

FOREIGN POLICY

FOR AMERICA

COP28 - Background & Talking Points Memo

November 30, 2023

Background:

From November 30 – December 12, the 28th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP28) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) will be held in Dubai, UAE. This annual gathering is the focal point for climate diplomacy and global climate action. This year's summit is expected to be the largest meeting on record, with over 70,000 expected to attend from world governments, civil society and the private sector. Vice President Harris and over a dozen cabinet secretaries and senior Biden Administration officials are expected to participate, alongside a host of other delegates from across the interagency, state and local governments, and US businesses.

Although neither President Biden nor President Xi are expected to attend, their recent bilateral meeting and the significant – if not transformative – climate outcome it produced are likely to figure prominently. The [Sunnylands Statement](#) captures tangible progress (and movement from China) on certain key points, including the development of economy-wide targets encompassing all greenhouse gases (GHG) and absolute, post-peaking power sector emissions reductions this decade. Against the backdrop of troubling findings in the most recent [UN Emissions Gap Report](#), which details how far off track we are from limiting global temperature rise to manageable levels, the U.S.-China agreement provides a foundation to build on in Dubai, but it also hints at likely sticking points, including on fossil fuel phase-out ambition.

While official programming will be concentrated in the “blue zone,” UNFCCC-controlled space where formal negotiations are held), side events and unofficial programming will be spread across the “blue zone,” “green zone” (adjacent, open-access space controlled by the UAE COP Presidency), and private venues throughout Dubai.

Focal Points:

[Events and activities](#) over the course of the two weeks will focus on the full range of solutions that must be advanced to **1) immediately peak and rapidly reduce GHG emissions this decade and 2) address the impacts of climate change that are unavoidable or already here.** The World Climate Action Summit, where most head of state involvement will be concentrated, runs from December 1-2. Each of the following

days is organized around a different sector or theme, including energy and industry; relief, recovery, and peace; finance and trade; and nature, land use, and oceans.

Three major issues will dominate the agenda at COP and ultimately shape views on whether the summit is a success or a failure. **U.S. leadership and constructive engagement on these fronts will be critical to achieving a positive outcome on any one – much less all three.**

- **Clear and Concrete Action on Phasing Out Fossil Fuels and Scaling Up Clean Energy Deployment** – The path forward is clear: the global energy system must be decarbonized rapidly if we are to avoid irreversible, cascading climate-related harms to lives and livelihoods here at home and around the world. In practice, this means reducing absolute fossil fuel demand by 25% this decade and 80% by 2050, according to the [IEA's recent Net Zero Roadmap](#). While “abated” fossil fuels will continue to play a role in the global energy mix into the future, this role will be limited. **It is critical that decision texts and mitigation initiatives put forward at COP are anchored by a science-based understanding of where and how abatement can be applied consistent with the goal of limiting temperature rise to 1.5 C.** As fossil energy is phased out, clean energy deployment must be accelerated to meet global demand. **By 2030, [global installed clean energy capacity must triple to 11,000 GW](#) and the rate of annual [improvement in energy efficiency needs to double to 4%](#).** The **U.S. should push for inclusion of these elements in all mitigation outcomes and all U.S.-supported COP28 initiatives.**
- **Operationalizing “Loss & Damage” Funding Arrangements** – One of the focal points of COP27 was an agreement to establish funding arrangements for climate “loss & damage,” climate harms experienced by the most vulnerable that go beyond what can be mitigated or adapted to. In November, after a year of fraught negotiations, the “L&D Transitional Committee” (TC) established at COP27 delivered consensus recommendations on [terms and a governing instrument for a dedicated L&D fund](#). The proposal, which represents a delicately negotiated balance, will be up for consideration and adoption at COP28. **It is imperative that the U.S. and all parties support swift adoption of the TC recommendations at COP28 and get to work operationalizing and capitalizing the Fund as soon as possible.**
- **Delivering on Climate Finance** – Developed countries’ failure to meet their collective pledge to marshal \$100 billion in annual support for developing country climate efforts by 2020 has eroded trust among the parties and hindered progress across the board. Finance is a key enabler for developing countries to expand clean energy access and resilience and it is a cornerstone of the grand bargain struck in the Paris Agreement. What’s more, the failure to deliver on climate finance is [contributing to a broader break down in trust between developed and developing countries](#) and impacting strategically important international relationships. While preliminary OECD data suggests that the \$100 billion goal may have been met in 2022 (two years behind schedule) past failures

and questions of transparency and integrity in reporting continue to muddy the waters. Blowback is particularly hard on the U.S., which is considerably behind other developed countries in meeting its climate finance commitments. A [State Department official recently claimed that climate finance totaled “nearly \\$6 billion, of which \\$2.25 billion was grant-based”](#) in 2022. Even if taken at face value, this is short of the \$11.4 billion President Biden committed to providing annually by 2024. **At COP28, the U.S. must come forward with ambitious and credible plans to boost international climate finance mobilization through direct bilateral and multilateral funding (including a pledge to the second Green Climate Fund (GCF) replenishment), indirect support and credit facilities, leveraged private investment, and [policy and process reforms at the International Financial Institutions \(IFIs\)](#).**

Progress on these issues will be captured in formal “mandated outcomes,” including:

- The first **Global Stock Take (GST)** - COP28 will produce the first GST under the five-year cycle established by the Paris Agreement. It should provide both a backward- and forward-looking assessment of progress. [Recent inputs](#) to the GST process and [other findings](#) suggest the world is woefully off track, but they also paint a clear picture of the additional actions we can and must take during this decisive decade.
- **Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA)** - COP28 is meant to deliver a final GGA framework to define, drive, and assess progress in global adaptation efforts, including and especially with respect to the mobilization of finance.
- **COP28 Cover Decision** – Each COP produces a headline, consensus, political statement summarizing the findings and conclusions reached at the summit.

