

China doubles down on coal plants abroad despite carbon pledge at home

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President Xi Jinping has pledged to wean China off coal but a top climate official said Beijing will continue to finance such plants abroad

China will press ahead with its multi-billion-dollar financing of coal plants in developing countries, a top climate official said Tuesday, despite Beijing's stated aim of slashing carbon emissions.

In 2020, China opened three-quarters of the world's newly funded coal plants, according to the UK-based monitor CarbonBrief, and accounted for more than 80 percent of newly announced coal power projects.

At home, however, President Xi Jinping has pledged to wean China off coal with a peak [carbon emissions](#) target of 2030 - and achieve carbon neutrality thirty years later.

Those ambitious targets have been met with international praise.

But China's overseas drive shows the complexity of untwining the economic drivers of coal power from [environmental concerns](#).

"We cannot simply say that we'll stop supporting coal-fired electricity plants in developing countries," Li Gao, head of the climate change office at the Ministry of Ecology and Environment, told reporters.

"Combating [climate change](#) is also about letting people in developing countries live good lives."

Echoing Xi's comments at a recent climate summit hosted by US President Joe Biden, Li said poorer nations still need coal to power their economies.

"This is wholly in response to (foreign countries') actual needs, and we use very [high standards](#) (to build the plants)," he said.

Li also suggested that these countries were not sufficiently developed to be able to use [renewable energy](#) as their main sources of power.

China is the world's biggest polluter and emits a third of greenhouse gases globally.

It has also continued to fund dozens of coal plants abroad, from Zimbabwe to Indonesia, and environmentalists say they are set to produce more emissions than major developed nations.

China is making the overseas coal play as part of its trillion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative, a plan to fund [infrastructure projects](#) and increase its influence overseas.

In contrast, officials have pledged to "strictly control" coal use domestically to reach ambitious climate goals.

Just under 60 percent of power in China still comes from coal, but a new five-year national development plan unveiled in March set a target of generating 20 percent of energy from renewable sources by 2025.

China will continue to build smaller-scale coal plants to ensure reliable power supply across the grid, but their "emissions will not be as large" as traditional [coal plants](#), according to Li.

"We will no longer continue large-scale development of coal-fired power plants, this is very clear."

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