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Update on COP15: States' Deliberations and Decisions

In the lead-up to the 15th United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of Parties (COP15) in Copenhagen, world leaders had been constantly reminded of the need to act on one of the most pressing global contemporary issues to date. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon has been a prime advocate, as seen in his efforts to rally global support to spur, particularly, developed and industrialising countries to formulate effective policies and give 'hope' for the survival of developing countries most vulnerable to climate change. Thanks to the support of media industries worldwide, the UN's efforts of providing hope at Copenhagen became known as Hopenhagen. Unfortunately, national and regional efforts came to naught during the two weeks of COP15 as the objectives that had been initially set out were hardly achieved. This Alert examines countries' deliberations and decisions that have influenced COP15's piecemeal outcome.

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The NTS Alert Team

Mely Caballero-Anthony, Irene Kuntjoro and Sofiah Jamil.

- Consortium of NTS Studies in Asia
- Centre for NTS Studies

From Bali to Copenhagen

The agenda of COP15 can be traced to the outcome of the 2007 UNFCCC meeting in Bali. During the Bali meeting, states were not only set to discuss options for mitigating climate change after 2012, but to also come to terms with recent scientific evidence suggesting that stronger action was needed to avert the disastrous effects of climate change, amidst growing industrialisation trends amongst developing countries. It was thus agreed that the agenda for COP15 would be twofold: First, to adopt post-2012 emission targets for developed countries that have ratified the Kyoto Protocol (Annex I parties); second, to engage non-Annex I countries (primarily other developed and industrialising states) to cooperate in addressing climate change. The latter component is based on the Bali Action Plan that was adopted during the Bali Meeting, in which Parties agreed to work towards achieving the following at COP15:

- A shared vision of what parties aim to achieve, including a long-term goal for emissions reductions;
- Mitigation of climate change by reducing the atmospheric concentration of greenhouse gas emissions;
- Adaptation strategies in response to the impacts of climate change such as rising sea levels and extreme weather events;
- Technology transfer and development; and
- Finance and investment for the mentioned measures.

Main plenary hall, Bella Center, COP15 Copenhagen



Source: Australian Science Media Centre. Available at <<http://www.flickr.com/photos/aussmc/>>.

As COP15 drew near, various countries floated several initiatives, such as alternative approaches to complement (or even replace) the economy-wide targets that are internationally binding. The US for instance had suggested a 'pledge and review' approach, whereby each nation would pledge national actions that are open to some degree of measurement, reporting and verification (MRV) by other countries. The benefit of this system would be that it allows developing nations to commit voluntarily rather than be part of a legally-binding agreement. Several states stated their national pledges in the run-up to COP15 (see Table 1).

Table 1 'National pledges' of selected countries, pre-COP15

Country	Policy Positions
China	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Set a 'binding goal' to reduce carbon intensity (i.e. cut CO2 per unit of GDP) by 40-45% below 2005 levels by 2020. ● Wants rich countries to reduce emissions to 40% below 1990 level by 2020.
USA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Will cut emissions to 17% below 2005 levels by 2020 (as mentioned in the Waxman-Markey Bill that was passed in the House of Representatives as the American Clean Energy and Security Act of 2009). ● Clean Energy Jobs and American Power Act of 2009 (Kerry-Boxer Bill) still awaiting Senate approval. ● Against Kyoto-style treaty imposing international legal obligations.
EU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Will cut emissions by 20% from 1990 levels by 2020, or 30% if other big emitters take tough action. ● Wants rich nations to make 80-95% cut by 2050. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ But this means only a 10% reduction to 2020. ● Wants poorer nations to slow emissions growth.
India	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reduce carbon emission intensity by 20-25% by 2020 from the levels they were at in 2005. ● Agrees to limit growth of GHG emissions but will not commit to binding targets. ● Says rich countries are to blame for climate change and points to big gap in per capita emissions.
Japan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Will cut emissions to 25% below 1990 levels by 2020, if other countries show similar ambition. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ This amounts to a cut of 30% in 10 years, and faces opposition from industries. ○ Previous government had only expressed an 8% cut. ● 'Hatoyama Initiative' will increase financial and technical assistance to developing countries.
Russia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 25% cut from 1990 levels by 2020, if others do the same.
UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● At the national level, an 80% cut by 2050.
Brazil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Based on rainforest trees remaining, 36-39% reduction on expected 2020 emissions.
Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Australia's parliament rejected the proposed Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme twice.

