



Reflections on current US Climate Policy: Implications to the international climate regime and the MENA region

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SEP 2025

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Summary

- On 25 January 2025, US President Donald Trump announced that the United States would withdraw from the Paris Agreement and other agreements, pacts, accords or commitments made under the UNFCCC.
- President Trump also revoked the US International Climate Finance Plan, a whole-of-government, signature initiative of the Biden/Harris administration.
- The international community's reaction to President Trump's withdrawal from the Paris Agreement was mixed, ranging from cautious to overtly critical of the decision.
- The US withdrawal has raised doubts on the ability of implementing the outcomes of COP29, held in Azerbaijan in November 2024, especially with respect to the decision on the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) on climate finance.
- In particular, it will likely be more difficult for Brazil, as host of COP30 in November 2025, to achieve an ambitious outcome on finance and other issues in the COP and Paris Agreement negotiations.
- The withdrawal is expected to result in a power vacuum in the Paris Agreement process. In response, the EU has indicated a renewed commitment to multilateralism while China has presented itself as a reliable partner in climate action.
- Funding cuts to institutions in the US such as NOAA and NASA is expected to weaken the collective ability to produce the reliable and impactful research needed to tackle the climate crisis and to adversely affect the preparedness of developing countries for extreme weather events.
- Climate vulnerable countries in the MENA region will be impacted by direct funding cuts from USAID and could face further repercussions, directly affecting the implementation of their NDCs and pursuing climate research.
- The conclusions and recommendations include:
 - all UNFCCC and Paris Agreement parties remain actively engaged in, and committed to, the climate negotiations and for developed countries to consider increasing their climate finance contributions;
 - higher income developing countries that have not contributed to the multilateral climate finance funds should also consider their capacity to contribute to these mechanisms;
 - the UAE should continue to demonstrate leadership in the Arab Group in the UNFCCC and Paris Agreement processes, and to work with other MENA countries on the implementation of their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the agreement;
 - higher-income MENA countries should consider providing support and capacity-building to the regional LDCs and fragile economies to enable them to implement their NDCs.

The Issue

On 25 January 2025, US President Donald Trump announced that the US would withdraw from the Paris Agreement.¹ Specifically, he instructed the US Ambassador to the United Nations to immediately submit 'formal written notification' of the US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement.² He indicated that the US withdrawal would be effective immediately.

He also instructed the Ambassador to 'immediately submit written formal notification to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, or any relevant party, of the United States' withdrawal from any agreement, pact, accord, or similar commitment made under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.³ In addition, he ordered the Ambassador, in collaboration with the Secretaries of State and Treasury, to immediately 'cease or revoke any purported financial commitment made by the United States under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Following the Trump announcement, the US cancelled a USD 3 billion multi-year pledge made to the Green Climate Fund (GCF) under the Biden/Harris administration.⁴

Trump also revoked the US International Climate Finance Plan (the 'Plan'). Announced in 2021, the Plan was a whole-of-government initiative of the Biden/Harris administration to enhance US climate ambition and to scale-up the mobilisation and provision of climate finance internationally. The plan had five objectives:

- 1) to scale up climate finance and enhance its impact;
- 2) to mobilise private sector finance;
- 3) to take steps to 'end international official financing for carbon-intensive fossil fuel-based energy';
- 4) to make capital flows consistent with low-emissions & climate-resilient pathways; and
- 5) to define, measure and report on US public climate finance.⁵

The Plan also addressed the need to align public and private financial flows in a manner consistent with achieving the objectives of the Paris Agreement of:

- holding the 'increase in the global average temperature to well below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels';
- increasing the ability to 'adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change and foster climate resilience'; and
- making finance flows 'consistent with a pathway towards low greenhouse gas emissions and climate-resilient development'.⁶

In particular, the Plan sought to provide a 'strategic orientation' and guide the work of US government agencies in climate finance and to 'allow the United States to promote enhanced climate ambition globally in climate mitigation and adaptation'. In addition, it aimed to ensure that developing countries were 'better positioned to tackle the climate crisis, with significant benefits to their communities and regions, as well as to the United States'.⁷

President Trump's rationale for these decisions was that the US had joined international agreements and initiatives that did not reflect US values or did not contribute to its economic and environmental objectives. Moreover, these agreements had resulted in 'American taxpayer dollars' going to countries that did not 'require, or merit, financial assistance in the interests of the American people'.

