

COPENHAGEN: FLAWED PROCESS MEETS NEW GEOPOLITICAL REALITY

Daniel Gagnier

Copenhagen was unlike any other COP (Conference of the Parties). It suffered from too many accredited parties, exaggerated expectations, multiple demonstrations and, most important, a shifting geopolitical reality, writes Daniel Gagnier, who was there as an adviser to the Canadian government. Canadian negotiators held their positions, while trying to bridge the differences — an impossible task, as even President Barack Obama was snubbed by the leaders of the G77, with consequences yet to be determined, despite a last-minute and only partially supported accord. Canada's task now, he concludes, "is to build a better consensus in this country before returning to the heady vapours of significantly different multilateral negotiations."

Contrairement aux autres Conférences des Parties (CDP), celle de Copenhague a croulé sous les excès : trop de participants accrédités, trop d'attentes et trop de manifestations. Surtout, elle a été victime d'une réalité géopolitique en mutation, observe Daniel Gagnier, qui s'y trouvait à titre de conseiller du gouvernement canadien. Les négociateurs canadiens ont maintenu leurs positions tout en essayant d'aplanir les divergences. Une tâche impossible, alors que le président Obama lui-même était traité de haut par les dirigeants du G77. Les conséquences en demeurent incertaines, malgré un accord de dernière minute qui a permis de sauver la face. Au Canada, conclut l'auteur, notre tâche consiste maintenant à créer un meilleur consensus avant de retourner négocier dans ce nouveau contexte multilatéral.



Two months have passed since a hasty retreat from a disappointing Conference of the Parties (COP15) in Copenhagen. Disappointing because our ambitious expectations were unrealistic and because an unprecedented meeting culminated in the presence of 120 world leaders, failed in their attempt to agree on a framework for an internationally binding agreement to replace the Kyoto Protocol. We have yet to find a way of containing global warming to a 2-degree increase.

In the months and weeks before 30,000 accredited participants gathered in the Danish capital, negotiators, political leaders, world media and civil society spokespersons set the stage. Leaks of e-mail leaks between climatologists fuelled skeptics all too willing to downplay both the challenge and the necessity for an international agreement. Environmentalists and social activists for their part called for quick governmental action for a new international convention with binding targets to head off the more nefarious impacts of climate change, especially for vulnerable developing nations. Small island states in danger of disappearing pleaded for action and spoke to those

fearing the worst of consequences from global warming. In this hothouse atmosphere, concerns over global health, aid and development for those regions most likely to suffer, impacts on the oceans and anticipated new weapons in the race to reduce our carbon footprint peppered media coverage. The outline of concerns over the limits of process was drowned out as calls for making the most of this opportunity heightened expectations.

In fact the history of efforts to deal with climate change goes back to the Rio conference nearly 20 years ago. Growing scientific evidence mounted through multiple COPs, not to mention hundreds of scientific and business meetings and extensive media coverage of negotiations. Thousands of reports and opinions on the reasons for global warming, the consequences and what actions countries, states, cities and individuals should take to mitigate or adapt flooded the literature and the airways. Few public policy issues or debates received as much continuous coverage.

The most famous of these gatherings, in Kyoto, Japan, led to the 1997 Kyoto Protocol. The protocol set a series of binding targets for developed countries: those that ratified were expected to

meet their targets by 2012. Along with targets, rules and procedures outlined a series of tools from Clean Development Mechanisms (CDMs) to the introduction of carbon markets. Claims abounded on how these would achieve reduction of GHGs and secure the monetization of carbon. Opponents characterized the complex and controversial consequences as massive wealth transfers based on “hot air” and a consequent loss of economic competitiveness.

Copenhagen was the culmination of a series of processes with limited success. Each of these processes was subjected to pressures from a concerned global citizenry and special interest groups, not to mention thousands of experts on climate, trade, markets and industry. This was amplified in Copenhagen, with significant increase in volume, with:

- 30,000 persons accredited for a facility with a capacity of 20,000;
- an estimated additional 10,000 demonstrators outside the Bella Centre representing a myriad of interests and causes, all concerned with the plight of the world going forward and all with a view on a remedy;
- 5,000 and plus world media with editors back home looking for news on results or developments on negotiations, sightings of visiting personalities or simply events around the COP;
- exhibits by environmentalists, non-governmental organizations, business associations, energy sector advocates and proponents of new green technologies and experts of every kind. Hundreds of side events were staged to educate and inform allowed those waiting for results at the negotiating table to listen to scientists, researchers, carbon market and finance proponents, trade experts on border carbon adjustments, church representatives and aid development workers.

Copenhagen was a virtual smorgasbord on climate and global warm-

ing. At the centre of the COP was the negotiation table, where professional lead negotiators were trying to find a way to reconcile the desires of the G77 (developing countries now numbering closer to 132), who wanted to see a Kyoto 2 beyond 2012, and a group of parties who were focused on a new long-term convention springing from the Bali Action Plan.