Sources: Various, 2009.

This approach has, however, been saddled with difficulties. Firstly, it has allowed states to use different measurements in their pledges. Instead of reducing total carbon emissions, industrialising countries - China and India - have opted to use carbon intensity: The amount of carbon dioxide emitted for each unit of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as their preferred measurement. China has noted that it would reduce its carbon intensity by 40 to 45 per cent by the year 2020 from 2005 levels, while India would reduce carbon emission intensity by between 20 and 25 per cent by 2020 from 2005 levels. Although such pledges are commendable as a first step towards addressing climate change, it is not enough. Increased economic growth in China and India would allow these countries to emit more carbon dioxide based on their rising GDP levels. As such, reducing carbon intensity may not necessarily translate into overall reduced levels of carbon dioxide, which are crucial in mitigating climate change.

Secondly, several states have had difficulties at the domestic level in passing bills for making these national pledges, such as those related to carbon emissions trading. The most adverse example of this was in Australia with the government's proposed Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme. Parliamentary debates on the issue caused a split in the opposition Liberal Party, between those who were in favour and willing to cooperate with the ruling Labour party, and those against it. The split led to the resignation of several Liberal Party officials including Liberal Party leader, Malcolm Turnbull. In addition, the scheme was rejected twice by the Senate, resulting in Prime Minister Rudd going to Copenhagen empty-handed.

The US also faces delays as the Senate continues to deliberate over the Kerry-Boxer bill. The Kerry-Boxer bill primarily focuses on reducing US greenhouse gas emissions through a cap-and-trade system with a 20 per cent emission reduction by 2020. A similar bill, known as the Waxman-Markey bill, passed through the House of Representatives with a lower target of 17 per cent emission reduction by 2020. If the Kerry-Boxer bill pass through the Senate then negotiations will take place to reconcile the two bills.

Even the preliminary pledges made by leaders from Australia, China, India and the US prior to COP15 fell short of what scientists said are needed to control increasing global temperatures. A *Jakarta Post* commentary by Fitriani Ardiansyah from the World Wide Fund for Nature, Indonesia, noted that pledges by China and the US - the world's largest carbon emitters - only add up to reductions of 10 to 14 per cent below 1990 levels by 2020.

In terms of climate aid, there is also asymmetry between the funds demanded by developing countries and the amounts that are committed by developed countries. Some developed countries have been working at garnering support to raise funds from other developed countries. For instance, the EU has pledged the equivalent of US\$ 10.6 billion over a three-year period to help poorer nations cope with climate change. However, compared to Japan's US\$ 15 billion contribution, the EU pledge is relatively insignificant. Leaders of developing countries are also seeking clarification from the EU on whether it is new money.

Such concerns are valid, given past incidents of inefficient aid transfers by developed countries. Firstly, it is possible that the EU pledges to include funds from existing budgets. According to Anne-Catherine Claude of ActionAid, almost all of the money is likely to be simply a re-labelling of existing aid commitments, given EU members' track record in doing so - such as the use of funds from overseas development assistance. Secondly, there may be an issue of timely distribution of funds. For example, during the 2001 UN meeting in Bonn, the EU, Canada, Norway, Switzerland, Iceland and New Zealand said that they would jointly pay developing countries US\$ 410 million a year from 2005 to 2008. However, not even a tenth of the promised climate aid has been delivered so far. What makes this round of financing more uncertain is that public finance generally is in short supply due to bank bailouts and stimulus packages created during the 2007 - 2009 global financial crisis. Even the US, which has been at the heart of the global credit crunch, has remained largely silent on the issue of climate aid prior to COP15. These pre-existing issues have thus contributed to the difficult discussions at Copenhagen.

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How did it play out?

