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Dismantling the Paris Order: Trump 2.0's Assault on Global Climate Governance and China's Strategic Response

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Abstract: The second Trump presidency, inaugurated in January 2025, precipitated a paradigmatic rupture in global environmental governance that has been profoundly amplified by subsequent international developments through mid-2026. Far exceeding a domestic policy reversal, the administration's energy doctrine systematically dismantles the institutional architecture of the Paris Agreement, weaponizes fossil fuel interdependence, and erects a green iron curtain against China's clean energy industries. This article conceptualizes these actions as a deliberate strategy of regime decay, designed to entrench U.S. energy hegemony while externalizing the costs of the climate crisis. Drawing on regime theory, hegemonic stability theory, and polycentric governance perspectives, the analysis unpacks the destructive logics of institutional paralysis, energy cartelization, and supply chain decoupling, and then traces their manifestations in critical events up to June 2026—including the COP30 impasse, an expanded technology blacklist, and a transatlantic rift over carbon border measures. The article reevaluates China's strategic environment, identifying both intensified structural pressures and a historic leadership vacuum, and advances a tripartite response framework—strengthening strategic autonomy, cultivating inclusive multilateral networks, and executing precisely calibrated countermeasures—to position China as a stabilizing architect of a more equitable and resilient climate order.

Keywords: Trump 2.0; Paris Agreement; Climate governance; Strategic autonomy; Multilateralism; China; COP30

1 Introduction: Regime Disruption as Grand Strategy

The return of Donald Trump to the White House in 2025 constituted far more than a cyclical political oscillation. It initiated a deliberate, unfolding campaign to demolish the normative and institutional foundations of the post-Paris climate regime and replace them with a transactional, fossil-fuel-centric

world order. While the first Trump administration's climate withdrawal was symbolically potent yet procedurally constrained, Trump 2.0 executed a blitzkrieg of executive orders, coercive energy diplomacy, and institutional obstruction that transformed the global climate architecture from a site of incremental erosion into a landscape of accelerated wreckage. By June 2026, the reverberations of this assault have been starkly revealed in a series of international confrontations—most notably a gridlocked UN climate conference, a dramatically widened green technology blacklist, a bitter transatlantic trade dispute over carbon pricing, and a wave of subnational legal rebellion within the United States itself.

This multipronged strategy does not stem from mere ideological caprice. It is a core pillar of an “America First” grand strategy aimed at restoring U.S. primacy by dismantling multilateral constraints, reasserting dominance over global energy markets, and containing China's ascent as a green technology powerhouse. The consequences have cascaded through the international system with gathering force over the past eighteen months. The facilitative logic of the Paris Agreement—predicated on universal participation, nationally determined contributions, and an iterative ambition mechanism—has been rendered inoperative not simply by U.S. absence but by active sabotage from within the UNFCCC process. Liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports have been systematically repackaged as instruments of geopolitical leverage, while clean energy supply chains are being severed through exclusionary alliance-building designed to quarantine Chinese innovation from Western markets.

For China, the world's largest emitter and the preeminent manufacturer of solar panels, batteries, and electric vehicles, the resulting strategic environment is defined by a profound duality: externally imposed constraints of unprecedented severity coexist with a sudden and massive vacuum in global green leadership. This article addresses two central questions: (1) By what concrete mechanisms is the Trump 2.0 administration dismantling the prevailing climate governance order, and how have these mechanisms evolved through mid-2026? (2) How can China reformulate its strategic orientation to not merely weather this regime decay but channel it into a restructuring of global environmental governance that advances both its own development interests and collective planetary well-being? The article proceeds by laying a theoretical foundation, deconstructing the trident strategy of institutional paralysis, energy cartelization, and green containment (with attention to its recent intensification), evaluating China's recalibrated challenge-opportunity matrix, and outlining an integrated policy response.

2 Theoretical Foundations: Regime Decay, Hegemonic Abandonment, and Polycentric Resilience

A crisis of this structural depth cannot be grasped through descriptive policy analysis alone. Interrogating the Trump 2.0 phenomenon and its implications for China demands a substantive engagement with theories of international cooperation and institutional transformation. This section anchors the subsequent

empirical analysis in three interconnected literatures—climate regime theory, hegemonic stability theory, and polycentric governance—and defines the master concepts of “global environmental governance” and “strategic autonomy”.

