



## NATIONAL POLICIES AS IMPEDIMENT TO THE PARIS CLIMATE CHANGE AGREEMENT: THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA IN FOCUS

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### Abstract

This paper, in reliance of the *‘Metaphor of Two-Level Games Theory*, examined the policy somersaults of successive administrations of the U.S. on global environmental issues. The paper discovered that domestic interests in the U.S. interfere with its global environmental issues. Climate change in the U.S. is politics intertwined on economic, political and social complexes often handled along party ideological leanings. The Republican Party, leadership, and supporters (e.g. the coal and fossil fuel industries) who are the principal owners/beneficiaries of agricultural and natural resource lands are adamant to accept climate change science; arguing policies and actions on climate change are likely to impact majorly on these interests and so reneges on climate science, not excluding organising backlashes against environmental groups. The paper recommended in making the case that the focus on the U.S. can inform developments elsewhere. Furthermore, it recommended that the average American and indeed the Republican Party followership should have a rethink to consider climate change as a subsisting calamity rather than trivialising climate change science on account of party identification, political ideology, relative concern about environmental conservation vis-à-vis economic growth and party’s affinity with the global oil industry.

**Keywords:** *U.S, National Policies, Paris Agreement, Democratic/Republican Party,*

### 1. Introduction

The United States of America remains a key participant in global environmental negotiations. U.S. involvement or otherwise determines the fruition or futility of any global environmental agreement (Harris, 2000). Recalling, the Montreal Protocol was a success on account of United States’ effective leadership role; whereas the Kyoto Protocol failed because the U.S declined effective leadership role and went ahead to equally repudiate it (Harrison, 2000).

However, the repudiation of successive climate change regimes (the Kyoto Protocol and Paris Accord) by the most active negotiator of treaties, the United States, is a worthy subject of scholarly inquiry. Thus, three questions are pertinent here. First, how can national governments ever harmonise their national interests with the much-needed global collaboration to deal with global challenges as climate change, especially, in the absence of a dominant international environment regime with the docile United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) standing in the gap? Second, why has the huge and compelling knowledge on climate change science narrowly influenced policy actions in the United States to mostly economic interests and not to a wider interest like national security? Third, why has the United States been routinely withdrawing from climate change agreements that had all the hallmarks of the U.S. as the most active participant in treaty negotiations?





While wider national interests that cut across national security issues involving climate change induced vagaries such as food shortages, drought, famine, etc, emanating from within the U.S. or across U.S. borders are of less priority, domestic concerns clothed in the context of the economy is oftentimes the culprit responsible for U.S. exits from climate change accords (Honer & Lewis, 2017). In simple language, why is the U.S. not agitated by wider national security challenges permissible from climate change than the economy alone which is often cited by successive Republican Administrations in repudiating climate change accords?

It was, therefore, of little surprise that while Republican President George Walker Bush junked the Kyoto Protocol with the excuse not to “harm our economy and hurt our workers” claiming “the incomplete state of scientific knowledge of the causes of, and solutions to, global climate change and the lack of commercially available technologies for removing and storing carbon dioxide” (Vespa, 2002, p.406), just four words, “we are getting out”, and this one critical sentence citing the primacy of the economy, “We are not going to lose our jobs...undermine our economy, hamstringing our workers...effectively decapitate our coal industry”, were used by fellow Republican President Donald Trump on June 1, 2017 to announce the administrations’ decision to withdraw the U.S. from and renege on the Paris Climate Change Agreement (Bohringer, 2003).

While climate change is real, it has entered the political agendas of states where their respective national interests direct otherwise. In fact, as Susskind (1994, p.12) asserted, “the treaty-making process is constrained by the global interplay of domestic politics...only agreements that are politically acceptable to national leaders will be approved”. In the case of the U.S, economic priorities are overshadowing other equally or more important domains. One of such domains is stability within or across U.S. borders. For those concerned with national security, stability is a primary goal and climate change remains a threat to the stability of the comity of states. In the context of the U.S. the CNA Corporation (2007, p.12) cautions that “maintaining stability within and among nations is often a means of avoiding full-scale military conflicts...For these reasons, a great deal of our national security efforts in the post-World War II era has been focused on protecting stability where it exists and trying to instill it where it does not”.

Second, the often-cited lack of comprehensive knowledge on climate change science among U.S. republican administrations as a plausible explanation for jettisoning successive climate change regimes undermines U.S. national security. Still, in the context of the U.S, erstwhile U.S army general, Gordon R. Sullivan (retired) cautioned against the futility on the part of U.S. administrations in wanting perfect scientific climate change knowledge before taking requisite action with the following words:

We seem to be standing by and, frankly, asking for perfectness in science. People are saying they want to be convinced perfectly. They want to know the climate science projections with 100 percent certainty. Well, we know a great deal, and even with that, there is still uncertainty. But the trend line is very clear. We never have 100 percent certainty...If you wait until you have 100 percent certainty; something bad is going to happen on the





battlefield...You have to act with incomplete information. You have to act based on the trend line. You have to act on your intuition sometimes. The Cold War was a spectre, but climate change is inevitable. If we keep on with business as usual, we will reach a point where some of the worst effects are inevitable. If we don't act, this looks more like a high probability/high consequence scenario (The CNA Corporation, 2007, p.10).