Alignments during the climate talks

Since the beginning of COP15, divisions amongst various parties were evident. Most notably was the 'Climate-gate' affair, which saw the selective publication of hacked emails between climate scientists by climate sceptics. The climate sceptics used the hacked emails to argue that influential climate scientists had manipulated data and prevented climate-change sceptics from publishing, thereby making the case for climate change stronger. Although such claims have been rebutted and an independent investigation is underway, this incident nevertheless allowed climate-change sceptics within COP15, such as Saudi Arabia's lead negotiator Mohammad Al-Sabban, to suggest that 'there is no relationship whatsoever between human activities and climate change'. Hence, despite international calls to address this global challenge, there still remains an ever widening gap between states that see climate change as a threat to economic development and comfort zones, and those that deem it a threat to their survival.

Further division surfaced when several proposals were put forward for review and discussion. One proposal that faced particular contention was the secret draft agreement formulated by the UK, US and Denmark, whose suggestions caused outrage amongst many developing countries. For instance, the proposal sought to force developing countries to agree to specific emission cuts and measures that were not part of the original UN agreement, and 'not allow poor countries to emit more than 1.44 tonnes of carbon per person by 2050, while allowing rich countries to emit 2.67 tonnes.' According to Sudan's Lumumba Stanislas Dia Ping, who heads the G77 group, this proposal would lead to further suffering and injustice.

A proposal by the BASIC group - Brazil, South Africa, India and China - was then made to counter the Danish proposal. However, it still failed to gain G-77 support, as it lacked specific targets for rich countries. Moreover, G-77 members felt that the new proposal did not satisfactorily address the vulnerabilities and preferential treatment of the least-developed countries, including the establishment of an International Adaptation Centre.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (centre left) attends a resumed session of the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, Denmark, 19 December 2009



Source: UN Photo/Mark Garten. Available at <http://www.unmultimedia.org/photo/>.

A large gulf between the US and China - the dominant actors at COP15 - was also revealed. Together, the US and China contribute up to around 40 per cent of global carbon emissions. China surpassed the United States as the largest emitter in 2008. Being the two largest emitters in the world, both countries rely on each other's emission reduction plans. The US was worried that its emission cuts would not be meaningful if China continues to produce more emissions with its fast economic growth, without any obligation to meet reduction targets. In response, the Obama Administration made it clear, as stated by President Obama in his speech, that transparency and verification are key provisions to negotiations at COP15. This move was made by the US in an attempt to engage other countries, including China, to encourage them to meet their own reduction targets.

During the Copenhagen meeting, China aligned itself with the rest of the G-77 bloc to further its interests. The bloc was comprised of a variety of developing countries, ranging from the poorest to the more prosperous major emerging economies such as India, Brazil and South Africa. China stood behind the proposition by developing nations that Annex-I countries should bear the responsibility of having larger emission cuts and provide a considerable amount of financial support to Non-Annex I countries to help them mitigate and adapt to climate change. China also stood by its position by resisting attempts at imposing a legally-binding reduction target by supporting the continuation of the provisions of Annex-I and Non-Annex I countries, stated under the Kyoto Protocol (China is a Non-Annex 1 country).

In trying to balance China in the negotiations and to win the support of developing states, the US proposed to contribute, by 2020, US\$ 100 billion a year as a long-term international initiative to help the poorest and most vulnerable nations. The US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, announced that this fund would be raised from 'a wide variety of sources, public and private, bilateral and multilateral, including alternative sources of finance...this is not aid in the traditional sense of aid'. She also invited the private sector to be the driver of this effort. This proposal was seen as a progressive step towards the US\$ 10 billion that the UN had suggested, but was rejected by the G-77 countries. The G-77 asked for 0.5 per cent to 1 per cent of the developed countries' GDPs, which should be

provided on top of existing development aid. Both of these policy positions clearly illustrate the expectations of developing and developed countries.

Climate policy governance

Transparency was a major and contentious issue in the Copenhagen negotiations. The Kyoto Clean Development Mechanism had provided a way for rich countries to offset their emissions by paying poor states to develop green projects since 2006. However, some countries have now insisted on a verification mechanism to measure the emission reductions of these green projects. Developed countries were worried that green projects in poor countries have underperformed and not generated the desired emission reduction. Some countries suspected that others with carbon market investments may manipulate their privileges and exploit the mechanism by acquiring larger carbon credits.

