

TRUMP'S PULL OUT FROM PARIS CLIMATE DEAL

ANGER, DISAPPOINTMENT, RESOLVE



"Highly regrettable, to put it very mildly. This decision cannot and will not stop those of us who feel obligated to protect our Earth."

ANGELA MERKEL
German Chancellor



"If we do nothing our children will know a world of migrations, of wars of shortage, a dangerous world, it is not the future we want for ourselves. ... make our planet great again."

EMMANUEL MACRON
French President



"We need to uphold rules, especially multilateral rules. In this world we will be in a jungle without rules."

LI KEQIANG
Chinese Premier



"There is no reverse gear to the energy transition, there is no backsliding on the Paris agreement."

JEAN-CLAUDE JUNCKER
European Commission chief



Protesters hold up signs during a demonstration in front of the White House in Washington, DC Thursday, objecting to US President Donald Trump's decision to withdraw from the Paris Climate accord.



"Climate change is undeniable... climate action is unstoppable and I urge governments around the world to stay the course."

ANTONIO GUTERRES
UN Secretary General



"It's as if they've turned their back on the wisdom of humanity. In addition to being disappointed, I'm also angry."

KOICHI YAMAMOTO
Japanese Environment Minister



"While the loss of America's leadership is unfortunate, this is a struggle that is far from over."

VOREQE BAINIMARAMA
Fiji Prime Minister on behalf of Pacific Islands



"You shouldn't make a noise about this, but should create the conditions for joint work (with US)."

VLADIMIR PUTIN
Russian President

A boon in disguise?
Analysts say US may do less harm outside climate pact than in it

AFP, Paris

America's withdrawal from the climate-rescue Paris Agreement under Donald Trump is a blow to global unity but may be a blessing in disguise for the pact itself, observers said.

This way, the Trump administration, heavily influenced by the fossil-fuel industry, will have less sway over the UN climate process, they said.

"A rogue US can cause more damage inside... than outside of the agreement," said Luke Kemp, a climate policy lecturer at the Australian National University.

Continued US participation in the Paris forum would have been merely symbolic, and yielded no impact on reducing US emissions of planet-warming greenhouse gases, he argued.

"It's better Trump is outside the agreement rather than pulling it down from the inside," added Mohamed Adow of Christian Aid, which lobbies for poor country interests at the two-decade-old UN climate negotiations.

"With Trump we were at best only going to have America's name on the agreement," he told AFP.

Trump announced America is "getting out" of a deal he said imposed "draconian" burdens that would cost the US millions of jobs and billions in cold hard cash.

The pact was "very unfair" to the United States and beneficial to other major polluters like China and India, the president claimed.

US cities, states defy Trump

AFP, New York

When President Donald Trump announced America's abandonment of the Paris climate deal Thursday, saying he was elected to represent "Pittsburgh, not Paris," several US cities and states responded with a defiant counter-declaration: We're staying in.

"As the Mayor of Pittsburgh, I can assure you that we will follow the guidelines of the Paris Agreement for our people, our economy & future," Democrat Bill Peduto tweeted in a swift, widely read retort to Trump's move.

The Democratic-led states of California, New York and Washington also asserted an environmental independence of sorts, pledging to uphold the global accord's goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to global warming.

"I don't believe fighting reality is a good strategy," California Governor Jerry Brown said in a statement announcing the formation of the United States Climate Alliance.

"If the president is going to be AWOL in this profoundly important human endeavor, then California and other states will step up."

Governor Andrew Cuomo said his state of New York was committed to complying with the Paris standards -- which call for US reduction of its emissions by 26 to 28 percent from 2005 levels -- "regardless of (the capital city) Washington's irresponsible actions."

California is the nation's most populous state. Along with New York and Washington, the three represent more than one fifth of US gross domestic product. They have urged other states to join their movement.

US move may add 0.3 degrees of warming: UN

AFP, GENEVA

The US withdrawal from the Paris climate pact could "in a worst case scenario" add a 0.3 degree Celsius rise in global temperatures over the 21st century, the UN said yesterday.

"We haven't run new models overnight but the indications are that it could be in the worst case scenario in the order of 0.3 degrees Celsius," the head of the World Meteorological Organization's atmospheric research and environment department Deon Terblanche told reporters in Geneva, referring to a possible rise over pre-industrial temperatures.

"That is the worst case scenario and this is probably not what will happen," he added.

Under the Paris deal agreed in 2015, world nations vowed steps to keep the worldwide rise in temperatures "well below" two degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) from pre-industrial times.

