Barack Obama stepped into the chaotic final hours of the Copenhagen summit today saying he was convinced the world could act “boldly and decisively” on climate change.

But his speech offered no indication America was ready to embrace bold measures, after world leaders had been working desperately against the clock to try to paper over an agreement to prevent two years of wasted effort — and a 10-day meeting — from ending in total collapse.

Obama, who had been skittish about coming to Copenhagen at all unless it could be cast as a foreign policy success, looked visibly frustrated as he appeared before world leaders.

He offered no further commitments on reducing emissions or on finance to poor countries beyond Hillary Clinton’s announcement yesterday that America would support a $100bn global fund to help developing nations adapt to climate change.

He did not even press the Senate to move ahead on climate change legislation, which environmental organisations have been urging for months.

The president’s speech followed the publication of draft text, obtained by the Guardian this morning, that reveals the enormous progress needed from world leaders in the final hours of the Copenhagen climate change summit to achieve a strong deal. The draft says countries “ought” to limit global warming to 2C, but crucially does not bind them to do so. The text, drafted by a select group of 28 leaders – including UK prime minister, Gordon Brown – in the early hours of this morning, also proposes extending negotiations for another year until the next scheduled UN meeting on climate change in Mexico City in December 2010.

In his address, Obama did say America would follow through on his administration’s clean energy agenda, and that it would live up to its pledges to the international community.
"We have charted our course, we have made our commitments, and we will do what we say," Obama said.

But in the absence of any evidence of that commitment the words rang hollow and there was a palpable sense of disappointment in the audience.

Instead, he warned African states and low island nations who have been resisting what they see as a weak agreement that the later alternative — no agreement — was far worse.

"We know the fault lines because we've been imprisoned by them for years. But here is the bottom line: we can embrace this accord, take a substantial step forward, and continue to refine it and build upon its foundation," he said.

"Or we can again choose delay, falling back into the same divisions that have stood in the way of action for years. And we will be back having the same stale arguments month after month, year after year – all while the danger of climate change grows until it is irreversible."

He also took a dig at China, drawing attention to its status as the world's biggest emitter and reinforcing America's hardline on the issue of accountability for greenhouse gas emissions.

The lacklustre speech proved a huge frustration to a summit that had been looking to Obama to use his stature on the world stage – and his special following among African leaders – to try to come to an ambitious deal.

The president was drawn into the chaos within minutes of his arrival at Copenhagen, ditching his schedule to take part in a meeting of major industrialised and rapidly emerging economies.

Responding to Obama's speech, a British official said: "Gordon Brown is committed to doing all he can and will stay until the very last minute to secure a deal... but others also need to show the same level of commitment. The prospects of a deal are not great."

Many reactions were strongly critical of Obama. Hugo Chávez, the president of Venezuela, described Obama's speech as "ridiculous" and the US's initial offer of a $10bn fund for poor countries in the draft text as "a joke".

Tim Jones, a spokesman for the World Development Movement, said: "The president said he came to act, but showed little evidence of doing so. He showed no awareness of the inequality and injustice of climate change. If America has really made its choice, it is a choice that condemns hundreds of millions of people to climate change disaster."

Friends of the Earth said in a statement, "Obama has deeply disappointed not only those listening to his speech at the UN talks, he has disappointed the whole world."

The World Wildlife Fund said Obama had let down the international community by failing to commit to pushing for action in Congress: "The only way the world can be sure the US is standing behind its commitments is for the president to clearly state that climate change will be his next top legislative priority."

The extent of crisis in the talks has taken leaders by surprise. The Brazilian leader, Lula da Silva, told the conference that the all-night negotiating sessions took him back to his days as a trade union leader negotiating with his bosses.

**Comments in chronological order**

*Post a comment*
Lionel
18 Dec 2009, 1:07PM
saying he was convinced the world could act "boldly and decisively" on climate change. I very much doubt that he was.

Recommend? (25)
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cscottmax
18 Dec 2009, 1:07PM
i'm not a fan of obama, but disappointment with him is totally unwarranted. the man is the president of a constitutional republic. his role in international treaties is quite clear. what possible good could come of obama promising to reach for the moon in cph while numerous members of HIS OWN PARTY in the senate are thinking of perhaps a kite fly at best?