On 10 March, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio announced the cancellation of 83% of the US Agency for International



Development's (USAID) programmes and the revocation of 5,200 contracts, a number of which had climate-related components.⁸ Following these decisions — as part of a wide-ranging round of budget cuts — the Trump administration cancelled USD 275 million in contributions to the Global Environmental Facility and Climate Investment Funds on the grounds that these funds promoted 'woke Green New Deal policies that are misaligned with Administration priorities'.⁹

Reactions of the International Community

The international community's reaction to President Trump's withdrawal from the Paris Agreement ranged from cautious to overtly critical of the decision. The European Union reiterated its commitment to the Paris Agreement process and indicated that it would 'stay the course, and keep working with all nations that want to protect nature and stop global warming'.¹⁰ Ed Miliband, Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change of the United Kingdom, said that the UK would 'try to find common ground' with President Trump, and that it was in the US national interest to address climate change.¹¹ The Canadian government deplored the decision and indicated that Canada remained fully committed to its obligations under the Paris Agreement.¹²

China responded cautiously, with a spokesperson for the Chinese foreign ministry highlighting that climate change was a 'common challenge faced by all of humanity' and that China would 'work with all parties to actively address the challenges of climate change'.¹³ Marina Silva, Minister of the Environment and Climate Change of Brazil, said that the Trump decisions were the 'opposite of policies guided by evidence brought by science and common sense, imposed by the reality of extreme weather events, including in his own country'.¹⁴

The UNFCCC's African Group of Negotiators described the decision as a 'direct threat to global efforts to limit temperature rise and avert the catastrophic impacts of climate change, particularly for the world's most vulnerable nations' and highlighted the United States' historical responsibility to 'lead in climate action'.¹⁵ The Least Developed Countries (LDC) group expressed regret at the US decision and stated that it threatened to 'reverse hard-won gains in reducing emissions' and put 'vulnerable countries at greater risk'.¹⁶ The LDC group also highlighted that the Paris Agreement remained a 'vital climate pact'.¹⁷

While not directly referencing the Trump administration decisions, Green Climate Fund Executive Director Mafalda Duarte called on the international community to step up to the challenge of mobilising climate finance. Duarte highlighted that the most severe consequences — including conflict and migration — will ripple across the globe unless action is taken where it matters most: in developing countries.¹⁸

Practical Effect and Likely Future US Role

The withdrawal from the Paris Agreement was not unexpected and was not without precedent. In September 2016, following the conclusion of the Paris Agreement negotiations, the US government deposited its instrument of acceptance of the agreement. The US, under the Barack Obama administration, had played a key role in the negotiation of the Paris Agreement. However, in November 2019, the first Trump administration notified the UN Secretary-General of the US's intention to withdraw from the agreement. This decision took effect in November 2020 in accordance with Article 28 (1)-(2) of the agreement. In one of its first acts in office, the Biden administration decided that the US would rejoin the Paris Agreement and, in January 2021, deposited its instrument of acceptance of the agreement.¹⁹

The immediate effect of the US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement is that it will no longer be bound by commitments made pursuant to the agreement. Key provisions of the Paris Agreement include the requirement, under Article 4, for each party to 'prepare, communicate and maintain' successive nationally determined contributions (NDCs) that it 'intends to achieve'. Parties are required to 'pursue domestic mitigation measures' and communicate their nationally

determined contribution (NDC) every five years. Each NDC should represent a ‘progression’ beyond the party’s current NDC and ‘reflect its highest possible ambition’. The US NDC, prepared by the Biden administration, had an economy-wide target of reducing net greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 61–66% below 2005 levels by 2035 and net zero (GHG) emissions by 2050.²⁰ The US NDC sets out in detail the measures the Biden administration intended to take.