2.1 The Fragility of Facilitative Regimes and the Vulnerabilities of the Paris Architecture

International regimes, as classically formulated, are sets of principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which actor expectations converge in a particular issue area (Krasner, 1982). The climate regime crystallized in the 2015 Paris Agreement exhibits a distinctive hybrid character: a legally binding framework of procedural obligations—transparency, reporting, updating of nationally determined contributions—envelops a core of substantively non-binding mitigation pledges. This architecture was deliberately designed to maximize participation by granting states extensive flexibility, relying on iterative peer pressure and a global stocktaking process to ratchet up ambition. Yet, as Keohane and Victor (2011) documented, this same facilitative design renders the regime exceptionally vulnerable to defection by a major power. The loosely coupled “regime complex” for climate change, with its overlapping yet uncoordinated institutions, introduces flexibility but simultaneously opens multiple entry points for forum-shopping, obstruction, and the propagation of counter-norms.

Trump 2.0’s strategy has exploited these structural vulnerabilities with surgical precision. Far from a simple withdrawal, the administration’s actions represent an extreme case of a state weaponizing regime complexity—attacking the central UNFCCC machinery from both without and within while constructing alternative energy governance arrangements that sideline climate objectives entirely. The theoretical literature highlights that institutional legitimacy, credible commitment, and adequate resource provision are essential for collective environmental action; the current U.S. posture deliberately undercuts all three, generating a cascading legitimacy crisis that the existing architecture was not engineered to withstand.

2.2 Hegemonic Stability, Public Goods, and the Problem of Abdication

Hegemonic stability theory posits that the provision of global public goods—climate stability paramount among them—requires a dominant state prepared to bear disproportionate costs and coordinate others’ behavior (Kindleberger, 1973). Historically, the United States functioned, albeit inconsistently, as a reluctant climate hegemon, using its market size and diplomatic influence to structure international climate agreements. The Trump 2.0 administration represents not merely a passive withdrawal from this role but an aggressive inversion: Washington is actively dismantling the institutional infrastructure it was historically expected to underwrite, leaving a gap qualitatively different from the first term’s slower exit (Urpelainen & De Graaf, 2018). Young (2002) noted that major power retrenchment creates both destructive instability and opportunities for institutional innovation. The resultant “hegemonic deficit”

opens space for burden-sharing among leading states or a transition toward decentralized collective leadership; it is this theoretical opening that makes an analysis of China's potential role so salient.

2.3 Polycentric Governance and the Agency of Subnational and Southern Actors

A third resource is the literature on polycentric governance. Ostrom (2010) demonstrated that complex environmental problems are often more effectively addressed through polycentric systems—arrangements with multiple, overlapping centers of authority taking mutually reinforcing action—rather than through monolithic treaties. Bäckstrand and Kuyper (2017) argued that polycentric architectures enhance democratic legitimacy and adaptive resilience by multiplying sites of accountability and innovation. This perspective has direct strategic relevance: as the United States vacates leadership and obstructs formal processes, alternative governance modalities expand. China can champion a pluralistic climate order that empowers developing countries, leverages subnational and business partnerships, and constructs layered coalitions of willing actors operating beyond the formal UNFCCC framework. Biermann and Kim (2020) have urged a rethinking of global environmental governance beyond a rigid North-South binary, a move that aligns with Beijing's discourse of a “community with a shared future for mankind” and its practical emphasis on South-South cooperation.

2.4 Core Concepts: Global Environmental Governance and Strategic Autonomy

Synthesizing these inputs, global environmental governance is defined as the entire ensemble of formal and informal institutions, rules, norms, and practices through which states, international organizations, markets, and civil society collectively manage transboundary environmental challenges, with the climate regime as its most consequential expression. Strategic autonomy denotes a state's capacity to define and pursue its fundamental development path and foreign policy objectives independently, while contributing to global public goods in internally coherent ways. This pairing—an understanding of regime fragility rooted in design flaws and hegemonic defection, combined with recognition of the creative agency available to polycentric actors—provides the analytical architecture for what follows.

3 The Trump 2.0 Trident: Institutional Paralysis, Energy Cartelization, and Green Containment—Evolving Execution through June 2026

Trump 2.0's environmental strategy displays a systematic, tripartite logic designed to nullify the Paris Agreement as a meaningful constraint on U.S. power, relegitimize fossil fuels as the foundation of geopolitical influence, and sever China's innovation arteries in the green economy. The eighteen months since January 2025 have witnessed a consistent intensification of each prong, marked by several critical

episodes that illuminate the strategy's operational logic and its cascading effects.

