

It escaped everyone's notice, possibly including the U.S. delegation, but buried in the G-20 Declaration is an endorsement of the need to cut greenhouse gases. This paragraph precedes the two reflecting disagreements about the Paris Agreement, and this particular paragraph purports to reflect the views of all twenty leaders, including Trump.

There are three paragraphs in the G-20 Declaration that address climate change. Understandably, most of the attention has gone to the second and third paragraphs, which reflect the isolation of the U.S. in terms of the Paris Agreement. Paragraph two recognizes the U.S. decision to withdraw from the agreement. (It does state a U.S. commitment help other nations "use fossil fuels more cleanly and efficiently and . . . deploy renewable and other clean energy sources," which seems like at least a tepid endorsement of renewables and energy efficiency.) The third paragraph then states that the other 19 countries are united in opposing the U.S. They view the Paris Agreement as "irreversible" and reaffirm the importance of swift implementation of the agreement.

So what about the first paragraph? It begins with a statement that a "strong economy and a healthy planet are mutually reinforcing." The next sentence says: "We recognise the opportunities. . . ." presented by "investment into sustainable energy sources and clean energy technologies and infrastructure." This is *before* the two paragraphs dealing with the U.S. and then separately with the other 19 nations. So in this first paragraph, the "we" in question consists of all twenty countries, including the U.S.

Then comes the sentence that I want to focus on:

"We remain collectively committed to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions through, among others, increased innovation on sustainable and clean energies and energy efficiency, and work towards low greenhouse-gas emission energy systems."

The key here is the commitment to cut greenhouse gases. Recall that the "we" here is the same as the "we" earlier in the document, "We, the Leaders of the G20" (as stated in the Preamble). So the United States seems to have signed onto the sentence about reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The following sentence is also interesting. It states:

“In facilitating well-balanced and economically viable longterm strategies in order to transform and enhance our economies and energy systems consistent with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, G20 members will collaborate closely.”

That made me curious: what was this 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that all twenty nations support? Here’s a sample of the Agenda:

“31. . . . We are determined to address decisively the threat posed by climate change and environmental degradation. The global nature of climate change calls for the widest possible international cooperation aimed at accelerating the reduction of global greenhouse gas emissions and addressing adaptation to the adverse impacts of climate change.”

That language in the Agenda is followed by a statement that notes “with grave concern” the gap between the mitigation pledges at Paris and the target of keeping climate change below 2 °C or 1.5 °C, the goal of the Paris Agreement.

So what’s going on here? Obviously, Trump himself never read the text of the Declaration — and perhaps no world leader could be expected to have the time to read such a document with any care. The Trump Administration is not exactly famed for careful staff work, so it’s possible that no one on the U.S. team ever noticed this language. The alternative possibility is that we’re seeing a quiet victory by the Ivanka Trump-Rex Tillerson cabal of climate moderates. That would actually be a positive sign, showing that they haven’t given up the fight and still have some influence, at least at the margin.

I’m under no illusion that Trump would feel bound by the language of the G20 Agreement. But it might reflect the possible beginning of a crack in the Administration’s massive resistance to climate action. Even within the Trump Administration, perhaps the “resistance” is not dead.