

U.S. on hot seat at Sharm el-Sheikh climate meeting

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‘Make big polluters pay’: Protesters at COP 27 demand Western powers meet their financial obligations to the Global South, Nov. 10.

The 27th Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework [Convention on Climate Change \(COP 27\)](#) is underway in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt. Delegates from all over the world are gathered to try to agree on proposals to slow down and eventually eliminate rising atmospheric temperatures from the emission of greenhouse gasses (GHGs).

At its conclusion, the White House and faithful media will speak in glowing terms of the U.S. role. This practice of issuing a rosy, self-serving assessment each year has masked the contentious deliberations that have taken place since the conferences began in 1995.

In reality, the U.S. has bullied its way through the annual conferences. In 1997, when the 3rd COP took place in Kyoto, Japan, Vice President Al Gore led the U.S. delegation. Already posturing as a leading figure on battling climate change, his team still insisted that the U.S. be allowed softer requirements than the rest of the world. They shoved an agreement down the throats of the other delegations to exclude most military emissions from agreed-upon calculations.

This was huge and continues today. The U.S. is by far the largest and most active military in the world and the number one institutional emitter of GHGs. U.S. emissions per capita are among the worst in the world — even excluding the millions of gallons of jet fuel and diesel fuel needed to keep the Pentagon’s tanks, jet fighters, and aircraft carrier groups threatening and brutalizing the world.

But the U.S. is now on the hot seat over another long-simmering issue - climate finance.

In 2009, at COP 15 in Copenhagen, industrial, developed countries were backed into

a corner over the damage that rampant capitalism has done to the Global South. Under pressure, they were committed to a pledge of \$100 billion annually beginning in the year 2020.

The payments are lagging. The U.S., Australia and Canada have provided less than half their share. Often, instead of outright payments, government figures and financial institutions have been trying to count already agreed-on aid funds and loans as part of the payments.

The terrible consequences of climate change worsened in 2021 and 2022. All around the world, extreme weather events took thousands of lives, left millions homeless, and destroyed infrastructure and agriculture. Normally temperate regions in the Pacific Northwest of the U.S. and many parts of southern and central Europe became ovens.

Historic droughts continued to plague East Africa and the Western U.S. China suffered a 70-day heatwave, and one-third of [Pakistan was left underwater](#) from floods – the severity of which has never occurred before.

This torrent of destruction has pushed the issue of climate finance to front and center at COP 27. President Joe Biden will attend on Nov. 11 and plans to boast about his legislative success. His Inflation Reduction Act grants billions to cherry-picked, profitable projects that cost the energy industry absolutely nothing, doesn't do enough to curtail the use of fossil fuels and ignores potential planet-saving projects among the landscape of innovations and technologies that have emerged.

It will be interesting to see how Biden glosses over the real issue at hand. Global South countries are no longer only demanding the fulfillment of the \$100-billion annual pledge. There is now discussion of further transfer of funds referred to as “loss and damage” payments. Any funds that the capitalist robbers are forced to pay should be seen in the context of the trillions of dollars robbed during the colonial

period. That process of exploitive theft continues today in the period of modern imperialism.



When President Ranil Wickremeshinghe of Sri Lanka spoke at the conference, he said, “The practice of colonialism transferred the rich resources of Asia and Africa to Europe to industrialize their countries, which is also the root cause of climate change — the consequences of which we, the poor countries, are forced to suffer.”

The issue of climate finance, and loss and damage payments, has to be seen in that context by all those who want to leave a livable planet for future generations.

But for the U.S. capitalist class and their representatives, this treads dangerously close to a demand for reparations to all those brutally oppressed in the development of U.S. capitalism.

Paul Bledsoe, who was the communications director of the White House Climate Change Task Force during the Clinton administration, was candid when [he told the New York Times](#), “America is culturally incapable of meaningful reparations. Having not made them to Native Americans or African Americans, there is little to no chance they will be seriously considered regarding climate impacts to foreign nations. It’s a complete non-starter in our domestic politics.”

U.S. delegates may be made to feel uncomfortable in Sharm el-Sheikh, and it remains to be seen whether or not the rising anger of those delegates from the Global South will be enough to pressure the U.S. and others to come up with more

funds or even to meet previously agreed on obligations. In any case, the global progressive movement, and particularly activists in the U.S., must unite around the issue of reparations for the Global South.

