



Sibling project to The Heat, a radio show about an overheating planet - Briefing #1
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The heatwave is coming. Multilateralism is unravelling. Can the SB64 interim climate talks in Bonn get any work done?

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Around the same time that streaming TV emerged as the dominant cultural form, the [Paris Agreement](#) was signed at COP21 in 2015. Since then the UNFCCC annual climate negotiation meet-ups have felt increasingly like end-of-a-few-seasons cliffhangers,.

Old cast members show up to raise the energy level ('remember Barack Obama? Well he's [back!](#)') Cancellation [panic](#) looms. Plotlines are [hastily tidied up](#).



COP31 will be held this November in [Turkey](#) but will be run with Australia (it's all mergers in the age of Paramount vs. Netflix...) Now that the emerging dominant cultural form is suddenly 'AI', the international multilateral system is hallucinating parallel versions of itself.

Who needs the UN Security Council when you can have US President Trump's [Board of Peace](#)? Tired of waiting around for Saudi Arabia, China, the UAE et al to [agree a date](#) to transition away from fossil fuels? The [Santa Marta](#) group of countries, led by the Netherlands and Colombia, would like to hear from you. (Will that double act [last](#) till COP31?)

With COP, the 'Conference of the Parties', being the main event – world leaders turn up to raise the roof, existentially-loaded negotiations run up-to-the-wire – the annual interim negotiations held in Bonn, Germany are the serious sleeves-rolled-up work that must be done ahead of each COP if there's to be any hope of useful outcomes.

Last year's Bonn summit was gloomy in extremis. Attendees said off the record that they had never known the energy in the UN's vast purpose-built-plaza to be [so low](#). Trump had just ordered strikes on Iran's nuclear missile silos and gone round the [UN Security Council](#) to do it. It seemed like the United Nation's jig was well and truly up.

A year on, the current conflict in the Middle East has had two mind-splitting and contradictory impacts. It's compounded the sense that the old 'rules based' global order of things is unlikely to ever return, at least not in a way that's recognizable as the 2024 version.

Despite that dawning realisation, the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz has caused a price spike of [just about every commodity](#). The analyst Michael Leibrich is calling this a "[Second Energy Shock](#)" which has focused minds on renewables as the [permanent alternative](#) to oil, coal and natural gas. By trying to secure control of oil and gas supplies, the USA and Israel have made that superpower 4D chess move redundant *and* it's [boosted China's hand](#) in global energy supply and technology chains. Clean energy is domestically sourced once it's installed (since you don't need to import sunlight or wind). It's therefore more reliable than fossil fuel supplies which can be held hostage.

There's so much evidence that the global energy transition is underway, highlights of which include:

- For each dollar the world invests in fossil fuels it invests [almost two](#) in clean energy
- [Electric Vehicle](#) (EV) sales are up since March (not necessarily such [great news](#) for the Uyghur people, though)
- So are Chinese [battery exports](#) (Chinese solar manufacturers are getting in on the game since sales of panel have, er, flattened)
- Batteries are [cheaper](#). They fell from US\$511.2 (USD 360) per kWh in 2019, to just below US\$213 per kWh in 2024, roughly a 58% drop
- Global battery [storage capacity](#) is up, with rapid growth in places including COP31's presidency Australia (18% of its dispatchable electrical capacity), and Saudi Arabia (see below)
- According to the IEA, the world's additional battery storage reached 108 gigawatts (GW), up around 40% from 2024. This exceeds the peak of gas-fired electricity production in 2002
- US energy storage hit a [record](#) of installations in 2025, 52% up from 2024. From a base of zero capacity in 2024, by the end of 2026 the US battery storage industry projects that capacity will [exceed domestic demand](#)
- Also in the USA, despite the dominant '[data centre](#)' narrative about the need for continued natural gas consumption to feed AI's insatiable need for electricity generation, gas-fired power [dropped by 2.9%](#) in 2025
- Matching [global trends](#), 90% of new US [energy infrastructure](#) is either renewable power or nuclear

- Despite president Trump killing Biden's IRA on the first day of his second term, and Trump's obsession with the supposed evils of wind and solar power, the IRA is proving [too legit to quit](#).

This reality, that Green energy is already winning bigly, scrambles the Axis-of-Venture-Capital-Hotels-and-Golf-Courses which the Trump family has tried to promote globally since his first term as US president.