If these treatises are anything for admonition for successive administrations in the U.S., the President Trump government must reassess the Paris Accord from a national security perspective because, Trump's repudiation of the Paris Accord is incomplete, half-hearted and remains but a catastrophe that disempowers people is only postponed (Hurrell & Kingsbury, 1992). This is because combating climate change causes and vagaries (environmental degradation, drought, famine, desertification, sea-level rise, etc) largely depend on the cooperation of the richest and strongest of states. More worrisome to the Westphalian state is that climate change is caused by "many global processes and transnationalactors which are beyond the reach of states, individually and sometimes even collectively...The power of organisations...is such as to place aquestion mark on the capacity of sovereign statehood" (Thomas, 1993, p.24).

In continuing this discourse, the focused analysis and interrogation of climate change in the U.S. (among supporters and deniers/contrarians of climate change) can help to inform and reach consensus on climate change in other states like Nigeria. The rest of the paper after this introduction is structured in the following four sections. Section two is on theoretical framework and literature survey on the Paris Accord and climate change on American mind. Whereas section three critically examines the influence of national/domestic factors as impediments to United States' global commitments on climate change, section four concludes the paper.

## 2. Theoretical framework and Extant Literature

### a. The Metaphor of Two-Level Games Theory

A huge literature exists that explain the determination of international politics on domestic interferences (Hughes, 1979; Rosenau, 1969, 1997; Holsti, 1962; Jervis, 1976). However, the '*Metaphor of Two-Level Games Theory*' used as the theoretical framework of this paper is rooted in Robert D. Putnam's seminal paper, '*Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games*'. Putnam (1988, p.434) posited that,

The politics of many international negotiations can usefully be conceived as a two-level game. At the national level, domestic groups pursue their interests by pressuring the government to adopt favourable policies, and politicians seek power by constructing coalitions among those groups. At the international level, national governments seek to maximise their own ability to satisfy domestic pressures, while minimising the adverse consequences of foreign developments. Neither of the two games can be ignored by central decision-makers, so long as their countries remain interdependent, yet sovereign.

The utility of this theory to this paper is that "the two-level approach recognises the inevitability of domestic conflict about what the 'national interest' requires...the two-level





approach recognises that central decision-makers strive to reconcile domestic and international imperatives simultaneously” (Putnam, 1988, p.460). Similarly, in the economic sphere, "the main purpose of all strategies of foreign economic policy is to make domestic policies compatible with the international political economy" (Katzenstein, 1978, p.4). The point so far emphasised is that the conducts of the state, as the central decision-maker, must simultaneously be in consonance with domestic and international pressures (Katzenstein, 1976).

This theory in explaining United States’ attitude towards international treaties asserts that domestic factors underpin U.S. foreign policy on global environmental issues. The heart of this metaphor is that a given administration must play two games at a time (Harrison, 2000). Thus, it is expected that for any issue in the realm of international negotiations (e.g. climate change) the administration must determine the influence of interested domestic political actors to help determine the bargaining outcomes which will enable a given international agreement to achieve domestic ratification.

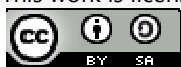
This is fundamental in that global agreements are more likely to achieve domestic ratification if all actors involved (such as the administration, Congress, the people, corporate organisations, etc) attain larger win-sets. That is, the administration must work to attain its own win-sets and other actors’ win-sets to achieve the preferred objective (Harrison, 2000). However, while this theory is unique in U.S. climate change discourse; it is limited to the extent that “it models foreign policy as developing from the intersection of the administration’s principled beliefs and the realities of domestic politics, with little consideration of technicalities of effective international mitigation policy (Harrison, 2000, p.108)”.

## **b. Climate Change: A Little History**

Climate change is a huge subject of scholarly inquiry today. As a phenomenon, climate change science is credited to the pioneering work of Jean Baptiste Fourier (Brenton, 1994). According to him the earth’s atmosphere traps the heat of the sun similar to the same way the glass traps the heat in a greenhouse (Brenton, 1994). Climate science came to gain international scholarly research in 1988 when a sort of consensus was reached on the following: first, a scientific consensus that warming was occurring as a result of anthropogenic CO<sub>2</sub>, methane and chlorocarbons emissions; second, that are prevalent environmental threats as acid rain; third, the prevalence of strange weather conditions such as it was in the 1988 drought in the United States; and fourth, that man was or human activities (often referred to as anthropogenic) were chiefly responsible for a changing climate (Flannery, 2006).

Arising from this experience, the United States in collaboration with other states worked to form the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (hereinafter IPCC) in 1988. The IPCC was primarily charged with, among other functions, to undertake a comprehensive investigation on climate change; organise international conferences (e.g. the Stockholm and Rio Conferences) aimed at committing states to Green-House-Gas (hereinafter GHG) emission reduction targets (Paterson, 1996).

Following the intense activities from the IPCC, GHG emission negotiations became intensified among the industrialised states of the Northern hemisphere; which in course of such negotiations set GHG emission limits for themselves. GHG emission negotiations in course of states’ interactions have never been hitch-free. This is because disagreements emerged between





the U.S. and other industrialised states on emission targets permissible to each. Second, there was disagreement between states of the North and South as to what amount of resources the North is prepared to pay as compensation to the South to enable the South meet their emission targets since the North is the primary emitter of GHGs (Berren& Meyer, 1992; Bodansky, 1993).

However, this trend in tackling climate change generally acclaimed as blind to territorial borders of specific states has been bedevilled by domestic politics of participating states (Oreskes, 2004; Robinson & Robinson, 2012; Henson, 2014). The politics so referred to here is that like in the United States, organised climate change denials that are ably sponsored by the coal and fossil fuel industries with support from the Republican Party leadership have since emerged strongly to deny the scientific authenticity of climate change science (Kolbert, 2006; Sussman, 2010; Spencer, 2012; Hartmann, 2013; Klein, 2015).

