



Doha Climate Summit Ends with the Long March to 2015

Near-Term Progress Now Depends on Fast Action in Other Forums

Andrew Light, Rebecca Lefton, Adam James, Gwynne Taraska, and Katie Valentine
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This year's U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change conference, held in Doha, Qatar, ended late on Saturday night, with expected results. After a 48-hour marathon negotiating session—which unfortunately has become typical in these yearly meetings—three distinct negotiating streams produced three overlapping but independent agreements.

The negotiators ultimately decided to do the following:

- The Kyoto Protocol was reauthorized for another eight years, though fewer countries signed on so it now only covers some 12 percent of global emissions.
- The countries ended the negotiating track created in 2007 on “Long-term Cooperative Action,” which previously produced the Copenhagen Accords and the Cancun Agreements that drew up voluntary pollution-reduction commitments covering 80 percent of global emissions.
- The new negotiating track on the “Durban Platform for Enhanced Action”—which was designed last year to produce by 2015 a new treaty that is applicable to all parties and covers 100 percent of global emissions—took its first steps toward achieving those goals.

Response to the meeting's outcome has thus far been varied, but as with most of these climate summits, many consider it far from adequate to address the growing climate crisis.¹ EU Commissioner for Climate Action Connie Hedegaard called it a “modest step toward a global climate deal.”²

These criticisms seem overwrought. It's not that critics of the meeting are wrong to want faster international action on climate change—that is something we all should strive to achieve. But it's pointless to imagine this body working any faster than it

is designed to, especially now that it is beginning the long process of negotiating a wholly new climate treaty.

The 195 parties to the U.N. climate convention unanimously decided in 2011 to set themselves on a path that would most likely not produce a major breakthrough in the negotiations for another three years. The Durban conference decided that the treaty would not be set until 2015.³ It should come as no surprise, then, that the outcome of this meeting was relatively modest. As we have said before, the intrinsic difficulties in the U.N. climate negotiation process—including the demand for consensus on decision making and the expectation that developed and developing countries should operate under different sets of rules—require that we continue to look for other opportunities for faster climate action in the near term. Doing so can quicken our climate change response even while we slowly build up the institutions created in the past four years in these annual climate meetings.

This issue brief summarizes the main resolutions that came out of the Doha conference and explains the implications of each.

Kyoto Protocol enters stage two

The Kyoto Protocol—the world’s only legally binding agreement on emissions reductions finalized in 1997—was set to expire at the end of December, which could have terminated the global carbon market mechanisms that have been established to support it. A majority of countries agreed on Saturday, though, to extend the protocol into a second term.⁴ This second commitment period will begin on January 1, 2013, and will conclude on December 31, 2020. It will thus bridge the gap between the end of the first Kyoto commitment period and the beginning of the next legally binding climate agreement, which ideally will be finished in the Durban Platform track in 2015, though the new treaty isn’t set to take effect until 2020 at the earliest.⁵

Unlike the Durban track treaty, which will be universally binding for all nations in the U.N. climate convention, the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol establishes obligatory emissions cuts only for those industrialized countries who have ratified it—at this point, only the European Union and a handful of other parties, including Australia, Norway, and Switzerland. Others that participated in the first period of the protocol, such as Japan, Russia, Canada, and New Zealand, have opted out of the second period for a variety of reasons, one of which being an aversion to signing a treaty that did not include the world’s biggest emitters.⁶ The second period does not cover the United States, which signed but never attempted to ratify the original protocol in the Senate, and it does not bind developing countries, such as China and India, to emissions reductions. The United States and China are the world’s largest greenhouse gas emitters.