3.1 Regime Dismantlement: From Symbolic Exit to Weaponized Paralysis, and the COP30 Impasse

In its first week, the administration invoked domestic legal authority to declare an “immediate and permanent” exit from the Paris Agreement and terminated all contributions to the Green Climate Fund and other multilateral climate finance mechanisms. This action generated a severe and enduring chilling effect on international negotiations. The collective ambition ratchet, core to the Paris framework, stalled as major emerging economies—Brazil, Saudi Arabia, Russia, and Indonesia—discernibly hardened their positions. The post-2025 climate finance agenda, intended to deliver a New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) for supporting developing country transitions, became the primary victim.

The COP30 conference, held in Belém, Brazil, in November 2025, provided stark illustration of the induced paralysis. Despite months of preparatory technical work, the U.S. delegation's procedural obstruction—refusing to table any finance offer, introducing deliberately unworkable amendments on transparency, and rallying a small bloc of oil-producing states—led to the complete collapse of the NCQG negotiations. For the first time since Copenhagen, a climate COP ended without a meaningful finance outcome. In the immediate wake of this failure, however, a counter-dynamic emerged. China, together with the BASIC group (Brazil, South Africa, India, China) and a coalition of over forty African, Caribbean, and Pacific states, issued a parallel declaration pledging to operationalize an alternative “Climate Solidarity Fund” to channel South-South climate finance, with initial pledges exceeding \$20 billion. This parallel initiative, while modest in scale relative to the trillions required, signaled a decisive shift in the institutional locus of climate finance innovation away from the paralyzed UNFCCC machinery—a shift that the theoretical framework of polycentric governance would anticipate and that carries profound implications for China's strategic positioning.

Simultaneously, the strategy of internal institutional paralysis persists. U.S. delegations to international environmental bodies continue to be staffed with ideologically committed opponents of climate multilateralism, who systematically deploy procedural tactics to disable decision-making from within. The administration has also inserted side clauses into multiple bilateral trade agreements explicitly denying any obligation to grant differential treatment to developing countries on climate-related measures, thereby constructing an alternative body of practice that directly contradicts the CBDR-RC principle. The cumulative effect is a multilateral climate regime being hollowed out from within while alternative normative structures are erected outside it.

3.2 Energy Nationalism 2.0: Building a High-Carbon Cartel and Weaponizing Interdependence

The second prong—the resurrection of energy dominance as a tool of geopolitical coercion—has

intensified steadily. The 2025 “Energy Dominance Executive Order” was followed by the “American Energy Revival Act,” which channeled unprecedented subsidies into shale extraction, “clean coal,” and advanced nuclear, fundamentally tilting the domestic playing field against renewable investment.

On the external front, Washington’s campaign to establish an LNG Producer Coordination Mechanism—an informal cartel with Qatar, Australia, and Russia—has advanced significantly. By mid-2026, the mechanism has functional capacity to coordinate production levels and price floors, and has begun to erode the political will of several European and Asian allies to pursue aggressive decarbonization. In parallel, the implicit “High-Carbon Club” uniting the United States, Saudi Arabia, Russia, and other petro-states has coordinated positions within the International Energy Forum and invested heavily in a globally coordinated pro-fossil fuel narrative, as Newell and Paterson (2010) presciently theorized. The weaponization of energy interdependence has moved from a declaratory policy to an operational reality, with LNG shipment allocations repeatedly used as leverage in diplomatic negotiations unrelated to energy.

3.3 Green Iron Curtain: Escalating the Decoupling of China’s Clean Energy Ecosystem

The third prong—the comprehensive effort to sever China’s clean energy industries from global markets, capital, and technology—has undergone a dramatic escalation over the review period. In mid-2025, a restarted Section 301 investigation culminated in 100 percent tariffs on China’s “New Three” exports—electric vehicles, lithium-ion batteries, and solar panels—accompanied by elevated tariffs on wind towers and critical minerals. These were reinforced by executive orders prohibiting federal procurement of components linked to Chinese entities.

In March 2026, the Department of Commerce added seventeen major Chinese solar photovoltaic and battery manufacturing firms to the Entity List, citing unsubstantiated forced labor allegations and national security concerns. This move effectively closed even the narrow remaining pathways for technology licensing, equipment purchases, and collaborative research between the two countries’ clean energy sectors. The exclusionary green alliance constructed through the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework and parallel EU dialogue now enforces strict rules of origin and a closed-loop certification system that systematically excludes Chinese-origin inputs, forming what is now openly described in Washington as a “green iron curtain.” The March 2026 entity list expansion was widely interpreted as a direct response to Chinese firms’ rapid advances in next-generation perovskite tandem cell manufacturing, confirming that the policy is calibrated to decapitate China’s technological frontier. The dissolution of the U.S.-China Climate Change Joint Working Group, formalized in mid-2025, completed the securitization of climate policy, eliminating the sole high-level bilateral channel and locking both nations into a nearly complete zero-sum framing of environmental cooperation (Lewis, 2014).