(Coincidentally, in a 21st May [UN General Assembly vote](#) brought by the Pacific island Vanuatu backing a [world court opinion](#) that countries have a legal obligation to address climate change, the 8 countries who voted against were the USA, Saudi Arabia, Russia, Israel, Iran, Yemen, Liberia, and Belarus. COP31 host Turkey, and oil and gas producers Qatar and Nigeria were among the 28 abstainers. The vote won 141-8.)

America under Trump is no longer seen as a [reliable security partner](#) by Gulf states, now that million dollar missiles failed to stop [US\\$20 000 drones](#). At the end of April the UAE [left OPEC](#) and entered a direct security arrangement with Israel, [Iron Dome](#) batteries being operated from Al-Dhafra Air Base near Abu Dhabi.

"It's time to consider closing the American bases, as they are a burden rather than a strategic asset"

Abdulkhaleq Abdulla

Former adviser to the UAE government

Meanwhile, the UAE and Saudi Arabia are [scaling up](#) renewable energy capacity in the Gulf. Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia Mohammed bin Salman's [epic cyberpunk cities in the desert](#) may have bitten the dust and his US\$1trillion Vision 2030 fund has been drastically scaled back. It doesn't matter all that much in the grand scheme of things, though. The reality of the transition to renewable energy is already here.

This leaves the thousands of international civil servants and activists, plus a light contingent of journalists, attending the regular Bonn interim summit this month in a weird state of limbo. The point of the annual meeting is to move the overall project forward. Everything looks bad for the climate and the future. Yet there are plenty of signs that "we can land this thing" if only the passengers and crew of Spaceship Earth can keep their collective nerve.

It's partly a function of the state of politics in the countries where the reality of the ongoing energy transition is accepted by policy makers, business and financial elites. National politicians seem only able to take part in [Culture Wars Theatre](#). It's then left to popular, well-liked local officials such as Andy Burnham in [Manchester](#) and Zohran Mamdani in [New York](#) to implement the changes that have to be made.

The SB64 agenda seems boring. Being there, it often feels that way too, but there's a reassuring, metronome-like regularity to the tedium. At least it's not improv at the Culture Wars Theatre. The Bonn agenda for 2026 includes some of the following items:

- **Trade & climate** This is the first Bonn meeting where trade's been debated. [Tariffs on Chinese EVs](#) and EU [carbon border taxes](#) in particular are hugely controversial especially with developing countries, and there are strong feelings on all sides
- **Tropical Forest Forever Facility** The big [takeaway](#) from Brazil's COP30 Presidency, will anything actually happen or is it like other [COP promises](#) to [protect and promote](#) global tree-cover?
- **Climate Finance** Every COP ends up being about money (based on the debate at SB64 so far, it's about [Article 9](#) of the Paris Agreement). COP31 will be no different
- **Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA)** A fraught process to untangle and simplify a cat's cradle of complicated [indicators](#) measuring how successfully countries are adapting to climate change (or not). African nations are pushing back on grounds of state sovereignty and other developing countries want finance tracking
- Turkey, hosts of **COP31**, are [pushing](#) for agreements to electrify 35% of global energy use by 2030, to increase energy efficiency in buildings by 25% and halve the increase in global waste by 2035.

In the next episode we're going to talk about the GGA because, buried inside the long list of indicators, there are a couple that relate directly to the heatwave that Resonance listeners on our FM frequency in Southwark personally [experienced recently](#).

The GGA is expected to call on signatories to the UNFCCC's various accords and mechanisms to track:

- tree planting as a means of heat reduction ([p21](#))
- hospital admissions ([p21](#))
- school action plans related to extreme heat ([p30](#)).

In the UK there's a local government [action plan](#) for extreme heat events. The UK's Health Security Agency [has a plan](#) too. There's a UK [National Adaptation Plan](#) which *should* integrate with these *and* with national net zero policy and [civil resilience and emergency planning](#), *as well* as the [National Adaptation Plan](#) submitted to the UNFCCC (not to be confused with the [NDCs](#) and GGAs... we told you this was reassuringly boring).

How does a debate in a plush UN conference centre in Bonn eventually become a system tracking hospital admissions and trees planted in Lambeth to deal with [excessive heat](#)?

That's what we're aiming to find out in our next programme on Resonance FM. (Also, check out this map of London [cool spaces](#).)

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