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# Obama's 'Prestige' on the Line in Copenhagen, With Climate Deal Far From Certain

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President Obama pauses during his speech about the war in Afghanistan at West Point, N.Y., Dec. 1. (AP Photo)

President Obama's plans for seeking an international agreement at a U.N. climate change conference next week sound precariously similar to his plans for pitching Chicago as the host city for the 2016 Summer Olympics two months ago.

At both meetings, the president scheduled very brief appearances, planning to arrive early and be long gone before any decision was reached. And, coincidentally, the destination in both cases was Copenhagen, Denmark.

Obama's first visit ended in decisive failure, with Rio de Janeiro winning the bid. So is the president setting himself up for a repeat? Or is he facing down his Denmark demons and looking to get his mojo back?

Patrick Michaels, former president of the American Association of State Climatologists and environmental fellow at the Cato Institute, said he has his doubts.

"The president is carrying nothing credible in his pocket, so how can he compel people to do something credible?" he said, referring to the fact that Congress has not passed its cap-and-trade bill.

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Obama has traveled abroad extensively -- to summits and conferences and high-level meetings -- since taking office. Those trips have produced a slew of agreements and announcements, but little concrete action. And on some of the biggest issues of the world stage -- the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Iranian nuclear program among them -- the president's approach has yielded little progress.

Analysts say that while Obama might help strike a broadly worded deal in Copenhagen, a legally binding replacement for the 1997 Kyoto Protocol may be just as unlikely after his visit as before.

Sen. Jim Webb, D-Va., reminded the president of his limits in a letter he sent to the White House last week after Obama announced he would travel to Copenhagen and lay out America's goals for cutting greenhouse gas emissions by 17 percent from 2005 levels by 2020.

"I would like to express my concern regarding reports that the administration may believe it has the unilateral power to commit the government of the United States to certain standards that may be agreed upon (in Denmark). ... The phrase 'politically binding' has been used," Webb wrote. "As you well know from your time in the Senate, only specific legislation agreed upon in the Congress, or a treaty ratified by the Senate, could actually create such a commitment on behalf of our country."

Michaels said that letter alone hurts Obama's efforts in Copenhagen, since it could confirm delegates' suspicions that the president may not be prepared to hold up the United States' end of any grand bargain.

Heather Conley, senior fellow with the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said Obama's travel schedule could also dim his chances of success.

The president plans to stop by on Dec. 9, before heading to Oslo to collect the Nobel Peace Prize the next day. But the climate conference lasts two weeks, from Dec. 7-18.

"The timing is off," Conley said. "He's going to be there the second or third day of the beginning of the negotiations. Political leaders are a bit flummoxed because they don't know how to incorporate President Obama's visit to Copenhagen, which they applaud, but it's not quite in the right sequence to make a concrete agreement possible."

She said any agreement would come at the "very end" of the conference, not the beginning.

The White House said the timing of the president's visit is immaterial.

"I think the president believes that that visit happening at the beginning is just as important as it would be at any point to getting that deal going quicker," White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs said.

Many officials at home and abroad have praised Obama effusively for his decision to attend the climate change summit and lay out U.S. targets.

Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., said in a statement that Obama's pitch "could be one hell of a global game changer."

"The fact that the president will attend the Copenhagen talks underscores that the administration is putting its money where its mouth is, putting the president's prestige on the line," Kerry said.

That's a dangerous place for the president's prestige to be, given what happened last time in Copenhagen. The president's other international trips have yielded mixed results.

Obama's eight-day trip through Asia last month didn't result in any concrete victories for the United States, though the president said his talks with Asian leaders could spur economic growth.

In a positive sign, China and Russia -- two nations Obama has reached out to -- later joined the United States and other Western nations in condemning Iran's nuclear activities. But Iran then turned around to declare defiantly that it would develop 10 more nuclear sites.

With Russia, Obama's travels yielded a number of agreements, including a pledge to cooperate more fully on bringing security to Afghanistan and a transit agreement allowing U.S. military equipment and supplies to travel through Russia on their way to Afghanistan.

The two countries also put out a statement setting out target limits for warheads and delivery systems, guiding negotiations for a new treaty to replace the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty.

But that effort has slowed, with administration aides now admitting that both countries will probably need a "bridge" agreement because a new deal won't be hammered out before the current treaty expires Dec. 5.

Elsewhere, the April G-20 summit in London resulted in a pledge for more than \$1 trillion in financing to the International Monetary Fund and other institutions. And during the summertime G-8 meeting in Italy, industrialized nations pledged to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 80 percent by 2050.

But a Kyoto successor is what the international community is focusing on when it comes to climate change. And the split is wide between developed countries like the United States and developing countries like India and China, which are hesitant to commit to binding targets.

The fact that the Senate has not yet followed the House's lead in passing a U.S. climate change bill puts Obama in a potentially weakened position in Copenhagen.

Michaels predicted "a lot of comprehensive hot air" in otherwise chilly Denmark.

"A breakthrough will be claimed when in fact none will exist," he said.

*FoxNews.com's Judson Berger and Fox News' Wendell Goler contributed to this report.*

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