Recommend? (59)
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leightoncooke
18 Dec 2009, 1:10PM
Email Obama:
http://www.38degrees.org.uk/page/speakout/obamacopenhagen?js=true
They couldn't organize a piss up in the Carlsberg brewery. Watching the Copenhagen climate summit fall apart is a saddening spectacle. Heavy handed Danish police tactics outside reflect the deadlock inside. There now seems no chance of any sensible agreement coming out of this conference. Perhaps failure will concentrate the minds of those with the power to make a difference. Perhaps the prospect of failure will be enough to snatch a last minute deal. Whatever happens, Copenhagen is the beginning of the struggle to combat the effects of climate change, not the end. This is not a trade conference. It is about our future, and our children's future. Evolution did not equip us well to deal with problems of this magnitude. Too many alpha male monkeys stand in the way of common sense. The US will have to abandon its obstructive tactics. It is the nation that carries the main responsibility for the present situation. China is on track to be the future major polluter, and the Chinese themselves are very aware of it. The Chinese know how to cope with problems on a vast scale. Their cooperation is vital to finding a solution. As for Europe, we can only hang our heads in shame at the way that Denmark has handled the organization of this conference. Excluding NGOs such as Friends of the Earth, and bashing the skulls of peaceful protesters, is not the best example of democracy at work in a continent that has a history of humanism and individual justice. The people of Africa and the developing world, the poor, the excluded,
the children who are yet to be born, and those who need our support to take action to
save our planet, deserve better. Sadly I found Obama’s speech in Copenhagen a massive
disappointment. He seems to have nothing new to offer, except for more rhetoric. The
time for rhetoric is over. America needs to change its mindset and lifestyle. Business as
usual is not an option. As Chavez pointed out the other day, if the world were a bank, we
would have saved it already.

Much is expected of him, yet his hands are tied behind his back by the US Congress and
its lobby system, much as the hands of demonstrators were bound by the police. Yet
despair is not an option. We must act. We must change. We can change.

@Cookiemouse

Putting all can’ts and shouldn’ts aside, it should come as no surprise to anybody that
Obama simply won’t shift into reverse after pursuing a brazenly pro-corporate, pro-
military agenda since securing the nomination for president.

His own appointed climate negotiator in Copenhagen, Todd Stern, was the biggest stink-
bomb at the negotiating table. The pathologically mendacious Hillary Clinton showed up
yesterday to wave a figure of $100 bln for developing countries, without specifying
where or from whom the money would come. It was largely an empty gesture to buy
time to broker, if possible, an even more exploitative deal for the world’s wealthy.

For some real perspective on US (government) priorities, look no further than this
Wednesday’s US House of Representives vote to approve, by a 395-34 majority, $638
bmn for 2010 military appropriations. Trip that over your tongue a few times....

This is no longer about an ‘inadequate’ US response. It’s about ‘full-on initiative’ in the
totally wrong direction.
Sad, sad, sad.

Teddddd

I am a supporter of Obama, but I am baffled by the World’s view of him as someone how
can miraculously make everything right.

Europe doesn’t want to cut CO2 by as much as the US 17% offer. China doesn’t want to
stop expanding its CO2 output. Small country dictators want to put more cash in their
corrupt pockets. How is a speech by Obama going to change that?
Bugbeer
18 Dec 2009, 1:19PM
Obama: all mouth and no trousers.

Recommend? (53)
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Drprl
18 Dec 2009, 1:19PM
cscottmax
what possible good could come of obama promising to reach for the moon in cph while numerous members of HIS OWN PARTY in the senate are thinking of perhaps a kite fly at best?
I don’t know what leverage he has. Could he threaten to resign if a promise to match Europe's reductions were blocked by Congress?

Recommend? (13)
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Link

Harvey Milk
18 Dec 2009, 1:20PM
This comment has been removed by a moderator. Replies may also be deleted.

