

Still time to slow climate change

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Highlight: The latest United Nations update on *climate change* is written in even more numbingly impenetrable prose than usual, but concealed in that thicket is a sledgehammer: Even if nations fulfill their current promises to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, we are headed for "catastrophic" global warming by century's end.

That is how U.N. Secretary General António Guterres characterized the report's prediction that the planet is on track to warm by 2.7 degrees Celsius (nearly 5 degrees Fahrenheit) by 2100. This far exceeds the Paris agreement target of keeping warming to no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius. And yes, the more dire forecast assumes that nations honor their current commitments to rein in emissions.

Body

The latest United Nations update on *climate change* is written in even more numbingly impenetrable prose than usual, but concealed in that thicket is a sledgehammer: Even if nations fulfill their current promises to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, we are headed for "catastrophic" global warming by century's end.

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We are sure to hear many dire warnings about *climate change* from world leaders, including President Joe Biden, at this week's U.N. General Assembly speech-fest in New York. We will hear pious boasting about what countries have already done to curb heat-trapping carbon emissions - and weaselly excuses about why they regrettably cannot do more.

What we will not hear is concrete plans to prevent the worst-case *climate* scenarios. U.N. scientists say that carbon emissions need to be slashed 45 percent by 2030. Instead, emissions are on a path to increase 16 percent above 2010 levels by the end of the decade.

Instead of slamming on the brakes as we head to the edge of a cliff, we're doing a Thelma-and-Louise and speeding up.

Of course, part of the problem is that this car has many drivers. Among the most powerful is Chinese President Xi Jinping.

As the world's dominant economic power, the United States has an obligation to lead humanity toward a clean-energy future. But China is now by far the globe's biggest emitter of greenhouse gases, accounting for more than twice the carbon emissions as the United States. We will never solve global warming unless Beijing becomes part of the solution, not part of the problem.

I've followed the *climate change* issue for three decades and my view has been that China will ultimately recognize its own self-interest and curb emissions.

But I'm losing faith. We've seen China continue to build and bring online coal-fired power plants. We've seen China continue to prioritize short-term economic growth over the long-term health and safety of its 1.4 billion citizens.

As the most powerful Chinese leader since Chairman Mao Zedong, Xi has more to say about the earth's environmental future than any other individual. It is true that U.S. carbon emissions per capita are much higher than China's, but that is no longer a rational yardstick. Everybody's emissions need to come down,

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right now, and we have the technologies and the incentives to make that happen. What China lacks is the determination to do the right thing, and this needs to change.

One world leader who does plan to attend the U.N. General Assembly in person is Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India - the world's third-biggest emitter of carbon.

Modi has begun talking a better game on climate change, saying that addressing the problem is a matter of national "environmental security." But at the G-20 meeting earlier this year, India blocked an agreement on more ambitious new climate goals and said the focus should instead be on getting rich countries to reduce their per-capita emissions.

But what world leaders really need to talk about is not a new set of numerical targets to be made, missed or fudged but a new paradigm for development based on clean energy. China, India and the rest of the developing world have every right to lift billions of poor people out of poverty. But everyone should want this to be done via energy from renewable sources that do not send the planet past a climate tipping point that is already in clear sight. There is no higher standard of living in a world that is drowning, burning and choking.

It is not too late to avert catastrophe. We have the means - solar, wind, hydroelectric, nuclear - to do so. All we need, world leaders, is the will.

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