

comment

Cancun concludes that we must adapt to a volatile climate

environment
Julian Hunt

Far from being another unsuccessful international meeting, as some predicted, the Cancun summit is likely to be looked back upon in years to come as a seminal moment.

The accord, reached on Saturday, endorsed the actions of countries to limit greenhouse gas emissions. However, more significantly for the long term, it accepted that preserving the global environment in its present state is probably unattainable. The focus now moves to adaptation to deal with the more volatile climate that is predicted by all the major centres of climate science for the rest of this century and beyond.

The exceptional seriousness of the warming problem was underlined most recently by an International Energy Agency (IEA) report last month on the trend of increasing global emissions of greenhouse gases. Under the Copenhagen Accord's environmental goals and pledges, emissions would rise 21 per cent above 2008 levels by 2035 alone; the emissions growth rate of China (now the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases) will increase at an even greater rate.

The IEA indicates that the increase in global temperature in these circumstances will be at least 3.5°C. There appears little that the incremental, non-legally binding Cancun accord (which builds upon Copenhagen) will do to alter this. Indeed, opposition to the deal has centred around the fact that critics, including Bolivia, assert that it would result in a global temperature rise of more than 4°C.

In the absence of moves towards a much stronger, global and legally binding deal, the world is thus on the path of the "business as usual" scenario envisaged recently as an unlikely worst case. Therefore, the international community has to consider unprecedented changes.

What is absolutely clear is that temperature rises of a 3°C to 4°C magnitude will, most likely, pose an irreversible tipping point for continental sized areas of changing land cover, and for ice on sea and land. As a result, millions (if not tens of millions) of people are likely to be displaced by the effects of desertification and rising sea levels, and mountain snow melt.

In this fast moving and disturbing picture, international action must now focus on how societies can adapt to (as well as prevent) these changes. And, with this in mind, politicians and the public would do well to seriously consider planning for the monumental changes in coming decades.

Put simply, as extreme weather becomes more frequent, countries will need to develop integrated practical policies that deal both with the full range of climate change adaptation and natural disasters. This year's weather-related disasters, ranging from the brush fires in Russia to the floods in Pakistan, will only grow in frequency and we must be better prepared.

In this difficult context, how is the world responding?

Firstly, although the Kyoto accord will not be renewed in 2012, the

(weaker and non-legally binding) Cancun deal that more than 190 countries have signed up to is nonetheless an important development. Key measures include a Green Climate Fund intended to raise and disburse \$100 billion (Dh367 billion) a year by 2020 to protect poor nations against climate impacts and assist them with low-carbon development; and a new adaptation committee will support countries as they establish climate protection plans.

While the Cancun accord has its weaknesses, it is much better than no deal at all. And, we must be realistic: given the massively wide range of political, economic and technical approaches to climate change policy across the world, it may be impossible to frame a much stronger international agreement that would satisfy all governments, businesses and civil society groups.

The second key trend is the development across the world of a wide diversity of approaches to tackling climate change at the local, regional and national levels. In a Mexico City symposium, organised by Global Legislators for a Balanced Environment (Globe), I heard earlier this month how collaboration in such "bottom up" initiatives will be an essential part of the global effort to tackle the dangers of climate change, and should be part of the Cancun accord.

For instance, in China, where a feasibility study is being concluded right now into a new comprehensive climate change law, financial rewards for reducing energy use provided by regional government are making substantial improvements in efficiency. These arrangements are evolving into local carbon markets, albeit small-scale and voluntary at this stage.

EU countries have been emphasising different kinds of low carbon energy, such as wind, carbon sequestration and nuclear power. The continent has also promoted its policy of carbon trading to motivate industrial efficiency.

Other countries are focusing on preventing the rise of atmospheric greenhouse gases by expanding forestry. For instance, Brazil and Mexico are introducing national legislation for minimising the loss of tropical rain forest and preserving these irreplaceable natural habitats, while ensuring the vitality of communities who live in them.

However, despite these initiatives, we are now at a point at which preserving our current environment is probably unobtainable. What is thus urgently needed is broader agreement on a range of practical actions to mitigate climate change and deal with its effects on health, business, agriculture and natural disasters.

The rising costs of dealing with these effects, such as coastal defences, reducing desertification and urban overheating, mean that preventative actions have to begin right away. It would be folly of the highest order to delay this process until economies grow further, as some influential economists continue to argue.