However, in spite of the ugly politics in climate change science, the international community has never relented on its oasis at reaching compromises in reducing GHG emissions. A number of agreements, treaties, protocols, etc, have been reached to enthrone a sustainable climate for humanity. And recently, on December 12, 2015, at the capital city of Paris, France, a broad climate agreement was achieved by all participating states including the United States, whose moment of signature endorsement received thunderous applause because the United States in recent times has come to gain notoriety in repudiating climate change accords.

However, since 2015 genuine concerns have been raised on the ability of the Paris Accord to enthrone a workable environment framework for a sustainable climate (FoE, 2015; Kampmark, 2015). For instance, KumiNaido of the Green-Peace International expresses his fears over the Paris Climate Change Accord, noting that,

The Paris Agreement is only one step on a long road and there are parts of it that frustrate, that disappoint me, but it is progress. The deal alone would not dig us out of the hole that we are in, but it makes the sides less steep...like any international compromise, it is not perfect...poor countries are also concerned that the money provided to them will not be nearly enough to protect them. Not all of the agreement is legally binding, so future governments of the signatory countries could yet renege on their commitments (Harvey, 2015, p.1).

Arising from the last statement above, it became unsurprising that the succeeding Donald Trump Republican Administration of the Barak Obama Democratic Administration accredited with fine-tuning the Paris Accord reneged on the Paris Accord by withdrawing the U.S. from the Paris Climate Change Accord.

### c. Climate Change in the American Mind

The United States is a complex society whose heterogeneity is copious in every strata of its domestic and international life. One subject which has polarised the American society is the environment; especially climate change, its attendant vagaries instigated by Green House Gas emissions. However, the polarised American society on climate change stems from the causes (is it anthropogenic?); the cures and trusts in climate science research (Sussman, 2010; Spencer, 2012; Funk & Kennedy, 2017). The totality of these ideological mindsets does impact positively or otherwise on government policies towards climate change. It is then of no surprises such







headlines as ‘Americans Want U.S in, Trump Wants U.S out, Republicans Want out, and Democrats Want in’, etc, are commonplace in American press (Mooney, 2005; Boykoff, 2007; Hulme, 2009; Grossman, 2010; Leiserowitz, et al, 2014).

While the elements of causes, cures and trust are vital to climate change decision making, more fundamental is public risk perception of climate change (Jacques, Dunlap, & Freeman, 2008). As Leiserowitz (2005, p.1433) averred,

...public risk perceptions can fundamentally compel or constrain political, economic, and social action to address particular risks. Public support or opposition to climate policies (e.g., treaties, regulations, taxes, and subsidies) will be greatly influenced by public perceptions of the risks and dangers posed by global climate change.

It is in such contexts that, in 2017 the Chicago Council Survey conducted its annual survey on American mindset on climate change prior to U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Accord by President Trump. Specifically, the question was raised if Americans support the U.S. being withdrawn from the Paris Agreement. The survey finds that an overwhelming Americans were opposed to the decision as indicated in Table 1 below.

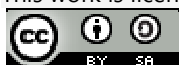
**Table 1: An Assessment of President Trump on the Paris Accord**

| 2017                  | Should Participate (%) | Should not Participate (%) | Refused (%) |
|-----------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|-------------|
| Overall               | 62                     | 35                         | 3           |
| Democrats             | 73                     | 25                         | 2           |
| Republican            | 37                     | 60                         | 3           |
| Independent           | 58                     | 40                         | 2           |
| Trump Republicans     | 23                     | 76                         | 1           |
| Non-Trump Republicans | 53                     | 45                         | 2           |

Source: Friedhoff & Goldsmith, 2017, p.5

From the table above, 62% of Americans want the U.S. to be part of the Paris Accord. However, as usual partisan divides are conspicuous where 73% Democrats and 58% Independents want the U.S. to remain in the Paris Accord vis-à-vis an insignificant 37% of Republicans who want the U.S. to repudiate the Paris Accord. There is a further split within the Republican Party into Trump Republicans and Non-Trump Republicans on U.S. participation in the Paris Accord or otherwise. Whereas 23% Trump Republicans support Trumps decision to jettison the Paris Accord, a paltry 53% of non-Trump Republicans expects Trump to be in the Paris Accord.

Further survey by the Chicago Council Survey on the severity of likely threats from climate change on Americans equally yielded similar results as Table 2 below indicates.





**Table 2: Severity of Threats from Climate Change**

| 2017                  | Critical (%) | Important but not critical (%) | Not Important (%) | Refused (%) |
|-----------------------|--------------|--------------------------------|-------------------|-------------|
| Overall               | 46           | 32                             | 22                | 0           |
| Democrats             | 69           | 27                             | 4                 | 0           |
| Republican            | 16           | 38                             | 46                | 0           |
| Independent           | 46           | 32                             | 22                | 1           |
| Trump Republicans     | 9            | 30                             | 60                | 1           |
| Non-Trump Republicans | 23           | 45                             | 32                | 0           |

Source: Friedhoff & Goldsmith, 2017, p.5

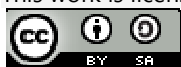
From the Table 2 above, an overall assessment of Americans (46%) indicated that climate change is critical to their wellbeing in the next ten years. The trend on party affiliations also indicated the usual dichotomy between Democrats and Republicans, where 69% of Democrats consider climate change as critical, whereas an infinitesimal 16% of Republican Americans consider climate change as a critical threat. Americans of the Independent party with 46% survey value say climate change is a critical threat. Finally, whereas only 9% of Trump Republicans assess climate change to be critical severity, 23% of non-Trump Republicans fears that climate change will definitely impact on them adversely.

