

# France, Germany seize upon US withdrawal from climate pact to push geopolitical interests

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US President Donald Trump's decision to pull out of the Paris Agreement on climate change has prompted denunciations from leading European politicians, including German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron.

Merkel called on "everyone for whom the future of our planet is important" to continue along the path together "so that we are successful for our Mother Earth." She added: "Nothing can and will stop us... In Germany and in Europe, we are more determined than ever to pool all of the forces in the world."

Macron appealed to the global population in a video message in both French and English (an historic first for the Elysee Palace) an hour after Trump's announcement. He accused the American president of committing a major mistake and referenced Trump's election slogan, declaring, "Make our planet great again."

Behind their melodramatic declarations, Merkel and Macron are exploiting the rift with America and Britain's exit from the European Union to build up the EU into a great power capable of competing with the US for global markets, investment opportunities and strategic influence.

Following the US withdrawal, Europe has drawn closer together. Germany, France and Italy rejected Trump's call for a renegotiation of the climate targets in a joint statement. British Prime Minister Theresa May refused to sign the statement but also declared her "disappointment" with Trump's decision.

As Trump announced the US exit from the climate change agreement in Washington, Merkel first welcomed Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and then Chinese Premier Li Keqiang to Berlin. The

centrepiece of each visit was a declaration of commitment to the climate deal, while business deals worth billions were sealed behind the scenes.

After Modi's visit, Merkel praised India for being "very intensively engaged in implementing the climate deal." Modi answered in German via Twitter: "I am sure that this visit will result in advantageous results and deepen the German-Indian friendship."

Li proclaimed in Berlin: "China stands by its international responsibilities." It is "unshakable" in its commitment to the struggle against global warming, he said, and intended to achieve its emissions targets "step by step." From Berlin he flew to Brussels, where a joint statement with the EU leaders reaffirming their commitment to the Paris Agreement was planned. But the statement did not emerge due to differences over trade policy issues.

"China wants to present itself as a responsible global power and simultaneously initiate the beginning of the end of the American epoch," the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* commented. Another comment in the same newspaper stated: "Donald Trump should have no illusions. Germany is currently hard at work plotting new alliances in the areas of climate and trade policy. With China and India."

The Paris Agreement, concluded in 2015, does not oblige any state to carry out concrete measures. Each country can set its own targets, and China, which emits by far the most CO<sub>2</sub>, has to reduce its emissions only after 2030.

But climate change policy long ago became an important instrument of global power politics. *Spiegel Online* enthusiastically examined, in two articles, what opportunities the US withdrawal would provide for

German business and foreign policy.

In a piece entitled “Complaining doesn’t help,” Feit Medick described Trump’s withdrawal from the deal as a “declaration of political and moral bankruptcy by the United States.” The good thing about this was “we can determine what happens next, not Washington.”

Protecting the climate was seen “in many places today no longer as a hindrance but an opportunity,” Medick continued. At stake were “jobs, innovation, connections and not least political leadership... if the chancellor was serious with her sentence about taking one’s fate into our own hands, she can start by getting down to business here and find the best way to hold together the weakened climate alliance.”

America will feel the impact of the withdrawal “in part automatically, but partly also by what we do,” threatened *Spiegel Online*. Trump had “put himself in a terrible position with his childish cancelling of the agreement.” “From trade to finance and arms exports... the readiness to accede to Washington’s desires, outside of the war on terror, [will] decline dramatically.”

Another article posted by *Spiegel Online*, “What the US exit means for the world,” details point by point the disadvantages that will accompany the withdrawal.

“The UN climate talks,” it states, “have become an important stage for diplomatic exchanges.” The issue at hand was not the reduction of greenhouse gases, but “development aid, economic incentives, the reorganisation of energy provision – that is, above all, business ‘deals,’ as Trump says. Whoever is not part of the talks loses influence.”

If a country needed “arguments with which to convince states on other issues... business deals at climate talks [could] be convincing.” China is building “African infrastructure at a rapid pace, which is securing the People’s Republic influence and trading relations there.”

The withdrawal from the global climate accord would have “disadvantageous consequences for the US’ global political influence.” Washington would miss out on “billions in business deals” that are arrived at in the course of configuring the agreement. The funds promised to poorer countries as part of the agreement were “not chiefly donations, but development projects into which firms from the paying countries are incorporated.”

“With the withdrawal from the climate accord,” *Spiegel Online* concluded, the US was leaving open “large business prospects for other countries: renewable energy.” Germany had “within the framework of the climate negotiations agreed the expansion of renewable energy in India – a project with advantages for both countries.”



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