Agreement on the transition to the new commitment period for the Kyoto Protocol was not without controversy. Strong differences of opinion, specifically from the Russian Federation, cropped up as the negotiations were concluding. Although the Russian Federation opted out of the second period, its area of concern throughout the negotiations was the carryover of surplus “assigned amount units,” or permits for allowable emissions that were not redeemed during the first period of the protocol, into the second period.⁷

Russia insisted that unused permits—also known as “hot air”—be transferred to the second period, despite significant opposition from other nations.⁸ Surplus assigned amount units are held predominantly by eastern European countries, whose economies collapsed after the fall of Communism. They received credits for the carbon emissions that they never produced but would have been allowed to, given an assessment of their economies before the protocol went into effect.⁹

Contrary to the Russian objections, however, the new agreement does allow transfer of surplus assigned amount units to the second commitment period, over the objection of many blocs of countries such as the Least Developed Countries and the Alliance of Small Island States. Nonetheless, the treaty does try to limit their environmental damage. The second term of the protocol mandates that a country “may acquire units from other Parties’ previous period surplus reserve accounts into its previous period surplus reserve account up to 2 percent of its assigned amount for the first commitment period.”¹⁰ This would limit the amount of “hot air” that can be carried over into the second commitment period of the treaty.

Moreover, in a heartening display of principle, parties such as Australia, the European Union, Japan, Lichtenstein, Monaco, Norway, and Switzerland all pledged during the final negotiations not to purchase excess units.¹¹ Mark Dreyfus of the Australian delegation said:

While it is important that countries receive recognition for overachieving on their targets, the volume of surplus [assigned amount units] carried over to the second commitment period could be as high as 7 billion tons. The unrestricted use of these surplus first commitment period [assigned amount units] risks meaningful climate change efforts to 2020. We will help ensure the environmental integrity of the Kyoto Protocol and countries’ emission reduction objectives by restricting demand for first commitment period [assigned amount units] through nationally appropriate arrangements. Australia will not purchase [assigned amount units] carried over from the first commitment period.¹²

Unfortunately, the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol will have a negligible effect on global emissions because the countries that are now bound by it to reduce their emissions produce less than 15 percent of total global emissions.¹³ But it is not useless: As we have argued previously, the extension of Kyoto will also serve as a basis for a globally binding treaty and a working carbon market in 2020 by keeping intact market-based mechanisms such as the Clean Development Mechanism, which allows for limited trading of emis-

sion reductions across boarders.¹⁴ The complicated procedures and mechanisms governing these trades, which pay billions of dollars for clean energy projects in developing countries every year, can be used to later serve as a basis for a treaty that aspires to cover all emissions around the world.¹⁵ In her final press briefing, Christiana Figueres, the executive secretary of the U.N. climate convention, confirmed this point, saying that moving the Kyoto treaty forward will ensure “that there is going to be environmental integrity and very robust accounting systems that will be able to be used by all countries in the new agreement.”¹⁶

Ad Hoc Working Group on Long-term Cooperative Action closes

The planned conclusion of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Long-term Cooperative Action was a critical lynchpin for a successful outcome in Doha. The Long-term Cooperative Action track, a subsidiary body of the U.N. climate convention, was the principal outcome of the 2007 Bali Action Plan.¹⁷ In last year’s negotiations in Durban, parties agreed to close this track of the negotiations in 2012 as it was originally created to last only two years.

Yet talks in Doha were strained on the terms of the final items in this track. Negotiators struggled on a number of issues, particularly on whether and to what extent to include in it new provisions to compensate developing countries for “loss and damage” from climate-related events,¹⁸ and whether to stipulate new targets for developed countries to provide financial assistance for mitigation and adaptation to climate change in keeping with the previously agreed-upon goal at the 2009 Copenhagen meeting of mobilizing \$100 billion annually for these purposes.¹⁹

In its five-year lifespan, the Long-term Cooperative Action track did help achieve the convention’s goal of limiting greenhouse gases by advancing key work plans, including:

- Enhancing mitigation efforts to reduce greenhouse gases
- Creating new work plans on adaptation to changes
- Development of policies for reducing emissions from deforestation and degradation
- Promotion of clean energy technology development and transfer
- Raising funds for more action on all of these activities in developing countries

A main task of the negotiators was to transfer workstreams under the Long-term Cooperative Action track into other bodies of the convention (such as the Durban Platform) and to put the final touches on the new institutions created over the past four years by this track—such as the Green Climate Fund, the new international financial body that will be responsible for raising the bulk of the promised \$100 billion in annual

climate finance from 2020 onward, and the Climate Technology Center and Network, which will make available expert advice and other resources to help poorer countries develop in a more sustainable way.²⁰

Concluding the Long-term Cooperative Action track, however, was ridden with contention about who should bear responsibility for action on climate change and the degree to which actions should be taken. Throughout the week, the inability for negotiators to agree on how to finish the work plan of this track derailed progress in the other parts of the negotiations. Talks in the Durban Platform track were even suspended, as negotiators struggled to keep pace with controversies that had erupted in the Long-term Cooperative Action negotiations.

