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## Post-summit forecast not looking good

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IT IS difficult to know which is in more trouble after the extraordinary last 24 hours of the Copenhagen climate conference - the environment or multilateralism. Probably the former, but the latter is in bad - some would say irreparable - shape.

Virtually nothing at the summit went right. Put aside the shocking organisation and the terrible food; the failure to agree on a substantial climate change accord in Copenhagen wastes two years of work since the Bali summit and, if not addressed with an increasingly unlikely international treaty in 2010, could mean a return to the pre-Kyoto Protocol days when no countries had binding targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

In climatic terms, this would be potentially opening ourselves up to some of the worst scientific predictions: in Australia, more drought, worsening bushfires, increased deaths due to extreme heat in the summer.

This could be the case even if the proposed Copenhagen Accord got up. Its weak "pledge and review" approach - basically, nominating domestic climate policies and meeting occasionally to report back on how things are going - would mean no testing of whether countries are doing what they say they are and no way of being sure commitments will add up to something that stems the projected damage. Everyone just does what they want. Yet the rifts between wealthy and developed nations and, increasingly, developing and poor over the past fortnight were so great that even agreement on this was barely possible.

Perhaps the yawning gaps between countries on what to do over an issue as vexed as climate change should not be so surprising. Besides Sudan's willingness to spoil the works at all costs and the island states' determination to punch above their weight in a fight for a justice that looks increasingly unwinnable, the most notable character trait at Copenhagen was the apparent Chinese indifference to the outcome. Beijing is moving to a cleaner future, with world-leading renewable-energy development. But it takes its role as a superpower quite differently from the US approach. It doesn't care if it is loved, and had few qualms about walking away empty-handed - for now, at least.

*This story was found at: <http://www.theage.com.au/environment/postsummit-forecast-not-looking-good-20091219-16r4.html>*