In addition, under Article 9, developed countries are required to provide finance to assist developing countries in the development and implementation of mitigation and adaptation measures. Under Article 9(5), developed countries are required to report biennially ‘indicative quantitative and qualitative information ... [on] projected levels of public financial resources to be provided to developing countries’. The most recent US Article 9(5) communication highlighted the Biden administration’s efforts to assist developing countries in their ‘pursuit of ambitious mitigation action and building climate resilience’ through initiatives delivered through, inter alia, USAID and via support for multilateral climate funds. The multilateral climate funds that received funding under the Biden administration included the Clean Technology Fund (CTF), the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Green Climate Fund (GCF), the Adaptation Fund (AF) and the Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF, administered by the GEF). The communications also referenced initiatives undertaken as part of the US International Climate Finance Plan.²¹

Paris Agreement parties also have commitments relating to strengthening ‘cooperative action on technology development and transfer’ and capacity-building under Articles 10 and 11, and reporting requirements on implementation under Article 13. The US withdrawal means that it will cease to comply with all such obligations.

In terms of the impact on the Paris Agreement process, the US withdrawal raise doubts on the implementation of the outcomes of COP29, especially with respect to the decision on the new collective quantified goal (NCQG) on climate finance. Under the NCQG decision, parties agreed to work together to scale up financing to developing countries from all sources to at least USD 1.3 trillion per year by 2035 and set the goal – with developed countries taking the lead – of at least USD 300 billion per year by 2035.²²

In particular, it will likely be more difficult for Brazil, as host of COP30 in November 2025, to achieve an ambitious outcome on finance and other issues in the COP and Paris Agreement negotiations. Moreover, as UNFCCC and Paris Agreement parties consider the implications of the US withdrawal and respond to the economic impacts of the Trump administration’s April announcements on tariffs,²³ they are also likely to be less ambitious with respect to their NDCs and climate action generally, both domestically and internationally.

Looking ahead, there is a potential power vacuum in the Paris Agreement process following the US exit. With the US no longer at the table, there are opportunities for China to gain geopolitical influence and to position itself as a reliable partner. The EU, for its part, has indicated a renewed commitment to multilateralism. In these circumstances, China and the EU are likely to continue to play a critical role in the Paris Agreement process, as are key developing countries, such as Brazil.

UNFCCC and Kyoto Protocol

While the January announcement of the US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement and cancellation of US pledges to the GCF took immediate effect, the legal effect of the US ‘withdrawal from any agreement, pact, accord, or similar commitment made under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change’ (UNFCCC) remains unclear.

The US signed and ratified the UNFCCC in 1992²⁴ and has remained a party since then, with the first Trump administration not leaving the convention. Opinions differ on whether the US could withdraw from the UNFCCC without US Senate approval.²⁵ According to international climate law scholar Daniel Bodansky, the ‘general consensus is that, in practice,

the president can withdraw the United States from treaties to which the Senate gave advice and consent'.²⁶ He argues that the only similar situation occurred in 1979 when then President Jimmy Carter withdrew from defence agreements with Taiwan as part of a process of 'normalising' diplomatic relations with China. Republican Senator Barry Goldwater challenged the decision in the US Supreme Court; the court was divided on the issue, with four determining that it was not a matter for the court to decide and one ruling that the President had the authority to terminate international treaties that the US had signed and ratified.²⁷

Given that the US is still legally a party to the UNFCCC, it is likely that the US will continue to be represented at COP meetings and associated fora at officials' level and seek to use its presence to influence the COP process and agenda. In this regard, while the US did not ever ratify the Convention on Biological Diversity,²⁸ it has maintained a presence at CBD COPs and has played a 'behind the scenes' role.²⁹