Cscottmax
18 Dec 2009, 1:24PM
drprl...
threatening to resign would have zero credibility for several reasons. chief among them is obama's ego, he is a man very much in love with the idea of being president. and secondly, his actual resignation would just bring in joe biden, and to continue the scenario, his resignation would bring in nancy pelosi. neither of those would have a BETTER chance of convincing congress of anything. the american system of government is purposefully designed to be slow and deliberate.

Recommend? (19)
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Teddddd
18 Dec 2009, 1:33PM
"I don’t know what leverage he has. Could he threaten to resign if a promise to match Europe's reductions were blocked by Congress?"
Meant to be funny I assume. Of course most of Congress would take him up on the offer.
But more importantly, Europeans need to realize that the numbers they hear over and over from their politicians are badly skewed. Based on 2005, the US offer is vastly superior to the European one. Only by looking at 1990 as a baseline and allowing Europe to claim carbon credits for shutting down Eastern European dirty plants does the European number look any good. The US has outperformed most Kyoto countries in pollution reduction over the past 10 years.

Recommend? (14)
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LucAstro
18 Dec 2009, 1:34PM

No, we can’t, the new Obama mantra. For him, it’s downhill from here. No health care bill, no serious targets on climate change, no real change. Business as usual, more plasma TVs, more cars, more wars, more walls.

Recommend? (59)
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Rhysapgruff
18 Dec 2009, 1:36PM

Expecting Obama to waltz in and solve everyone’s problems was naive and childish. He’s one leader among many hundreds. Those who would criticise him now should ask themselves how much further away a deal would be if a Republican sat in the White House. As someone above has pointed out, he is the leader of a constitutional republic, it’s simply not within his power to promise the sun, the moon and the stars to anyone who wants them.

Recommend? (36)
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lid6j86
18 Dec 2009, 1:38PM

This comment has been removed by a moderator. Replies may also be deleted.

VillageVoice
18 Dec 2009, 1:46PM

The assessment is disappointment. That President Obama gives us the truth and a clear-eyed assessment is not.

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nercules
18 Dec 2009, 1:47PM
cscottmax & drprl:
One of the most fascinating comparisons between the Bush and Obama administrations
is the mutual lack of democratic scruples involved in either going to war or going to bat
for failed financial institutions. When it comes, however, to allocating money for
domestic prerogatives such as health care, the environment, joblessness, education,
everything’s a long, dragged out process and there ‘just aren’t the funds’ to get it done.
These administrations have more in common than people seem willing to recognize, but
the really interesting thing was that the liberal response to the Bush admin was one of
horror and helplessness -- like nothing could be done to oppose the Bush-Cheney
steamroller. Now, with the Democrats in power, the libs are backpedaling on earlier
progressive demands and going soft on Obama’s many betrayals, citing that he’s just
operating within built-in limitations of the office. I personally despise the Republicans,
but to be honest, they are far truer to their (stated) principles, which is why they fight
harder...and resort to strong-arm tactics if they have to get it done.
A pox on both their houses.

Recommenda? (22)
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trinidad1107
18 Dec 2009, 1:49PM
This comment has been removed by a moderator. Replies may also be deleted.

Freedomisgood
18 Dec 2009, 1:56PM
I understand people are upset with the US president right now. But he has not the
power to sign a treaty anyway. People mis understand the US constitution. For the US
president to enforce a treaty it would have to approved by a super majority vote in
congress. To get them to agree that much, you would have a likelier chance of getting
struck by lightning!
He could maybe sign just an agreement but it would not be as effective, also he would
still have to have a majority vote! But not a super majority vote.
An agreement could also be thrown out after his term as president is up! A Treaty could
not! But I do not think a treaty could ever be ratified!

Recommenda? (12)
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STOP PRESS: Messiah arrives, fails to save planet.

Recommend? (61)
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This comment has been removed by a moderator. Replies may also be deleted.

Lid6j86 excellent couldn't have put it better myself

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A couple of thoughts - of course Obama can't sweep in and "save the world" by himself, I don't think anyone was expecting that, but neither is he just one of many world leaders - as the USA is one of the primary polluters and also hold a great deal of the world's wealth and power. If America took a strong lead it could make a huge difference to the outcome.

