By pulling out of the Paris Accord, Donald Trump’s America is deserting the climate fight, reneging on its commitments and abdicating responsibility, possibly even its claim to world leadership.

America is withdrawing from one of the most burning issues of the hour for the future of our planet: global warming. And abdicating its world leadership. The US will no longer serve as a role model or guiding light for the nations of the world. It is shrinking, a huge country withdrawing into itself and accusing others of seeking to harm its interests.

Reneging on the commitments undertaken and ardently defended by Barack Obama, America is now withdrawing from the Paris agreement to cut greenhouse gas emissions. According to Mr. Trump, America has no further obligation – whether technological or financial – to slow global warming, and its economic development would be hindered by the accord.

This infantile regression is already a turning-point in and of itself, and it may prove to be one more harbinger of a 21st century that won’t be as “American” as the 20th. But what makes it all the more remarkable is a parallel movement: absent American leadership, Europe is resolutely stepping into the breach. Angela Merkel set the tone last week in Munich after the NATO summit in Brussels and G7 meeting in Italy, where Mr. Trump stuck to a quarrelsome, aloof and isolationist stance. Within the Western camp, said the German chancellor, we Europeans need to draw the obvious conclusions and “take our fate into our own hands”.

In an unprecedented initiative, President Macron made a public statement – in French and then in English – to say there is no “plan B”, no renegotiating the deal, and to call on the 194 to abide by the painstakingly reached terms of the signed agreement. Only a few moments later, Germans and Italians joined the French in a joint statement upholding this position, outlining a European response to America’s default and heralding a change of the guard in world leadership.

Mr. Trump, a die-hard climate skeptic, picked the charming setting of the White House Rose Garden to make his announcement. In his signature acrimonious blend of caricature and mendacity, the president portrayed the United States as victims of the greed and unfair ingratitude of other countries – emerging powers like China and India that are benefitting from delays in applying the agreement, and Europeans, especially the Germans, who “have collectively cost America trillions of dollars through tough trade practices and, in many cases, lax contributions to our critical military alliance”.

Mr. Trump claims to be defending the US economy. He thumbs his nose at the fact that, as the world’s second-biggest emitter of greenhouse gasses, the US is historically responsible for the lion’s share of global warming. But he has been trumped by modern progress: the energy transition is driven by technological advances that are steadily lowering the cost of renewable energies. US corporations and the mayors of some of the country’s biggest cities have got the message. They intend to defy the White House and comply, for their part, with the provisions of the Paris Climate Accord.