US exit a gift for China

AFP, Beijing

The US exit from the Paris climate pact is a gift to China's ambitions to become world leader on everything from trade to global warming, despite its own mixed record.

Beijing appeared well aware of the opening that it was given as it vowed to uphold the deal to cut carbon emissions after President Donald Trump's withdrawal from the agreement.

"We also hear that our actions and leading role are applauded by the international community," foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying told reporters yesterday.

The remarks came as Chinese Premier Li Keqiang met with European Union leaders at a summit in Brussels where the two sides moved to fill the leadership void on fighting climate change.

China is the world's top polluter but also its biggest investor in renewable energy and it has pledged to reduce its reliance on carbon-belching coal and clear the toxic smog from its cities.

The US retreat from the deal struck in 2015 has given China a chance to snatch the lead in the global battle against climate change and boost its clout at future negotiations, analysts said.

It could also spur Chinese investment in overseas renewable energy projects -- and expand its political influence -- as poorer countries increasingly look to their deep-pocketed trade partner for help.

"This is gold for China. It really puts them in a powerful position," said John Mikler, an associate professor in international relations at the University of Sydney.

"The paradox of the America First doctrine is it's putting America last and China is taking the lead."

Beijing's emphatic support for the Paris deal comes as the world's second-largest economy promotes itself as a champion of globalisation, capitalising on Trump's inward-looking stance on trade and foreign policy.

It also fits with Beijing's domestic political agenda of being seen to make efforts to clean up the environment and find new ways to spur economic activity into the future.

After years of breakneck growth, China's economy is slowing as it transitions away from a debt-fuelled investment-driven model to one more reliant on consumer spending.

China's overseas investment in renewable energy deals exceeding \$1 billion each soared 60 percent to \$32 billion in 2016, according to the US-based Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis, which expects the trend to continue.

California Governor Jerry Brown is hoping to get on board despite Trump's backsliding on the Paris agreement.

"We want to further strengthen our relationship with China," Brown told the Los Angeles Times on Wednesday before flying to China to attend a clean energy ministerial meeting.



His proposal to open negotiations for a new or updated deal was quickly rebuffed by France, Italy and Germany, leaving America out in the diplomatic cold.

Veteran observers of the decades-old process welcomed an end to the "will he, won't he?" seesaw that has distracted the ongoing climate talks since Trump's election last November.

And they warned the United States would be hardest hit - economically and diplomatically by the fallout.

"The decision is based on last century's economics and will turn the US into last century's economy," Andrew Steer, president of the World Resources Institute (WRI) think-tank, predicted.

According to the CITEPA research institute, America's renewable energy sector in America employed some 800,000 people in 2016 -- nearly five times more than the fossil-fuel sector.

Hundreds of American companies have urged the Trump administration to stay the clean energy course.

Trump admin asks SC to revive Muslim travel ban

AFP, Washington

President Donald Trump's administration asked the US Supreme Court on Thursday to reinstate its temporary ban on travelers from six Muslim majority nations despite repeated setbacks in the lower courts.

In its filing, the government asked the top US court to rule on the legal standing of Trump's order, appealing a ruling by the federal Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals that upheld a nationwide block of the travel ban.

It also asked the Supreme Court to lift another US-wide injunction issued by a federal judge in a separate case based in Hawaii. That case is currently before the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, where a decision is pending.

The administration is "confident that President Trump's executive order is well within his lawful authority to keep the nation safe and protect our communities from terrorism," Justice Department spokeswoman Sarah Isgur Flores said.

"The president is not required to admit

people from countries that sponsor or shelter terrorism, until he determines that they can be properly vetted and do not pose a security risk to the United States."

The filing came one week after the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals ruling dealt a fresh blow to Trump's efforts to push the controversial travel ban.

The Fourth Circuit said it "remained unconvinced" that the part of the measure naming the specific countries -- Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen -- had "more to do with national security than it does with effectuating the president's promised Muslim ban."

It said it was unclear whether the government's security concerns outweighed the plaintiffs' concerns about discrimination.

The Court of Appeals "concluded that the president acted in bad faith with religious animus when, after consulting with three members of his cabinet, he placed a brief pause on entry from six countries that present heightened risks of terrorism," the filing read.



Afghan protesters shout anti-government slogans during a protest against the government following a catastrophic truck bomb attack near Zandab Square in Kabul yesterday. At least four protesters were killed as police fired live rounds to disperse hundreds of stone-throwing demonstrators.

VENEZUELA CRISIS
Maduro grants referendum on crisis reform

AFP, Caracas

Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro has agreed to a referendum on contested constitutional reforms in an apparent concession to critics in his own camp as he resists opposition efforts to fire him.

