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Obama Has Goal to Wrest a Deal in Climate Talks

By [JOHN M. BRODER](#) and [ELISABETH ROSENTHAL](#)

COPENHAGEN — [President Obama](#) arrives here on Friday morning bent on applying a combination of muscle and personal charm to secure a [climate change agreement](#) involving nearly 200 countries.

He injects himself into a multilayered negotiation that has been far more chaotic and contentious than anticipated — frozen by longstanding divisions between rich and poor nations and a legacy of mistrust of the United States, which has long refused to accept any binding limits on its greenhouse gas emissions.

The world is looking to Mr. Obama to wrest some credible success from this process. And on Thursday, with almost 120 heads of state and government in attendance, there were some signs that a meaningful political deal might be at hand, including a slight shift in [China's](#) position and a pledge by the United States to help the poorest nations cope financially with [global warming](#).

But top negotiators here said that the talks could also prove a humiliating failure, because China and the United States, the world's two largest emitters, remain deeply divided over a number of difficult problems.

Mr. Obama is putting a measure of his and the nation's prestige on the line by entering a debate with so much still unresolved. It was only 11 weeks ago that he left this same city empty-handed after pleading for Chicago to be selected as the site of the [2016 Olympics](#).

But the maneuvering and brinkmanship that have characterized the final week of the talks are also a sign of their seriousness; never before have global leaders come so close to a meaningful agreement to reduce the greenhouse gases linked to warming the planet.

The administration provided the talks with a palpable boost on Thursday when Secretary of State [Hillary Rodham Clinton](#) declared that the United States would contribute its share of \$100 billion a year in long-term financing to help poor nations adapt to climate change.

The administration had remained silent for months as other major economic powers came forward with similar or even more generous financial proposals.

A senior Obama administration official said the announcement was carefully timed to resuscitate the talks before Mr. Obama's arrival.

"It's a negotiation," he explained.

But Mrs. Clinton's offer came with two significant conditions. First, the 192 nations involved in the talks here

must reach a comprehensive political agreement that takes effect immediately. Second, and more critically, all nations must agree to some form of verification — she repeatedly used the term “transparency” — to ensure they are meeting their environmental promises.

China, the world’s largest producer of greenhouse gases, has brought the talks to a virtual standstill all week [over this issue](#), which its leaders claim to be an affront to national sovereignty.

But the Chinese balkiness on the issue is matched in large measure by Mr. Obama’s own constraints. The Senate has not yet acted on a climate bill that the president needs to make good on his promises of emissions reductions and on the financial support that he has now promised the rest of the world.

“The president and his team have been doing everything possible to create a deal that is fair to the U.S. and facilitates international agreement,” said Paul Bledsoe of the [National Commission on Energy Policy](#), a bipartisan advisory group. “But if the Chinese will not accept monitoring of emissions, then a deal is not worth doing.”

China appeared to crack the door a bit toward a system of reporting its emissions and its actions to reduce them on Thursday. He Yafei, the vice foreign minister, repeated China’s opposition to any intrusive international monitoring regime in a news conference on Thursday. But he said his country would consider voluntary “international exchanges” of information on its climate programs.

Administration officials here were not ready to publicly declare any breakthroughs in their talks with China and other nations on verification measures.

“We’re making progress on all the outstanding issues with the Chinese,” a senior administration official said in a conference call with reporters. “But it’s still a very challenging task. It’s impossible to anticipate where this will end.”

Detailed talks were still continuing Thursday afternoon among at least 16 different subgroups on a range of issues, including finance for developing countries and mechanisms to preserve forests — even on whether to keep the Kyoto Protocol or commit to rolling that treaty into a new agreement.

A contingent of Democratic leaders in Congress flew in Thursday to highlight support for the administration’s position at the summit meeting. House Speaker [Nancy Pelosi](#) and a number of House committee chairmen declared that the climate change bill they passed in June would provide a large share of the money needed to redeem the administration’s promises. They met privately with a number of delegations to urge them to encourage China and a number of other nations in the so-called [Group of 77](#) developing countries to drop their objections to the proposed agreement.

“I believe the leaders appreciate the magnitude of the challenge they’re facing and will come to an agreement by the end of the week,” said Representative [Edward J. Markey](#), Democrat of Massachusetts. “And the \$100 billion really does help with the concerns of the G-77. And now we’re left with China.”

Republicans mounted a counteroffensive. Senator [James M. Inhofe](#), Republican of Oklahoma and Congress’s most vocal climate change skeptic, showed up in the press area of the Bella Center early on Thursday to deliver what he called a reality check to the proceedings here.

“There is going to be no [cap and trade](#) or binding legislation in the United States,” he said. “It’s dead. It’s not going to happen.”

Somewhat more substantively, in Washington, a group of House Republicans said they planned to introduce a resolution formally disapproving of the [Environmental Protection Agency’s](#) finding that greenhouse gases endangered public health and safety, a step that could lead to economy-wide regulation of such emissions.

The Republicans said the finding would lead to job losses and take money out of the pockets of consumers “so that radical environmentalists can wage a war against nature.”

The resolution, if it passes, will not have the force of law.

The \$100 billion figure proposed by Mrs. Clinton is similar to estimates by the [European Union of the needed contributions](#), although the amount is below the \$150 billion or so that experts at the European Union have pushed for.

Mrs. Clinton said the money would be a mix of public and private funds, including “alternative sources of finance,” but declined to explain what that might mean. Nor did she say what the American share of the fund would be, although typically in such multilateral financial efforts the United States contributes about 20 percent. She said the money should contain billions of dollars to slow deforestation, which contributes to concentrations of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

Some delegates and observers said that Mrs. Clinton’s announcement might weaken the solidarity of the G-77 developing countries with China.

Apparently attempting to appeal to these divisions, the United States Congressional delegation immediately went into a meeting with Indian officials, focusing on verification of emissions reductions programs, Ms. Pelosi said.

Prime Minister [Wen Jiabao](#), meanwhile, appeared focused on consolidating China’s G-77 ties, meeting with representatives of Brazil, Bangladesh, Trinidad, Ethiopia and Sudan since his arrival on Wednesday night.

The head of Brazil’s delegation, Dilma Rousseff, said her country, too, objected to “intrusive verification,” and felt strongly that the Kyoto track should be maintained, for now anyway.

“No one is going to give up a bird in the hand for a bird that hasn’t been introduced to us yet,” she said.

Fander Falconí, Ecuador’s foreign minister, was skeptical of the American financial offer.

“What we really need are firm mechanisms to reduce emissions from industrialized countries,” he said. “Financial mechanisms are useful, but not central, not a solution.”

Andrew C. Revkin contributed reporting from Copenhagen.

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