Even before the COP a number of trends were discernible from the time the Kyoto Protocol came into effect. The protocol was negotiated to bind developed countries that ratified it, but the effect was to accept the proposition that the rich, industrialized nations, which had enjoyed a century or more of carbon, intensive economic benefits, should reduce their footprint before asking the G77 to follow their example. After all, the principle of equity demanded that the developing countries have a right to improve the living conditions of their populations and that the developed world should not only take the first steps at GHG reduction but should help with technology transfers and financial aid. Only then would the promise of G77 members to reduce their carbon intensity come into play. In brief, 20 percent of the world cannot continue to consume 80 percent of global resources while hundreds of millions in the developing world still

In fact the history of efforts to deal with climate change goes back to the Rio conference nearly 20 years ago. Growing scientific evidence mounted through multiple COPs, not to mention hundreds of scientific and business meetings and extensive negotiations.

have no access to electricity, not to mention other fundamental needs. The issue of global equity and long-overdue economic and social development justifies an asymmetrical approach. In common parlance: let the rich countries put their money where their mouths have been and continue to be.

Along with the equity principle comes technology transfer. Even if most technology belongs to private companies, or transfers in today’s interdependent world happen more rapidly

than ever before, providing the latest technologies free of charge remains an important means to reduce carbon footprints even in countries where on a per capita basis emissions are but a fraction of what they are in the United States, Canada and Europe.

This leads us to the crux of the next prerequisite for global reduction. If the developing economies, led by China, India and Brazil, are to move beyond the formula embedded in the Kyoto Protocol, the rich nations should help pay for the transition. Sir Nicholas Stern in *The Economics of Climate Change: The Stern Review* set the minimum level at US\$300 billion per annum for this climate aid to be effective. Copenhagen’s opening gambit was the Quick Start Fund, set at \$10 billion per annum over a three year ramp-up to 2012.

This amount became a floor in the flash of an eye so that by the time US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton addressed the conference, the offering was increased 10-fold to a \$100-billion pledge. Demands, however, on the margins of negotiations were from \$300 billion and climbing. Before resolving whether we would follow Kyoto with a second protocol or negotiate a new long-term convention, the horse-trading had opened and to

many the auction had begun. The financing and technology issues, while important, paled in significance compared with the political re-orientation centred on an alliance of leadership for the G77 led by China, India and Brazil.

Political stakes crystallized as one national leader after another committed to be at the COP in the final days of negotiation. This allowed the process and the negotiations to run in circles while waiting for the high-stakes players to show up and broker a deal. The die was cast as the clock ran out and

pressure mounted for global leadership to do what negotiators had failed to do in the year leading to and including the two weeks of the COP. Call it brinkmanship, or whatever, but having 120 world leaders in one place had not happened in modern history. One would have to go back to the founding conference of the United Nations to come close.

Pregnant with implications for multilateral negotiations, where leaders usually come together to approve or put the final touches on agreements negotiated beforehand, the dynamics at Copenhagen impeded movement and exacerbated the cleavages between the various camps. The realignment of power was represented by the use of the term G2, as observers hinged their hopes for a breakthrough on discussions between the US and China. In an instant, we entered into a dimension, whether real or not, populated by multiple groupings, G2, G8, G20, G77, etc. I heard experienced COPers begin to articulate the hope that if the COP failed and the G2 led nowhere, the climate negotiations could move to the G8. Is success dependent on a new process? Or are we, after Copenhagen, even aware of the need to restore to health the multilateral process?

Two headlines stand out in my mind since my return from the COP. The first appeared in the *Washington Post* on December 20: "Copenhagen Climate Deal Shows New World Order May Be Led by US, China." The second was a *Guardian* editorial on December 19 "Copenhagen Climate Conference: The Grim Meaning of 'Meaningful.'" Both make the point that we are at a turning point in the global political balance of power: nothing less than a new geopolitical reality emerging out of the fog of the last decade and a global recession around the issue of global climate change. The ordered and sublime world of the old G8 has fragmented and Humpty Dumpty has fallen off the wall into pieces of uneven size and importance.

Perhaps — but reality is more complex. What has shifted in the past decade is represented by the rise of China as an



Jason Ransom, PMO

Prime Minister Harper and Premier Jean Charest of Quebec announcing a green energy project in Rivière-du-Loup in January. Charest was highly critical of Canada's position at Copenhagen, saying it fell short of Quebec's targets for emission reductions. He later said he didn't take one word of it back.

economic and increasingly powerful political influence, along with India and Brazil. We are seeing an evolving global economic realignment. Considerable demographic clout, financial capability in contrast to the indebtedness of the US, along with market capability supported by manufacturing, leapfrogging technologies and entrepreneurship are today's context. The fastest high-speed train in the world is now in China along with what is soon to be the greatest volume of high-speed rail development. Unfettered by the burden of excessive democracy or by institutional paralysis, China directs economic development tailored to produce results in order to meet the expectations of its population.

