

Copenhagen: Will a deal emerge?

Written by Rodger A Payne

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RODGER A PAYNE, OCT 24 2009

This past week, the news related to the ongoing climate negotiations was quite confusing. On Monday the 19th of October, the BBC reported optimistically:

"It's an uphill battle, but I just feel today it's more do-able than (I did) yesterday," Mr Miliband [UK climate secretary] told journalists in a briefing directly after the MEF meeting closed on Monday evening in London.

"There was a universal view that we need to get an agreement in Copenhagen – not an agreement at any price, but that we've come a long way and we intend to translate that into an agreement by the end of the year."

The very next day, October 20, *The New York Times* reported the opposite:

With the clock running out and deep differences unresolved, it now appears that there is little chance that international climate change negotiations in Copenhagen in December will produce a comprehensive and binding new treaty on global warming.

Why the pessimism?

Negotiators have accepted as all but inevitable that representatives of the 192 nations in the talks will not resolve the outstanding issues in the time remaining before the Copenhagen conference opens in December. The gulf between rich and poor nations, and even among the wealthiest nations, is just too wide.

To get a feel for the gulf separating states, just take a look at Michael A. Levi's article in the September/October issue of *Foreign Affairs*:

The odds of signing a comprehensive treaty in December are vanishingly small. And even reaching such a deal the following year would be an extraordinary challenge...

Many U.S. lawmakers want absolute near-term emissions caps from China and India, but those countries will not sign up for anything of the sort for at least another decade. And before they consider a deal of any kind, Chinese and Indian negotiators are demanding that developed countries commit to cutting their greenhouse gas emissions by over 40 percent from 1990 levels by 2020, but none of the world's wealthiest countries will even come close to meeting this goal.

It gets worse as Levi points out that China and other developing countries are requesting that rich nations commit 1% of their GDP annually (over \$300 billion, more than all current foreign aid combined) to a special fund that would help poorer nations reduce emissions and adapt to climate change. As Levi points out, "Western politicians will not be willing to send anything near this amount of money to their economic competitors in order to secure a deal."

To be fair, the BBC story pointed out that 17 states producing around 80% of global emissions were meeting informally this week to discuss the precise problem of financing emissions reductions in the developing world. Many of the biggest emitters are developing states — India, China, Brazil and Indonesia (the latter two because of

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deforestation). However, while the talks concluded with a call for financial support, no precise figures or pledges were forthcoming.

The world is in the midst of a major recession, right?

The *Times* article mentioned the two-level game problem that I discussed recently. If the U.S. Congress cannot pass a climate deal, then other states are reluctant to make any additional commitments. Meanwhile, U.S. negotiators are apparently refusing to make any offers beyond what Congress would pass — and are just as clearly opposed to a simple extension of Kyoto's requirements. US negotiator Todd Stern reminded the world this week: "We're not a party to the Kyoto Protocol and we're not going to be a party."

Indeed, the Obama administration says that no deal is better than a bad deal that does not address the major concerns of significant players. One major reason the US never ratified Kyoto was because the Protocol didn't limit China's emissions. As Levi points out, it is difficult to weep for Kyoto as even good neighbor Canada exceeded its emissions targets by nearly 30%. The IPCC 2007 reports pointed out that 2004 emissions exceeded 1990 emissions worldwide by 28%. That's the period covered by Kyoto.

How can a new treaty ensure more potent action?

Further complicating matters is the fact that European governments are said to favor a new Kyoto-style agreement that sets relatively firm emissions targets.

The news this week was confusing, but much evidence suggests that any new agreement on climate change will have to wait until 2010.

About the author:

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