In the transparency debate, Chinese delegates argued that the MRV was an infringement upon China's sovereignty and national interests and favoured a continuation of the current self-reporting mechanism. The Chinese government argued for non-intrusive international cooperation in monitoring their carbon intensity reduction. Their critics in the UN, on the other hand, have always doubted the credibility of China's self-reporting mechanism on various issues.

These credibility issues reflect existing domestic governance problems on transparency, monitoring and reporting that differ in each country. A verification mechanism would not only relate to measuring emissions but also to provisions for technology transfers as well as financial and capacity building support. Therefore, an inspection regime to ensure compliance over emission reduction targets remains a contentious issue after the creation of the Copenhagen Accord.

Progress on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD)

One notable achievement in Copenhagen was the agreement among countries of the need to protect forests and support the REDD initiative. Attendees at COP15 acknowledged that deforestation contributes up to 20 per cent of global carbon emissions. The UK Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, argued that the forestry sector contributes to the livelihoods of 90 per cent of 1.2 billion people globally. A methodological guide to measuring forestry emission cuts in developing nations as part of REDD Plus was adopted during the Copenhagen meeting. Six developed states, namely Australia, France, Japan, Norway, the UK and US agreed to provide US\$ 3.5 billion as an initial fund as part of a larger effort to help developing countries in halting deforestation. It was estimated that about US\$ 25 billion would be needed by 2015 to reduce deforestation by 25 per cent. This fund would also be used in other ways as a means of protecting forests, which would include the protection of biodiversity and support for other relevant development processes. This form of acknowledgement is significant as it indicates an acceptance of the importance of REDD Plus as it is an initiative focusing not only on deforestation and forest degradation but also conservation, sustainable forest management and re-planting initiatives.

However, there remain several problems that need to be solved beyond this initial pledge to fund REDD Plus. The first is the need to have timetables and targets for reductions in deforestation by 'forested' nations. Second is the need to know how the outstanding funding will be raised either from government transfers or other mechanisms, such as carbon trading. Third, is the need to know who would receive this funding - national governments, local governments or local communities, including indigenous people? The fourth is the need to include provisions to combat and monitor weak governance and corruption that often occur in forested nations. When answers to such problems are made clear it would facilitate the adoption of appropriate approaches to deal with deforestation in various forested nations.

The Copenhagen Accord: Setback or progress?

The Copenhagen Accord was argued to have failed on a number of fronts. First, it failed to produce an agreement on emissions commitments for 2020 by the major emitting countries. Second, it failed to quantify a goal for global emissions reductions by 2050. Third, it failed to lay out details regarding carbon trading beyond 2012. Fourth, it failed to provide clear details on technology transfers. Fifth, it failed to specify procedures for reducing deforestation. Sixth, it failed to set out a timeline to work on a larger treaty. Lastly, it failed to represent a consensus of the 193 parties of the conference.

Nevertheless, on a more positive note, Robert Stavins, the Albert Pratt Professor of Business and Government and Director of the Harvard Environmental Economics Program, and David Doniger, the Policy Director of the NRDC Climate Center argued that the Copenhagen Accord highlights some progress in global climate negotiations. First, it recognises the 2-degree Celsius threshold of increased global temperatures. Second, it acknowledges the need for a comprehensive adaptation programme to reduce the vulnerability and increase resilience of nations with international support. Third, it lays out the international funding commitment of US\$ 100 billion per year to support mitigation and adaptation, especially to the poorest and most vulnerable countries. Fourth, it acknowledges financial support from developed countries to reduce deforestation and forest degradation. Fifth, it signals engagement by key countries, including the major emerging economies, to reduce their emissions. Sixth, it contains methods for countries to establish and register national goals for emission reductions. David Doniger further argued that with this provision, 'the Copenhagen Accord creates a dynamic situation, with the potential for a virtuous circle of countries reinforcing their commitments over time in response to similar moves by others'. Seventh, it offers an agreement, in principle, on monitoring and verification on compliance to the reduction commitments. According to the Accord, emissions reductions for Annex-I countries will be measured, reported, and verified according to guidelines that would be formulated, whereas mitigation taken by non-Annex I countries will be subject to domestic MRV, reported through national communications with international consultation and analysis. This is seen as an acceptable compromise on the issue of transparency.