Also am I missing something when we talk about China's emissions? Look at almost every gadget in your house, your plastic Christmas decorations and the clothing in your wardrobes. "Made in ...", yes China. China's emissions are in large part OUR emissions in the West. Why is this never mentioned when talking about them cutting emissions, as if it is all entirely their responsibility, instead of ours for dumping our industries over there?

Recommend? (15)
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It is quite amusing to now see the same media outlets who assisted Obama in creating positive public perceptions of him (and, in doing so, put him in the White House) now trying to do the opposite. Evidently, he has not turned out to be the champion of the progressive left that they all wanted. As Obama has demonstrated both in this speech as
well the Nobel Prize speech, the actual Barack Obama (unlike the fictional, inspirational figure we have seen on our television screens previously) is a realist, rather than the idealist he told us he was during the US presidential race. Initially, my appreciation of Obama did not extend beyond the great pleasure of seeing a person of colour lead a Western nation. I am surprised to find that I am now warming to Obama the political leader. Perhaps he is not just a pawn of the left...perhaps he is worthy of his unprecedented achievement after all...

Recommen? (15)
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Briggflatts
18 Dec 2009, 2:11PM
I've said it before, and I'll say it again: Obama is an absolute agent of conformity

Recommen? (10)
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Tiresias
18 Dec 2009, 2:17PM
So, the Great Unicorn Hunt continues. They can blow, holler and poop until their cheeks crack but they will achieve nothing more than a warm sense of participation. Let's hope the hoteliers of Copenhagen have a good Christmas on the back of it - it's an ill wind, etc.

Recommen? (4)
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pastis
18 Dec 2009, 2:17PM
America is the country of the big 3 - Ford, Chrysler, General Motors. Not to mention the oil industry. What did you expect?

Recommen? (2)
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harryintl
18 Dec 2009, 2:18PM
This comment has been removed by a moderator. Replies may also be deleted.

Freedomisgood
18 Dec 2009, 2:20PM
"China's emissions are in large part OUR emissions in the West. Why is this never mentioned when talking about them cutting emissions, as if it is all entirely their responsibility, instead of ours for dumping our industries over there?" That is right! The US shipped all of its manufacturing jobs to other countries that DO NOT CONTROL POLUTION, OR REGULATE POLUTION near as well as the the US does, there for ruining even more of the planet! The US needs to take responsibility and move alot of oes manufacturing jobs back to the US where as the polution can be regulated and clean manufacturing can accur! I consider myself a true enviromentalist! I understand that man has to co-exist with nature, not destroy it!!!! We can still have industry without destruction!

Recommend? (9)
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Hammerfore
18 Dec 2009, 2:20PM
This comment has been removed by a moderator. Replies may also be deleted.

PaulinNI
18 Dec 2009, 2:23PM
No we can't! It was all hot air from the very beginning. Obama's been weighted in the balances and found wanting. Another false prophet bites the dust.

Recommend? (25)
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DeimosP
18 Dec 2009, 2:24PM
What is needed is for the US to cut its emissions significantly (i.e. to join in with the rest of the world) - but they wont. It shows their character (selfish ?). It is not Obama's fault they are like that. They expect us to take all the pain for them and they will try and buy-off objecting countries.
Sorry US. You are the world's biggest polluter per head of population by a long long way and you need to do something about it. You are destroying the human race with your selfishness.

