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ABSTRACT:

The Paris Agreement came into effect in 2016, and since then, it has served as a major driving force for the member countries to lower their greenhouse gas emissions and protect the environment. It designated key responsibilities to developed countries to put in extra effort in promoting environment-friendly practices. However, the Trump Administration has been reluctant to allow developing countries like China and India to get relaxations under the treaty, thus prompting its withdrawal from the same. Moreover, he has been focusing on the domestic use of oil and gas found in the country, allowing other countries to take similar steps. The America First policy might go down in history as the very reason why environmental pollution could not be stopped in time, when necessary, steps had already been decided by the world community coming together. Is there any hope for the world to save planet Earth when one of the world's most powerful countries is backing off from its responsibilities? What legal maneuvers can be taken to compel America to fulfill its obligations towards our planet? In this article, we clarify how the US can be influenced to adhere to the principles agreed upon under the Paris agreement and move towards a safe environment for the people.

I. INTRODUCTION:

The environment has been a sensitive geopolitical issue in recent times. The alarming increase in global warming has put certain countries on tenterhooks, thus bringing global attention to this seemingly insignificant and rather unconventional topic in the present era, where technical innovation and AI dominance supersede all other concerns. Countries like Bangladesh, Indonesia, and other island nations are facing an existential crisis with the rise in sea levels due to the melting of glaciers, which in time could pose a threat to other countries as well.¹ Frequent forest fires in

¹ Daniel Dickinson, *What is sea level rise and why does it matter to our future?*, UN NEWS (Jul. 25, 2025, 06:00 PM) <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/08/1153596>.

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southern Europe and America have also been a major concern due to the dry climate being experienced there.² The Amazon has been in decline for decades due to urbanization and migration, causing the ‘lungs of the Earth’ severe damage.³ Similarly, studies have found that the desert region of the Sahara has been continuously increasing, thus causing great alarm.⁴ Most of the issues are in some way or other related to human intervention in environmental matters. Global warming is the leading cause of all these events, and human activities like deforestation, mining, and excessive use of coal and petroleum products have added to the burden. These changes have prompted the United Nations to swarm into action and call on its member countries to stop all the actions that have a lasting impact on the environment. But it is the individual countries that will have to ultimately step up to reverse the adverse conditions by working individually as well as conjointly along with the companies who are equally responsible for the present condition.

Environment affects all, which means no one can escape its clutches. The question is – how did all of this happen? Mankind has been living on earth for centuries, but why has the environment only now been degraded to such an extent? The answer lies in the period of industrialization, which saw a massive shift from an agriculture-based economy to a manufacturing-based one. The US and Europe saw industries being set up to manufacture all kinds of goods and products that ran on energy primarily extracted from fossil fuels. This led to an increase in carbon emissions, degradation of the environment, air and water pollution, depletion of natural resources, etc. While countries enjoyed great economic returns and boosted productivity, it all came at the cost of environmental pollution at an unprecedented level. During the industrial era, approximately 2.3

² James MacCarthy, Jessica Richter, Sasha Tyukavina & Nancy Harris, *The Latest Data Confirms: Forest Fires Are Getting Worse*, WORLD RESOURCES INSTITUTE (Jul. 26, 2025, 12:25 PM) <https://www.wri.org/insights/global-trends-forest-fires>.

³ *The Amazon*, WWF (Jul. 26, 2025, 02:15 PM) <https://www.wwf.org.uk/where-we-work/amazon#:~:text=This%20precious%20ecosystem%20is%20under,logging%2C%20mining%20and%20climate%20change>.

⁴ Owen Mulhern, *Is the Sahara Desert Growing?*, EARTH.ORG (Jul. 26, 2025, 04:30 PM) https://earth.org/data_visualization/the-past-present-and-future-of-the-sahara-desert/.

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trillion tonnes of carbon dioxide were released into the atmosphere. Almost half of it has been absorbed by the oceans and other ecosystems, but the remaining portion has stayed in the atmosphere. Studies show that the Earth's average global surface temperatures have warmed by about 1.1°C since the start of the Industrial Revolution.⁵ The Industrial Revolution, being the major cause of environmental degradation, was prevalent in the 17th and 18th centuries in Europe and America, which means that the primary responsibility lies with these developed nations that the Earth is suffering today. But are these countries ready to be accountable for their actions and ready to compensate the poor who are now suffering without even having done anything?

