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July 9, 2009

Poorer Nations Reject a Target on Emission Cut

By [PETER BAKER](#)

L'AQUILA, Italy — The world's biggest developing nations, led by China and India, refused Wednesday to commit to specific goals for slashing heat-trapping gases by 2050, undercutting the drive to build a global consensus by the end of this year to reverse the threat of [climate change](#).

As [President Obama](#) arrived for three days of talks with other leaders of the [Group of 8](#) nations, negotiators for 17 leading polluters abandoned targets in a draft agreement for the meetings here. But negotiators embraced a goal of preventing temperatures from rising more than 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit, and developing nations agreed to make "meaningful" if unspecified reductions in emissions.

The mixed results underscored the challenges for Mr. Obama as he tries to use his first summit meeting of the Group of 8 powers to force progress toward a climate treaty. With Europe pressing for more aggressive action and Congress favoring a more restrained approach, Mr. Obama finds himself navigating complicated political currents at home and abroad.

If he cannot ultimately bring along developing countries, no climate deal will be effective.

The debate over warming dominated the opening of the summit meeting, but the Group of 8 nations also tackled the global economic [recession](#), Middle East peace, the war in Afghanistan and development in Africa. Mr. Obama invited his colleagues to a nuclear security conference in Washington in March and prepared to announce a \$15 billion program to combat world hunger. And in a statement, the leaders said they "deplore postelectoral violence" in Iran, and they pressed Tehran for a diplomatic solution to the standoff on its nuclear program.

President [Nicolas Sarkozy](#) of France told reporters late Wednesday that the major powers would give talks with Iran until September to make progress; but “then we will have to take decisions,” he said.

Mr. Obama put climate change front and center by scheduling a meeting on the sidelines of the main talks on Thursday and inviting nine other nations that, along with the Group of 8, pump out 80 percent of the world’s greenhouse gases. American officials called the results a step forward in the arduous process intended to lead to a worldwide climate treaty at a conference in Copenhagen in December.

But the impasse over the 2050 targets demonstrated again the most vexing problem in reaching a consensus on climate change: the longstanding divisions between developed countries like the United States, Europe and Japan on one side, and developing nations like China, India, Brazil and Mexico on the other.

While the richest countries have produced the bulk of the pollution blamed for climate change, developing countries are producing increasing volumes of gases. But developing countries say their climb out of poverty should not be halted to fix damage done by industrial countries.

As various sides tried to draft an agreement to sign Thursday, those tensions scuttled the specific goals sought by the United States and Europe. The proposed agreement called for worldwide emissions to be cut 50 percent by 2050, with industrial countries cutting theirs by 80 percent. But emerging powers refused to agree because they wanted industrial countries to commit to midterm goals in the next decade and to follow through on promises of financial and technological help for poorer nations.

“They’re saying, ‘We just don’t trust you guys,’ ” said Alden Meyer, of the [Union of Concerned Scientists](#). “It’s the same gridlock we had last year when Bush was president.”

Still, American officials said the agreement on Thursday would include important conceptual commitments by the developing nations to begin curbing emissions and to set a target date for gases to peak.

Moreover, a separate statement approved by the Group of 8 nations embraced the 80 percent emission cut for industrial nations and said scientists believed that the increase in world temperature “ought not to exceed” 2 degrees Celsius, or 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit.

“There were a number of different steps that create a meaningful commitment on emissions control,” said Mike Froman, Mr. Obama’s chief Group of 8 negotiator, “and we’re still a fair

ways away from Copenhagen, and we'll be working with the developing countries between now and then to try and firm up commitments.”

The complicated multidirectional negotiations reflect varying messages that the Obama administration is sending different audiences. It is telling the Europeans it agrees with their long-term goals but will not commit to their ambitious short-term targets. At the same time, it is not demanding that leading developing countries make comparable commitments, stoking suspicions in Europe that Mr. Obama is pursuing a separate diplomatic track with China that will result in less ambitious targets.

Other Group of 8 leaders emphasized that any solution to climate change depended on the developing world's joining the battle. Without China and India, said Arkady Dvorkovich, the chief Russian negotiator, any further discussions would not lead anywhere. Besides the United States, Russia and France, the Group of 8 includes Britain, Germany, Italy, Japan and Canada.

Prime Minister [Silvio Berlusconi](#) of Italy, the meeting's host, said it made little sense for Group of 8 countries to take on onerous commitments if “five billion people continue to behave as they have always behaved.”

Any deal with developing nations became even more elusive after President [Hu Jintao](#) of China left for home to deal with unrest in the west of his country. Without agreement from the developing nations on specific targets, the Group of 8 nations watered down their commitment to the 2-degree benchmark.

A recent draft of the Group of 8 agreement said emissions should be reduced “to limit the average increase in global temperature to 2 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels.” The final version said the nations “recognize the broad scientific view” that it should not rise more than 2 degrees Celsius.

Mr. Meyer said temperatures had already risen by 0.8 degree and would probably rise by another 0.6 degree based only on pollution already in the air, meaning that embracing that goal would require that major steps be taken almost immediately.

President [George W. Bush](#) agreed to a 50 percent cut in global greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, but not to an 80 percent reduction in those produced by industrial countries. With Mr. Obama's support, the House recently passed legislation to curb emissions, though not nearly as fast as the Europeans want.

Jake Schmidt, the [international climate policy director](#) at the [Natural Resources Defense Council](#), said that despite the rejection of the 2050 goals, it was heartening that the developing countries were committing to make reductions, and he added that the 2-degree benchmark would be an important yardstick.

“Now,” he said, “every action that is put forward from any country is viewed through this lens — does it help to hold global temperatures below 2 degrees?”

Elisabetta Povoledo contributed reporting from L'Aquila, and John M. Broder from Washington.

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