U.S.’ executive order and its implications

What is the issue?

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In March 2017, U.S. President signed an executive order which promotes U.S. energy independence and economic growth, but with potential collateral damage to global efforts to limit climate change.

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What is the EO about?

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- The aim is to give a boost to coal, oil and gas production.
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- The centrepiece is a **review of the U.S. Clean Power Plan**.
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- The plan aims at reducing greenhouse gas emissions from the American electricity sector.
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- This was a key element in the previous U.S. administration’s plans to meet America’s climate pledge under the **Paris Agreement.**
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- Reviwing it might loosen regulations which ultimately might result in increased emissions.
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- The order lifts a moratorium on leasing federal land for coal mining, and revisit rules to limit methane emissions.
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- It also withdraws estimates of the “social cost of carbon”, an economic approach that sets a dollar value to the gains from reducing carbon.
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What are its implications?

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- The deeper significance rests in the political signal it sends to the rest of the world.
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- The Paris Agreement is a confidence game. Each country is required to submit a national pledge to limit emissions growth.
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- This would be reviewed internationally, and updated and enhanced every five years.
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- US President’s order punctures global confidence.
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- Now, other countries may follow the U.S. lead and dilute their national actions.
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- This is not the first time the U.S. has pulled the rug out from under the global community.
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- In the mid-1990s, it notably walked away from the Kyoto Protocol, which requires developed countries to take the lead.
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What are the implications for India?

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- India should not follow the same footsteps and neglect the Paris Agreement.
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- India’s interests are best served by strengthening the Paris Agreement.
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- This could be used to hold to account the developed world.
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- India has little to gain from going slow on implementing its own pledge because it is extremely vulnerable to climate impacts.
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What India should do?

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- As a large emerging country, India has enormous leverage as a deciding factor in the future of the Paris Agreement.
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- It should **insist that Western countries maintain their obligations,** including financial.
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- Indeed, the new US' order provides an opening to enhance India's global standing.
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- Such a climate position could even be useful in a larger foreign policy sense, serving as a soothing element in relationship with China.
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- This order is likely to hurt the interests of the U.S. in the long run because it postpones an inevitable but complex readjustment of energy systems around renewable energy.
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- It undermines confidence in the U.S. as a reliable global partner, and even revokes preparation for climate impacts meant to safeguard American citizens.
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- In this scenario, India should reaffirm its Paris pledge and placing its weight behind implementing the Paris Agreement.
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Source: The Hindu

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