II. PARIS AGREEMENT:

In 1992, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change was signed by 154 countries in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. It aims to limit human interference in climate change. The most potent step would be the reduction of carbon emissions and the use of renewable energy to meet the demand of the people.⁶ It aims to achieve economic development by sustainable means. Under the UNFCCC, the Kyoto Protocol was signed, aiming to reduce several greenhouse gases like methane, carbon dioxide, and hydrofluorocarbons. The protocol was based on '***common but differentiated responsibilities***', highlighting the capacity of different countries to achieve the targets according to the means and economies of the countries. It also added more responsibility to some countries that were historically responsible for global warming. Since the Kyoto protocol aimed mostly for certain advanced and developed countries, many felt that countries all over the world needed to participate to achieve the goal of a healthy environment successfully. The Paris

⁵ Kara Anderson, *What was the Industrial Revolution's Environmental Impact?*, GREENLY (Jul. 26, 2025, 05:45 PM) <https://greenly.earth/en-gb/blog/ecology-news/what-was-the-industrial-revolutions-environmental-impact>.

⁶ *What is the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change?*, UN CLIMATE CHANGE (Jul. 24, 2025, 08:10 PM) <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/what-is-the-united-nations-framework-convention-on-climate-change>.

⁷ *What is the Kyoto Protocol?*, UN CLIMATE CHANGE (Jul. 24, 2025, 04:40 PM) https://unfccc.int/kyoto_protocol.

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Agreement was thus agreed upon by the member states to add responsibility to all countries in saving the planet from climate change, affected by human intervention. It asked countries to decide on their emissions and strictly adhere to them, and even aim to reduce them gradually. It set target years for each country and emphasized transparency and accountability for all those nations that could not keep up with their targets. It added features like financial help from developed nations to the poor countries, to help them build capacities to reduce emissions and still seek economic growth.⁸ The Agreement also envisaged the principle laid down in the Kyoto Protocol that the historically advanced and developed countries bore more responsibility towards the degradation of the environment, thus they had to put in more efforts for its protection.

The highly-debated Paris Agreement was signed in 2016 to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to hold the increase in global temperatures to well below 2°C above the pre-industrial levels.⁹ The most controversial clause of the agreement is the acknowledgment of the deteriorated condition of the environment during industrialization by the developed countries and the relief given to the developing countries in maintaining global temperatures while still taking measures towards their economic and industrial growth. It also maintains that the developed countries ought to provide the developing countries with financial support to fulfil their responsibility towards the planet.¹⁰ Around 195 parties signed the agreement with the view that global participation would indeed contribute towards bringing down the temperature, thus saving the environment and the people. The Paris Agreement is considered a milestone by the green activists who have been raising their voices in support of such global recognition of the looming issue. Thus, from the 1992 Rio ‘Earth’ Summit to the COP 21 Paris agreement, the UN has taken

⁸ Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Apr. 22, 2016, 3156 U.N.T.S. 143; art. 11.

⁹ *The Paris Agreement*, UN CLIMATE CHANGE (Jul. 24, 2025, 06:30 PM)
<https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/paris-agreement>.

¹⁰ Paris Agreement, *supra* note 8, art. 9.

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crucial steps to acknowledge the harm that has been caused to the environment and the need of the hour to reverse this harm for continued stability and development of the planet. It is not only the people who are affected by the declining environment, rather the biodiversity is facing the crisis head-on with no one else to rely on. It is clear that the developed nations have to take the initiative in protecting the environment from the harm already done to it.