While these divisions exist with no compromise in sight, policymakers in the U.S. must find a balance or compromise with the American public in proper consultation because climate change remains a daunting challenge that has come to stay; for it is no longer a threat curable by securing the territorial borders of one’s state alone as against the encroachment from other states (Thomas, 1993; Panayotou, 1993; Coppock & Johnson, 2004; Naval Studies Board, 2010; Brewer, 2014).

### 3. U.S. National Policies as Impediment to the Paris Agreement

Upon identification of environmental issues as a global concern, the United States has played a dominant role in seeking multilateral solutions. The U.S. perception for environmental challenges stood on the conviction that solving environmental challenges is most achievable by multilateral actions involving all key stakeholder countries. In this direction, the U.S. was peculiarly exemplary in its efforts at solving environmental issues in the 1960s up to the early 1990s (Bryner, 2000; Harrison, 2000). The U.S. was discerning in a couple of what may be called first initiatives-the observation of the first ever Earth Day in 1970, the formation of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 1988, etc, are cases in point (Jacobson, 2002).

However, this multilateral and constructive leadership initiatives of the U.S. demonstrated for environmental concerns, especially climate change waned in the late 1990s. Rather than being multilateral, the U.S. became Janus-faced in adopting unilateral measures in solving climate change issues even at the peril of its ties with traditional allies as the United Kingdom (Cooper, 1992; Cass, 2006). Why did the U.S. opt for unilateralism in the case of climate change? Given the U.S. massive multilateral efforts on environmental issues, why did the U.S. consecutively repudiated the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Accord?





In a brief Rose Garden, White-House ceremony, President Donald Trump on Thursday June 1, 2017, withdrew the United States from the Paris Climate Change Accord by the following repudiating words:

As president, I can put no other consideration before the wellbeing of American citizens. The Paris Climate Accord is simply the latest example of Washington entering into an agreement that disadvantages the United States to the exclusive benefit of other countries, leaving American workers, who I love and taxpayers to absorb the cost in terms of lost jobs, lower wages, shuttered factories, and vastly diminished economic production...In order to fulfil my solemn duty to protect the United States and its citizens, the United States will withdraw from the Paris climate accord...I was elected to represent the citizens of Pittsburgh, not Paris...The bottom line is that the Paris Accord is very unfair at the highest level to the United States...As of today, the United States will cease all implementation of the nonbinding Paris Accord and the draconian financial and economic burdens the agreement imposes on our country...We are going to have the cleanest air. We are going to have the cleanest water. We will be environmentally friendly. But we are not going to put our businesses out of work. We are not going to lose our jobs...undermine our economy, hamstringing our workers...effectively decapitate our coal industry. We are getting out, but we will start to negotiate and we will see if we can make a deal that's fair. If we can, that's great. And if we cannot, that's fine...The rest of the world applauded when we signed the Paris Agreement...They went wild. They were so happy. For the simple reason that it put our country, the United States of America, which we all love, at a very, very big economic disadvantage (Rucker & Johnson, 2017, pp.1-2).

As earlier asked, why would the U.S., an active participant in treaty negotiations suddenly come to gain notoriety as a reluctant participant in treaties, repudiating the then subsisting Kyoto Protocol and recently the Paris Accord (Rajamani, 2009)? Are the reasons advanced above in President Trump's address cogent in withdrawing the United States from a globally applauded agreement? Scholarship has argued that while United States' repudiation of the Kyoto Protocol on account of its top-down stringent nature and more so that "the convention-protocol approach...encourages a process that is often long drawn out"(Susskind, 1994, p.31), was justified (Kahn, 2003). However, the Paris Agreement was in sharp contrast a bottom-up model that allowed each state to determine its own objectives and pathways to implementing the Paris Accord (Ramesh, 2017). It is in line with this bottom-up structure of the Paris Accord that Bodansky&Diringer (2014, p.17) asserted that the Paris Accord,

...may be seen as a practical accommodation to political and diplomatic realities...hybrid model that recognises that while climate change is inherently a global challenge, the political will to address it must arise, and be exercised, primarily within the domestic realm. It is, accordingly, a concession to the limits of international law in influencing countries' behaviour in an area so vital to their self-interests.







If the Paris Accord be so bottom-up structured to suit the domestic peculiarities of participating states, what then explains the U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Accord? This section discusses America's domestic policies to identify why the U.S. repudiated the Paris Climate Change Accord. Amongst others this paper identifies the following United States' national policies and domestic peculiarities as impediments to the Paris Accord:

## **a. The Peculiarity of Climate Change**

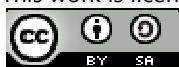
Whereas the U.S. undertook multilateral leadership roles, climate change presents a peculiar challenge vis-à-vis domestic constraint. First, the U.S. has the highest record of Green House Gas (hereinafter GHG) emissions vis-à-vis other states. On per capita standards, U.S. emissions usually exceeded the emissions of other major emitters of GHGs. Arising there-from, the U.S. became the target for environmental and NGO activism on account of U.S. unprecedented GHG emission rates that are considered morally unacceptable. This rise in U.S. GHG emissions are attributed to geography-the size of the U.S. and the distances that Americans travel domestically are factors, as it is the country's climate (Jacobson, 2002, p.424). Secondly, in demographic terms, "a general proposition of GHG emissions are a product of the country's population multiplied by its level of development, modified by the country's energy efficiency" (Jacobson, 2002, p.424). The increase in GHG emissions are therefore attributed to the rise in the U.S. population and economy exceeding most other GHG emitters from the 1990s (Jacobson, 2002).

