

Movement at Marrakech: Climate Change in the Shadow of Denial. “The Trump Electoral View”

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Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Environment](#)

While it was all but obscured in the course of the US presidential excitement, negotiators at the climate change conference in Marrakech were busy attempting to hammer out the means to implement the Paris Climate Agreement.

The long and confusing shadow cast over the negotiations was considerable. Donald Trump has made no bones about climate change as a plot conjured up by other interests, specifically Chinese ones. “The concept of global warming,” he tweeted in 2012, as is his wont, “was created by and for the Chinese in order to make US manufacturing non-competitive.”

During the election, Trump became the spokesperson for dirty industries, fossil fuels and lost dreams, lauding the virtues of coal and mocking strategies and policies directed to alternative energy. The latter, or so he positioned himself, was the stance of the chatting class do-gooders. Embracing coal, oil and gas was a means of embracing the disenfranchised, a true fit of muscled nostalgia.

This Trump electoral view (governing may be more complicated) is cosmically different from the stance taken by the Obama administration, which has made it a point to come to some agreement with China to harmonise ambitious climate change policies and the push towards decarbonisation.

To that end, the negotiations were taking place as theatre rather than substance, a grand contingency. US Secretary of State John Kerry spoke of “the overwhelming majority of the citizens of the United States, who know climate change is happening and who are determined to keep our commitments that were made in Paris”.

While the front displayed by member states in attendance was one of comity and the firm common ground, the background note was shrill: tribalism and populism hovering with menace, environmental agencies fearing a slash in their funding.

As Gernot Wagner and David Keith note in *Foreign Affairs* (Nov 21), “Global warming is a near-perfect example of the tragedy of the commons, as it is a problem that no individual action, no single country can resolve on its own.” Trump, pulling the plug on the effort, might well propel the stage towards greater fractiousness and self-interest.

The other facet of this is to assume that any damage will be minimised by technological efforts and factors that are not within the control of the White House. The private sector, for instance, has been moving in the direction of alternative energy for years.

There are also logistical issues, the paperwork nightmare about withdrawal. The length of

time it will take to disentangle the US from the machinery of the climate change framework would take up to four years.[1] A better option there would simply be non-enforcement and foot dragging.

Should the United States withdraw, others will step in. China has already indicated its enthusiasm in taking over should the US step back. This is bound to prove bruising for American pride, and it is a point the advisors will be wise to keep in mind.

As for the conference itself, there was continued emphasis on the problem of squaring the gap between National Determined Contributions (NDCs), otherwise known as the government's climate commitments, and the overall aim of keeping the global temperature rise significantly below 2 degrees centigrade.

One way of doing so has been advanced by Markku Markula, President of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR). "The EU," suggested Markula, "must take the lead and incorporate cities' and regions' carbon emission achievements in time for the next NDC revision period that starts in 2018" (EU Committee of the Regions, Nov 21).[2]

Initiatives such as the Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Change and the 2050 Pathways Platform, both designed to mesh the cooperative mechanism between all levels of government, were also launched. This is not merely a case of State intervention, but that of the city and the region. Across cities and regions in the United States, "green" initiatives are also being undertaken. Not all hands of endeavour, destructive or otherwise, stem from the White House.

Given the nature of his unruly mind, there is nothing to suggest that Trump would not relent on the issue of climate change limits, provided he sees business running through it. The word to repeat here is competitiveness, even if that aspect retains a distinct hollowness to it. What comes into the boardroom of that particular reality show is bound to vary.

As a case in point, the president-elect, ever unpredictable, now claims there is "some connectivity" between human agency and climate change. As for the 2015 Paris climate accord? "I'm looking at it very closely. I have an open mind to it." [3]

Not that the mind is so open, if the appointments to the transition team is anything to go by. Mryon Ebell, senior fellow at the Competitive Research Institute, has the Environmental Protection Agency in his sights. On the surface, the appointment resembles, in its comic dimensions, the appointment by President George W. Bush of John R. Bolton to the post of UN Ambassador.

The recipe for administrative chaos is being followed, and the point of concern will be specific to such matters as the Clean Air Act or a reduction of funding for such bodies as the National Science Foundation. While Trump is not an ideologue, some of his appointees are.

For the moment, much of what took place in Morocco may well be a dead letter once the president-elect storms his way onto the international stage. The greatest concern will be the anti-climate change zeal from those ideologues clinging in eager anticipation to Trump's coattails.

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Notes

- [1] <http://www.theverge.com/2016/11/10/13579222/trump-presidency-climate-change--energy-environment-coal>
- [2] <http://cor.europa.eu/en/news/Pages/COP22-Marrakech-sets-new-path.aspx>
- [3] <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/donald-trump-says-he-believes-there-is-some--connectivity-between-humans-and-climate-change-in-major-a7432671.html>

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