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Diplomatic cable: US has no plans to renegotiate Paris Agreement

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President Trump is open to “re-engagement” with the Paris climate deal “on more favourable terms”, but not seeking to re-write the text, leaked cable reveals



Secretary of state Rex Tillerson says the US has no plan to re-write the Paris Agreement (Photo: Office of the President-elect)

By Megan Darby

Donald Trump’s administration is not trying to re-write the Paris climate deal, according to a US diplomatic cable published by Reuters on Tuesday.

The briefing note from secretary of state Rex Tillerson to embassies around the world, dated 4 August, clears up one of the lingering uncertainties around the US position.

Envoys have been instructed to quash speculation the US wants to re-open a hard-fought international consensus on tackling climate change.

“At this time, there are no plans to seek to renegotiate or amend the text of the Paris Agreement, or begin negotiations toward a new agreement,” diplomats were advised to tell their host governments.

The US will continue to take part in UN climate talks, the cable said, starting with COP23 in Bonn this November. This is to “protect interests and ensure that decisions are not taken that would prejudice our future policy”.

Instead of “renegotiation”, the language has shifted to “potential re-engagement” with the agreement “under more favorable terms” in future.

Meanwhile, the Trump administration will not be honouring the US contribution to the pact pledged under Barack Obama. That includes reneging on commitments to fund climate-friendly development in poorer countries and cut carbon emissions.

President Trump has complained the US is on the hook for an “unfair” level of finance and argued greenhouse gas curbs threaten American jobs.

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The note clears up some confusion sown by President Trump when he announced in June his intention to withdraw the US from the deal. In the next breath, he said the US would “begin negotiations to reenter either the Paris Accord or a really entirely new transaction”.

Several world leaders swiftly responded that the agreement “cannot be renegotiated” and experts criticised his Rose Garden speech as “clumsy”, “divisive” and “incoherent”.

While Trump may have abandoned the notion of overhauling the entire framework for international climate cooperation, there are still many unknowns.

The briefing put forward holding statements on many issues, including US climate policy, the international \$100 billion climate finance target and deal on aviation emissions.

As for what “re-engagement” would entail, US diplomats were given no details. “We are considering a number of factors. I do not have any information to share on the nature or timing of the process,” they were told to say.

On climate finance to the developing world, the note re-iterated that the president was cutting funds to the Global Climate Change Initiative and Green Climate Fund. “We anticipate continuing support for developing countries’ energy, land-use, and resilience activities where mutually beneficial to our broader foreign policy, economic development, and national security objectives,” it said.

It was left unclear whether the Trump administration would continue to fund the UN climate body’s operations. Barack Obama paid the US fee for 2017 in advance.

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