Climate finance

Enhancing action on climate finance was a major sticking point. From 2009 to 2012 developed countries delivered \$30 billion in “fast-start” finance for adaptation and mitigation measures. The success of this program was acknowledged in the final version of the Long-term Cooperative Action text.²¹ But going into Doha, there was no agreed-upon plan for continuing this funding into the decade, let alone a path for getting from this delivery of \$10 billion a year to the promised \$100 billion annual commitment set to begin in 2020.

Accordingly, there were three major components of the finance text that were unsettled going into the final round of negotiations:

- The question of whether to stipulate a target amount for a second period of fast-start financing from 2013 to 2015—ideally larger than the first period
- Whether to continue the work program to facilitate long-term financing, which could secure sources of financing that could eventually deliver \$100 billion annually
- Initiating discussions about how the main repository of these funds—the Green Climate Fund—would become operational

The final outcome document does not include a specific target amount for a second round of fast-start financing but urges more developed countries than have already committed to announce climate funding pledges when financial circumstances allow.²² It also asks them to, at a minimum, provide resources equal to the “average annual level of the fast-start finance period,” or approximately whatever they were able to raise between 2009 and 2012. This was important so as to ensure that the next phase of climate financing is at least equal to the previous fast-start period.

The outcome document also extends the work program on long-term finance for another year to try to inform developed countries how to identify pathways to scale up their efforts to meet the \$100 billion goal by 2020. These countries are asked to submit their plans for increasing funding from public, private, bilateral, and multilateral sources to reach the goal of \$100 billion annually by 2020. While the work program can be a resource for those nations who need ideas about how to best raise more funding for climate finance, it will also provide developing countries with some insight into plans for funding the Green Climate Fund, among other climate-oriented financial programs. A high-level ministerial dialogue will follow up on all of these efforts as part of the next U.N. climate summit in Warsaw in 2013.

Since 2010 CAP has supported a “ramp up” period from the fast-start finance ending in 2012 until 2020 to ensure that the jump from \$10 billion a year in climate-related assistance to \$100 billion is not too abrupt. Our 2010 report with the Alliance for Climate Protection and Climate Advisers made the compelling case that it would be nearly impossible to jump from the fast-start period to the 2020 period without a ramp-up of funding through the rest of this decade.²³ We also argued that the amount needed for the ramp-up period was fairly modest, in the range of \$60 billion from all sources by 2015. We determined that this amount would be sufficient to close the ambition gap between what parties pledged to do under the Long-term Cooperative Action track through the Copenhagen Accord and the emission reductions needed by 2020 to maintain the possibility of stabilizing temperatures at 2 degrees Celsius by the end of the century.

It would undoubtedly be very difficult to draft acceptable language on increasing climate finance ambition right now, especially in the current economic climate. But given that the United States has already indicated that it will attempt to maintain its current levels of climate finance (\$7.5 billion total over the fast-start period), and given that several other parties with less cumbersome processes for setting budgets have already announced their intention to increase funding over the next few years, the parties should at least have been able to come up with some kind of aspirational language for a ramp-up period.²⁴ We have likely not seen the last of this issue.

Loss and damage from climate change

In 2007 the Bali Action Plan mandated that parties explore “means to address loss and damage associated with climate change impacts in developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change.” The anticipated effects included damage from extreme weather events and slow-onset events such as ocean acidification and sea-level rise.²⁵ At the Cancun climate change conference in 2010,²⁶ nations established a work program on loss and damage as part of the Cancun Adaptation Framework and requested that the convention’s Subsidiary Body on Implementation—one of the two technical bodies, along with the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological

Advice, that provides advice to the convention and implements decisions—make recommendations to the full convention this year on how to address loss and damage. Unfortunately, whether and to what extent the parties could agree on these recommendations came close to ruining any progress in this track of the negotiations in Doha.

