

Is It Wise to Pull Out of the Paris Climate Change Agreement?

Dr. Wordman

Abstract

Paris Climate Agreement was signed by 147 nations after 25 years of effort in negotiation since a UN Framework Convention on Climate Control (UNFCCC) was established in 1992. It was a visible deed by the Obama Administration now being reneged by the New Trump Administration by its announcement of withdrawal from the Accord on 6-1-2017. Why? New Science Evidence, military strategy or simply a political decision driven by the notion that reduction of carbon emission kills American jobs? The answers are no. Therefore, shouldn't Americans be asking the question seriously: is it wise to pull out of the Paris Agreement?

The Paris Climate Agreement (in short PA) is an impressive achievement under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The agreement took effect on November 4, 2016 with 147 country members signed, exceeding the required threshold of 55 countries producing over 55% greenhouse gas emission according to the 2015 list. On 4/1/2016, the Obama Administration and China issued a joint statement that they would sign the Paris Climate Agreement. 174 countries and EU signed on the first date, 4/22/2016. France Foreign Minister, Laurent Fabius, Called it a turning point in the goal of reducing global warming and the ratification of PA was celebrated by Paris Mayor, Anne Hidalgo by illuminating the Eiffel Tower and the Arc de Triumph in Green. However, on June 1st, 2017, less than six months into effect, the new US Administration decided to pull out of the PA agreement, making the world's effort in climate change control vulnerable and the ultimate effect of PA questionable.

When Donald Trump won the 2016 US presidential election on November 8th based on his 'make America great again' slogan, he took it as a mandate to launch an 'America first agenda'. Therefore, it is no big surprise for Trump to renege on the PA since it requires developed countries not only to pledge a commitment to reduce voluntarily greenhouse gas emission so the global warming can be controlled to below 2 degree centigrade increase by 2050 but also to contribute to the \$100B/yr green climate fund by 2020 until 2025 to help developing and vulnerable nations to deal with weather induced damages. Trump and his advisors seem to equate climate control or the greenhouse emission reduction to job loss in the U.S. and regard PA to be favoring developing countries and unfair to the U.S. Trump Administration cancelled the two unpaid \$2B of the \$3B contribution to the green climate fund the Obama Administration pledged. Needless to say, the U.S. action caused a heavy blow on PA and aroused a heated discussion in the U.S. and in the whole world.

The environmental issue concerning global warming caused by greenhouse gas emission was a long recognized problem going through debate for its validity and seeking solution in an equitable way. The Kyoto Protocol (KP) linked with UNFCCC was adopted on 12-11-1997 and put into force on 2-16-2005; KP set emission reduction target with its first commitment period starting from 2008 and ending in 2012. Unfortunately, the KP failed to produce either a

meaningful emission reduction or a sustainable development mechanism. The UNFCCC was a treaty adopted on 5-9-1992 (while George W H Bush was the US president) and signed on 6/3-14/1992 in Rio de Janeiro and put into effect on 3-21-1994. Fortunately, the UNFCCC treaty (with 197 parties as of 2015) accomplished a framework acknowledging the principles about the necessity of climate change control, but unfortunately, it contained no binding nor commitment of any action for reducing gas emissions which contribute to climate change. It took 25 years of negotiation to reach the Paris Climate Agreement. For the first time, there is a goal in PA and a technology and finance plan to deal with global warming.

PA is an agreement not a treaty, thus Obama could sign it without the necessity of approval by the US Senate (A Republican controlled Senate in 2016). As an agreement, Trump can reverse it with no need to seek the Senate approval. But the UNFCCC is a treaty which is not so easy to disengage. Even for PA, Trump Administration must wait three years till 11-4-2019 to send a letter to withdraw from it and then officially leave it after 11-4-2020 according to a PA clause. November 4, 2020, of course, is after the next US presidential election, it is likely that the PA withdrawal may become an election issue and face a new decision if the U.S. gets a new president. The PA deal is a broad package of actions to reduce emissions and to combat the impacts of climate change, including a specific goal to limit global temperature increase to 2 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels, or a more desired target of 1.5 degree Celsius temperature rise, if possible. To this end, countries have had to submit “nationally determined contributions.” These are nationally designed pledges containing climate targets. The U.S., for example, agreed to cut greenhouse gases by 26 percent to 28 percent below 2005 levels by 2025, which was a much welcomed news when Obama and Xi made a joint announcement to the media in 2014 committing the U.S for the above pledge and China for the first time to cap her emissions by 2030 or earlier.

Comes to Climate Change Control, both political parties of the U.S. weren't keen for any mandatory action by any international body out of a 'selfish' consideration: ‘the interest of US industries and the US economic development and standard of living’ according to world opinions. Internally, through decades of public education, especially in the school system, global warming and climate change control had been accepted as a real problem by the US public. Any debate or argument cannot deny the climate change phenomenon except perhaps there exists different interpretations of the results of climate change computer modeling regarding how soon the disastrous effect will precisely occur. It has certainly been accepted by the US public, the climate change control requires global collaborative efforts. The two great nations, China and the U.S. contribute almost 40% of world's total greenhouse gas emission. Therefore, Trump Administration may want to adopt a climate change control pace suitable to ‘America first agenda’ but it is unwise to pull out of the PA entirely.

Apparently the G7 nations failed to convince Trump not to withdraw from PA, The EU members’ disappointments are easily understandable. As an agreement, PA has no teeth to bite the U.S. legally. However, there has been talk in some nations of a climate-related trade tariff on products coming from the U.S., a clear resentment. In Asia, Piyush Goyal, India’s energy minister, said that India remains committed to its Paris pledge — no matter what happens in the rest of the world. “We are not addressing climate change because somebody told us to do it, it is an article of faith for this government,” Goyal said. “Sadly the developed world does not show the same

commitment to fulfill their promises, which could help speed up the clean energy revolution.”
“China will continue to carry out innovation, green, open and shared development regardless of how the other countries’ positions are changing, based on the inherent needs of its own sustainable development,” Hua Chunying, a spokeswoman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said in a news conference in Beijing. China is clearly stepping into a leadership position in the arena of climate change control.

Trump may argue for his decision based on cost consideration, saving Americans tax dollars and enhancing competitiveness for US energy industry, however, the oppositions from American citizens, US oil companies and environmentalists do not buy his arguments. Pulling out of PA does not show US toughness or leadership; on the contrary, it hands over the ‘leadership’ on a platter to China. The U.S. has little excuse to cancel contribution (\$2B) to the green climate fund and to spend it on Naval Freedom of Navigation (FONOP) in South China Sea for no apparent justification other than butting into some island disputes for which the U.S. is not a claimant.