Alongside the formal outcomes, COP28 will also feature an “**Action Agenda**,” which encompasses the numerous national, subnational, and private-sector led initiatives that will be put forward at COP. These often include new partnerships and campaigns, investment packages, sectoral interventions, and policy measures. Although these will not fit within any formal or official COP outcome, they are nevertheless an important part of what COP will deliver, as they have tangible, real-world impact.

Talking Points:

We’re at a decisive moment.

- The window for averting the worst impacts of climate change and adapting to the intensifying climate-related threats we’re already experiencing is rapidly closing.
- [2023 has been the hottest year on record](#) and the U.S. alone has already experienced [25 climate and extreme weather related disasters that exceeded \\$1 billion in losses](#).
- To avoid a future in which [1-in-100 year events become 1-in-5 year events](#), we must move further and faster to curb greenhouse gas emissions and increase climate resilience this decade.

- Bold, decisive U.S. leadership is needed to secure international alignment around a rapid, deep, and equitable phase out of fossil fuels and the accelerated build out of clean energy. As Sen. Markey recently put it, “You can't preach temperance from a barstool, and the United States is running a long tab.”

Climate change is the preeminent security challenge facing American families and communities around the world. It is in our national interest to lead global efforts to tackle the issue.

- Our national and collective security is at stake. Climate action and the investments we put behind it here at home and around the world promote social, political, and economic stability and directly address other related challenges ranging from global hunger to energy access and security.
- Every dollar spent on climate mitigation and adaptation leads to avoided costs and expanded opportunity, not just in target communities but globally. These efforts [support broader peacebuilding goals](#), [lower the cost of responding to extreme-weather-related disasters](#) and [open new markets for trade in low-carbon and resilience goods and services](#) (including those pioneered and commercialized in the U.S.).
- Strategic partners have [identified climate change as a top tier security priority](#) and are looking for the U.S. to lead, [including through the mobilization of international climate finance](#). What the U.S. does or fails to do on climate impacts the strength of our relationships in an increasingly contested and fragmented global environment.
- The most recent [National Climate Assessment](#) lays out clearly how climate change is already impacting lives and livelihoods in communities across the country, from increased flooding and droughts to more destructive wildfires and hurricanes. However, it also lays out how the steps we take to address these challenges – by decarbonizing and increasing our resilience – are [creating jobs](#) and [reducing costs for American families](#).

COP28 is a pivotal moment, but it is a waypoint not a destination.

- COP28 is an important moment to capture and galvanize action, but it will not in and of itself deliver the progress we need to see. Solving the climate crisis will require a sustained effort at all levels of government and the private sector.

Reactive Q&A:

Q: What do we need to see from this COP?

A: Bold U.S. leadership and global alignment around the deep, rapid, and equitable phase-out of fossil fuels (including a science-based understanding of the limited and

defined role that abated fossil fuels will play), alongside accelerated clean energy deployment (tripling installed capacity to 11,000 GW by 2030) and advances in energy efficiency (doubling the annual rate of improvement to 4% by 2030). This should be reflected in decision texts but also in the national, subnational, and private sector initiatives connected to COP28.

Q: U.S. GHG emissions are in decline, while China, already the world's largest emitter, continues to see its grow. Why should the U.S. step up to the plate when China is the real problem?

A: No country – including the U.S. or China – can bend the curve of global emissions on its own. The world's two largest economies and emitters must both act decisively. We need to strive for a virtuous cycle of increased ambition and accelerated action. The [Sunnylands Statement](#) provides a strong foundation to build on and demonstrates what is possible when we engage constructively. What's more, although U.S. emissions have been trending downward, [progress has not been linear and the science makes clear that we must move faster](#) if we are to deliver on our own targets, enabling us to lean on other countries to do more.

Q: We need to focus on our own energy security. Why are we throwing up roadblocks to domestic energy production?

A: A diversified, clean, and resilient energy system is a secure energy system. Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the turmoil it has generated in global oil and gas markets have laid bare the staggering vulnerability created by our continued reliance on fossil energy. Investing in clean energy supply chains, manufacturing, and infrastructure is the surest path to our long-term energy and economic security.

Q: What does it say that the conference is being hosted by one of the world's wealthiest petrostates?

A: The spotlight will rightly be on the UAE COP Presidency, especially following recent reports of oil and gas deals being floated in high-level meetings. The Presidency's role is to serve as an honest and impartial broker for outcomes centered on the phase out of fossil fuels and scaling up of clean energy. It is imperative that the Presidency lives up to this responsibility and avoids actions that would undermine trust in this process. It is also important to remember that the U.S. remains the world's largest producer and consumer of oil and natural gas. All major emitters have a responsibility to lead from the front at COP28 and take action to deliver a deep, rapid, and equitable phase-out of fossil fuels and accelerate clean energy deployment.

Q: Every week new headlines and reports make it seem like we're past of the point of no return. What can possibly be achieved at COP28? Shouldn't we just give up?

A: While the [latest science](#) paints a stark and troubling picture of where we are, it is equally clear on what can and must be done to put the world on the right track. This is a call to action not a eulogy. It's important to recall that [the progress made in the last](#)

[decade in lowering the cost of clean energy and expanding deployment has beat all expectations.](#) We need to repeat that success as we increase our ambition.

Have more questions? Contact:

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