As for climate change, the statistics going forward also sustain a different reality. The future growth of GHG emissions is greatest by far in the evolving economies, especially China, as we rich countries deal with stagnant populations, slower-growth economies and

shifts to knowledge-based and service economies. (Canada is an exception as immigration increases its population, and natural resources, including minerals and energy, fuel its economy.) At the core of climate and warming challenges are two critical transformations — that of a changing economy and a redefinition of national competitiveness.

In short, climate is the watershed issue for this century just as nuclear proliferation, global wars and the end of empires shaped the last 100 years. And how we deal with it will matter more for the economic and social well-being of peoples than we can imagine.

Despite our narcissistic desire to be at the centre of the world, this COP was not about Canada. It was about a community of nations bringing its views, its expertise and its capacity to deal with a global challenge that knows no borders. To be able to make a credible contribution, Canadians have to be brutally honest with ourselves and consider our ability to effect change

that will in the short term mobilize our people to innovate. In the longer term we have to be insistent that targets while necessary are insufficient — the results must be measurable, reportable and verifiable for everyone. This means international standards and binding protocols for all — countries, states, provinces and cities.

My disappointment in over 20 years of dealing with this issue is that we knew too little about the implications of what we were undertaking with Kyoto and rather than try to go beyond the comforting political rhetoric and a laissez-faire attitude, we deluded ourselves into believing either that we could do little or that we were moving ahead. No consensus was developed in this country on a national action plan despite several attempts.

So, true to form, we reverted to our propensity as Canadians to emphasize our differences and criticize each other on the domestic and international stage. This striving to show who and what level of government in federated states does or can do more is a red herring. It merely adds to our traditional national unity debate and masks the fact that climate change knows no borders. It behooves us all to do as much as possible regardless of jurisdiction and to remember that the consumer is at the base of all political levels in this country. There is no free ride on solutions to climate issues — it's a shared burden and not a matter on which we merely look to industry or someone else to make the sacrifice while we continue to enjoy life. There is no magic bullet — many different kinds of contributions are needed to weave a tapestry where the whole is a precondition for success.

I am proud to be a Canadian and a Quebecer. I am also grateful for the positions taken by BC, Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec under the Western Climate Initiative. More than this, I am aware of and recognize the contribution of Alberta and Saskatchewan to mitigate their carbon footprint as they continue

to deliver the energy we need for the foreseeable future to keep from freezing in the dark. In any other country we would by now have found the courage to recognize that we need a national energy strategy that orders our potential and values our gifts of geography and geology. At the very least an energy framework backed by political leadership will ensure that Canada contributes to a lower-carbon economy.

In the process described above, the position taken by the Canadian government at COP15 was cautious and pragmatic. Actual versus intensity targets had already been accepted and communicated by Environment Minister Jim Prentice, and even if drowned out by the noise, provincial target setting was welcomed as a positive development. The Canadian position was courageous as it ran counter to interest groups and recognized our lim-

In the longer term we have to be insistent that targets while necessary are insufficient — the results must be measurable, reportable and verifiable for everyone. This means international standards and binding protocols for all — countries, states, provinces and cities.

itations and the economic integration of our economy with that of the US. This led to criticisms in our press over lack of ambition and failure to reach our Kyoto targets: code for indifferent government and failed leadership. When the COP produced a political accord that failed to achieve full backing and less than meaningful results, the emphasis shifted to "What does it mean, and what next?"

The challenge internationally is to redefine a process for success as opposed to one for show. The goal should be to restore to some semblance of order a multilateral negotiation approach that builds confidence and goes for consensus rather than all having to approve. On content we are beyond the Kyoto landmark; this is not to deny its benefits in raising awareness

and encouraging the development of new tools. The future, however, belongs to proven performance-based results with all establishing their targets in proportion to their capabilities. Most important, true transparency lies in the ability to convince people that all this change and hard choices are worth the effort. The way to do this is to ensure that the MRV (measurement reporting and verification) approach is embedded with rigour and public reporting.

As for Canadians, our challenge will be in developing a national consensus and action plan that recognizes the strengths and capacity of each of our regions. This may make past federal-provincial discussions look simple. This will test our political leaders, our policy skills, our communication abilities and the resourcefulness of our institutions. Success will transform our economy and enhance our competitiveness; failure will doom us to the position of laggard and camp follower.

We are on the road to the next COP. Unless we revamp the process and bridge the gap between the son of Kyoto and a new long term convention, we risk another statlemate. Unless we ensure transparency on a performance-based platform with internationally binding targets and standards, we could find ourselves, as our forefathers did, reacting out of necessity in the face of crisis to find the better path forward.

Canada in this environment can play a key role in building the bridges needed to secure an international treaty. To be able to do so, we need to have a consensus at home. Otherwise why would we be seen to have the necessary credibility internationally?

Daniel Gagnier is chair of the International Institute for Sustainable Development and adviser to the Canadian Delegation to COP15. He is a former deputy secretary to the cabinet, former principal secretary to Premier David Peterson in Ontario and former chief of staff to Premier Jean Charest in Quebec.