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Issue Brief

China Set to Lead Fight Against Climate Change

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President Trump’s decision to withdraw from the Paris Agreement has received strong criticism both at home and abroad. The move which has made United States the third country along with Nicaragua and Syria, to reject the Paris Agreement has been labeled as a disgrace by United States Senator, Bernie Sanders.¹

Former US Secretary of State, John Kerry, who signed the Paris Agreement, was also not pleased with President Trump’s announcement. According to Kerry, it “may be the most self-defeating action in American history.”² German Chancellor Angela Merkel came up with a more resolute response, “We in Germany, Europe and the world will combine our forces more resolutely than ever to address and successfully tackle challenges for humanity such as climate change.”³

The landmark deal signed in Paris in 2015 raised plenty of optimism because two of the leading polluting countries in the world, United States and China, agreed to curb carbon emissions in accordance with the deal. The global community was looking at the United States and China to play the leading roles through their political engagements and economic activities. After the withdrawal of the United States, China now has the opportunity to lead the global fight against climate change. In response to the announcement made by President Trump, Chinese Premier, Li Keqiang, reassured his country’s commitment to the Paris Agreement at the recently held EU-China summit. A joint statement by the EU and China called for stepping up efforts for mitigating global warming.⁴

Under the leadership of President Xi Jinping, China has been pulling the world together with its collective development approach, whereas President Trump’s ‘America First’ approach has also done a favour to China. Unlike President Trump, President Xi has shown openness in his foreign policy approach. While the US



President is supporting protectionist policies, the Chinese leader is enthusiastically developing trade relationships across the world. In his address at the World Economic Forum earlier this year, President Xi

stated that, “we must redouble efforts to develop global connectivity to enable all countries to achieve inter-connected growth and share prosperity. We must remain committed to developing global free trade and investment, promote trade and investment liberalization and facilitation through opening-up and say no to protectionism. Pursuing protectionism is like locking oneself in a dark room. While wind and rain may be kept outside, that dark room will also block light and air. No one will emerge as a winner in a trade war.” He also raised the importance of protecting the environment while pursuing economic and social progress and urged political leaders to stick to the Paris Agreement.⁵

President Xi has certainly risen up as a responsible world leader. Earlier, in 2017, the Chinese government canceled the construction of more than 100 new coal-fired power plants, instead announcing plans to invest at least \$360 billion in green-energy projects by 2020.⁶ China's coal consumption declined for the third straight year in 2016. The government is planning to reduce coal usage in favor of natural gas and renewable energy including hydro, wind and solar power. Last year, solar capacity grew by 81.6 per cent and wind capacity grew to 13.2 per cent compared to 2015. Greenpeace, a non-governmental environmental organization, noted that China’s new energy plan has led to a significant drop in country’s CO2 emissions. After this outcome, Greenpeace said that it “reinforces China's growing status as a global climate leader, and sends a strong signal to US President Trump that his dirty energy agenda will send the American economy in the wrong direction.”⁷

According to Climate Action Tracker, China is set to overachieve its pledges under the Paris Agreement after a remarkable decline in its coal-use and simultaneous growth of renewable energy.⁸ Meanwhile, China has replaced the United States to become the most attractive country for renewable energy investment according to EY’s Renewable Energy Country Attractiveness Index 2017.⁹ These indicators reflect the strong commitment of Chinese leadership towards combating climate change.

China is not only fighting climate change domestically, but is also pushing for action globally. With its partners in the developed world, it is aiming to raise \$100 billion a year by 2020 to help poorer countries cut their emissions.¹⁰ China reaffirmed its commitment towards the Paris Agreement along with other participating countries at the OBOR Summit held in May 2017 as well.¹¹ This manifests that all of China’s planned investments abroad will take the Paris Agreement into consideration.

By demonstrating its capabilities and matching words with action, China is now well-positioned to lead the fight against climate change.

Notes and References:

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