

SHADOW GOVERNMENT

Why Abandoning Paris Is a Disaster for America

The Obama administration's brain trust on how Trump's rejection of the global climate change agreement is a monumental blunder.

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Ever the showman, President Donald Trump tweeted

Wednesday about his soon-to-be-announced decision on whether or not to pull out of the Paris Climate Agreement with the air of a 1950s Las Vegas emcee building up his audience's anticipation for an upcoming act. But the decision to remove the United States from the long-negotiated, hard-fought, international agreement is no sideshow. This is about what's in the best interests of American prosperity and security.

As promised, Trump stepped to the podium in the Rose Garden on Thursday afternoon, announcing that the United States would leave the Paris accord. The decision will have serious, irreversible repercussions for the United States and the world.

The president's justifications for leaving the agreement are also just plain wrong.

First, contrary to the president's assertions, America's hands are not tied and its sovereignty is not compromised by the Paris climate pact. The Paris agreement is an accord, not a treaty, which means it's voluntary. The genius (and reality) of the Paris agreement is that it requires no particular policies at all — nor are the emissions targets that countries committed to legally binding. Trump admitted as much in the Rose Garden, referring to the accord's "nonbinding" nature. If the president genuinely thinks America's targets are too onerous, he can simply adjust them (although we believe it would be shortsighted for the administration to do so). There is no need to exit the Paris accord in search of a "better deal." Given the voluntary nature of the agreement, pulling out of the Paris deal in a fit of pique is an empty gesture, unless that gesture is meant to be a slap in the face to every single U.S. ally and partner in the world.

The second big lie is that the Paris agreement will be a job killer. In fact, it will help the United States capture more 21st-century jobs. That is why dozens of U.S. corporate leaders, including many on the president's own advisory council, urged him not to quit the agreement. As a letter sent to the White House by ExxonMobil put it, the agreement represents an "effective framework for addressing the risk of climate change," and the United States is "well positioned to compete" under the terms of the deal.

Action on climate and economic growth go hand in hand, and are mutually reinforcing. That is why twice as much money was invested worldwide in renewables last year as in fossil fuels, and why China is pouring in billions to

try to win this market of the future. A bipartisan group of retired admirals and generals on the **CNA Military Advisory Board** is about to release a report that will also spell out the importance of competitiveness in advanced energy technologies — not just to the economy, but also to the country's standing in the world. Pulling out of climate will result in a loss of U.S. jobs and knock the United States off its perch as a global leader in innovation in a quickly changing global economic climate.

The rationale for ditching America's commitment to the Paris accord just doesn't hold up. Moreover, Trump's decision to withdraw from the Paris Agreement comes with several serious and lasting consequences for the United States and the world:

The Trump administration is hastening catastrophic effects of climate change. Scientists and economists now state with confidence that the failure to act to arrest and mitigate global climate change will have devastating global consequences, including for young Americans alive today and for their children and grandchildren. Donald Trump himself may well live to see more climate-related catastrophes hit the homeland. His children and grandchildren certainly will.

Americans all over this country are already seeing the changes — storms are more severe, big floods come more often, and in the most extreme case, Arctic waters are melting and opening up sea lanes for the first time in recorded history. Trump saw the damage from Hurricane Sandy firsthand, a preview of what climate change has in store for future generations.

Heading off the worst effects of climate change requires global action: Action by one country alone, no matter how powerful, cannot address the threat. But our country, one of the world's two largest carbon emitters, does have significant power to improve not just our own climate, but the world's — and Trump's decision takes us in the wrong direction. That's especially tragic in light of the signature achievement of the Paris Agreement, which was to get

every country on board; now China and India have made the same commitments the United States and other highly developed countries have. It binds us all together through a political agreement — but the strength of that agreement depends on all of us meeting our nationally determined responsibilities.

Put simply, the U.S. decision to withdraw from the Paris Agreement will have impacts on the global climate that a future U.S. administration will not be able to undo. It will undermine the most significant and comprehensive coordinating mechanism for global action to combat climate change that we have. It will weaken an existing asset to defend present and future generations of Americans against a significant threat; it will undermine our security. Indeed, leading military experts, including Secretary of Defense James Mattis, have warned that the impact of climate change will lead to more refugee flows, more famine, more conflict, and more terrorism. As Mattis **said**, “Climate change is impacting stability in areas of the world where our troops are operating today.” By withdrawing from this agreement, Trump would be ignoring an issue his own secretary of defense has said is a national security threat.

Trump is abdicating U.S. leadership and inviting China to fill the void. During his Rose Garden address, the president asserted that the Paris agreement disproportionately benefits American competitors, such as China. Yet pulling out of the accord redounds to Beijing’s benefit even more.

The Paris agreement was forged in part on the backbone of a preliminary understanding between the United States and China—the two largest carbon-emitting nations. In recent days, as Trump dithered about whether or not to stay in, the Chinese quickly seized the opportunity to claim the mantle of global leadership and have **made clear** that they will stay in, even as the United States pulls out. Chinese Premier Li Keqiang is riding the wake of Trump’s disastrous visit to Europe, where China and the European Union are

expected to release a joint statement on Friday reaffirming their commitment to combatting climate change. This follows Xi Jinping's defense of globalization and the importance of countries' looking beyond their own national interests at Davos earlier this year. Beijing will win an Olympics-sized soft-power boost by staying in while the Washington reneges.

Ceding U.S. leadership to the Chinese on this issue is likely to have political and economic costs. China, like Russia, sees value in any division between the United States and Europe — as a rising power it would rather negotiate with us separately rather than collectively. Europeans grateful to China for its continued partnership on climate will be less concerned to take account of U.S. interests with respect to, say, China's harmful industrial policy, human rights violations, or economic and military coercion expansionism in Asia. European deals with China for the production of infrastructure and equipment related to renewable energy will surely follow. Pulling out of Paris will weaken our geopolitical standing — and complicate our efforts to work with our partners and allies to manage a rising China. Other nations that see themselves as bearing the brunt of climate change, including those of strategic importance to the United States — such as Vietnam, the Philippines, or much of Africa — will now see China as part of the solution to their problem.