III. TRUMP AND THE TURNING POINT:

The Paris Agreement inarguably imposes responsibility for the massive environmental hazards caused by the so-called developed nations while keeping the developing countries in check over related future risks. The survival of several countries depends on the delivery of promises by countries joining the agreement. This is a matter that needs to be prioritized even when there would be no immediate impact of the same on the countries opting out of it. A country like the USA, which assumes the position of the greatest country in the world, undoubtedly has an extraordinary role to play in promoting such treaties and ensuring that every country performs its role in keeping up with its obligations. But at such a crucial moment, the country is now reluctant to abide by its promise made to millions of people across the globe. President Obama signed the Paris Agreement in 2016, stating that the loss of a safe environment would be very harmful for the people and that the USA is committed to ensuring safe measures for its people. He did not get the Senate's approval but stated that the treaty was non-binding in nature, thus he could sign it under the executive power of the President. The Obama Administration made a promise to cut the carbon dioxide emissions by at least 26% over 2005 levels. To meet the needs, he brought the Clean Power Plan in 2014 and also brought regulations to limit emissions of methane and HFCs.¹¹ But in the 2017 presidential election, Donald Trump claimed victory, thus putting an end to America's proactive concern for environmental issues. While Trump first ordered the withdrawal of the USA in 2017, the

¹¹ John Light, *Trump is Pulling out of the Paris Agreement? Here's what will happen*, UN DISPATCH (Jul. 26, 2025, 12:10 PM) <https://undispatch.com/trump-pulling-paris-agreement-heres-will-happen/>.

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Agreement stated that no country could withdraw its support within 3 years of it entering into force, plus an additional year to fully exit the treaty¹². So technically, the USA could not get out of it until 2020, just in time for the next presidential elections, where a new president could reverse his decision and remain a part of the treaty. When Joe Biden became the 46th President of the USA, he guaranteed that the country would fully comply with its obligations under the Agreement. But it came to naught when Trump was once again elected as the US President and reiterated his stance on quitting the Paris Agreement. He believes that countries like India and China are exploiting the treaty and making money out of it by addressing the developed nations as the real perpetrators of the environmental decline, and are themselves free from any such guilt. He asserts that every country should be held equally liable for the surge in temperatures, thus contributing equally towards safeguarding the environment, irrespective of any past actions. At that time, leaders from across the world condemned his decision and affirmed their commitments towards the Agreement.¹³ Many companies in America stated that they would uphold their commitments towards the Agreement and would abide by its rules.¹⁴ They opposed what Trump stated in his speech regarding the withdrawal, even though his speech was all about putting America and Americans first. But the question is – can Trump really withdraw from the Agreement that easily? When President Obama signed the treaty in 2016, he bypassed the Senate's stance and went ahead with conforming to the principles of the treaty, stating that the Agreement wasn't a binding one and that the executive powers of the President allowed him to sign it. Using the same political means, the Trump Administration could use the non-binding character of the Agreement to unilaterally withdraw from it.¹⁵ During his first tenure, time constraints did not allow him to take

¹² Paris Agreement, *supra* note 8, art. 28.

¹³ Jonathan Watts; Kate Connolly, *World leaders react after Trump rejects Paris climate deal*, THE GUARDIAN (Jul. 26, 2025, 10:20 AM) <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/jun/01/trump-withdraw-paris-climate-deal-world-leaders-react>.

¹⁴ Jim Giles, *US businesses hold steady on support for Paris Agreement even after cozying up to Trump*, TRELLIS (Jul. 26, 2025, 10:00 AM) <https://trellis.net/article/big-business-trump-paris-agreement/>.

¹⁵ Durney, Jessica, *Defining the Paris Agreement: A Study of Executive Power and Political Commitments*, 11 C&Cl LR 234, 242 (2017) JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26245362>.

