

Time for the UK to tell the COP26 main players some home truths

There is a part of the UK establishment that is always keen to belittle and run the UK down, claiming we are small and unimportant now we have left the EU. They ignore the facts that we are the second biggest contributor to NATO, a member of the UN security Council, the fifth largest world economy, a member of the G7 and the Commonwealth, and an important influence on world events. This autumn sees the UK chairing the COP 26 Climate conference, shortly after we chaired the G7.

There is however one important area where I agree with them that we are small and not very important, and that is in the list of countries and regions that put out the most carbon dioxide. Ironically here the establishment seem to think it is the UK that has to do so much more, when all the figures show attention needs to be focussed on the Big three carbon generators, China, the USA and the EU. Between them they account for 52% of the world output compared to our 1%. In other words if the UK eliminated all its carbon dioxide output it would have the same effect on world figures as the Big 3 cutting their output by just 2%.

China is still saying she intends to increase her massive carbon output further this decade before finding some ways to start to curb it. China needs to be challenged on her large and growing output. At 29% of world CO₂ she is by far and away the biggest single source. If the UK eliminated all its CO₂ that would not fully offset one recent year's growth in output by China. The USA has just experienced four years under a President dedicated to increasing US output and use of cheap fossil fuel energy. He successfully boosted US output of oil and gas to help power an industrial renaissance by onshoring investments that had gone abroad and expanding US output. The new President thinks this was a wrong policy but has yet to announce the ways in which he intends to redirect US activities. We await a detailed plan with timetables on how to get US people out of their internal combustion engines cars, eating less meat and putting in electric heating. The EU too has a similar issue. Germany remains wedded to a major car industry which largely sells diesel and petrol vehicles. The country burns a lot of coal and says it intends to keep coal in its power mix at least until 2035. How is this compatible with the EU's aims? The EU is around one tenth of world carbon dioxide production.

As Chairman of the Conference the UK needs to challenge the USA and EU to produce timely and convincing plans of how they will achieve demanding targets as early as 2030 as it is difficult to see them hitting them on current policy. All major participants need to see that if they do not get a much better offer from China and other leading emerging market countries world emissions will continue to grow.