The work program of the Subsidiary Body on Implementation explored the effects of loss and damage in three areas.²⁷ It assessed the risk of loss and damage associated with climate change, developed a range of approaches to address loss and damage, and worked with the full convention to enhance implementation of the approaches after taking submissions from parties and civil society.

In Doha this momentum turned into a call for more concrete steps forward. At the end of the conference, parties agreed to discuss the establishment of an international mechanism to address loss and damage that will be taken up for approval at the 2013 climate summit in Warsaw.²⁸ The run up to this discussion will include an expert meeting to consider possible approaches to addressing slow-onset events of climate change, preparation of a technical paper on noneconomic losses to climate change, and preparation of a technical paper on gaps in institutional arrangements to address loss and damage both within and outside the U.N. process. Just as importantly, the parties agreed that “promotion of livelihood and economic diversification to build resilience” was vital in planning, priority setting, and implementation of adaptation actions.

The problem, of course, is that significantly delivering on some kind of global loss-and-damage program will be extremely costly. The U.S. Congress is now considering a \$60.4 billion request from the administration to cover damage from superstorm Sandy in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut.²⁹ Paying for and responding to dozens of global climate-related disasters a year would be even more daunting. In addition, the logistics are hard to fathom at this point.

There were, however, alternatives—or at least complementary programs—suggested in the Subsidiary Body’s findings. The parties agreed to “promotion of livelihood and economic diversification to build resilience” in planning, priority setting, and implementation of adaptation plans in developing countries.³⁰ Given how difficult and expensive it would be to build something akin to a global Federal Emergency Management Agency to respond to climate events, we should consider the relative costs of instead investing in increasing the resilience of developing countries so that they will be better prepared for such events.

Securing accomplishments of the Long-term Cooperative Action track

The successful closing of the track on Long-term Cooperative Action ensures that its accomplishments will live on and continue as a basis for international collaboration on climate change. For instance, the Long-term Cooperative Action track advanced a work-

stream to develop practices for avoiding emissions from deforestation—these practices will be built upon in a new work program that will coordinate with and be supported by the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice, as well as the Subsidiary Body for Implementation.

Most importantly, though, the negotiating track on Long-term Cooperative Action gave birth to the 2009 Copenhagen Accord and the 2010 Cancun Agreements, which together marshaled the largest collection of voluntary climate mitigation commitments the world has ever seen and created an elaborate system for tracking them.³¹ The mobilization of these commitments is a groundbreaking achievement of the Long-term Cooperative Action track.

Whereas the Kyoto Protocol mandates binding emissions reductions from developed countries only—representing an ever-shrinking percentage of global emissions—under these two agreements, governments from both developed and developing countries representing more than 80 percent of global emissions announced measures for reductions by 2020. The resulting creation of a system for measuring, reporting, and verifying those commitments will be absolutely essential to getting where we need to be on global mitigation efforts, as it puts more pressure on these countries to reduce their emissions in order to actually deliver on these promises. Like the Clean Development Mechanism from the Kyoto Protocol, the institutions created in the Long-term Cooperative Action track can be used to service the future treaty that is in progress in the Durban Platform.

The Durban Platform for Enhanced Action expands

The new track on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action focused on both the timing and substance of the new negotiation track. The notable conclusion with regard to timing is simply that the parties agreed to “immediately proceed with substantive discussions.”³² This means that the Durban Platform will be at the heart of the climate negotiations next year in Poland. Two workstreams were created—one to design the new treaty by 2015 and the second to address the so-called ambition gap.

The first workstream is relatively more straightforward, at least in terms of taking the first steps toward 2015. The parties agreed to create in 2013 a series of roundtables and workshops on the priorities and structure of the new treaty. They will also gather submission from all parties on the usual range of topics, including mitigation, adaptation, finance, and low-carbon technology development, as well as options for the legal form of the treaty—for example, whether it should be structured more like the Kyoto Protocol or one of the agreements from the track on Long-term Cooperative Action.