Third, the influence of individual and public policies; this is discernible in the residential patterns in the U.S. where emphasis is placed on nuclear family patterned housing units built on large portions of land, which limit efficiency in public transport (Jacobson, 2002). Fourth, the status of a petroleum producer makes the U.S. vulnerable or prone to inexpensive energy such as cheap gasoline. It is revealing that the price of petroleum is cheaper in the U.S. than Europe and Japan. Thus, the average American is indifferent to increasing taxes on petroleum. Fifth, the U.S. is constrained, through the activities of the antinuclear movement, to adopt nuclear energy as an alternative to petroleum (Jacobson, 2002, p.425).

## **b. Distrust between the White House and Congress**

The double-faceted United States' policy on climate change further manifests in intense distrust between the White House and Congress. Hitherto, distrust between these two institutions dates back to the Reagan Administration's assault on environmental laws and its conflict with congress over the type of environmental laws to be pursued (Bryner, 2000). Thus, institutional challenge to climate change in the form and shape of congress is perplexing in the U.S. So much of congressional opposition to climate change is noticed where the division of power between the president who is the chief negotiator of international treaties and congress that is saddled to pass legislation to implement such treaties. Oftentimes, the activities and work of the president and congress are conflictual and deadlocked. For example, while the president may want to have firm grip and leadership of wide global environmental issues, a lot, however, depends on congress' range of issues of interests to them; especially where congress is known for responding to just narrow domestic interests and their respective constituencies (Bryner, 2000).

This peculiar attitude from Congress compels the president to undertake a two-level chess game of interacting with Congress at one level and the international community at another level





(Putnam, 1988). This indeed represents enormous challenge to any administration no matter how popular the administration may be. For example, President Clinton was noted in remarking that “we are facing squarely the problem of global warming. But there are still some in congress who would rather pretend it does not exist” (Bryner, 2000, p.119). Such presidential frustrations only tell of the extent of distrust between the White House and the Congress; a scenario that hinders both parties from handling new environmental challenges.

### c. United States’ Domestic Regulations on Treaties

United States’ domestic regulations regarding international treaties also compel Washington in adopting unilateral measures on climate change related treaties. It is a basic domestic norm that the U.S. will not ratify any treaty unless there is an overwhelming conviction that it can comply with the set treaty. This caution is emphasised on the conviction that in the U.S. private individuals and parties (such as environmental groups and NGOs) can sue the government to comply with a ratified treaty that has already become the law of the land.

This practice in the U.S. is not obtainable elsewhere. In most other states, treaties are signed and ratified by their governments with the full knowledge of the practical difficulties in fulfilling such treaties, yet these governments are compelled to implement them because these treaties are considered as targets that are intended to be met and not as an obligation that it must be lawfully implemented. This difference in treaty obligations explains U.S. unilateralism in climate change. The Paris Climate Change Regime was, therefore, repudiated on an account that the U.S. cannot remain a ratified party to a treaty but fail in compliance (Jacobson, 2002).

### d. The United States’ Unregulated Economy

As the U.S. is most renown in its belief in laissez-fair system (i.e. a free market economy where the invisible forces of demand and supply are allowed to interplay without government interference), the U.S. economy is highly unregulated. This is most unlike the economies of United States’ contemporaries with fairly regulated economies. The point made here is that, efforts at combating climate change would require government regulation of the national economy; a practice most unacceptable to the spirit of a free market economy.

Thus, the U.S. would be in a difficult position in attempting an economic practice that is totally alien to the citizenry. In an attempt to avoid this challenge, the U.S. fought to include flexible mechanisms into the Paris Accord. The U.S. was successful in its bid for flexible mechanisms which enables her to do emission trading; which allows the U.S. to purchase “emission allowances from a state that had lower emissions than its limitations” (Jacobson, 2002, p.426).

### e. The Political System in the United States

The United States is further seen as unilateral rather than multilateral on climate change issues on account of the peculiar political system in place that is at variance with what obtains elsewhere. In the U.S. the constitution mandates Congress to “give advice and consent to the ratification of any international treaty by two-thirds majority vote. This establishes a requirement for domestic consensus that is substantially higher than that required in other countries” (Jacobson, 2002, p.427). The beauty of this kind of checks and balances in the U.S. is further made attractive by the strict application of separation of powers where Congress (Legislature)





seeks to influence policies and actions emanating from the White- House (Executive Arm) and vice versa. This practice is a rarity in the British parliamentary democracy where the executive relies on its majority in parliament to reach compromises in getting proposals approved.

## f. Public Policy Polarisation in the United States

Polarisation in the America society on climate change could be located among the following categories of deniers: denying scientists, governments, the media, political and religious organisations, industries, and the public (Sussman, 2010; Spencer, 2012; Bjornberg, Karlsson, Gilek, & Hansson, 2017). Each of these groups acts as funders, promoters, or otherwise in furthering the climate change denial agenda in the United States. The implications thereof are enormous.

First, public policy polarisations in the U.S. remain a threat to U.S. implementation of the Paris Accord. It is true that, the U.S. is a highly complex and politically polarised society whose diversity manifest in all strata of its national life and which by extension impact on its international life. This political stratification is noticeable in government policies and actions and in the generality of the public; where almost all of these dichotomies are triggered by party affiliations and influences (McCright& Dunlap, 2011; Antonio &Brullie, 2011).

