

Hot times?

Written by Rodger A Payne

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RODGER A PAYNE, DEC 5 2010

This blog went silent again for a few months and I'm very sorry about that. I taught International Security this term and spent a lot of time thinking about the war in Afghanistan and the prospects of Iranian proliferation. And not much time thinking about climate change politics. Many of the blogs linked on the right-hand list have also reduced their coverage this year. Al Jazeera currently has an item posted called, "Climate change: who cares?"

However, classes have almost ended and the Associated Press had the following news item this week that caught my eye:

A scorching summer that killed thousands in Russia and exceptionally mild winters in the Arctic were among extreme weather events that have put 2010 on track to be one of the three hottest years on record, U.N. experts said Thursday.

The data from the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) show that the last decade was the warmest ever, part of a trend that scientists attribute to man-made pollution trapping heat in the atmosphere.

There's still an outside chance 2010 could be the warmest year on record — though keep in mind that records date back only to 1850. The other two warmest years were 1998 and 2005.

So, is the international community finally prepared to act on this latest information? After all, readers might recall that negotiators were scheduled to followup the Copenhagen meetings with sessions in Cancun, Mexico, late this year. In fact, the conference (COP 16) began on 29 November and continues until 10 December.

Entering the talks, as the BBC reported, almost no one thought that states would strike a new deal to limit greenhouse gas emissions or to commit significant new funding to abatement or mitigation. After a week of talking, Dr. Andrew Light of George Mason and grist thinks the chance of "big success, such as final ratification of the Copenhagen Accord or a new legally binding treaty, approach zero." And Maldives President Mohamed Nasheed told the BBC that affluent big powers haven't even lived up to "fast-start" financial commitments they made just last year in Copenhagen.

During last December's UN climate summit in Copenhagen, developed nations (headed by Japan, the EU and the US) promised to provide developing countries with \$30bn for the period 2010-2 to help them adopt clean technologies and begin to protect themselves against climate impacts.

Much of the money has been pledged to individual countries and projects. But, said Mr Nasheed, none has been delivered.

"None at all; it's a nightmare," he said.

Light blogged that Nasheed is actually wrong about this and that the U.S. alone has appropriated \$1.7 billion in 2010. Some other officials quoted in the BBC story acknowledge that funds are administered through bureaucracies that might be slow to act.

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Optimistically, Dr. Light also points out that the U.S. promises to keep its Copenhagen pledge about emissions reductions even if no new climate legislation is passed. The Obama administration will continue to move forward with EPA regulations, even as states have cobbled together various kinds of regional climate markets and initiatives.

About the author:

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