

Trump administration announces US withdrawal from Paris climate agreement

By Daniel de Vries
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President Trump announced Thursday that the United States will withdraw from the Paris climate change agreement. The move, which repudiates even the most modest and nonbinding targets for greenhouse gas emissions reductions, takes place amidst growing conflicts between the major capitalist powers and a raging political crisis within the US itself.

In a major 30-minute Rose Garden address, Trump justified the withdrawal with a full-throated reassertion of “America First” nationalism, sounding fascist themes that were present in his inaugural address and other speeches.

The Paris accord, Trump insisted, is a “massive redistribution of United States’ wealth to other countries.” The nonbinding agreement represents a grave threat to American sovereignty, he claimed, and would supposedly eliminate millions of jobs, offshoring coal mining from the US to India, China and Europe.

“America’s \$20 trillion in debt-cash-strapped cities cannot hire enough police officers or fix vital infrastructure,” Trump continued. “Millions of our citizens are out of work, and yet under the Paris accord, billions of dollars that ought to be invested right here in America will be sent to the very countries that have taken our factories and our jobs away from us.

“The Paris Agreement handicaps the United States’ economy in order to win praise from the very foreign capitals and global activists that have long sought to gain wealth at our country’s expense,” Trump added. “We don’t want other leaders and other countries laughing at us anymore... I was elected to represent the citizens of Pittsburgh, not Paris.”

The language of Trump’s speech bears the unmistakable stamp of the president’s embattled chief strategist Stephen Bannon, who provided one of the

few prominent voices within the administration arguing for withdrawal. Bannon had a prominent seat during yesterday’s address, along with the administration’s Environmental Protection Agency administrator, Scott Pruitt.

The president left the actual terms of withdrawal ambiguous. While the US would cease implementation of the climate accord, he kept open the possibility of reentering Paris under new terms or renegotiating a new pact.

The speech was delivered amidst a deepening conflict within the US state largely centered on foreign policy issues. It signifies an effort by Trump to shore up his “base” through the promotion of demagogic, extreme nationalism, attempting to direct social tensions within the United States outward.

In debate in Washington, there is no democratic or progressive faction. The Trump administration is composed of oligarchs and military generals that embody the gangsterism that characterizes the American corporate and financial oligarchy.

Trump’s posturing as a defender of the “forgotten man,” a phrase used on several occasions yesterday, is a fraud. The rejection of any measures to address climate change is of a piece with an agenda of slashing or eliminating vital social programs to fund an expansion of the military and a tax windfall for the rich. Pruitt, a climate change denier, is leading an effort to gut environmental regulations on energy companies that endangers the health and wellbeing of millions.

While Trump’s opponents within the political establishment took the opportunity yesterday to posture as defenders of the environment, the Paris agreement, reached in discussions that involved the Obama administration, in fact places no significant constraints on greenhouse gas emissions.

The *New York Times*, in an editorial denouncing Trump's decision to withdraw, admitted as much. "In truth, the agreement does not require any country to do anything; after the failure of the 1997 Kyoto Accord, the United Nations, which oversees climate change negotiations, decided that it simply did not have the authority to force a legally binding agreement."

The near-universal support for the Paris agreement by the major financial and corporate giants, including many of the big energy transnationals, exposes the agreement as one that above all protects profit interests.

Reactions from big-business interests yesterday were largely critical. Elon Musk, the CEO of the electric automaker Tesla, and Disney CEO Robert Iger announced that they will resign from the president's economic advisory council. Goldman Sachs CEO Lloyd Blankfein sent his first ever tweet denouncing Trump's move. "Today's decision is a setback for the environment and for the U.S.'s leadership position in the world," he wrote.

The agreement also had the support of energy giant, ExxonMobil, along with its former CEO and current Trump administration Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson.

Opposition to withdrawal among corporations is motivated in part by economic issues, including concerns that US corporations may face taxes or tariffs as a result of not being part of the international agreement.

More fundamental are concerns within the ruling class that the actions of the Trump administration, including withdrawal from the Paris agreement, will further undermine US geostrategic interests and the overall global position of American imperialism.

In particular, Thursday's decision intensifies the conflict with Germany and the European Union, which have historically played a leading role in international climate agreements. These tensions were on full display during the recent NATO and G-7 meetings, after which German Chancellor Angela Merkel stressed that Europe "must take its fate into its own hands."

The international response to Thursday's announcement was swift and combative. European Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker quipped, "not everything in international agreements is fake news." Hua Chunying, a spokesperson for the Chinese Foreign Ministry declared, "Climate change is a global challenge. No country can place itself outside of this."

The European Union and China are planning to issue a joint statement Friday in Brussels reaffirming their commitment to Paris, following on meetings between Chinese and German officials to discuss the development of their economic and foreign policy cooperation.

Nicholas Burns, a retired career diplomat and an undersecretary of state for President George W. Bush, expressed the concerns of sections of the American ruling class in an interview with the *Times*. "From a foreign policy perspective," he said, "it's a colossal mistake—an abdication of American leadership. The success of our foreign policy—in trade, military, any other kind of negotiation—depends on our credibility. I can't think of anything more destructive to our credibility than this."

In an interview with the *Financial Times*, Burns described the withdrawal from the Paris agreement as "devastating," adding that it would provide a "gift" to Russia and China.

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