Under the 1997 Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change ('Kyoto Protocol'),³⁰ industrialised countries and economies in transition agreed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. At the time, the protocol was regarded as an important step in the evolution of the global climate regime. While the US, under the Clinton administration, played an active role in the negotiation of the Kyoto Protocol and signed the agreement following the conclusion of the negotiations, the US Senate did not ever ratify it.³¹

Climate Science Research

The Trump administration's approach to climate policy and related decisions also have broader implications for climate science research. Following the change of administration, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), one of the world's major climate and weather research institutions, was weakened by layoffs. Scientists and experts were dismissed from working on the sixth National Climate Assessment (NCA6), a report that focuses on the impact of climate change on the United States. In a similar move, employees were also laid off from the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Energy, with federal grants being withheld. Additionally, the administration prevented American scientists from attending a key Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) meeting, a body in which scientists from federal agencies such as the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and NOAA have long played an important role. This withdrawal is expected to weaken the collective ability to provide the science required to tackle the climate crisis.

These decisions do not only impact the science. They also have the potential to adversely affect the preparedness of developing countries for extreme weather events, such as hurricanes and droughts, since many of them rely on NOAA's forecasting. Coupled with the US decision to halt financial contributions to the UNFCCC, leaving it with a 22% shortfall in its core budget,³² these measures could also eventually impact global climate governance.

International Climate Finance Flows

The US is a significant provider of international climate finance. In 2023, the US provided USD 9.5 billion with the Biden administration pledging to provide USD 11.4 billion annually by 2024.³³ Although many analysts argue that this was less than the US's fair share of climate finance, the increase was welcomed by many. With President Trump's administration, the narrative with respect to climate finance and other aid-related funding has changed. Recent analysis suggests that approximately a tenth of all global climate finance could be at risk.³⁴

Cutting US funding not only directly affects bilateral projects; it also adversely impacts the funding of major international climate funds and multilateral development banks. In addition, the funding gap created by the US actions, is detrimental to climate-vulnerable least developed countries and funding for adaptation projects that often require grant financing.

The interlinkages go beyond cutting direct climate finance. The US leaving partnerships such as the Just Energy Transition Partnership leaves coal-reliant countries in a difficult position to pursue their energy transition. The shutdown of USAID halts the flow of millions of dollars that were earmarked for a variety of climate projects in developing countries with the aim of reducing emissions, transitioning to clean energy, adapting to the impacts of climate change and improving the resilience of local communities.

The Trump administration has also announced the withdrawal of the US from the board of the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage (FRLD), which took effect from March 2025. The FRLD seeks to assist vulnerable nations cope with extreme climate events. The mandate of the FRLD is to 'assist developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change in responding to economic and non-economic loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change, including extreme weather events and slow onset events'.³⁵ The Fund received significant support globally during COP27 and COP28 and, as of April 2025, had mobilised USD 768.40 million in pledges from 27 contributors. The move also casts doubt on the US pledge of USD 17.5 million to the fund.³⁶

As highlighted above, the US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement and associated obligations, including the submission of an NDC, also puts the achievement of the NCQG on climate finance at risk. Moreover, given the current geopolitical landscape and in the wake of the administration's introduction of new tariffs, the capacity of other major donors, such as France, Germany, Japan, and the United Kingdom, to step up and fill the gap with stronger climate finance commitments is potentially constrained.

The EU, as noted above, will continue to play a key role in the Paris Agreement and COP processes, and to be a major donor. It will also continue with the implementation of its own climate policies, including the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM). The CBAM seeks to impose a 'fair' price on carbon and effectively taxes the production of carbon-intensive goods that enter the EU. The regime is currently in a transitional phase and will be implemented fully in 2026.³⁷ Other countries, including Canada, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, and the United Kingdom, are considering the development of similar schemes.³⁸ The implementation of the EU scheme and similar arrangements in other countries may, however, attract further measures in response from the Trump administration and limit their capacity to contribute as donors to the multilateral climate funds and bilateral and regional programs with climate components.

Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Region

The MENA region is among the world's most climate-vulnerable territories.³⁹ The region includes two least developed countries (LDCs, Djibouti and Yemen) and one Small Island Developing State (SIDS, Bahrain). Key climate risks for the region include temperature increase, precipitation variability and sea level rise.⁴⁰ The region has also been adversely impacted by modest economic growth, increasing indebtedness (especially the oil-importing MENA countries, such as Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia) and uncertainty due to conflict in the Middle East.⁴¹ This has left several countries with significant finance gaps and implications for climate action and ambition.

Despite the region's vulnerabilities, MENA countries receive a very small proportion of total global climate finance flows; for example, in 2019/20, the region received only 2% of global climate finance,⁴² amounting to approximately USD 16 billion.⁴³ With the cuts mentioned above, this will leave countries in the region struggling to secure climate finance in a shrinking finance landscape while the costs of adapting to the impacts of climate change continue to increase. It could also impact their mitigation efforts due to increased hesitation among the private sector and banks to invest in renewable energy. In addition to direct impacts on project, the region has a variety of research collaborations with US universities and research institutions, some of which have suffered from funding cuts. The continuity of such projects remains unclear and will depend on finding other suitable donors.



Additionally, the Trump administration's decisions are likely to constrain the capacity of donors to contribute to the multilateral climate funds and to support climate action through bilateral development assistance programmes to lower income developing countries in the MENA region. As a result, climate-vulnerable countries in the region are likely to be adversely affected by reduced international climate finance flows, both multilaterally and bilaterally. In addition, cuts to USAID and other US programmes with activities in the MENA region are likely to constrain the ability of lower income MENA countries to implement their NDCs under the Paris Agreement and to pursue the transition to clean energy, adapt to the impacts of climate change and improve the resilience of local communities.

Initially, the region's expectations relied on China, the EU and the UK to fill in the finance gap. However, there is a global trend of reducing climate finance and development aid, particularly in developed countries. This trend is considered a consequence of dedicating more resources to industrial and defence spendings as countries brace for US trade protectionism measures.⁴⁴

To this end, regional solutions could play a significant role in ensuring climate action and promoting solidarity. A utilization of existing multilateral development banks, such as the Islamic development bank or leveraging investments from Gulf sovereign wealth funds could plug shortfalls and reduce dependence on western aid. Collaborating with other institutions such as the world bank and climate funds under the UNFCCC could help direct funding towards the most vulnerable countries in the region including fragile and conflict affected countries.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The US administration's decisions were not unexpected, especially considering the US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement during Trump's first term in office. As noted above, the US withdrawal will make it harder to implement the outcomes of COP29, especially with respect to the decision on the NCQG, and more difficult for Brazil, as host of COP30, to achieve ambitious outcomes on finance and other issues.

The following actions are recommended to address the consequences of the US exit from the Paris Agreement and other related decisions, and the resulting international climate finance gap.

1. To achieve an ambitious outcome as possible at COP30, all UNFCCC and Paris Agreement parties should remain actively engaged in, and committed to, the climate negotiations.
2. With the purpose of sustaining momentum to achieve the new collective quantified goal (NCQG) on climate finance, developed countries should consider increasing their contributions to the multilateral climate funds, such as the GCF and the FRLD.
3. Developed countries that have not contributed to the multilateral climate finance mechanisms should consider contributing to these funds.
4. Higher income developing countries that have not contributed to the multilateral climate finance mechanisms should consider their potential capacity to contribute to these funds and increase their investments in clean energy and climate resilience.
5. The UAE, as a key regional player and host of COP28 in 2023, should continue to demonstrate leadership in the Arab Group in the UNFCCC and Paris Agreement processes, and to work with other MENA countries on the implementation of their NDCs.
6. Higher-income MENA countries should consider providing support and capacity-building to the regional LDCs (Djibouti and Yemen) and fragile economies to enable them to implement their NDCs and develop funding proposals that will satisfy the requirements of the major multilateral funds and bilateral donors.

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