

## US could become join Syria, Nicaragua as only countries outside Paris climate agreement

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One of Donald Trump's prominent campaign promises — to pull out of the Paris climate agreement, a 2015 U.N. accord that aims to combat climate change — may soon become reality.

The move, which senior officials have said could come as early as this week, would be one of several Obama-era environmental milestones that Trump has dismantled. And all the while, a new study shows global temperatures might be rising faster than expected.

Leaving the agreement would displace the U.S. from a stance of global leadership and place it alongside just two non-participating countries: Syria, which is in the midst of a civil war, and Nicaragua, whose GDP per capita is just 4 percent of the U.S.'s. Even countries such as Liberia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which are among the poorest in the world and were struggling with an Ebola epidemic at the time, have signed on.

The U.S.'s withdrawal would be especially striking because developing countries, most of which are in the agreement, have a much harder time cutting emissions.

That's because "the richest countries have much of their economy in lower-emitting sectors" — think finance and technology rather than manufacturing — and fewer people are deprived of access to energy, according to Robert Lempert, an environmental policy researcher at RAND Corporation. "The U.S. can grow their economy and improve their quality of life without increasing energy use. But in developing countries, you can't do that."

But numerous developing countries nonetheless participate because the Paris agreement has such a decentralized structure. Each country sets its own climate goals, and there's no legal consequence for missing that goal.

That structure also means a U.S. withdrawal would not spell the end of the agreement — countries have little incentive to leave. China and the European Union, among others, have already reaffirmed their commitments in light of Trump's comments.

Rather, withdrawal "is going to damage the U.S. much more than it's going to damage the Paris agreement itself," said Nat Keohane, vice president for global climate at the Environmental Defense Fund.

What is that damage? "It provides an opportunity for China to exert itself on the global stage" after the U.S. leaves a "leadership vacuum," said Ann Carlson, an environmental law professor at UCLA. That's with regards to the climate — the U.S. would lose its seat at the negotiating table to set global emissions monitoring standards — and also diplomacy. Experts on both sides agree leaving the international consensus on climate change would harm the country's reputation.

“Pulling out of the Paris agreement would be an unforced error in the sense of undermining our diplomatic efforts going forward,” Keohane said. “For the rest of the world this is a central issue for foreign policy.”

People who support leaving the agreement, though, don’t see it this way. “There’s so much fluidity in international politics” that the diplomatic hit would be temporary, said Pat Michaels of the libertarian-leaning Cato Institute.

That said, experts from both sides agree that staying in the Paris agreement alone isn’t enough to keep the U.S. in a role of global environmental leadership. Whether the U.S. formally leaves the agreement or just ignores it by crafting domestic policies that hurt the environment, it will face the same harms.

“Every move the Trump administration has made signals loudly and clearly that the U.S. is not going to address greenhouse gas emissions in any meaningful way,” Carlson said. “Putting aside Paris, we’ve already done that.”

But regardless of whether — and how — the U.S. exits the agreement, returning to a role of global environmental leadership under the next administration is possible, and some experts believe, necessary.

Referring to a U.S. withdrawal from the agreement, Keohane said, “If this ends up as a four-year blip on a long-run downward (emissions) trajectory, then the climate can survive it. But the climate won’t be able to survive the long-run absence of U.S. leadership.”