

Where Will the Bali Roadmap Lead?

William O'Keefe, CEO, & Jeff Kueter, President
George C. Marshall Institute

After two weeks of what were described as “tense and emotional discussions,” 190 nations in Bali agreed to a roadmap to guide future negotiations regarding climate change. On the surface, it appears that those negotiations will be guided more by rationality and energy reality than climate orthodoxy and zealotry.

Although the European Union (EU) and others persisted in pushing for an energy-suppressing extension of the Kyoto Treaty, delegates chose a more realistic path that recognizes the importance of developing new technologies, moving existing ones to developing countries, examining options for adaptation, and confronting the challenge of promoting economic growth while constraining the growth in greenhouse gas emissions.

The Kyoto Treaty, which expires in 2012, has failed because it demands too much, too soon and ignores the vital role of fossil energy in achieving and maintaining economic growth and prosperity. Developing low- and no-carbon energy systems is a marathon, not a forced march. It has been described as the technology challenge of the century.

The challenge in implementing the Bali framework will be reaching an agreement that reflects the true state of scientific knowledge, that is truly global, that creates incentives for increased investment in developing countries, and that strikes a balance between the need for more energy, primarily fossil energy, and realistically constrains emissions growth. Advocates who persist in promoting unrealistic and unattainable reductions in emissions will simply hinder real progress.

If the roadmap leads to a stronger commitment to investment in technology and more effective global collaboration, the Bali meeting will have made a useful contribution.

The Marshall Institute Policy Outlook series will periodically examine important issues affecting science and public policy. Particularly focused on the use of scientific information in formulating policy decisions, Policy Outlooks will aim to provide clarity and objectivity to policy-relevant discussions. The views expressed by the author are solely those of the author and may not represent those of any institution with which he is affiliated.