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further action on the issue. But as soon as he became the President once again, he affirmed his decision to back away from the Agreement unless re-negotiations were done where all countries would be equally responsible and the USA would not have to pay the developing countries some amount to take steps to protect the environment. During his first withdrawal, France had already warned that there would be no negotiations on the Paris Agreement and that there could be no plan B in such situations. But there have been no further communications in this regard. In fact, many in the Trump Administration believe that he is not inclined to join the agreement, which is why there has been no talk of re-negotiations. It has been pointed out that the Paris Agreement allows members to adjust their existing nationally determined contributions (NDCs) according to their circumstances and ambitions. This allows the US to carefully adjust to the contribution it wants to make, which can be lower than what is traditionally expected from a developed country of its caliber. The Trump administration could have used this clause and lowered its contribution while effectively pursuing the implementation of the treaty. Complete withdrawal from the treaty not only undermines the collective effort from the rest of the world, but it also reflects the poor policy-making power and diplomatic handling of its affairs at a global level. Another dangerous highlight of the Trump Administration is its focus on domestic drilling of oil fields and coal mining. The US has huge amounts of reserves of coal and oil, which have not been exploited enough. The 2008 slogan “Drill, baby, drill” was revived by Trump during his 2024 election campaign, indicating his willingness to mine coal fields and drill the oil reserves. During his inaugural speech, he claimed that America had the most oil and gas reserves and that it was time for America to use them. He even signed the executive order declaring a national energy emergency and urged speeding up the drilling of the liquid gold.¹⁶ This indicates that the American President does not think highly of the environmental concerns and is only interested in doing what might be best for

¹⁶ Spencer Feingold, *The US enters its ‘drill, baby, drill’ era. Here’s what a top energy leader has to say*, WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM (Jul. 27, 2025, 07:30 PM) <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2025/03/us-enters-drill-era-top-energy-leader-oil-gas/>.

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the US, but not the world. While it may temporarily benefit American goals, it will definitely handicap the prospects of the entire world, including the people in America.

IV. IMPACT OF TRUMP POLICIES:

It is certain that when the world sees the US backing off on its promises, most of the smaller nations would be inclined to look for their benefit rather than think of the world or the environment. Every country wants economic progress and stability, and curbing the use of natural resources available to them and finding its alternatives in renewable energy will be a burden on them. With no external foreign support, most of these countries would incline towards withdrawing from the Agreement. The future is already looking bleak. Argentina has announced that its oil and gas production will be going up soon.¹⁷ Meanwhile, South Korea and Japan have decided to import more oil and gas from the US to diversify their supply lines.¹⁸ India has signed a trade deal where it would increase its imports of crude oil, petroleum products, and natural gas from the US.¹⁹ With such an increase in oil and gas production, the US will definitely not be able to keep up with its promises of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Another major step by President Trump is his decision on elimination of EV mandate and the termination of federal support for EVs.²⁰ This means that EVs would get no support from the government, and the Biden Policy on EV adoption would be reversed. This will hinder adequate production of EVs because of the low demand, which would mean that traditional vehicles run on petrol and diesel would continue their production,

¹⁷ Argentina continues to ramp up oil production, GLOBAL ENERGY PRIZE (Jul. 27, 2025, 05:45 PM) <https://globalenergyprize.org/en/2024/10/18/argentina-continues-to-ramp-up-oil-production/>.

¹⁸ US, Japan, South Korea commit to placing US LNG for energy security, SPGLOBAL (Jul. 27, 2025, 06:05 PM) <https://www.spglobal.com/commodity-insights/en/news-research/latest-news/lng/040425-us-japan-south-korea-commit-to-placing-us-lng-for-energy-security>.

¹⁹ N. Ravi Kumar, *Why has India promised to buy more U.S. oil? Explained*, THE HINDU (Jul. 27, 2025, 05:30 PM) https://www.thehindu.com/business/why-has-india-promised-to-buy-more-us-oil-explained/article69307515.ece#goog_rewareded.

²⁰ Quantifying Trump's Impacts on EV Adoption, HARVARD UNIVERSITY (Jul. 28, 2025, 09:10 PM) <https://salatainstitute.harvard.edu/quantifying-trumps-impacts-on-ev-adoption/>.