The surprise announcement late Thursday followed two months of deadly unrest during anti-government protests and signs of division in the socialist leader's side.

The opposition says his constitutional reform plan is a bid to cling to power -- and key allies such as Attorney General Luisa Ortega have broken ranks with him, arguing it is undemocratic.

Maduro said at a cabinet meeting late Thursday that "the new constitution will be put to a referendum so that the people can say whether they agree or not."

Maduro aims to set up an elected constitutional reform body called a "constituent assembly." His opponents say he will fill it with his allies.

Ortega had filed a legal challenge against the plan earlier Thursday. Maduro said those who opposed his plan were "traitors."

Ortega has been a traditional ally of the socialist leadership since the time of Maduro's late predecessor Hugo Chavez.

Her challenge at the constitutional court does not have legal force to stop Maduro's plan, but "shows the divisions and disagreements within Chavismo," said political analyst Luis Vicente Leon.

Elected in 2013, Maduro is resisting opposition calls for early elections to remove him.

Snowden no 'traitor'

Says Putin in Oliver Stone interviews

AFP, Moscow

In US director Oliver Stone's edgy new interview series, Russian leader Vladimir Putin says he believes intelligence leaker Edward Snowden is not a traitor and appears to confirm multiple assassination plots have targeted him.

Excerpts released Thursday from "The Putin Interviews" show the strongman president chatting from behind the wheel of a car, in the Kremlin and a country estate as the maverick three-time Oscar winner Stone listens.

He asks Putin whether, as a former KGB agent, he despises Snowden -- who was given refuge in Russia after he initiated one of the largest data leaks in US history.

Gesticulating at the wheel of a Mercedes with an interpreter sitting behind, Putin stresses Snowden is "not a traitor" and "did not give any information to another country that would have caused harm to his people."

Nevertheless, asked if he agreed with what Snowden did, Putin says "no."

"In my opinion, no, it's wrong," he says, adding that in this place he would simply have resigned.

"If he didn't like something about the work he was invited to do, he should just have resigned, that's all."



US committed to Asia-Pacific allies: Mattis

REUTERS, Singapore

US Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said yesterday the United States remains committed to its Asia-Pacific allies, as he arrived in Singapore for the region's premier security forum.

Mattis, who is making his second visit to the region since he took charge of the Pentagon on Jan. 20, will be looking to articulate a clear US policy for allies in the region and reassuring them at the annual Shangri-La dialogue in Singapore.

Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, who spoke at the opening of the forum yesterday evening, said there was concern in the region that the US withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Paris climate accord would lead to Washington retreating from global leadership.

"While these decisions are disappointing, we should take care not to rush to interpret an intent to engage on different terms



as one not to engage at all," Turnbull said.

Authorities in Singapore stepped up security as Turnbull, Mattis and other leaders arrived for the meeting. They have said the terrorism threat to the city-state remains at the highest level in years, although there was no credible intelligence of an imminent attack.

However, last week's dramatic attack in the Philippines by militant groups owing allegiance to Islamic State has created jitters in the region.

Armed troops patrolled the area around the venue for the Singapore forum and nearby mailboxes were sealed.

US President Donald Trump has actively courted Beijing's support on North Korea, raising concerns among Southeast Asian allies in the lead-up to the dialogue that Washington might allow China a more free rein elsewhere in the region.

Turnbull said the region wanted to see China take a responsible leadership role or risk becoming isolated.

WAR ON IS IN PHILIPPINES

Military launches new air raids

AFP, Marawi

Loud explosions rang out in the now mostly deserted city of Marawi yesterday as Philippine fighter jets launched fresh bombing runs in a bid to dislodge militants linked to the Islamic State group.

Buildings burned after the raids, as ground forces shelled fortifications and tunnels in the eastern half of the mainly Muslim city, where up to 50 fighters are believed to be holed up.

Yesterday's fighting came as attention in the Philippines was focussed on a casino in Manila, where a masked gunman set fire to gaming tables, igniting a blaze that left 36 people dead. Authorities insisted the gunman, whom they said had committed suicide inside the leisure complex, was a robber, not a terrorist.

But the US-based Site Intelligence Group, which monitors extremist threats, said IS-linked operatives were behind the attack.

In Marawi, the death toll from the 11-day-old conflict reached 175 as the military reported four fresh fatalities among its forces.

The toll includes 11 soldiers who were killed in friendly fire this week during a mis-targeted air strike.

A total of 120 militant gunmen have been killed, including suspected foreign fighters, while the battles have also left at least 19 civilians dead.