Pulling out of Paris will likely result in creating jobs in China that could have been created here in the United States. It will give Chinese and other countries' companies a leg up in the growing and competitive green economy, putting U.S. companies at a serious disadvantage. The industry and the jobs of the future are in renewables — why would we cede any of that ground to Chinese, Indian, and European companies? The United States will be relegated from a global leader, economically and otherwise, to a member of a lonely camp of pariah countries that haven't signed this global pact, together with only Syria and Nicaragua. America First? Hardly.

Withdrawing from Paris will damage U.S. standing in the world. Pulling out of Paris will call into question the word of the United States and weaken our ability to call on other countries to work with us on other global threats, such as global terrorism and global **pandemics**. International agreements are not irrevocable; indeed this one, which the United States had a heavy hand in creating, was crafted carefully as a series of nationally determined, voluntary commitments precisely in order to gain worldwide support, and with the understanding that countries can adjust their commitments as needed. Walking away from that agreement sends a clear — and foolhardy — message to all other countries around the world: Don't trust the United States.

And why should they, if we so evidently signal that U.S. foreign policy is utterly politicized, and that agreements signed with one administration will not be honored by the next. It is firmly in the U.S. interest to have others' trust — and for us to be able to demand in return — the durability of agreements, even when governments change. As a chief architect and moral leader of the post-World War II order, our own behavior with respect to agreements and international law sets the example. If the most powerful country in the world has suddenly decided that signing and living up to an agreement no longer matters, why should it matter to other states?

Why should Russia, for example, fear any sanction for invading the sovereign territory of another country, or North Korea fear any reaction to flouting U.N. Security Council resolutions? Why would other countries look to the United States to lead — or choose willingly to follow our lead — when we come asking for commitments, to counter the Islamic State or to address the next global pandemic?

In the wake of the president's disastrous first foreign trip, National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster and Director for the National Economic Council Gary Cohn were dispatched to attempt to reframe the trip on the *Wall Street Journal* **op-ed** page. There they gave perhaps the clearest and most alarming

explanation of what America First means as a foreign policy and how it applies to the Paris Agreement. A key passage reads:

The president embarked on his first foreign trip with a clear-eyed outlook that the world is not a “global community” but an arena where nations, nongovernmental actors, and businesses compete for advantage. We bring to this forum unmatched military, political, economic, cultural, and moral strength. Rather than deny this elemental nature of international affairs, we embrace it.

McMaster and Cohn are wrong. To be sure, the world is a competitive arena that has at times throughout history turned into bloody conflict and ruin. That is precisely the reason the United States has always looked for alliances and partnerships grounded not only in common interests, but common values and commitments. It is also why wise presidents have long recognized that even as the most powerful nation on Earth — and in many cases precisely because of our global reach — the United States has an interest in a rules-based system. That system protects our citizens living overseas, our businesses operating overseas, and our military operations around the world. We threaten the underpinnings of that system at our peril.

Pulling out of Paris means Republicans own climate catastrophes. Just as President Barack Obama bequeathed to the Trump/Paul Ryan/Mitch McConnell team a workable framework for ensuring health care coverage, President Trump inherited a workable framework for global climate action. The Republicans have chosen to pour sand in the gas tank of Obamacare, using the levers of government to attempt to make the Affordable Care Act fail even as they themselves fail to deliver a real alternative. Polls show that Americans — even Republicans — understand that the GOP now owns health care as an issue. They will similarly own whatever disasters befall the United States if they do nothing to be part of the solution. They are ignoring the scientific evidence and turning their backs on the best chance to address this

global challenge. In fact, the **majority** of the population of every state in the United States supports staying in this agreement. The president and his Republican allies are flouting the will of the American people as our country walks away.

This week, there was news that this year's peach crop in South Carolina and Georgia was ruined by the extreme temperature swings — unseasonably hot in late winter, and a cold snap in late spring. As extreme weather events like this and other phenomena associated with climate change accelerate, when we confront our next Katrina or Sandy, people will remember that it was Trump and the Republicans who did nothing. Make that worse than nothing: They lost ground and put their party ahead of the country.

Trump's pulling out of Paris means that the rest of us are called upon to do more — and we will. Even as the White House abandons the pact, there are plenty of ways for Americans to advance its goals. Many state and local governments are already tackling energy efficiency and emissions reductions. California, the sixth-largest economy in the world, will not abandon its emission standards. And many U.S. cities are a locus of both great innovation and high-impact investments. That is why Mayor Bill de Blasio **announced** this week that he will sign an executive order for New York City to uphold climate commitments even if the United States pulls out. Major corporations across this country have recognized the opportunities in clean energy and energy storage, and see the risks of inaction to their long-term profitability. ExxonMobil's shareholders even **voted** this week in support of more open and detailed analysis of the threats posed by climate change to the oil business. Entrepreneurs, investors, and researchers will continue to press forward with the next generation of innovations that can reduce carbon emissions. And we can all continue to pressure our political leaders to take serious action to confront this threat. If Trump ditches Paris, there's no time for despair — it's a time for action.

There are many reasons why pulling out of Paris is a bad idea. (In addition to those above, there's the fact that, like most divorces, this is a yearslong legal process that requires more than a tweet or a speech.) Trump can bluster that he's putting America first, but climate change is real and will become far more dire in the coming years. The need for action to address it will remain urgent. The rest of the world won't be standing still and neither should we if we want to advance American security and prosperity.

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