

US' Paris exit holds benefits for Taiwan

Written by Huang Tien-lin 黃天麟
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On Thursday last week US President Donald Trump announced that the US would pull out of the Paris climate agreement. The decision has sparked ire in the international community and drawn criticism from many Americans.

Before the announcement, many leading US companies — including Intel, Microsoft, Apple, Google and Tesla — had urged the Trump administration to stay in the agreement.

Why did Trump insist on quitting the Paris agreement, despite opposition from major US corporations whose support he needs to bring manufacturing back to the US? There must be reasons to make him believe upsetting them is worth it.

In his speech announcing the withdrawal, Trump said that the agreement, although beneficial to many countries, is not good for the US and its workers.

He said the accord allows China increased carbon emissions in the next 13 years — that is, by 2030, China has to reduce its carbon emissions to 60 to 65 percent of its 2005 emissions, but because its economy is growing rapidly, it can in fact increase its emissions — but requires the US to significantly reduce its carbon emissions, although it provides 30 percent of the agreement's funding.

Despite China's attempts to assume global leadership, when it comes to making international agreements, it always demands to be treated as a developing country to obtain better terms.

For example, China joined the WTO in 2000 as a developing country and therefore avoided all the international obligations of developed economies. It has taken the same approach to issues such as trade liberalization and globalization.

As an authoritarian country with a state capitalist economy, China has managed to enjoy all the benefits of globalization while continuing to practice blatant protectionism.

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In the Paris agreement, China has also tried to pass the main responsibility of reducing carbon emissions to the US by claiming that its carbon emissions per capita are far below those of other developing countries, despite having the highest carbon emissions in the world.

The US' decision to back out of the Paris agreement has implications for Taiwan.

First, it is clear that Trump views China as the US' primary economic and military competitor and threat, and he is clearly unhappy about China benefiting from US concessions in the Paris agreement.

Second, Trump, who deeply believes in his own campaign slogan to “make America great again,” will place even more emphasis on Taiwan's importance to US national security. In addition, only a strong US will be able to protect Taiwan.

Third, if Taiwan can improve its economic ties with the US, the Trump administration will also place more emphasis on the nation's economic stability.

Fourth, Taiwan also has a serious problem with its high carbon emissions. The US' decision to withdraw from the Paris agreement will lighten the pressure on Taiwan to reduce its carbon emissions, which will be helpful to the nation's plan to phase out nuclear power by 2025.

Some have said that the US' decision provides an opportunity for China to become the new leader in the fight against climate change. To that, the White House simply responded: “Fine.”

The aim of this article is not to analyze whether Trump made the right decision to quit the agreement — that will be left to other experts to investigate and discuss — but at the very least, the decision is not necessarily bad news for Taiwan.

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In fact, the news should make the government feel relieved as it continues to fight for international rights and sovereignty.

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