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Non-state actors to the assistance of climate action

Auteur

David Levai

Associate Researcher

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The Global Climate Action Summit (GCAS), which was expected to be one of the major climate events of this year, was held late last week in San Francisco, USA. According to the majority of participants and commentators, it was a great success. However, what has actually been accomplished by California's outgoing governor, Jerry Brown, the principle organizer of this summit convened before Donald Trump's decision to withdraw from the Paris Agreement, along with all the speakers from around the world? To take stock of these accomplishments, and to assess their potential impact a few weeks prior to the 24th Conference of the Parties to the Paris Agreement in Poland, the question arises of what were the objectives, official or unspoken, of this event.

Beyond the multitude of side events organized during the three days, two major dynamics underpinned the summit. This dichotomy was quite tangible, especially at the closing ceremony.

The first objective of the GCAS was indeed highly political: to target US actors along with the country's voters, a few weeks before the mid-term elections, to reinvigorate the numerous actors engaged in climate action, and to impede the Trump administration's intentions to scrap the legislative and regulatory framework relating to the emissions of CO₂ and other greenhouse gases—such as methane emitted by hydrocarbon extraction, which has become the target of the latest [wave of deregulation from the EPA \(Environmental Protection Agency\) last week](#).

For this reason, the most climate savvy Democrat leaders shared the floor in San Francisco: from John Kerry, former Secretary of State, to Michael Bloomberg, former mayor of New York, UN Special Envoy and probable 2020 presidential candidate; from Al Gore, a long-time activist and outstanding speaker, to Barack Obama's virtual presence through a video message to affirm his very real support.

Furthermore, beyond these leading figures, the multiplicity and diversity of US entrepreneurs and elected officials of all stripes aimed to send an unequivocal message to the rest of the world, far beyond the climate community, to reassure their partners: in essence, "The White House can no longer claim to speak for the United States, it is us, entrepreneurs, mayors, local elected officials, academics, and even ordinary citizens, who are guarantors of the word of the American people, and we will strive to achieve emission reduction commitments made prior to COP21." Some would say that there is nothing new in this, since it was already the spirit of the major mobilization of American actors at the previous COP in Bonn last November, who gathered under the [« We are still in »](#) banner.

However, the presence of many ministers and foreign national government representatives at a gathering of so-called "non-state actors" is proof that the goal to replace the Federal Administration has been achieved. Evidence is provided by the large Chinese delegation, led by Special Envoy Xie Zenhua, Chief Negotiator of the Paris Agreement, which was present in many panels to reaffirm, if needed, Chinese leadership on renewable energies and electric vehicles, for example. The mere fact that a cooperation agreement was signed between China and California, which often regards itself as the world's 5th largest economic power, is not unimportant and demonstrates the will of Beijing to continue working with the United States while circumventing Washington.

In parallel with this exercise of political communication designed both to mobilize Americans and to reassure other countries of their commitment, this summit was intended to illustrate the multitude of actions that the territories and private sector have undertaken to help limit global warming without sacrificing financial results. This demonstration of a transition that is already underway, along with the [myriad of new announcements](#), had three objectives:

1. First, **reassurance**. After a summer marked by an increase of extreme weather events around the world, and on the eve of the release of the IPCC report, which will once again highlight the urgency of a systemic transformation of our model if we want to maintain the possibility of limiting warming to 1.5°C, citizens committed to an ecological and climatic transition needed to hear some good news, which may explain the cathartic function of this [presentation of an increasing range of solutions](#). The response from GCAS was loud and clear: "Yes, solutions exist and the dawning of this world is possible!".
2. Then, **acceleration**. The aim of the GCAS was to generate a knock-on effect in all sectors of the economy to recruit more companies, and more local elected officials so that they join the ranks of the "early movers", those who were perhaps more visionary than others and readied themselves ahead of their competitors to position themselves as leaders in climate action. It was a question of demonstrating that this personal and institutional commitment, far from being based on an ethic of responsibility, was simply a matter of "good business" and "good politics".

3. Finally, **persuasion**. This objective involved convincing national political leaders not only of the strong and growing expectation among their fellow citizens, but also of the veracity and solidity of existing responses so that by 2020 they can set a more ambitious course, with a focus on carbon neutrality by 2050. The purpose of this large gathering was for local and multinational actors, private and public, to send a signal to governments and leaders that they were ready to support them in moving forward, but to do so they needed their legislative, regulatory and financial support to foster the development and deployment of these responses to climate change.

This was one of the objectives of the [appeal to Patricia Espinosa, the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change \(UNFCCC\)](#), which will be relayed by Governor Brown next week to the United Nations General Assembly. Let us hope that this call will be heard, then quickly acted on at the national level to activate the legislative and regulatory levers necessary to create the momentum.

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- [Lola Vallejo](#),
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A first test of the effectiveness of this summit of non-state actors as a political catalyst will be played out at COP24 which, in Poland in December, will gather together the representatives of the signatory states to the UNFCCC. In addition to the [Talanoa Dialogue](#), which will culminate at COP24, with the aim of taking stock of current efforts and informing the revision of national commitments by 2020, the summit of non-state actors is both a call for more synergy with states, but above all a call for more ambition in terms of global climate action. Beyond exhilarating declarations, it is now necessary, first and foremost, to follow up with real greenhouse gas emission reductions.

Source Photo > [Global Climate Action Summit Website](#)

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