Within government and governance circles, the activities and actions of government officials are easily discernible from party affiliations. For example in the context of the Paris Accord, President Trump is seen by many as playing politics with a cornerstone global agreement as the Paris Accord where 195 countries expected of the U.S. to play a leadership role. President Trump asserted in his withdrawal address that he was elected to represent the citizens of Pittsburgh, and not Paris. However, the incumbent Mayor of Pittsburgh, Bill Peduto while reminding President Trump that 80% of voters in Pittsburgh voted in favour of Hilary Clinton in the 2016 presidential election, said that “as the Mayor of Pittsburgh, I can assure you that we will follow the guidelines of the Paris Agreement for our people, our economy and future” (Thomsen, 2017).

In furthering this political discourse, President Trump stated in his withdrawal speech that, “the rest of the world applauded when we signed the Paris agreement...They went wild. They were so happy”. If any interpretation would be made, these words connote Trump’s sense of seeing the Paris Accord as more of global politics; a sort of the global community cooperating against the U.S. Arising from such divides, there are bound to be difficulties in tackling climate change because climate change science is influenced by political and social values (McCright& Dunlap, 2011; Fisher, et al. 2013; Guber, 2013). The prevalence of this polarisation is that in the “United States of America climate change is no longer a scientific issue, but a socio-political one that is now largely dominated by political divisions, primarily along party lines” (Allred, Twidwell&Fuhlendorf, 2014, p.1).

The American society, like its government is divided on issues of the environment, most especially climate change science, action and mitigation efforts along party underpinnings. Whereas the Democratic Party seem or interpreted as positively amenable to climate change and environmental safety and consciousness, the Republican Party is often interpreted by its actions and policies as pro-profit and therefore anti-green on account of its avarice towards the environment which explains the Republican Party’s close affinity with the fossil fuel industry





and other oil conglomerates (Kennedy, 2004; Yergin, 2008, 2011; Zhang, Dai, Lai & Wang, 2017). The effect of this on climate change is that republicans are excessively living the “western experience of modernity...built upon industrial capitalism, an economic system predicated on the accelerating extraction and consumption of fossil fuels for energy” (McCright& Dunlap, 2011, p.155); a lifestyle that compels republicans governments to deny the scientific consensus and the salience of threats to societal persistence as climate change (Hoggan, 2009).

Furthermore, while political divides along party lines on environmental issues are commonplace among the political elites in the U.S. Congress, however, this political divide has crept into the general public in the 1990s and beyond where the American populace now follow the political elites with the Republican Party leading the attack on the scientific basis of climate change. This political divide has become worrisome that,

Presently, the divide between the two parties has become even greater as a recent opinion poll indicates that 50% of Republican voters consider there to be no solid evidence of global warming and climate change compared to 10% of Democratic voters...Although recognition of this political divide within the United States is not new, it is a fundamental barrier for national policy and action, as well as international standards, mitigation, and adaptation (Allred, et al, 2014, p.2).

Finally, and more worrisome is that education in the American society is thwarted against climate change science along party affiliations (McCright& Dunlap, 2011). Whereas increase in concern for and knowledge of climate change increases with education for Democratic Party members, it is paradoxical that for the Republican Party members, concern for and knowledge of climate change decreases with education (Malka, Krosnick, & Langer, 2009; Hamilton, 2011; Hamilton, Hartter, Lemcke-Stampone, MooreSafford, 2015). The implication herein is that, “the effects of educational attainment and self-reported understanding on global warming beliefs and concern are positive for liberals and Democrats, but are weaker or negative for conservatives and Republicans” (McCright& Dunlap, 2011, p.155). This paradoxical development is even made worse by the states of Kansas and Oklahoma with majority republican representation restrict the teaching of climate change in public classrooms by means of legislation (Allred, et al, 2014; Kansas Legislature, 2013; Oklahoma Legislature, 2013). In the state of Montana, state representative Joe Read attempted to introduce “*HB 549: An Act Stating Montana’s Position on Global Warming*” to the Montana State legislature. Though the bill failed, if otherwise, it would have then mean that “(a) global warming is beneficial to the welfare and business climate of Montana, (b) reasonable amounts of carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere have no verifiable impacts on the environment, (c) global warming is a natural occurrence and human activity has not accelerated it” (Deen, 2014, p.375) and (d) that climate change in America is frustrated by a smog of uncertainties; doubts emanating from scientific and economic, reasons. The challenge here is that “when faced with such uncertainties, governments by nature have difficulty launching near-term action against long-term risks...uncertainty should not be allowed to obscure the urgent need for action. To the contrary, uncertainty is itself a reason to act now” (Aldy, et al, 2003, p.4).

Such a polarised American society on climate change has far reaching policy implications. First, it remains that it is practically impossible in creating and implementing a





single federal climate regime capable of restraining U.S. emission of Green-House Gases (GHGs) (Rowell, 1996; Abbasi, 2006; Deen, 2014). Second, the political and social polarisation of the American society emboldens President Trump to repudiate the Paris Accord; i.e. no foreseeable strong opposition from the domestic environment except pockets of opposition from the Democratic Party and environment activists (Zhang, Dai, Lai & Wang, 2017).

### **g. The Economy**

The economy of the United States is often cited by government and others in denying climate change science. They argued that “science has yet to determinethe exact causes of climate change, and it is prematureto disrupt the economy to address a threat that man may notcause” (Stuhltrager, 2008, p.36). As Republicans known for their consensual doubt for climate change science (Holbo, 2006), one major area President Trump had in mind with his reference to the Paris Accord in putting the United States economy and jobs at risk is the coal and fossil fuel sector. Recalling that the Obama Administration through the Interior Department had capitalised on the issue of climate change to place a temporary ban on new coal mining leases on public lands as the administration was concerned that coal mining activities impacts adversely on the environment. In continuation of his climate change policy, the Obama Administration also ensured major mining companies pay higher royalties to the government as means of discouraging mining with the intent to preserving the environment (Kintisch, 2010).