Recommend? (5)
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RHuxster
18 Dec 2009, 2:25PM
So like the CO2 Emissions, much of the World Leaders talk was just that, 'Hot Air'. Of
course, unlike the World Leaders Talking, probably added overall to CO2 emissions. Considering, the Transport, Logistics, and energy required to Host 200 Countries and more and there entourages, the talk at the conference is very expensive in terms of cost to the Planet. Watching President Obama give his speech, is like ‘Watching the Captain or a passenger rearrange the Chairs on the Sinking Titanic’. Without a deal, Global reductions, in emission targets look further away then ever, and of course there is no plan or framework for dealing with the rapid onset of the effects of Global warming. It looks like the Worse case scenario, could happen ‘Coral Bleaching’ if Sea Temperatures rise by just Two Degree Celsius, that means it could be the Oceans becoming devoid of life, as Coral provides home and shelter for many Sea Creatures. The Great Barrier Reef is doomed to Disappear which has been here for many thousands of years, long before man. Global Changes to salinity levels, and Ocean Currents reversing and changing. The Gulf Stream could switch off and Britain may be plunged into -31 Degree Celsius Temperatures. There probably be a growth in Hurricanes, Typhoons and year in year out more extreme weather events. Bangladesh and the Maldives will disappear along with other Low lying coastal regions. Desertification of Africa, and the encouragement of Desserts, will lead to famines and refugee crises, with a large number of African migrants coming to Britain and the EU. Many regions will be flooded by rising Sea levels, and the World will suffer from higher Temperatures and heat waves. Many ecosystems could end up on the verge of collapse. Our so called Leaders have failed once again to take decisive action, and build on the Kyoto Protocol. Probably the chances for any future Agreement are going to be much more distant. We will probably have unilateral agreements between Countries rather than the more important Global Treaty. This could allow countries to go at different rates, but of course, that does not add up to much in my view, as it makes dangerous Climate change rise of 3 Degree Celsius or even Eight over the next century look more likely. It would then be an excuse for Governments to procrastinate further and not make any significant emissions cuts. There is no impetus or urgency for the Big Three China, India, and The US to take any action at all. Governments really needed to have demonstrated leadership and encourage Innovation, Industry and Large Corporate Businesses to make shift to more Cleaner Greener forms of energy, such as Wind, Tidal Solar, and Hydro electric power, fuel cells, and a Hydrogen fuel economy long term, as well as in the short, nuclear energy.

Two years of negotiations added up to no significant treaty to replace Kyoto. The problem, in my view, is that, progress is too slow, and the changes necessary to avoid catastrophic climate change, are not going to take place within the necessary time frame of 20 to 30 years. It looks as if man could go the way of the Dinosaurs, and become extinct. I hope that I am wrong of course.

Recommend? (3)
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CheGuevarasDead
18 Dec 2009, 2:27PM
This comment has been removed by a moderator. Replies may also be deleted.

Jozeph
18 Dec 2009, 2:28PM
Obama has played a losing hand rather well in Copenhagen. As others have made clear here, the president does not have the authority to make any significant promises. Without strong backing from Congress and the American people, he's quite powerless in this matter.

DrJazz
18 Dec 2009, 2:29PM
Freedomisgood:
The US needs to take responsibility and move a lot of its manufacturing jobs back to the US where the pollution can be regulated and clean manufacturing can occur! I consider myself a true environmentalist! Won't that disturb your Liberty to exploit the poor in other countries? And won't it mean you have a lot less of your money in your pocket to spend how you wish?

morris2010
18 Dec 2009, 2:31PM
Obama speech highlights why nobody trusts the US.

simaldo
18 Dec 2009, 2:33PM
I still think the current US administrations desire to engage in these discussions is a step in the right direction. The fact the Obama came to address the delegate despite knowing that a deal was unlikely to be achieved is to be commended.
18 Dec 2009, 2:34PM
Obama is a big fat disappointment. Dithering on bankers bonuses, trying to shut down talk of the Tobin tax even though most of the world agrees with our position. Now this lukewarm attitude to climate change.
He makes Gordon Brown look good doesn’t he? How strange that Britain has at last got a proper centre left govt since Blair got shoved out, and ours is the only one in the developed world flying the flag for sensible centre-left policies (apart from Japan’s new govt).

Recommend? (10)
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Tox66
18 Dec 2009, 2:36PM
I trust the US morris2010, to act as the US always does. If you mean that you don’t trust them to do your bidding, and sharp about it, then you’re right not to do so. But then, why should they?
What should perhaps occupy your minds more is why don’t people trust internationalists and socialists and other such sundry totalitarian dross. But it won’t, of course.

Recommend? (10)
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Link

torvald
18 Dec 2009, 2:36PM
the man is slowly drowning in his own rhetoric

Recommend? (16)
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Link

PaulinNI
18 Dec 2009, 2:39PM
Sorry US. You are the world's biggest polluter per head of population
So much misinformation here it's staggering.
Fact: the world's biggest polluter per head of population is Australia.
Fact: the world's biggest polluter is China.

