



## **Climate change's false illusion of progress**

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On November 11, 2014, President Obama announced an "historic agreement" with China on greenhouse gases. Most people assumed it would be some sort of commitment to reduce emissions. And most people were wrong.

Rather, the joint communique coming out of Beijing repeatedly said China "intends" to hold its carbon dioxide emissions constant "around" 2030. By then, their emissions will be between two and three times the U.S.'s current emissions.

For its part, the U.S. announced in November, and then again on March 31, that we "intend" to reduce our emissions 17 percent below 2005 levels by 2020 and 26-28 percent below by 2025. The first is an easy target because the base year (2005) predated the natural gas revolution and the substitution of cheap gas for coal in electrical generation. The second target is much more intrusive, likely requiring most passenger cars to have exotic and expensive powertrains. But intentions are not commitments, and are much more easily broken.

"Intentions" may be the price that the U.N. and Obama are willing to pay to reach some sort of agreement at the December climate fest in Paris. March 31 was the deadline for nations to announce what the U.N. calls their "Intended Nationally Determined Contributions" (INDC's) to reducing emissions of dreaded carbon dioxide caused by apparently pernicious economic activity.

Not that the UN cares a whit about the INDC's legality within sovereign nations. In announcing the INDCs, it wrote that they were to do so "without prejudice to the legal nature of the contributions, in the context of adopting a protocol, another legal instrument or an agreed outcome with legal force under the Convention applicable to all Parties."

Here the UN appears to be saying it will formalize international "intentions" with "legal force" under the "Convention," which refers to the Framework Convention on Climate Change, written at Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Any protocol to it requires approval by a two-thirds majority in the Senate, which is not going to happen.

Obama has wrongly asserted that whatever comes out of Paris will not require Senate ratification; rather he will act in accordance with it via more executive orders. Any legal challenge will outlive his term in office.

The president's plan is actually nothing new. It's similar to what we laid out in 2009 as our proposal at the UN's failed attempt to do what it is now trying to do in Paris. Back then, we said we would reduce our emissions 30 per cent by 2025, 42 per cent by 2030 and 83 percent by 2050. On a per-capita basis, the 2050 emissions will be what they were in 1867. By 2100, thanks to population growth, they would be somewhere around what they might have been when the pilgrims landed.

The EPA's own global warming model, which calculates the climate impact of various policy proposals, considers these numbers too small to measure. This might explain why they are curiously lacking in any public communications about climate policies.

Assuming (wrongly) as the EPA does, that surface temperatures will warm 5.4°F for doubling atmospheric carbon dioxide, the amount of warming that will be averted in 2050 is 0.08°F and in 2100 is 0.20, amounts that are too small to even measure reliably. Assuming (more correctly) that the warming will be 2.7°F, our "intentions" will forgo 0.05° of warming by 2050, and 0.12° by 2100.

Climate change initiatives have largely been used by politicians to create the false illusion of progress, leadership, and government competence. All we can hope for is that our leaders "intend" to one day get more realistic and tell us the real numbers.

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