The succeeding Trump Administration, with support from key coal companies like Cloud Peak Energy and other commercial interests, has removed all of the Obama climate change policy measures, a process that has enabled a new life for coal mining on U.S. lands. In appreciation, Richard Reavey, head of public relations for Cloud Peak Energy, operators of a strip mine said,

Mr. Trump’s change of course was meant to correct wrongs of the past. The Obama administration had become intent on killing the coal industry, and had used federal lands as a cudgel to restrict exports. The only avenues of growth currently, given the shutdown of so many coal-burning power plants in the United States, are markets overseas. Their goal, in collusion with the environmentalists, was to drive us out of the export business (in Lipton & Meier, 2017, p.3).

However, if the economy of the U.S. was a genuine explanation for exiting the U.S. from the Paris Agreement, a number of developments predating the U.S. exit did not add-up. For example, Republican Party backed coalminers and Democratic Party Congressmen in separate letters both urged President Trump not to withdraw the U.S. from the Paris Accord. Collin Marshall, President and CEO of Cloud Peak Energy in his letter to President Trump acknowledged that indeed two-thirds of Americans concede that climate change is real and that GHGs emissions are culpable. Collin Marshall, however, admonishes Trump not to allow the perceived climate change threats to condemn the U.S. and the world to energy poverty and economic malaise. Collin Marshall rather proffered that there is currently a technology that can deal with the threats of climate change; a technology if applied will allow the U.S. to “benefit from reliable, abundant natural resources like coal” (Marshall, 2017, p.1). According to Marshall (2017) these benefits are accruable by commercialising the proposed technology in a large scale.







With such a promising economic prospect, Marshall (2017) while acknowledging Democratic Senator Kevin Cramer’s letter in this respect, urged both Republican and Democratic Congressmen to collaborate in adopting the proposed technology designed to deal with climate change concerns.

In support of Marshall (2017), Democratic Senator Kevin Cramer and his Congressional colleagues wrote to President Trump not to exit the U.S. from the Paris Accord, arguing that while “President Obama pledged a 26 to 28 percent reduction in U.S. Green House Gas emission by 2025, compared to the 2005 baseline. This target would cause irreparable harm to our economy, particularly our manufacturing and energy sectors, and should be rejected (Cramer, et al, 2017, p.1). Senator Cramer and his Congressional colleagues urged President Trump to “include plans to drive technology innovation to help ensure a future for fossil fuels within the context of the global climate agenda...the U.S. should use its seat at the Paris table to defend and promote our commercial interests, including our manufacturing and fossil fuel sectors” (Cramer, et al, 2017, p.2)

In consonance with the above two requests, ExxonMobil, a transnational corporation of U.S. origin equally wrote to David G. Banks, the Special Assistant to the President for International Energy and Environment to pledge their unalloyed support for the Paris Accord. ExxonMobil stated that,

The Paris Agreement as an effective framework for addressing the risks of climate change. We welcomed the Paris Agreement when it was announced in December 2015, and again when it came into force in November, 2016...Thank you for the opportunity to reiterate ExxonMobil’s support for the United States remaining a party to the Paris Agreement (Trelenberg, 2017, p.1).

From the above, there was an established tripartite consensus by coalminers of Republican leanings, Democratic Congressmen and ExxonMobil that urged President Trump not to withdraw the U.S. from the Paris Accord. So what national interests was the president seeking to protect in withdrawing the U.S. by repudiating the Paris Accord? If the economic argument does not hold water, it is most probably that President Trump’s withdrawal of the U.S. from the Paris Accord was more of politics than economics: fulfilling a campaign promise of withdrawing the U.S. from the Paris Accord.

However, while such rhetorical questions demand answers, and still while beneficiaries of Trump’s coalmining policies are still rejoicing, the U.S. states of California and New Mexico and environmental NGOs like Sierra Club have gone to court and on the streets demonstrating with such inscriptions as ‘Public Lands in Public Hands’, etc, demanding explanations for exiting the Paris Accord and justice in the need to protect the environment in the U.S.

## **h. The Structure of Congress and Its Conflicting Ideological Leanings**

Structurally, the U.S. Congress is decentralised and fragmented; whose workings are mostly done through committees. This pose challenges to handling environmental issues that spread far beyond traditional jurisdiction and sectors of Congress and; which demands broad perspectives and technical expertise in handling them. However, most congressional members lack the technical know-how in handling subjects of special technical expertise. In the United States, for





example, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and its operations are subject to oversight hearings and investigations from numerous congressional committees. These committees slow down the operations of the EPA on account of conflicting demands and instructions placed on EPA (Bryner, 2000).

Furthermore, climate change science in the U.S. is fraught in massive controversies often resulting in ideological differences among congressional membership; especially along major party affiliations as it manifests in the Republican Party congressional membership which considers climate change science as hoax and the Democratic Party congressmen that assesses climate change science as real and happening now. These ideological differences and the resulting disagreements on climate change and other environmental issues interrogate government environmental regulations on industry and individual behaviours (Bryner, 2000).

## **i. United States and Its Unilateralism**

Is the U.S. acting unilaterally on its persistent repudiation of climate change agreements? Opinions are divided. A select scholarship sees it as an act of unilateralism while others see it as wanting to act multilaterally only but being cautious of one's national interest, especially where an agreement is seen as being flawed or unfair to United States' economy (Morrissette & Plantinga, 1991; Bohm & Larsen, 1994; Rose, Stevens, Edmonds, & Wise, 1998; Kahn, 2003). Being fair demands that climate change agreement "serves a positive role as a unifying principle that facilitates an international greenhousewarming agreement" (Bohringer, 2003, p.8).