4 China's Recalculated Equation: Systemic Pressures and Historic Opportunities, Updated to Mid-2026

The radically altered strategic landscape presents China with an evolving matrix of pressures and opportunities, several new dimensions of which have crystallized since late 2025.

4.1 The Intensifying Quadruple Pressure Front

First, market constriction has deepened due to the March 2026 entity list expansion, which not only blocks exports to the U.S. but deters third-country firms from integrating Chinese components for fear of secondary sanctions. The exclusionary green alliance's implementation has proven more rapid and comprehensive than initially anticipated, significantly compressing the export space for Chinese clean energy products.

Second, technology strangulation now extends beyond hardware to cover essential software, design tools for chip manufacturing, and access to certain atmospheric and oceanic datasets previously shared under bilateral research agreements, directly impacting China's capacity for independent climate modeling and smart grid optimization.

Third, the responsibility trap has tightened considerably. The COP30 failure, while widely blamed on U.S. obstruction, nonetheless amplified demands from a diverse range of nations—including climate-vulnerable small island states and some middle-income developing countries—for China to unilaterally shoulder a much larger share of the climate finance burden. This places Beijing in a persistent diplomatic bind between the accusation of free-riding and the risk of overcommitment.

Fourth, the physical importation of climate risks continues to accelerate. The U.S.-sponsored high-carbon lock-in, combined with the absence of an operational multilateral finance mechanism post-COP30, virtually guarantees overshoot of the 1.5°C pathway, intensifying domestic threats to food security, water resources, and coastal economic assets.

4.2 The Fourfold Opportunity Window—Reinforced by Recent Events

Alongside these pressures, four structural openings have been significantly reinforced by developments through June 2026. First, the global green leadership vacuum was rendered unmistakable by the COP30 fiasco. The inability of the traditional multilateral system to deliver even a minimal finance outcome has generated a palpable demand for alternative anchor institutions, a demand that China's immediate co-launch of the parallel Climate Solidarity Fund partially met.

Second, external containment continues to function as a forcing mechanism for indigenous innovation. In direct response to the 2026 entity list expansion, China announced the establishment of a National Green Technology Breakthrough Fund with an initial capitalization of ¥500 billion, specifically targeting

the denied technologies—advanced photovoltaic materials, long-duration storage, and green hydrogen electrolysis. This mission-oriented approach is converting a denial list into a precise innovation roadmap.

Third, a significant transatlantic rift over climate and trade policy has opened since late 2025. Negotiations between Washington and Brussels on a CBAM exemption for U.S. fossil-intensive exports collapsed entirely in April 2026, following the administration’s refusal to make any carbon pricing commitments. In May 2026, the European Commission formally launched a feasibility study on carbon market interoperability with China, signaling a pragmatic pivot that seeks to preserve the EU Green Deal’s economic logic by cooperating with the world’s largest manufacturer of low-carbon goods. This development dramatically expands the strategic space for Sino-European green industrial cooperation.

Fourth, a major internal challenge to federal policy has emerged within the United States itself. In June 2026, a coalition of fourteen U.S. states—including California, New York, Washington, and Massachusetts—filed a consolidated lawsuit in federal court challenging the constitutionality of the presidential withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, arguing that the President cannot unilaterally undo an international agreement that the Senate previously endorsed in its consent resolution for the original UNFCCC. While the lawsuit’s ultimate legal prospects remain uncertain, its political significance is considerable, and several of the plaintiff states have simultaneously deepened subnational clean energy procurement partnerships with Chinese manufacturers. This polycentric counter-current, operating within the U.S. political system, creates a crucially important brake on the full implementation of decoupling and preserves practical channels for technological and commercial exchange that the federal administration seeks to eliminate.

5 A Tripartite Strategic Framework: Autonomy, Multilateralism, and Calibrated Rivalry—Refinement in Light of Recent Developments

To transform this evolving conjuncture into durable strategic advantage, China requires a multifaceted response framework that is simultaneously inward-consolidating and outward-expansive. The framework presented here is refined to incorporate the lessons of the eighteen months through June 2026.