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most likely increase it. Where the world is inclined to adopt modern and effective technology to reduce the burden on natural resources, America would be contradicting every single step it had taken to save the environment. *“One analysis suggests that should the rest of the world delay taking action by eight years, the result would be a doubling of cumulative CO₂ emissions over the next century, rendering the 2°C target unattainable.”*²¹ Without the plans made by the previous governments in place and new reformatory targets set by the new government, it will be very difficult for the country to achieve the goals it has set for itself in the upcoming years. Since Trump’s reason to quit the Paris Agreement is to keep America first, let’s also discuss the effect of this withdrawal on America. Trump claims that the treaty allows countries like China, India, and other Southeast Asian nations to open more coal mines and oil refineries, whereas it restricts the US from doing the same. The agreement says no such thing. It only says that developing countries can have higher emissions, but they also have to roll out alternative green energies simultaneously. In no way has the agreement restricted any country from stopping any activity, though it does request mindful use of such harmful sources. The coal industry in China, India, and the US is declining due to market forces, as subsidies on natural gas and solar energy are making them a cheaper option. Trump says that coal mining would generate lots of jobs, but he has ignored the jobs in renewable energy, which employs even more Americans.²² Respiratory diseases in Americans have increased in the past few decades. “Over the past 30 years, the percentage of Americans with asthma has more than doubled, and climate change is to blame for it.”²³ This shows the issue isn’t a hoax, as made out by the American President, but a real problem. Every country has to put in efforts to eliminate this threat to the planet.

²¹ Rhodes, Christopher J., *US Withdrawal from the COP21 Paris Climate Change Agreement, and Its Possible Implications*, 100 SP L.J. 411, 414 (2017) JSTOR <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26406389>.

²² Margaret Hartmann, *What Quitting the Paris Climate Accord Will Do to the U.S., and the Planet*, INTELLIGENCER (Jul. 28, 2025, 07:45 PM) <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2017/06/what-quitting-the-paris-deal-does-to-the-us-and-the-planet.html>.

²³ Isabella Hornick, *Asthma prevalence in US rose from 1990 to 2019*, HELIO (Jul. 28, 2025, 07:30 PM), <https://www.healio.com/news/pulmonology/20231110/asthma-prevalence-in-us-has-risen-from-1990-to-2019>.

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V. SOLUTION TO THIS WITHDRAWAL:

America's quitting the Paris Agreement does not mean that all hope is lost. Almost half of the states in America do not agree with Trump's policies and have already made plans to ensure that sustainable energy is promoted across their territories. Progressive state governments will most likely redouble their efforts to curtail fossil fuel infrastructure and enforce robust climate policies and emissions reduction.²⁴ Many companies in America are against quitting the treaty and have therefore reassured the international community that, irrespective of the country's policy, they would continue to use sustainable methods and abide by their promises towards the environment. Many companies fear that the international community would put additional tariffs on their products if they do not accept the international standards of sustainable development. These tariffs can be a beneficial way to make American companies conform to such international standards. Sanctioning the US can be another way. Countries can come together to project sanctions on the US and coerce them into accepting the standards decided by them in the Agreement. It may not have the desired effect, but can at least warn the US govt. that things might not go their way every single time. Similarly, tariffs can be charged on petroleum products from the US to prohibit them from irrational mining and drilling. ***"Both India and China are ahead of schedule with their Paris agreement commitments and are continuing to move away from coal."***²⁵ They give large subsidies to companies and people buying renewable energy for building offices and houses thus bringing awareness that each individual needs to contribute towards the protection of the environment. Countries have begun to invest in renewable energy for the future of their citizens and it is high time that every country should put equal amount of effort into it. Poor nations need finance to fund these developments and the developed nations must help, not thinking about their

²⁴ Goldwyn, David L., & Andrea Clabough, *Election 2020: What's at Stake for Energy?*, AC 5 (2020) JSTOR <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep23546>.

²⁵ LIGHT, *supra* note 11.

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financial loss, but the future of their people. After all, the developed nations have become developed by exploiting this very planet.

VI. CONCLUSION:

Paris Agreement was signed with the consensus of all the member countries, so collective effort from them is required to achieve the desired goal. The goal of shared responsibility means helping out each other in times of need. The planet is ours thus, its protection is our responsibility as well. Few countries may back out from the deal claiming climate change to be hoax, but the rest of them must put in efforts to perform their best. Every little thing done for the planet well help us in the long run. These countries will eventually accept that their own future would be in peril if they do not step up to show their support. Meanwhile, others must continue to do their best and support renewable energy and cut down on their greenhouse gas emissions to provide for a safe environment to the future generations. The future generations depend on us to have a better future for themselves.