The second workstream addresses the gap between what has been pledged under the current set of climate agreements discussed so far in this brief, and where we need to be

at the end of the decade to maintain the possibility of eventually stabilizing global temperature increase at 2 degrees Celsius over pre-industrial levels later in the century. This gap is currently approximately one-half to one-third of the reductions needed to keep the 2-degree-Celsius pathway open.³³

The situation has become critical. The world has already warmed approximately 0.8 degrees Celsius³⁴ since humans began pumping large amounts of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere in the 19th century, which has resulted in already-perceptible climate-related impacts. We may soon be facing the inevitability of a world at least 4 degrees Celsius warmer—which could be disastrous—unless we act fast.³⁵

The second workstream was devoted to developing a work plan with this ambition gap to 2020 in mind. The text of the Durban Platform that was agreed upon by the end of the Doha meeting encourages parties to present initiatives, proposals, and actions for implementation to reduce greenhouse gases by the 2013 meeting. These submissions should be geared toward assessing mitigation and adaptation, benefits to action, barriers to implementation, and, perhaps most importantly, finance and technology. The platform also requested a technical paper from the secretariat on the mitigation benefits of the different proposals that are expected to be submitted by these parties.

One aspect of the Durban Platform to watch will be item 13c of the final text, or the provision around the “scope, structure, and design of the 2015 agreement.” The U.S. position, as advocated by Special Envoy for Climate Change Todd Stern, has been to consider a flexible agreement that draws on the Australian “schedule approach,” which would more resemble the structure of the Cancun Agreements in allowing countries to first articulate what they are willing to do in a certain timeframe and then finding ways to increase their collective ambition.³⁶ Other negotiators, most notably from many member states of the European Union, will certainly disagree with this approach, seeking a more stringent, binding agreement, and ensuring a clash of views.³⁷

Conclusion: Closing the ambition gap

Even with the success of the Long-term Cooperative Action text in drawing the major carbon emitters in to articulate what they are willing to do in the near term, global pledges to reduce emissions are still inadequate. In his opening press conference in Doha two weeks ago, U.S. Deputy Climate Envoy Jonathan Pershing, quoting President Barack Obama, did not deny this, and instead stated flatly, “We haven’t done as much as we need to do.”³⁸

Unfortunately, though, no parties have stepped up to the plate and offered to increase their ambition in this decade. Rather, some of them seem willing only to demand that other parties increase their emission reductions before they will make further commitments. A submission from Bolivia, China, India, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and a handful of other countries

during the first week of the Doha meeting called for developed parties to “reduce their aggregate emissions by 40 to 50 percent below 1990 levels by 2020.”³⁹ This would be twice the highest commitment of any party to these talks to date and is highly unrealistic.

Not responding to such requests in the affirmative, however, does not indicate a weakness of will. Such calls for action are not laudatory, they are not heroic, and they are not productive. It’s easy to address the current ambition gap by simply stipulating that other parties take it on entirely. It is harder to find a cooperative solution that is actually achievable and that appropriately divides burdens among the world’s largest carbon polluters.

We see two top priorities for moving forward in international climate action that are both more cooperative and more realistic than the aforementioned submission. We must increase the incentives to bring more private finance into the overall package of climate finance, as well as increase action on greenhouse gases other than carbon dioxide in the near term.

[How to increase climate finance](#)

The focus in Doha on climate finance is certainly appropriate. One way we can cut the 2020 ambition gap is by financing the clean energy projects that developing countries have already put on the table in submissions under the Copenhagen Accord.⁴⁰ But the process of ramping up climate finance will move faster once the world realizes that the best way to move forward is by increasing the amount committed to mobilizing private finance. A push in this direction is in the interest of the United States and is within our reach, given levels of investment we already make in energy projects abroad.

There are several clear benefits that commitments to climate finance provide for the United States. For starters, investments in climate aid are cost effective.⁴¹ By investing in mitigation, the United States hedges against the future costs associated with climate change—with a return of about \$7 to every \$1 invested.⁴² If structured appropriately, these investments can leverage private financing and bring more capital into projects.

