

US-European tensions erupt at the G7 summit

9 June 2018

This weekend's summit of the G7 is the most contentious meeting in the body's forty-three-year history. It has revealed deep and growing fissures between the United States and its European allies.

Press reports have indicated that the summit may conclude without the customary communique after acrimonious public exchanges between US President Trump, French President Emmanuel Macron, European officials and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

As late as Thursday, Trump was reported to have considered boycotting the summit altogether, and the administration subsequently announced that the president would leave early.

Looming over the summit was Trump's June 1 decision to impose sweeping tariffs of up to 25 percent on steel and aluminum imports from the EU and other countries. Both the EU and Canada have made clear they intend to take retaliatory measures, raising the possibility of a full-scale trade war between the United States and its nominal allies.

The bitter character of the divisions between the United States and its allies was made clear in a series of statements by Macron, who declared Thursday on Twitter: "The American President may not mind being isolated, but neither do we mind signing a 6 country agreement if need be. Because these 6 countries represent values, they represent an economic market which has the weight of history behind it and which is now a true international force."

Macron subsequently told reporters, "The six countries of the G7 without the United States are a bigger market taken together than the American market." He added, "There will be no world hegemony if we know how to organize ourselves. And we don't want there to be one."

Coming after Macron's so-called "charm offensive" last month, in which the French president paid obeisance to Trump with the hope of convincing him to change the administration's policy on trade and the

Iran nuclear deal, Macron's blunt statement was a sharp about-face.

Trudeau echoed these sentiments, declaring "We are going to defend our industries and our workers" and, in a none-too-subtle threat, "show the U.S. president that his unacceptable actions are hurting his own citizens."

The summit was likewise riven by sharp differences over Trump's drive to launch a major new war in the Middle East. Forming an axis with Saudi Arabia and Israel, Trump has withdrawn from the 2015 Iran nuclear agreement—in the face of opposition from the European powers—in preparation for an intensified economic, diplomatic, and possible military showdown with Iran.

At the same time, Trump has opened the prospect of cooling off the United States' two other major geopolitical conflict areas: with North Korea, including a US-North Korean summit scheduled in Singapore immediately after the conclusion of the G7, and with Russia, to which Trump held out the prospect of regaining membership in the G7 after it was ejected in 2014.

However, as with the fractured geopolitics of the 1930s, the "deals" offered by Trump to one or another country are merely the prelude to military conflict. War is on the horizon, though it is not yet clear between whom.

While the election of Trump and his "America First" nationalist economic policy has exacerbated tensions between the US and Europe, the increasingly fractured state of global geopolitics is bound up with much deeper processes.

With the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, the American ruling class declared that it would not tolerate any competitor to its global hegemony. Using its military power to offset its economic decline, the United States embarked upon a quarter century of wars in the Middle East, Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

Now these wars are metastasizing into "great-power

conflict,” as the Pentagon declared late last year, involving Russia, China, or even the European powers themselves. As Trump administration officials have repeatedly made clear, the United States trade war policies are an integral component of this strategy of “great-power conflict.”

With the American president barreling into a full-scale trade war, the response of Trump’s opposition party, the Democrats, has not been to denounce protectionism, but to press for its more aggressive application to Russia and China . After Trump this week announced moves to reduce trade restrictions on the Chinese technology company ZTE, Democratic House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi declared, “China is eating our lunch, and this president is serving it up to them.” Trade war, once treated as an abhorrent mistake and prelude to war that must never be repeated, has been accepted as a fact of 21st-century capitalism.

Behind the scenes, there is talk of new geopolitical alignments to challenge the United States. Writing in the *National Interest*, former Reagan administration advisor Doug Bandow noted, “Until now the Europeans have shown no inclination that they will make the necessary sacrifices to seriously challenge the United States.” But if the US’s allies “take a big step into a new future... this G-7 Summit could be the start of a serious allied challenge to Washington’s leadership.”

Such a geopolitical realignment would have vast consequences for the international order, and for political life in every country. There is no peaceful means toward such a reorientation of the geopolitical and diplomatic relations that have governed world politics for nearly three quarters of a century.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* warned last year, “Anyone who asserted that a coalition of these powers will emerge to stabilize world capitalism, and block the emergence of large-scale trade war and military conflict, would be placing heavy bets against history.” The demands by the European powers for an “independent” foreign policy are accompanied by calls for nuclear rearmament, police state measures, and anti-working-class austerity. They are all seeking to leverage their expanded military power to advance their own imperialist interests—either in alliance with, or possibly against, the United States.

As in the 1930s, with its trade wars, rapid fire-peace treaties, small-scale wars and annexations, international geopolitics is entering an increasingly feverish phase. Treaties are signed, then broken, new alliances are made, borders are put up, and, perhaps most importantly, all the powers are rearming to the teeth.

In this immensely dangerous situation, the working class must seek to articulate its own program and perspective. As Leon Trotsky, the founder of the Fourth International, put it, the task is to follow “not the war map but the map of the class struggle.”

The reemergence of a global movement of the working class, expressed in an international strike wave of workers on every continent and in every industry, provides the objective basis for a renewed international movement against war and for socialism.

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