

# Biden to Skip U.N. Climate Summit, Drawing Grumbles From Environmentalists

*President's expected absence at COP28 in Dubai comes as administration grapples with Israel-Hamas war*

**By Sabrina Siddiqui and Scott Patterson**

WASHINGTON—President Biden won't attend a United Nations [climate summit](#) in Dubai this week, White House officials said, skipping an annual gathering of world leaders focused on addressing global warming.

While the officials didn't say why Biden is expected to miss the summit, known as COP28, other top administration officials, including John Kerry, Biden's special envoy for climate change, will participate in the forum.

Officials have said privately for weeks that the president was unlikely to attend the summit this year, but his expected absence has drawn criticism from climate advocates who say his administration hasn't done enough to stress climate policies.

Since taking office, Biden has attended the annual gathering—first in Glasgow in 2021 and then in Egypt in 2022—and used the opportunity to highlight his administration's climate-change agenda. The event this year comes as the president and his administration are [grappling with the Israel-Hamas war](#), which in recent days reached a critical juncture amid a hostage deal and temporary pause in fighting.

"The president has been very much focused on the conflict between Israel and Hamas," White House national security council spokesman John Kirby said Monday when asked about how the war was affecting Biden's other priorities, including the climate summit. "At the same time, he's also working across a range of issues...He's the commander in chief, which means he has global responsibilities and the president is more than capable of handling them on any given day."

The COP28 summit, which is expected to draw leaders from nearly 200 countries and public figures [such as Pope Francis](#), is set to begin Thursday. On that day, Biden is to attend the National Christmas Tree lighting in Washington and meet with Angolan President João Manuel Gonçalves Lourenço, according to a schedule

released by the White House. While the schedule didn't include any public events on Friday or Saturday, it noted Biden will attend the 46th Kennedy Center Honors and host a reception Sunday at the White House for this year's honorees.

Vice President [Kamala Harris](#) is also not expected to attend the gathering, according to a spokeswoman.

"The administration looks forward to a robust and productive COP28 where Special Envoy John Kerry, National Climate Advisor Ali Zaidi, and Senior Advisor John Podesta, among others, will continue to build on" administration actions to tackle climate change, White House spokesman Angelo Fernández Hernández said.

Addressing global warming has been one of the Biden administration's central policies. Last year's climate law, [the Inflation Reduction Act](#), is distributing billions of dollars to clean-energy companies, promoting the shift to electric vehicles and supporting the domestic production of rechargeable batteries.

Earlier this month, Biden referred to climate change as "the only existential threat to humanity."

"We either get this right or there's not going to be a whole lot of people around to talk about it," Biden said while in San Francisco for meetings with Chinese leader Xi Jinping and other leaders from the Asia-Pacific region.

Some environmental groups, however, say the administration isn't doing enough. A group of scientists recently sent a letter to Biden urging him to commit to more action on climate. "There's no question it's unfortunate if the president chooses not to go," said Rachel Cleetus, a climate-policy director at the Union of Concerned Scientists, a nonprofit advocacy group, which sent the letter. "The United States clearly has a responsibility to step up at COP28."

Government officials and business leaders gathering in Dubai will discuss how nations will reach their climate goals and debate whether to issue a statement on phasing out fossil fuels.

The summit is also expected to showcase plans by the world's biggest fossil-fuel producers to address climate change. "This is your opportunity to show the world that, in fact, you are central to the solution," the Emirati official leading COP28, Sultan al-Jaber, [said at a recent conference](#) of top oil-and-gas officials in the United Arab Emirates.

Climate activists have complained that the conference, held this year by one of the world's top crude-oil producers, is providing a platform for the fossil-fuel industry and its claims that it is playing a key role in addressing climate change. Jaber

highlights the seeming contradictions that will play out at COP28. He is the chief executive of Abu Dhabi National Oil Co., one of the world's biggest crude producers, and the founding chief executive of Abu Dhabi-based renewable-energy firm Masdar.

International Energy Agency Executive Director Fatih Birol said in a recent report that the oil-and-gas industry "must do much more to respond to the threat of climate change." [Less than 1% of global clean energy investment](#) came from oil-and-gas companies, the report said.

*Andrew Restuccia contributed to this article.*