However, U.S. acting unilateral or multilateral depends on U.S. willingness to renegotiate a new model of the respective accords. While Bush did not initiate a new model of the Kyoto Protocol and could be seen as unilateral, President Trump is working on a new model of the Paris Accord and Trump may be seen as being multilateral. In international politics discourse, unilateralism as opposed to multilateralism is defined as "the unwillingness to work with other countries in solving a problem, and pursuing independent action instead" (Kahn, 2003, p.548).

Acting unilaterally or multilaterally on the part of U.S. government may be immaterial. As a federal system, while the states of New York, California, and Washington through their respective governors have in protest formed the United States Climate Alliance to pursue the Paris Accord within their state boundaries, the states of Colorado, Connecticut, Hawaii, Oregon, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Vermont and Virginia pledged their support for the Paris Accord by joining the United State Climate Alliance (Rucker, & Johnson, 2017).

## **j. America First Agenda**

It is a norm that successful foreign policies of any state grow out of domestic political consensus (Bodansky, 2001, p.51). This is certainly applicable to the United States. The U.S. has a history of successful global treaties that emanated from domestic homogeneity and support and by implication global treaties that are unsuccessful in U.S. political history are traceable to heterogeneous domestic political consensus. This is what is referred to as 'America First', which demands that United States' foreign policy must be consonance with her domestic requirements (Patrick, 2002). The Montreal Protocol may suffice here. The Montreal Ozone Agreement, designed to regulate chlorofluorocarbons known for its destructiveness of the ozone layer, for





example, was successful on account of its domestic receptiveness (Schneider, Rosencranz & Niles, 2002).

However, in the recent past, United States' participation in the climate change negotiations relied on international instead of domestic support. Therefore, U.S. repudiation of the erstwhile Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Accord are of no surprise; for both lacked domestic consensus. Though not oblivious that international action by way of a governance regime in a specific subject is necessary to make domestic policies effective, the relevance of domestic support for global regimes as the Paris Accord must never be neglected. The Obama and Trump's presidencies contrast sharply on this account; i.e. the involvement of the citizenry in global climate change negotiations. Thus, Trump emphasised and carried through his America First agenda vis-à-vis Obama's reliance on foreign support.

Economically, whereas Trump sees the Paris Accord as undermining the U.S. economy, especially America's traditional energy sources (fossil fuel and coal industries), Obama sees the Paris Accord as promoting "America's climate security, promotes America's low carbon economy and renewable energy industry, and is indispensable for securing employment and maintaining the U.S. competitive edge" (Zhang, et al, 2017, p.221). Politically, whereas President Obama considers the role of the U.S. in the Paris Agreement as advancing U.S. international life in terms of leadership, President Trump instead consider the Paris Accord as weakening U.S. sovereignty.

#### 4. Conclusion

Recalling the concern of the paper which ponders why the United States, renowned for her multilateral efforts in solving global challenges, suddenly repudiates global agreements like the Paris Climate Change Accord. The response to this concern is that while the U.S. remains the chief negotiator and leader in most international treaties, domestic impediments constraint the U.S. from implementing her international obligations, which goes to affirm the truisms that domestic politics and international relations are often entangled, which further buttress that a thin line separates issues of the global from those of national interests (Putnam, 1988). Thus, the U.S. Janus-faced approach to climate change is circumstantial; for it is in line with her domestic interests, priorities or where global commitments are inconvenient to domestic interests (Victor, House & Joy, 2005; Landau, Legro & Vlastic, 2008). In the United States, there is an avowed commitment to its claim to exceptionalism<sup>1</sup> and creed in America first agenda; which sandwiches a number of U.S. domestic interests like the economy, the people, etc.

Whereas the above is true of the United States, so many undercurrents are at work to make critical observers of U.S. national politics to think otherwise (Harrison, 2000). The heterogeneous nature of the American society which is further encumbered by ideological dichotomies reflects and in the process stifles in a number of issues. Climate change is one such culprit of American ideological divides. The science of climate change has polarised the American society into climate change science deniers (e.g. coal and fossil fuel companies like ExxonMobil) that carries support from the Republican Party and pro-environment supporters (e.g. environmental activist organisations like Sierra Club and NGOs) who say climate change is real and so the science of climate change is correct. These pro-climate change groups attract support from the Democratic Party in the U.S. A worrisome development herein is that the





American divide along party ideological lines on climate change science gets worrisome by the level of education attained. Critical surveys have proven that denial of climate change science increases with education among Republicans; however, believe in anthropogenic climate science increases with education among Democrats and Independents (Hamilton, et al, 2015). No matter the ideological divides in the U.S., caution is needed in that the “environment is no longer something ‘out there’, separate from humanity, but something we are increasingly remaking by our actions (Dalby, 2014, p.43).

Finally, this paper showed that while international environmental agreements are impossible without U.S. effective leadership, it equally remains a truism that the U.S. cannot lead on global environmental issues unless domestic politics become homogenous (Harrison, 2000).

## Notes

1. American ‘exceptionalism’ “refers to a pervasive faith in the uniqueness, immutability and superiority of the country’s founding liberal principles, accompanied by a conviction that the United States has a special destiny among nations”, Patrick, 2002, p.7.

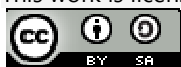
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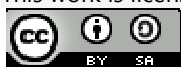


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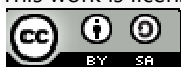


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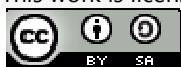


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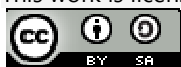


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