Recommend? (28)
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Teddddd: I believe you've been mislead here, or perhaps you just have not read enough. The US wants to reduce emissions by 17% from 2005 levels by 2020, this is the equivalent of a meager 1.4% from the 1990 levels which most other countries use as a reference point. The European countries have said they want a 30% reduction from the 1990 levels by 2020 if an agreement is reached and 20% otherwise (which I think is bullshit, reduction should not be dependent on what others do).

China has promised 40-45% "emissions per unit of GDP" by 2020 from 2005 levels. I am by no means an economist, but assuming the current growth rate of 9% for all years between 2009 and 2020, the Chinese GDP would grow by about 250% by 2020. This actually equates to a 42% *increase* in CO2 emissions.

Per capita, assuming no population growth (so per capita will actually be somewhat lower than this) this is an increase from 4.57 tons of CO2/capita to 6.48 tons of CO2/capita.

The US emissions per capita is 18.67 tons of CO2/capita, they propose a 17% reduction from these levels, or about 15.496 tons of CO2/capita in 2020 (again, assuming no population growth).

The EU emits 7.84 tons of CO2/capita and proposed a 30% reduction from the 1990 levels if an agreement is met for similar reductions in other developed countries, let's take the pessimistic (and most likely) view that this will only be 20% from 1990 levels. The EU-27 decreased emissions between 1990 and 2005, so actually this will be about on par with the US 17% from 2005, so about 6.51 tons of CO2/capita by 2020.

They are of course all playing with the numbers to make their offer to appear to be the most ambitious. The US chose 2005 levels because US emissions have increased since 1990. The EU chose 1990 levels because EU emissions have decreased since 1990. They are all trying to get away with doing as little as possible while it appears that they are doing as much as possible to those who do not go and look up the statistics (i.e. the vast majority of the population).

Recommend? (9)
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President Obama talks of the dangers to security, economy and the world. Hollow Mr. President and insufficient to address the concerns to the concerns of the rest of the world.

Now, possibly a call to boycott United States products and services, in favour of products and services from countries that are strident in their CO2 reduction policies, would at least get the attention of this mighty gas guzzler and emissions polluter.

No one should advocate war, trade or otherwise, yet the Planet ? animal, vegetable and
mineral, is undoubtedly vulnerable to the vagaries of traditional unfettered capitalism that espouses the principles of maximum exploitation and minimum concern for the welfare of all.

The text, drafted by a select group of 28 leaders - including UK prime minister, Gordon Brown - in the early hours of this morning, also proposes extending negotiations for another year until the next scheduled UN meeting on climate change in Mexico City in December 2010.

Another jolly Christmas party, this time next year.

Gordon Brown can be Santa Claus.

A clever speech.

Indeed. It seems that is the only thing that Obama is good at: giving clever speeches that mean or change nothing.

niklas82 - maybe instead of promising % reductions from various start points, people should say we will commit to only emitting 6.5 tons of CO2/capita. The EU and Chinese proposals deliver this. The US proposals don't and Obama needs someone to give him a good slap.
No one should advocate war, trade or otherwise, yet the Planet? animal, vegetable and mineral, is undoubtedly vulnerable to the vagaries of traditional unfettered capitalism that espouses the principles of maximum exploitation and minimum concern for the welfare of all.

Where are you from, that can lecture Americans like that?
Is it really that near to heaven already?

I love how the US right-wing peanut gallery archfully reminds us about sticking to the letter of the Constitution. Laughable.

No one with a cursory understanding of the US political system expects that Obama can bind the country to a treaty without due process....BUT at the very least he could invest some passion and political capital in trying to persuade his fellow politicians and voting public to come to terms with some new, quite stark global prognoses...critics be damned. It's obvious that it's just not where his priorities lie. It was clear that Obama wasn't going to be blazing a progressive trail from the moment he railroaded Rev. Wright.

Just rewind a couple of days and replay his impassioned defense of 'just war' to the Nobel Committee. No such hemming and hawing and defeatism there. Not to mention, no lack of funds to back up his insanely bellicose remarks.