

16003 What Does a Climate Deal Mean for the World?

By Coral Davenport *The New York Times* DEC. 12, 2015

The Paris deal could be viewed as a signal to global financial and energy markets, triggering a fundamental shift away from investment in coal, oil and gas as primary energy sources toward zero-carbon energy sources like wind, solar and nuclear power.

Just five years ago, such a deal seemed politically impossible. A similar 2009 climate change summit meeting in Copenhagen collapsed in acrimonious failure after countries could not unite around a deal.

The changes that led to the Paris accord came about through a mix of factors, particularly major shifts in the domestic politics and bilateral relationships of China and the United States, the world's two largest greenhouse gas polluters.

Since the Copenhagen deal collapsed, scientific studies have confirmed that the earliest impacts of climate change have started to sweep across the planet. While scientists once warned that climate change was a problem for future generations, recent scientific reports have concluded that it has started to wreak havoc now, from flooding in Miami to droughts and water shortages in China.

In a remarkable shift from their previous standoffs over the issue, senior officials from both the United States and China praised the Paris accord on Saturday night.

Secretary of State John Kerry, who has spent the past year negotiating behind the scenes with his Chinese and Indian counterparts in order to help broker the deal, said, "The world has come together around an agreement that will empower us to chart a new path for our planet."

The final language did not fully satisfy everyone. Representatives of some developing nations expressed consternation. Poorer countries had pushed for a legally binding provision requiring that rich countries appropriate a minimum of at least \$100 billion a year to help them mitigate and adapt to the ravages of climate change. In the final deal, that \$100 billion figure appears only in a preamble, not in the legally binding portion of the agreement.

Despite the historic nature of the Paris climate accord, its success still depends heavily on two factors outside the parameter of the deal: global peer pressure and the actions of future governments.

The core of the Paris deal is a requirement that every nation take part. Ahead of the Paris talks, governments of 186 nations put forth public plans detailing how they would cut carbon emissions through 2025 or 2030.

Those plans alone, once enacted, will cut emissions by half the levels required to stave off the worst effects of global warming.

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