia, in December 2007 set a two-year timetable for the world to produce a grand new agreement to cut even deeper into the greenhouse-gas emissions largely blamed for global warming.

Every one of the thousands attending that U.N. conference saw the problem, however: The U.S. administration of President George W. Bush had blocked progress on climate change for seven years, and would do so for one more.

When President Barack Obama took charge last January, he had just 11 months to work with international partners to negotiate a successor agreement to the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, which had imposed modest emissions cuts on industrialized nations, and which the U.S. had rejected.

With time so short, the new U.S. leadership needed a long run of luck. But its luck ran out with this year's drawn-out and distracting U.S. health-care debate. Legislation that would cap U.S. carbon emissions for the first time was delayed, and those international partners grew wary of entering any new deal without that firm U.S. commitment.

By this fall, expectations for Copenhagen were lowered. Even U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, whose job is to be upbeat, was dismissing hopes for a treaty binding nations legally to commitments on greenhouse gases.

Negotiating work still awaited the thousands of delegates from 193 nations who gathered here Dec. 7 for the two weeks of talks. They could at least clear away more technical unresolved issues - on saving forests, on exchanging clean-energy technology, on new ways to raise and distribute money to poorer nations for dealing with climate change.

Those talks made only fitful progress, however, and by Wednesday were bogged down. In a reprise of a perennial theme at the annual climate conferences, negotiators from the developing world complained the "north" - wealthy nations - was trying to impose its views on the conference's concluding documents.

It is now time for the "political phase," as environment ministers took over the

Analysis: Climate talks a halting step toward goal

Published on Electronic Component News (<http://www.ecnmag.com>)

backroom bargaining, in preparation for the arrival of the top ranks: Obama, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao and the leaders of more than 100 other nations. In the diplomatic world, that means the table will be set.

"One hundred leaders of the world aren't going to fly in here and declare defeat," observed ex-U.S. Sen. Tim Wirth, a longtime climate campaigner and head of the U.N. Foundation.

Two factors should enable leaders to smile when their group photo is snapped Friday: The developing nations, unhappy though they are, need their richer negotiating partners to help finance efforts to deal with coastal erosion and other effects of global warming; and diplomats and lawyers, under pressure, may show remarkable skill in finding the right words to paper over differences.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, upon arrival Thursday, generated new hopes with an announcement that the U.S. would join others in raising \$100 billion a year by 2020 to help poorer nations cope with global warming. It was more money than has previously been promised. But the pledge was contingent on a broader agreement, including some kind of oversight to verify China's emissions of greenhouse gases.

Her offer followed that of Japan, which on Wednesday announced a \$15 billion, three-year contribution to a "prompt-start" fund to support poorer nations' adaptation to climate change and their switch to clean energy. That was added to some \$11 billion pledged earlier by the European Union.

"The United States must recognize it has a special historical responsibility for climate change," the U.N.'s Ban told an elite dinner gathering here Wednesday, referring to the past U.S. role in overloading the atmosphere with carbon dioxide.

Many expect the Americans to up their "prompt-start" bid to around \$3 billion in the first year. To show U.S. good faith, they may also point to a variety of efforts - including new powers of the Environmental Protection Agency - to supplement the legislative proposal to reduce U.S. emissions, relatively weak in the early years of reductions.

But the Americans, in turn, will look toward the Chinese for help in reaching some agreement here. The Beijing government, which offers restraint on emissions but isn't likely to be legally bound under a future treaty, has resisted calls to submit its emissions actions to some kind of international oversight. That's an area where it may give some ground by Friday.

Despite the expectations in 2007, the "Bali Action Plan" actually did not call for a treaty at Copenhagen 2009, but rather an "agreed outcome." That outcome on Friday may look thin on substance, but will represent another halting step in a long process of failures, successes and in-between results extending far into the future, as the world grapples with a problem that won't soon go away.

Analysis: Climate talks a halting step toward goal

Published on Electronic Component News (<http://www.ecnmag.com>)

Source URL (retrieved on 09/02/2014 - 5:22am):

<http://www.ecnmag.com/news/2009/12/analysis-climate-talks-halting-step-toward-goal>

Links:

[1] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Climategate>

[2]

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/environment/copenhagen/article6956783.ece>