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Mottaki's fall reflects Tehran's precarious balance of power



analysis
Emile Hokayem

It mattered little that in his last major appearance as the foreign minister of Iran, Manouchehr Mottaki dutifully delivered a textbook defence of the Islamic Republic's foreign policy and nuclear programme to a largely sceptical audience at the Manama Dialogue two weeks ago. On Monday, his boss, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, decided he had to go.

Predictably, the Iranian president's allies have justified the move by the lacklustre performance of the comparatively bland Mr Mottaki. In reality, the reasons for this unsurprising, if brutal and arguably discourteous dismissal – Mr Mottaki was in faraway Senegal when the news was delivered to him – have more to do with the struggle for power between conservative cliques in Tehran than his effectiveness as foreign minister.

To be sure, Mr Mottaki did not have an easy ride as his country's top diplomat. For a start, the foreign ministry has become a marginal player in Iran's security and foreign policy decision-making. Many of its talented and urbane diplomats have been sidelined for suspected sympathies with the reformist wing. It organised a controversial conference on the Holocaust that drew international opprobrium. It has been kept in the dark by the increasingly powerful Revolutionary Guard and other players who run security policy in regards to Iraq, Afghanistan, the Gulf and the Levant. Mr Mottaki also paled in comparison with his sophisticated predecessors, Ali Akbar

Velayati and Kamal Kharazi, who had direct access to Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.

And while Mr Velayati and Mr Kharazi were in sync with the presidents they served, Mr Mottaki was never Mr Ahmadinejad's choice for the post. In the 2005 presidential elections he was a top adviser to Ali Larijani, the scion of Iran's most powerful political family and the leader of a conservative faction. At the insistence of Mr Khamenei, keen then to unify the various conservative groups, Mr Larijani became the secretary general of Iran's powerful Supreme National Security Council – and Mr Mottaki got the less important foreign affairs portfolio.

That arrangement did not last long as Mr Larijani and Mr Ahmadinejad's strong personalities clashed over the nuclear negotiations. The former left his job in October 2007 but quickly rebounded when he was appointed speaker of Parliament. Even then, Mr Ahmadinejad spared his foreign minister no embarrassment: he appointed special envoys that reported directly to him and circumvented the foreign ministry. One of these envoys is the controversial Esfandiar Rahim Mashaie, Mr Ahmadinejad's relative, closest confidante and purported choice as presidential successor.

To add to Mr Mottaki's troubles, he never was a central player in the nuclear negotiations, as demonstrated by his absence at the inconclusive Geneva talks earlier this month. That was the purview of Mr Larijani

and later of his replacement, Saeed Jalili. His relations with the latter, an Ahmadinejad ally, were execrable. Instead, he became confined to selling the country's position, engaging in damage control and lobbying small nations on relatively peripheral issues: getting Iran a seat on a UN women's rights panel, blocking a UN resolution condemning Iran's human rights violations, and containing the fallout of an embarrassing episode of arms smuggling by IRGC elements to Nigeria.

Mr Mottaki, his detractors now say, has not advanced Iran's interests abroad, most notably failing to prevent the adoption of UN sanctions against his country. This accusation of diplomatic timidity may be true, but it smacks of scapegoating: no amount of lobbying could help Iran in recent years. It also may be the case that Mr Mottaki had become so inconsequential that Mr Khamenei consented to his dismissal.

Mr Mottaki's replacement is Ali Akbar Salehi, the head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organisation and a vice president to Mr Ahmadinejad. Mr Salehi's profile has risen in recent years. The MIT-trained nuclear scientist, whose diplomatic credentials include a stint as his country's representative to the UN nuclear watchdog, was a key player when Turkey and Brazil brokered the Tehran declaration in May.

Interestingly, he was named in a recent UN Security Council Resolution sanctioning Iran for its illegal nuclear procurement, and he has even been hit with a travel ban. Already there is chatter that Mr Salehi, as one of the architects of Iran's nuclear programme, will have the authority and legitimacy to reach a nuclear compromise – or the very opposite.

There is a broader context to the Mottaki episode: Mr Ahmadine-

jad is trying to increase the powers of the presidency to the detriment of those of Parliament. He has imposed the lifting of subsidies over the objection of many parliamentarians, and plans to introduce direct patronage that would reward his base. These manoeuvres may be a prelude for the next presidential elections scheduled for 2013, and Mr Mottaki's dismissal evidence that Mr Ahmadinejad has momentarily gained the upper hand in this arms wrestling.

