

Xi's visit to Berlin highlights growing US-EU conflicts before G20 summit

Alex Lantier
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Donald Trump arrived in Poland Wednesday night in advance of the July 7-8 G20 summit in Hamburg, Germany, which is taking place amid deepening tensions between Washington and its traditional allies in the European Union. The summit, supposedly an economic meeting, will focus on world military crises such as the US-Chinese standoff over North Korea and growing EU-US geopolitical conflicts in Asia, the Middle East and Eastern Europe. Another issue will be Trump's withdrawal from the Paris climate accord.

Prior to Trump's arrival in Poland, US officials issued a barrage of statements denouncing China's refusal to economically strangle North Korea after the Pyongyang regime test-fired an intercontinental ballistic missile on Tuesday. Nonetheless, Chinese President Xi Jinping received a warm welcome during his state visit in Berlin on Wednesday, which focused on growing trade and political links between the two countries, the economic powerhouses of Asia and Europe. The dominant issue in Xi's visit was unmistakably the escalating conflict between the major powers at the heart of the world capitalist economy, with Xi and German Chancellor Angela Merkel both issuing sharp criticisms of US policy.

Asked by *Die Zeit* whether she would repeat her now-famous remark from May that Europe could not simply rely on its alliance with Washington, she replied: "Yes, exactly that way."

Xi arrived in Germany fresh from his summit in Moscow with Russian President Vladimir Putin, where the two leaders agreed on a common policy toward North Korea at odds with Washington's. Xi published a comment in the German media titled "To Make the World a Better Place," which called for closer German-Chinese strategic ties and implicitly criticized Trump's "America First" policy.

The Chinese president wrote that Germany and China should "play a leading role and enhance strategic communication on bilateral relations and major international and regional issues... The G20 needs to stay committed to open development, support the multilateral trading regime with the WTO at its heart, and enable trade and investment to continue to drive global economic growth."

At a press conference, Merkel endorsed China's Silk Road/One Belt-One Road plan to develop a Eurasian infrastructure network to connect China, Russia, the Middle East and Europe. "We believe we would be happy to participate in such projects and hope the bidding process will be transparent," she said. Merkel highlighted preparations for an investment treaty that could lead to the negotiation of an EU-China free trade zone, as well as greater opportunities for German foundations to work in China after the passage of a new Chinese law on NGOs.

German and Chinese officials also signed a \$22 billion contract for the purchase by China of Airbus jetliners.

Amid growing competition between EU and Chinese companies, however, Merkel demanded larger and more favorable trade positions for German firms in China. "We also want to be treated fairly and to have access to markets," she said. "That is very important for our companies."

Thomas Oppermann, the parliamentary group leader of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), demanded that the European powers adopt an even more explicitly hostile line toward US interests at the G20 summit. "If you try to react to Trump with permanent appeasement, that ultimately leads to an erosion of Western values. And already there are little Trumps in Poland and Hungary," he said.

Oppermann also called on Merkel to unify the 19 other states at the G20 against Trump, isolating the United States: “There may also be a good chance to accomplish that,” he said.

Xi’s visit to Berlin in the lead-up to the G20 summit underscores the breakdown of the international institutions and alliances that have dominated the affairs of world capitalism since the Stalinist bureaucracy dissolved the Soviet Union in 1991. As Washington threatens North Korea with military action that could unleash war with China and Russia, the NATO powers are going into the G20 summit deeply split. The summit is not so much an economic conference as a gathering of rival powers, all seeking to decide with whom they will ally as the prospect looms of a new, horrific global conflict.

Trump’s visit to Poland itself is a reprise of US strategy during its first major standoff with the EU in the post-Soviet period. In 2002, as the Bush administration prepared its illegal invasion of Iraq over the objections of Berlin and Paris, US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld counterpoised “New Europe,” that is, the Eastern European countries, to the countries of “Old Europe” that were opposing the invasion.

These growing conflicts between the world’s major economies are a warning to workers internationally. Xi’s visit to Berlin yesterday and Trump’s visit to Poland today underscore that the conflict over Iraq between Washington and the Berlin-Paris axis fifteen years ago was not an isolated development. Rather, it was the product of deep, lasting antagonisms rooted in the competing corporate interests of the major imperialist powers, which twice in the last century erupted into world wars.

In visiting Poland on the eve of the G20 summit, