

# A Pivotal Opportunity

Todd Stern



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Vice Chair of China's National Development and Reform Commission Xie Zhenhua (left) shakes hands with U.S. Climate Change Special Envoy Todd Stern in Washington, D.C., July 2009.

*Todd Stern, special envoy for climate change at the U.S. State Department, is instrumental in developing U.S. international policy on climate and is the administration's chief climate negotiator, representing the United States internationally at the ministerial level in all bilateral and multilateral negotiations. He has extensive experience in the public and private sectors, in environmental and other global issues.*

*Here Stern lays out the main challenges and important remedies relating to climate change from the perspective of the Obama administration.*

**W**e have reached a pivotal moment in the climate challenge, and what we decide to do now will have a profound and lasting impact on our nation and our planet.

The science is clear. Arctic sea ice is disappearing faster than expected. The Greenland Ice Sheet is steadily shrinking. The melting of permafrost in the tundra raises the risk of a huge methane release. Sea levels now threaten to rise much higher than previously anticipated. And water supplies are increasingly at risk with the melting of glaciers in Asia and the Western Hemisphere.

These are the facts. They send a simple and stark message: The status quo is unsustainable.

The health of our planet is in our hands and the time for action is now.

The upcoming United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Copenhagen offers a chance to mobilize international

collective action to meet this global challenge. Under the leadership of President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton, the United States is working with our partners around the world to find common ground and stem the tide of future irreversible damages.

We recognize that the United States must be a leader in the global effort to combat climate change. We have a responsibility as the world's largest historic emitter of greenhouse gases. We know that without U.S. emissions reductions, no solution to climate change is possible. And we are confident that the United States can and will take the lead in building the 21st-century clean energy economy.

In just eight months, the Obama administration has dramatically shifted U.S. policy on climate change and is leading by example through robust action at home. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act included more than \$80 billion for clean energy investment. President Obama set a new policy to increase fuel economy and reduce greenhouse gas pollution for all new cars and trucks. And there is a bill making its way through Congress, the American Clean Energy and Security Act of 2009, that would cut U.S. carbon emissions from 2005 levels by 17 percent in 2020 and 83 percent in 2050.

But action by the United States and other developed nations is not enough. More than 80 percent of the future growth in emissions will be from developing nations. There is simply no way to preserve a safe and livable planet unless developing countries play a key role in the climate negotiations and join us in taking collective action to meet this common challenge. It is not a matter of politics or morality or right or wrong, but simply the unforgiving math of accumulating emissions.

Addressing climate change is an economic opportunity, not a burden. The link between clean, sustainable energy and robust economic growth is the hallmark of the 21st-century global economy. With the right support, developing countries can leapfrog the dirtier phases of development and seize the potential of new, clean energy sources. This is the future.

The United States is pursuing a multipronged strategy to engage the international community and encourage developing countries to take further action.

First, we are fully committed to the Framework Convention negotiating process. Our negotiating team recently returned from its third trip to Bonn, and we will continue to take part in the negotiating sessions leading up to Copenhagen in December 2009.

Second, we have established an invigorated dialogue among 17 of the largest economies — including China, India, Brazil, Mexico, South Korea, South Africa, and Indonesia — through our Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate, which met in July at the leaders level in Italy immediately following the G8 meeting. The forum presents a unique opportunity to hold candid discussions among the world's major economies on a number of complex issues, including mitigation, adaptation, technology, and finance, which will be a central focus in Copenhagen.

Third, we are focusing on key bilateral relationships. The administration has expanded efforts to strengthen the

U.S.-China relationship, and climate change is an essential component of that dialogue. I joined Secretary Clinton in February during her first trip to China, where she elevated the climate change challenge to a top priority. Secretary of Energy Steven Chu and Secretary of Commerce Gary Locke delivered similar messages during subsequent visits. Moreover, the State Department, in conjunction with the

Treasury Department, recently hosted meetings of the Strategic and Economic Dialogue with China, where the two countries signed a memorandum of understanding on clean energy and climate. Simply put, no global solution will be possible if we don't find a way forward with China. In addition, I traveled with Secretary Clinton to India and later alone to Brazil to consult and deepen our dialogue with two important partners and explore opportunities for our countries to make progress toward a successful outcome at the UNFCCC negotiations in Copenhagen.

Rarely are we presented with as clear an opportunity to shape our future and enhance our way of life for generations to come. The United States is clear in its intent to secure a strong international agreement, and I am confident that together we can meet the global climate change challenge. ■

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