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Issue Brief

Fallout of Trump's Withdrawal from Paris Climate Change Agreement

June 14, 2017

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President Donald Trump announced on June 1, 2017, that he will withdraw the United States (US) from the landmark Paris Agreement on climate change which was adopted in 2015. The US, which is the world's second largest greenhouse gas emitter had largely

Trumps New Climate and Energy Order

- Orders the review of the Clean Power Plan
- Asks all federal agencies to identify regulations that "impede" energy production
- Lifts the moratorium on federal coal leasing
- Ends restrictions on hydraulic fracking
- Rolls back federal regulations limiting methane emission
- Eliminates greenhouse gases from consideration under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

Proposed Trump Budget Changes

- Eliminates the U.S. contribution to the Global Climate Change Initiative
- Eliminates the Green Climate Fund
- Cuts the Environmental Protection Agency budget by 31 percent
- Ends NASA's main Earth science programs monitoring climate change
- Cuts funding to the Pentagon's Advanced Energy Projects (ARPA-E)



abstained from agreeing upon any climate deal previous to the Paris Agreement, which had been a major hindrance towards any major global climate change consensus.¹ The decision to withdraw from the climate accord was influenced by a letter from 22 Republican US senators. Trump characterised the Paris Agreement as a deal that aimed to hinder, disadvantage and impoverish the US, costing it \$3trillion in lost GDP and 6.5 million jobs.

When President Obama made the US signatory to this agreement, it was a major victory for environmentalists, but the latest proclamation from the White House has sent reverberations around the world. During the negotiation process, the US pushed to make the agreement flexible to bring all countries on board and to keep them in the fold even if their situations and priorities changed. This flexibility means that US withdrawal would be completely unnecessary on the argument that the Paris Agreement is unfair because large polluting countries such as India and China are not required to do anything until 2030. Trump's decision signals a policy shift with wide-ranging repercussions for the climate and America's ties with the world post Conference of Parties (COP) 21.

COP21 was a United Nation's (UN) Conference on Climate Change in Paris held between November-December 2015, to put adverse environmental changes into perspective and find solutions for them. The major achievement of this Conference was the Paris Agreement. Almost 200 countries signed a milestone agreement on climate change, and for the first time agreed to take action to restrain greenhouse gas emissions. This was achieved after two weeks of relentless negotiations, where all nations of the world came up with a new deal that seeks to stop the release of heat-trapping gases into

¹ AFP, "Trump to announce 'withdrawal' from Paris climate deal: US official," Dawn, June 2, 2107, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1336761>

the atmosphere by 2050. The outstanding achievement of the Paris Agreement, which will come into effect in 2020, is that all countries will be required to work on climate change. As per the deal, the world will aim to even out global warming well below 2° above pre-industrial levels, and even less if possible.² The announcement of the Paris Agreement would have seemed far-fetched 6 years ago after the Copenhagen Climate Summit devolved into bitter squabbling between powerful developed and developing nations as they struggled to find a successor to the 1997 Kyoto Protocol. But the Paris pact was smoothed by a decision to allow countries to offer their own pledges to cut emissions, rather than have goals forced on them through the UN process.

In a bid to spur governments to lift their ambition, the Paris accord includes a series of reviews of emission targets that countries will need to meet. These reviews will start in 2020, two years after a collective assessment in 2018 of how the world is faring on emissions and other parts of the agreement. Reviews will then occur every five years. Under the deal, countries will only be allowed to make targets more ambitious, not less. While the agreement seeks to limit warming to below 2°, it also asks countries to pursue efforts to keep temperatures below 1.5°. This was the central demand in Paris from vulnerable nations, such as low-lying Pacific islands, which could be wiped off the face of the planet with ever increasing sea-levels in not too distant a future. According to the terms of the agreement, greenhouse gas emissions should reach a peak as soon as possible and then start declining rapidly in order for the total amount of atmospheric pollution to be brought at 0 level by the latter half of the century. The industrialised nations agreed in principle to deliver a minimum of \$100 billion a year in public and private funding to help poorer nations cope with the impacts of climate change and cut their emissions. That figure will be reviewed upwards in 2025.³

The actions of the US president, most recently at the G7 meeting in Sicily, had already begun to provoke murmurs among its traditional allies about a world that would be better without American involvement in climate issues. Countries like Germany, France and Italy have vowed to carry on with the accord, and both India and China have also announced to stay put and continue to cut their carbon emissions. The Paris deal is a statement of intent from governments to their populace and businesses that low-carbon economies are on the way and that this inevitability should be financially supported. Trump wants to renegotiate the agreement to make it more favourable for the US, which other international players feel

² Justin Worland, "What to Know About the Historic 'Paris Agreement' on Climate Change," Time, December 12, 2015, <http://time.com/4146764/paris-agreement-climate-cop-21/>

³ UN, "Towards a Climate Agreement," UN and Climate Change, 2015, <http://www.un.org/climatechange/towards-a-climate-agreement/>

could act as a drag upon the international climate effort, and the Trump administration can do more damage inside the agreement than outside it.⁴ This decision puts the US in company with Syria and Nicaragua as the world's only non-participants in the Paris Climate Agreement. This will have sweeping implications for the deal, which relies heavily on the commitment of large polluter nations to reduce emissions.⁵

Supporters of the climate pact are concerned that a US exit could lead other nations to weaken their commitments or also withdraw, softening an accord that scientists have said is critical to avoiding the worst impacts of climate change. The likelihood of collaboration on carbon-cutting goals past 2025 is on far shakier ground, with the US forfeiting a seat at the table to shape the climate future. This could deal a staggering blow to the nascent international cooperation on climate change. The key relationship that brokered the Paris agreement was between the US and China. President Obama and President Xi Jinping were able to find enough common ground to build a coalition with other states and the EU.⁶ China has rapidly re-affirmed its commitment to the Paris accord pledging greater co-operation to cut carbon and emerge as a significant player in global effort to stem rising temperatures. Trump's move could give some countries the political cover to scale back their efforts to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions, but the US decision does not yet spell dismay for the climate itself. This is because the global trend toward renewable energies is continuing, including in the US, and with China and India's efforts to shift from coal to renewable energy gaining momentum, hope remains for reduction in carbon emissions and preservation of global environment.

⁴ Oliver Milman, "Paris climate deal: frustrated world leaders prepare to move on without US," the Guardian, June 1, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/may/31/donald-trump-paris-climate-change-deal-agreement-us>

⁵ Bob Bryan, "Trump's pulling the US out of the Paris climate agreement could be disastrous for the economy," Business Insider, June 1, 2017, <http://www.businessinsider.com/trump-leaving-paris-climate-agreement-effect-on-us-global-economy-2017-6>

⁶ Matt McGrath, "Five effects of US pull-out from Paris climate deal," BBC, June 1, 2017, http://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-40120770?ocid=socialflow_facebook&ns_mchannel=social&ns_campaign=bbcnews&ns_source=facebook