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## China Joins U.S. in Pledge of Hard Targets on Emissions

By [EDWARD WONG](#) and [KEITH BRADSHER](#)

BEIJING — The Chinese government announced Thursday that it had set a target to slow the growth of its greenhouse gas emissions by 2020, a day after the Obama administration set a provisional target for reducing United States emissions.

The Chinese offer, which focuses on energy efficiency, contrasts with the strategy of the United States and most other nations to reduce total emissions. [China](#) has resisted demands from American and European negotiators to adopt binding limits on its emissions, arguing that environmental concerns must be balanced with economic growth and that developed countries must first demonstrate a significant commitment to reducing their own emissions.

With its enormous population and breathtaking pace of economic development, China surpassed the United States two years ago as the largest emitter of greenhouse gases.

It was unclear whether the timing of China's announcement was coincidental, though the Chinese have been preparing an opening position ahead of international talks on [climate change](#) in Copenhagen next month. In the past, Beijing has tried to avoid looking as if it has been directly influenced by American decisions.

A senior Obama administration official said that the United States had pressed hard for a public commitment from China and was relieved that it had delivered. But the official, who spoke anonymously because of the delicacy of the matter, called the carbon intensity figure "disappointing," and said that the administration hoped it represented a gambit that would be negotiated upward at Copenhagen or in subsequent talks.

The Chinese propose, by 2020, to reduce so-called carbon intensity — or the amount of carbon dioxide emitted per unit of economic output — by 40 to 45 percent compared with 2005 levels. By that measure, emissions would still increase, though the rate would slow. That falls far short of what many in Europe and other nations had hoped for — an increase in energy efficiency of at least 50 percent.

Analysts said the Chinese offer might take some of the pressure off the United States, which is offering to reduce the total tonnage of its greenhouse gas emissions "in the range of" 17 percent below 2005 levels by 2020 and 83 percent by 2050. But now China seems to be offering almost no deviation from its business-as-usual path, a more troubling development to some.

In a sense, the Chinese offer is less ambitious than the American proposal because China is already well on the way to its target with existing energy efficiency initiatives, while the American offer would require changes in many government policies. American efforts, though, have been mired in Congressional infighting.

Yet the offers by the United States and China both amount to politically safe opening bids in what is likely to be a long, tough process of negotiations on concrete steps that the two countries should take to address climate change.

How that will play out in Copenhagen, where nations will negotiate terms for a post-2012 treaty on reducing emissions, or in follow-up sessions next year, is unclear.

[President Obama](#) discussed climate change with [Hu Jintao](#), the Chinese president, when the two met in Beijing on Nov. 16. Officials from the two countries were in talks on the issue under President [George W. Bush](#), but Mr. Obama earlier this year made climate change a top priority in diplomacy between the governments.

China's arguments about balancing environmental concerns with economic growth resonate with other developing countries like India, and both countries propose slowing the growth of emissions relative to the growth of their economies.

The target announced Thursday "is not so low that China can get to it easily without actual effort, nor is it too high to believe," said Jin Jiaman, executive director of the Global Environmental Institute, an advocacy group based in Beijing.

China, India and the United States are expected to be crucial players among the 190 or so nations at the meetings in Copenhagen. Leaders have said they do not expect to come to a firm agreement there.

The State Council, China's cabinet, said Thursday that fixing the target for 2020 was a "voluntary action" taken by the Chinese government "based on our own national conditions," according to the state-run news agency Xinhua. Chinese officials also announced Thursday that Prime Minister [Wen Jiabao](#) would attend the [Copenhagen talks](#).

Michael A. Levi, director of the climate change program at the [Council on Foreign Relations](#), called the target announcement disappointing because it did not move the country much faster along the path it was already on.

"The Department of Energy estimates that existing Chinese policies will already cut carbon intensity by 45 to 46 percent," Mr. Levi said. "The United States has put an ambitious path for emissions cuts through 2050 on the table. China needs to raise its level of ambition if it is going to match that." Some environmental advocates have also said that the substance of Mr. Obama's announcement on Wednesday was weak as well.

Ahead of Copenhagen, China has been trying to deflect criticism by showing that it [can make commitments](#) to battling climate change. In September, Mr. Hu said at the [United Nations](#) that China would slow its emissions growth by 2020, but drew some criticism by not giving a target at the time.

Both Washington and Beijing face domestic pressure from business and political constituencies pressing their governments not to make energy and environmental pledges that could limit economic growth during a [recession](#). Members of Congress made it abundantly clear to the Obama administration that they would not approve any treaty that did not include a firm promise from major developing countries, particularly China and India, to at least slow the growth of emissions.

Meanwhile, the two countries have come under increasing pressure from European and other nations to bring some sort of commitment to the Copenhagen talks or risk their total collapse. Officials in China and the United States waited until just two weeks before the start of the conference before putting their offers on the table.

Some analysts said China might be unwilling to make larger commitments until Congress passed stalled legislation on emissions reduction targets.

The figures released by the White House on Wednesday were based on targets specified by legislation that passed the House in June but is stalled in the Senate. Congress has never enacted legislation that includes firm emissions limits or ratified an international global warming agreement with binding targets.

“China is in a more comfortable negotiating position,” Yang Ailun, the climate and energy campaign manager for Greenpeace China, said earlier this month. “In fact, every country is in a more comfortable negotiating position than the U.S. right now.”

*Edward Wong reported from Beijing, and Keith Bradsher from Hong Kong. John M. Broder contributed reporting from Washington, James Kanter from Brussels and Jonathan Ansfield from Mequon, Wis. Zhang Jing contributed research from Beijing.*

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