



Rockets Red Glare Distract Nation From UN Climate Summit and Import of Global Climate Protests

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With the dramatic launch of the American-led air war in Syria, and the escalation of Middle Eastern hostilities against ISIL, the critically important UN Climate Summit in New York has had to compete on mainstream media with the far more dramatic war coverage.

Given Congress, the public, and the media's notoriously short attention spans, the videos of exploding tanks, burning buildings, and fleeing refugees have also already begun effacing potent images of the historic People's Climate March in New York on Sunday and the Wall Street protests that followed on Monday.

Thanks to the minimal attention paid by network TV to the colossal march by more than 400,000 people in New York -- the largest climate demonstration in world history -- it was all too easy for ordinary American TV viewers to forget about climate change, until the next climate disaster.

Sad, because in the long run, the climate's fate is far more important to the world even than the desperately needed military campaign by the U.S. and its allies to eradicate barbaric ISIL terrorists from Syria and Iraq.

The thousands of climate demonstrations in nearly 3,000 climate demonstrations in more than 150 countries, plus the national outpouring of support in the U.S. the People's Climate March finally represent a major turning point in the climate movement's struggle for global influence and power. The global grassroots climate change movement has finally come of age and begun flexing its muscles on the world stage.

The concerted protests were designed to send the Obama Administration and world leaders a powerful message ahead of the UN Climate Summit, and indeed they did. President Obama acknowledged the grassroots pressure in his address to the UN and urged delegates to respond to the protests with meaningful action. The President had in effect been asking for public pressure on the issue for many months.

By mounting the largest coordinated climate demonstration in world history in the wake of National Climate Week, the worldwide protest movement gave the Administration the negotiating cards it was seeking.

The UN Climate Summit was not an official negotiating session but rather a high-level occasion for world leaders to discuss their proposals for the international climate treaty to be signed in Paris in December 2015. It is supposed to go into effect in 2020, which seems like an incongruously leisurely timetable, given how perilous the current climate crisis has become and how close we are to catastrophic climate change.

Previous global climate negotiations have all failed to set mandatory carbon emission cuts even as global emissions have climbed inexorably. The international community has thus had to accept voluntary commitments since the failed 2009 UN Climate Action Conference in Copenhagen. The U.S.'s failure to embrace mandatory international reductions in greenhouse gases has made us part of the problem rather than the solution.

Voluntary greenhouse gas reduction pledges made at subsequent UN Climate Action Conferences in Cancun, Durban, and Doha have been declared inadequate, by the parties themselves, to prevent an unacceptable rise in global temperature of 2° C or more.

Frustrated now with decades of ineffectual international negotiating under the auspices of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the climate marchers and their millions of supporters are finally calling for an end to further procrastination now that global concentrations of greenhouse gases have soared to levels unknown on the planet for 5 million years. The climate demonstrators are likewise making their frustration clear over Congress's failure to adopt a national cap 'n trade or carbon fee system or a national renewable energy requirement. President Obama's energy and climate policies, too, are in the cross-hairs.

While laudably advancing energy conservation and renewable energy, the Obama Administration has gone full speed ahead with fossil fuel development as part of the President's self-described 'all of the above' energy policy. The powerful groundswell of support for Sunday's extraordinary national Climate March is a clear indication that millions of Americans are finally fed up both with the Congressional stalemate over climate legislation and with the Federal government's fundamentally ineffectual, contradictory climate policies.

End of Part 1. In Part 2, I will provide a brief critique of the Obama Administration's climate policies.

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