



Trump's Plan for Clean Energy Will Damage Economy, National Security

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By [Michael Breen](#) and [James Koehler](#)



President Donald Trump recently issued an executive order to start the process of reviewing and, ultimately, attempting [to disassemble the Clean Power Plan](#) and its supposedly job-killing mandates. Although he did not undo the full scope of President Barack Obama's signature domestic environmental achievement in the stroke of a pen (given that the Paris Climate Accords were, for the moment, left untouched), President Trump charted his own path forward by attempting to make an argument in support of U.S. energy security by unleashing more domestically-produced coal on the market.

Unfortunately for President Trump—and the rest of us—his assault on environmental policies will damage our economy and our national security alike.

Businessman though he may be, President Trump seems unwilling or unable to acknowledge that energy markets, not policy, have driven coal into its current state. Natural gas from Pennsylvania, Texas, Colorado, Wyoming, Oklahoma, and West Virginia has driven down the price of natural gas, leaving coal unable to claim the moniker of “cheapest source of energy,” even among fossil fuels on the market today. For all his campaigning on the reconstitution of coal jobs, the president is actually making this problem more severe: His expedited permitting for pipelines to carry more supplies and alleviate pricing choke points—coupled with limited federal regulations on hydraulic fracking—are strengthening the market position of natural gas every day.

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These numbers aren't just bearing out on the home front, either. Even Europe, which for a short period of time propped up demand for U.S. NAPP and CAPP coals from Appalachia, has witnessed a decline of 50 percent in U.S. coal imports over the last five years. Abundance, commodification, and commercially-standardized pricing of U.S. and internationally-produced liquefied natural gas—which can be used throughout the "load curve" to meet daily energy demand—is threatening coal worldwide. Only China and India are the remaining two sources of global growth for coal. Observable air quality in Beijing or Delhi provides something less of a ringing endorsement.

If the economics of President Trump's promises are unsound at best, his allusion to energy security stands on even shakier ground. The notion that rolling back the Clean Power Plan and propping up the coal industry will make us more secure doesn't make sense—especially given that the emissions from burning fossil fuels are the primary drivers of climate change, which has been formally recognized as a national security risk under both the Bush and Obama Administrations. National security and military leaders see climate change as a "threat multiplier" because increasingly severe weather events are hitting the most fragile corners of the world hardest, in turn increasing the demand on the U.S. military and strengthening the hand of extremists they go up against in battle.

No one is denying that coal miners and cheap energy built a tremendous part of this country. Appalachia has much to be proud of for its contributions to American growth and strategic dominance in the 20th century, and to say otherwise would be absurd. But "King Coal" no longer exists—that is to say, there is no OPEC-cartel equivalent of coal—for a reason. The market has produced cleaner, more cost-effective, and more efficient options that consumers demand, and given the fact that renewable resources in particular aren't exacerbating the threats and demands of climate change, that is a good thing.

The President could roll back every environmental rule ever placed on the coal industry—indeed, he may well try to do so. Nonetheless, the market reigns supreme: Coal is losing ground to an abundance of domestically-produced natural gas, not to mention a growing market of renewables. These market forces, taken in conjunction with the real and serious national security risks tied to fossil fuel emissions, mean that an attempt to rely on the energy sources of the past won't be making us more prosperous or safer any time soon.



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