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In considering the difficulties and obstacles at COP15, it is also worthwhile examining other alternatives suggested by pessimists of Copenhagen. Nigel Lawson, the Chairman of the Global Warming Policy Foundation, argued that looking at the failure of Copenhagen, adaptation is more pertinent as the priority measure in addressing climate change. He stated that this effort may bring possible benefits to the people while reducing costs. He further argued that adaptation could be done locally and did not require global agreement. However, he agreed that vulnerable countries should be assisted to adapt. Beyond adaptation, efforts should also involve increased investment in technological research and development in energy.

Complementary to the global effort, reflected in the Copenhagen Climate Change conference, it is also pertinent to move towards the sub-national level of policymaking. As argued by Julian Hunt, a visiting professor at Delft University, localisation of actions should be the focus of post-Copenhagen policy. This idea diverges from the fact that despite regional variations in climate change predicted by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change model, there is a need to better understand local climatic conditions so that appropriate adaptive strategies can be formulated. This approach is considered effective because it engages the grassroots. It also forms loose collaborative networks that enable regions, experts, the private sector and decision-makers from different localities to learn from one another and draw upon national and international resources.

Moreover, beyond Copenhagen, countries can nevertheless continue with their own individual efforts to address climate change. While there are delays in passing the Kerry-Boxer bill (as the proposed Clean Energy Jobs and American Power Act) in the US Congress, the Obama Administration has taken proactive steps in establishing new rules to regulate greenhouse-gas emissions from thousands of power plants and large industrial facilities, which are responsible for nearly 70 per cent of greenhouse-gas emissions in the US. Such a move (that has been facilitated through the Environmental Protection Agency) not only has the potential to push Congress to reach an agreement on a climate bill, but also provides evidence of the country's resolve to address climate change. This is despite the bad press the US has received for its inaction on international climate negotiations, primarily during the George W. Bush Administration. For their part, Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd plans to reintroduce his carbon emissions trading bill in parliament for the third time in February 2010, while India's 12th Five Year Plan that commences in April 2012 will be based on a low carbon strategy.

Wen Jiabao, Premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, addresses the high-level segment of the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen on its last day, Copenhagen, Denmark, 18 December 2009



Source: UN Photo/Mark Garten. Available at <<http://www.unmultimedia.org/photo/>>.

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Conclusion: Window of Opportunity

The highly-anticipated 2009 United Nations Climate Conference in Copenhagen has passed and left a number of outstanding problems to be solved before the first phase of the Kyoto Protocol expires in 2012. Despite criticisms over its failure to reach a substantial agreement, the Copenhagen meeting reflects the primacy of climate change as a policy issue in international relations. By lowering hope and expectation - from an ambitious legally-binding, coordinated international action to intergovernmental policy coordination - the Copenhagen Accord has provided the foundation and support for the implementation of national commitments. The details of this Accord remain to be pursued in 2010, before the next COP meeting in Mexico City.

Copenhagen has provided momentum for furthering global climate policies. Nevertheless, states should not rely on this alone. Efforts at national and local levels should continue to be pursued as the impact of climate change continues to challenge the security of states and peoples. Such sentiments have clearly been expressed through a sombre season's greeting on a defrosting window on the UNFCCC website: 'The window of opportunity is not getting wider.'

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About the Centre:

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In 2009, the Centre was chosen by the MacArthur Foundation as a lead institution for the MacArthur Asia Security Initiative, to develop policy research capacity and recommend policies on the critical security challenges facing the Asia-Pacific.

The Centre is also a founding member and the Secretariat for the Consortium of Non-Traditional Security (NTS) Studies in Asia (NTS-Asia). More information on the Centre can be found at www.rsis.edu.sg/nts