5.1 Internal Dimension: Forging a Green Resilience State

The priority remains the deepening of domestic resilience. The March 2026 entity list expansion has underscored the urgency of the National Green Technology Breakthrough Fund, which must be governed with competitive, independent rigor to avoid the pitfalls of state-led industrial policy. The domestic market must be activated as a pressure cooker for innovation through a behaviorally sophisticated green consumption stimulus that couples consumer rebates with a standards upgrade regime, ensuring that Chinese clean energy firms emerge as genuinely globally competitive innovators rather than protection-dependent national champions.

5.2 External Dimension: Architecting a Polycentric and Inclusive Climate Order

Externally, the COP30 experience and the subsequent transatlantic shift demand that China transition to confident, system-building mode. The alternative Climate Solidarity Fund, announced in Belém, must be rapidly professionalized with transparent governance, results-based disbursement, and a focus on adaptation and distributed renewable projects in least developed countries and small island states. This fund can serve as a core institutional anchor for a broader South-South green partnership.

The greening of the Belt and Road Initiative should be elevated to systematic production capacity cooperation with standard dissemination, through the co-establishment of Low-Carbon Transformation Demonstration Zones in key partner states—Pakistan, Kenya, Saudi Arabia—where Chinese renewable equipment, smart grid systems, and carbon monitoring methodologies are integrated into local contexts, gradually becoming de facto regional norms.

The May 2026 EU feasibility study on carbon market interoperability must be seized upon. Beijing should propose a concrete work plan for a pilot linked carbon pricing mechanism covering selected industrial sectors, leveraging the EU's search for an alternative to U.S. recalcitrance. Simultaneously, a formalized BRICS+ Green Energy and Supply Chain Working Group should coordinate critical mineral governance, green standard mutual recognition, and shared research, creating a resilient inner core for the broader Global South coalition. These overlapping, inclusive networks embody the polycentric principle that resilience flows from multiple, mutually reinforcing centers of initiative rather than from concentrated authority (Ostrom, 2010).

5.3 U.S.-Facing Dimension: Law, Track-2, and Subnational Penetration

Managing the bilateral relationship requires a layered approach. On the trade front, China should continue filing joint WTO complaints alongside affected partners against the 2026 entity list expansion, elevating the legal and reputational costs of U.S. unilateralism. With the formal bilateral working group dissolved, Track-2 and Track-1.5 dialogues must be prioritized on low-politicization technical topics.

Most critically, the June 2026 state lawsuit against the Paris withdrawal provides a strategic entry point. China should establish direct cooperative agreements with the plaintiff states—California, New York, Washington—on carbon market piloting, zero-emission vehicle standards, and green finance instruments. These de facto subnational interdependencies can insulate climate cooperation from federal volatility and create a pro-engagement constituency with tangible economic stakes in avoiding complete decoupling. Such practical polycentrism, operating within and across national boundaries, represents the most promising avenue for preserving the infrastructure of climate cooperation during a period of intense great-power rivalry.

6 Conclusion: Toward a Reordered Climate Compact—The Road from COP30

The eighteen months since the second Trump inauguration have confirmed that the administration's assault on the Paris order is not an aberration to be waited out but a deliberate, structurally driven campaign of dismantling. The trident of institutional paralysis, energy cartelization, and green technological containment has been executed with accelerating intensity, devastating the formal multilateral process at COP30, segmenting global clean energy supply chains, and opening bitter rifts with European allies. Yet the same period has witnessed the emergence of precisely the polycentric counter-dynamics that the theoretical framework of this article anticipated: a South-led finance initiative born from the COP30 wreckage, a pragmatic EU pivot toward carbon market cooperation with China, and a significant subnational legal mobilization within the United States.

For China, the lesson is unambiguous. The temptation to respond with insular, defensive consolidation must be resisted. The alternative path—and the one toward which the evidence of the past eighteen months points—is to treat the current institutional wreckage as a catalyst for creative reconstruction. The framework of strategic autonomy advanced here is not a counsel of isolationism but an insistence that durable international leadership must be anchored in domestic resilience, that the most effective multilateralism in the present era is polycentric, and that engagement with a revisionist Washington requires precise calibration of firmness and outreach. By deepening its own green transformation, building overlapping and inclusive international coalitions (now including pragmatic European partners), and strategically penetrating the subnational and commercial fissures in the U.S. political landscape, China can help midwife a climate order that is more robust precisely because it is less dependent on the benevolence of any single power. The old Paris order is crumbling, but the materials for a more durable compact—forged in the crises of COP30 and sharpened by the realities of 2026—are already at hand. Whether they are assembled into something lasting will depend on decisions made in Beijing, Brussels, the courtrooms of California, and the burgeoning green corridors of the Global South.

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