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Developing nations in Paris climate accord threaten to keep polluting unless they're paid

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Yemen has promised a whopping 1 percent cut in greenhouse gas emissions as part of the global Paris climate agreement.

North Korea, meanwhile, has said its pollution will double by 2030 compared with 2000 levels — but only if the rest of the world writes a sizable check. Otherwise, its emissions will rise even further.

Peru says it can cut emissions by 30 percent by 2030 compared with its “business as usual” projections, though that would be a net pollution increase of 22 percent and is contingent on billions of dollars in funding.

India, Iran, South Sudan, Niger, the Central African Republic, Cuba, Egypt, Paraguay and a host of other countries have similar demands: Pay up, or else they will have to keep polluting.

When President Trump pulled out of the Paris climate accord last week, his critics — including former President Barack Obama — said he was turning his back on the future and joining only Syria and Nicaragua in refusing to take part.

But for many that remain in the accord, the demands for cash are fueling the argument that the Paris agreement, at its core, is as much about redistributing international wealth as it is about saving the planet from climate change.

Supporters of the deal routinely point out that 193 countries have signed on. Although that is technically true, the vast majority of commitments offered in Paris would result in emissions increases or would require billions of dollars in funding — or, in many cases, both.

“Claiming that 193 countries signed on is a meaningless statement, which is likely why it’s made. The meaningful way to view it is that 193 countries agreed that the U.S. should harm itself and to gladly pay on Tuesday for the U.S. to harm itself today,” said Chris Horner, a senior fellow at the Competitive Enterprise Institute and a leading critic of the Paris pact. “There’s a stark difference between agreeing to sign on to Paris and agreeing to do something, to undertake pain. In essence, they rented their signature for the promise of Paris-related wealth transfers. But for them to promise to do anything beyond take our money and impose the agenda, too, would really cost us.”

Unlike much of the developing world, major countries such as the U.S., Russia and China did not make their commitments beholden to international financial support. The U.S. vowed to cut its

emissions at least 26 percent by 2030 compared with 2005 levels; Russia made a similar commitment.

China said it will hit peak emissions by 2030 and then begin reductions. The European Union is aiming for a 40 percent cut by 2030 versus 1990 levels.

Other developed countries, such as Canada and Japan, also did not make their promises contingent on financial help.

But for the vast majority of the countries, their promises aren't feasible without a major influx of money.

At least \$420 billion has been formally requested under countries' submissions to the Paris agreement, according to Carbon Brief, a U.K.-based group that tracks international climate change and maintains a comprehensive database of all information related to the Paris deal.

That figure, however, is far lower than what will ultimately be required. Many countries do not specify exactly how much money it will take to meet their emissions reduction targets.

Yemen, for example, said it could increase its 1 percent pledge to 14 percent with financial help, but the country — the poorest in the Muslim world — didn't indicate how much cash it needs.

Some analysts say the final figure for worldwide compliance with the Paris pledges would be in the trillions of dollars. U.N. officials estimated that it would cost at least \$100 billion per year, and that figure could rise to more than \$400 billion per year by 2020 to ensure compliance.

When the Obama administration finalized the agreement in December 2015, it committed \$3 billion to the United Nations' Green Climate Fund, which is meant to help countries meet their targets. Only \$1 billion of that has been paid out, and the Trump administration won't sign off on any further payments.

In fact, the president specifically cited that fund and its reliance on U.S. cash as key reasons for pulling out of the deal.

“So we're going to be paying billions and billions and billions of dollars, and we're already way ahead of anybody else. Many of the other countries haven't spent anything, and many of them will never pay one dime,” Mr. Trump said in his Rose Garden address last week. “America is \$20 trillion in debt. 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. So think of that.”

Some analysts say the Green Climate Fund would work against efforts to make the U.S. economy greener by funneling money from technological research to developing nations.

“These very real expenses will consume money that could be used by the private sector to fund innovative new technologies that are economically sound and can power our society with little pollution,” Patrick Michaels, director of the Center for the Study of Science at the libertarian Cato Institute, said last week after Mr. Trump announced America's withdrawal.

It's unclear whether the agreement can survive without U.S. financial support. The president has said he is willing to re-enter the deal if he can secure terms more favorable for the U.S., though he seemed unwilling to put the country on the hook for significant payouts to developing countries.

Still, supporters of the Paris accord as it is currently structured argue that it offers economic opportunities to the U.S. by promoting jobs in clean energy.

“So, because of this decision, American leadership in those sectors is now going to be put at risk,” former Secretary of State John F. Kerry, a key architect of the deal, told NBC’s “Meet the Press” on Sunday. “We could lose some of our ability to be able to grow those jobs and in fact lose out on the largest market of the future. The biggest market in the world in the future is going to be trillions of dollars spent in the sector of energy.”