



U.S., now China: will India be next to set climate change targets?

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Washington, Nov. 27 – Immediately following President Obama’s announcement of domestic targets for greenhouse gas emissions reductions Nov. 25, China did the same Nov. 26. This swift succession may indicate that last week’s U.S./China talks reached an agreement on joint action – and may indicate that an agreement was also reached in U.S./India talks last week.

Until now, a major argument used by Sen. James Inhofe (R-OK) and other Republican critics of proposed U.S. climate change legislation has been that unilateral action by the U.S. to reduce emissions of CO₂ and other pollutants would put American industry at a competitive disadvantage. The critics charge that the proposed curbs would undermine the U.S. economy and send jobs overseas to countries without similar environmental restrictions. This argument will be significantly weakened by China’s announcement and could become moot if India follows suit.

The U.S. and Chinese announcements have been generally welcomed as steps in the right direction which greatly improve prospects both for a preliminary “prompt start” climate agreement at the Dec. 7-18 negotiations in Copenhagen and for a final binding global agreement sometime in 2010. This week’s announcements, however, include U.S. and Chinese reduction targets which fall far short of European commitments and expectations.

On Nov. 25, the White House announced that President Obama is committed to pursuing “a U.S. emissions reduction target in the range of 17% below 2005 levels in 2020” in the hope that the U.S. Congress will pass legislation which mandates a reduction at or near the 17% level. The White House made it clear that its commitment will be “put on the table” if the Copenhagen talks secure “robust mitigation contributions from China and the other emerging economies.” (Details at www.agri-pulse.com/uploaded/20091125H1.pdf.) The following day, China announced its own target: cutting its carbon emissions 45% below 2005 levels.

In contrast to the relatively modest U.S. and Chinese targets, the European Union has called on the world’s major emitters to cut their emissions by at least 25% below 1990 levels. Europe itself has pledged to achieve a 20% reduction by 2020 which will be increased to 30% if there is a binding global agreement. The U.S. target of 17% below

2005 levels in 2020 in fact equals only a 5.5% cut below 1990 levels. Similarly, China's 45% below 2005 would be equivalent to less than 10% below its 1990 levels.

What happens next with just 10 days to go before the Copenhagen conference begins is that pre-talks negotiations will continue. It is virtually certain that Obama's target will remain at 17% because that matches the 17% level set in the House-passed Waxman-Market climate bill – and that China's 45% target will remain since it may reflect a quid-pro-quo deal worked out last week between the U.S. and China. The next piece to fall in place could be having an equivalent target announced by India. If such targets are affirmed in Copenhagen with many more of the 190 nations at the talks adding their own targets, chances will be improved for Senate action on its stalled Kerry-Boxer climate bill which sets a 20% by 2020 target.

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#30