Climate change also presents severe destabilization threats to insecure regions through resource constraints and migration challenges.⁴³ Investments in developing countries can reduce their dependence on unstable foreign oil and increase U.S. influence overseas.⁴⁴ Climate finance also creates economic growth and jobs here at home by tapping into the \$2.2 trillion yearly clean energy market.⁴⁵ With the entire international affairs expenditures at less than 1 percent of the U.S. federal budget, climate finance provides an excellent return on investment in tough economic times.

It’s also useful to put America’s portion of this commitment to increasing climate finance in context. Mobilizing a global total of \$60 billion in climate finance over the next three

years, as we have proposed, is just \$20 billion each year. Assuming even a very high target for the United States to provide one-third of that amount, it's less than \$7 billion per year that we would need to mobilize.

This is well within reach. Last year the United States financed just less than \$9 billion in energy projects through the Overseas Private Investment Corporation⁴⁶ and the Export-Import Bank.⁴⁷ Most of this money went to fossil-fuel sectors, which has been the traditional focus for energy investing for the Overseas Private Investment Corporation and the Export-Import Bank. Simply prioritizing clean energy over fossil fuels could meet ambitious climate finance commitments with zero new budget authority.

Short-lived pollutants

Given the difficulties of forging a new climate agreement that is both applicable to all and sufficiently ambitious to reach acceptable levels of mitigation, we should turn now to reductions in other climate pollutants that are shorter lived and more powerful than carbon dioxide in terms of their ability to warm the planet, such as methane (from landfills and agriculture, for example), hydrofluorocarbons (otherwise known as HFCs; mostly used as a refrigerant), and black carbon (more commonly known as “soot,” primarily from burning diesel fuels but also from cooking with biomass). These greenhouse gases do not drive the entire global economy and so should be easier to phase down and eventually eliminate. Fortunately, there are efforts underway.

The United States has submitted a proposal every year since 2009 with Canada and Mexico to phase out HFCs under the Montreal Protocol.⁴⁸ This action is the single-largest achievable measure the world can undertake to close the current ambition gap. The level of HFCs is projected to double by 2020,⁴⁹ in large part because they are being used as substitutes for the ozone-depleting substances that are being phased out under the Montreal Protocol.

At the last meeting of the Montreal Protocol in Switzerland this past November, the parties agreed to set up a discussion group on this proposal and asked their scientific advisory board to prepare a report on technical options for phasing out HFCs. But India, China, and Brazil continue to block this measure, either to protect industries that still use this dangerous pollutant or to enable themselves to benefit from a loophole in the Clean Development Mechanism that pays these firms to destroy the HFCs that they produce.⁵⁰ If the United States is going to get these countries to agree to phase out this powerful greenhouse gas, it must elevate making a deal in the Montreal Protocol to the highest levels of diplomacy with these countries in the next administration. This means that the secretary of state and even President Obama must engage these countries on this issue at the leader level.

Additionally, in February 2012 the United States and five other countries created the Climate and Clean Air Coalition on Short-Lived Climate Pollutants to focus on the reduction of a range of short-lived climate pollutants that collectively could reduce global warming by 0.5 degrees Celsius and maintain those savings if followed by aggressive carbon reduction measures.⁵¹ Twenty parties and a variety of nongovernmental organizations are now part of this coalition.⁵² We estimate that together, such measures could cut the current ambition gap in half.⁵³

While one of these measures is more top-down—determining new parameters for an existing global target, the Montreal Protocol, and implementing it—and the other is more bottom-up—collecting a group of countries under the Climate and Clean Air Coalition willing to take up this problem together and creating opportunities to assist each other in raising their collective ambition—the most important feature of them is that they can all be pursued outside of the U.N. climate negotiations. Without taking opportunities such as these, the long and slow process of forming a new U.N. climate treaty may ultimately result in a wasted effort.

Andrew Light is a Senior Fellow, Rebecca Lefton is a Policy Analyst, Adam James is a Special Assistant, Gwynne Taraska is a Visiting Research Associate, and Katie Valentine is an intern at the Center for American Progress. All work on international climate policy. We are grateful to Richard Caperton for his assistance with this column.

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