Factionalism of this type, maddeningly difficult to navigate for outsiders, has been a staple of revolutionary Iranian politics. It is undeniably a complicating factor when it comes to foreign policy. In late 2009, Mr Jalili, with the backing of Mr Ahmadinejad, agreed to a scheme to transfer low-enriched uranium abroad in exchange for fuel rods for the Tehran Research Reactor. The Obama administration hoped this arrangement would create needed confidence for future nuclear talks. Though billed as a pragmatic figure, Mr Larijani opposed the deal to deny the president a political victory (the Green movement did the same) and got Mr Khamenei's backing. Mr Mottaki was tasked with spinning Iran's reversal even as it angered Russia and China.

There is an important irony in this political drama: even as the Iranian regime consolidates its authority by repressing internal dissent and quashing the Green movement, the regime is fracturing from within. Though not irremediable in the short term, these disputes show that political dysfunction in Tehran is more to blame than western rigidity.

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Stars burn bright at festival, but still a small universe of film

notebook
Ali Khaled

If the man who played the godfather Vito Corleone, taxi driver Travis Bickle, raging bull Jake La Motta and US government-nemeses Al Capone approves your filmmaking credentials, it's a safe bet you'll be feeling pretty pleased with yourself.

Teta, alf mara ("Grandmother, a thousand times"), a documentary by the Dubai-based Mahmoud Kaabour had just won the Audience Award for Best Documentary and a special jury mention at the Doha Tribeca Film Festival, and the 31-year-old Lebanese director is receiving his award from arguably the greatest actor of his generation, Robert De Niro.

With the seventh edition of The Dubai International Film Festival (DIFF) in full swing now, the search is on for more filmmaking talent, especially among Emiratis, to follow in Mr Kaabour's footsteps.

DIFF, while still a fledgling event, has started to find its feet. The novelty factor of the first few years has worn off, to be replaced by expectations. Morgan Freeman, George Clooney and Adel Imam have over the years given the event a certain gravitas, but it is now time to develop the festival seriously as a platform for emerging talent and a hub where ideas are exchanged and, like other festivals around the world, major deals are struck.

For all the positive strides it has taken, DIFF remains something of an unknown entity. Some film fans feel that it is not advertised aggressively enough, while the excellent

workshops and forums that the festival hosts should be attracting far more attention.

The Dubai Film Market is an initiative that was set up to bring film industry professionals from around the world together, providing a platform for negotiations and co-operation on projects. This market serves as the gateway to the Dubai Film Connection, DIFF's co-production unit, and to the Dubai Film Forum, a hub for talent development, business and industry panel discussions and workshops. Finally Enjaaz, the festival's new post-production support programme, entitles local applicants funding of up to \$100,000 (Dh367,000). So the opportunities are there, but will they be seized?

A vibrant film industry should not only rely on an annual film festival. The love of cinema, and indeed

art in general, is something that needs to be nurtured. For financial reasons, filmmaking, like music, painting, performing and writing, still lags considerably behind jobs in banking and government as career choices for young Emiratis. There is no quick fix for this. Long-standing attitudes need to change if this embryonic cultural shift is to bloom.

As a film locale, the UAE ticks off most boxes. Despite its relatively young age, or maybe because of it, there are many untold stories that are ripe for filmmakers to explore. It has excellent locations that can be exploited, from iconic landmarks, high-rise structures, major hotels and outlets and long stretches of highways. Crucially, you can film on location by the beach, in the desert and in urban areas. Guerilla filmmaking, the

dedicated film buff's art form using personal equipment and props, skeleton cast and crew, and practically nonexistent budgets should, in theory, thrive here.

At the moment, however, censorship and lack of funding remain major obstacles for local filmmakers, dissuading many from expressing themselves.

There are positive signs however. A welcome feature of The Gulf Film Festival – DIFF's smaller sister event – earlier this year, was the number of Emirati film students, mostly female, whose work focused on culturally taboo subjects. Topics like unaffordable dowries, the rise of plastic surgery in the country and Emirati boys' obsession with their cars were all humorously considered.

These short films were created with modest equipment and no

funding at all, hence a small victory for guerilla filmmaking.

Others have taken the fast track to success. Nawaf al Janahi nabbed the most promising filmmaker award last year for his film *Al Dayra (The Circle)* and this year screenings of *The Philosopher*, by another Emirati filmmaker Abdulla AlKaabi, is drawing attention.

Ali Mostafa, the director of *City of Life*, has predicted that within five years local cinemas will be offering three Emirati features a week.

Whether, and when, this tipping point becomes a reality remains to be seen, but Mr Mostafa and Mr al Janahi have certainly offered some hope to a new generation. De Niro, the muse to the peerless director and one-time guerilla filmmaker Martin Scorsese, would surely approve.

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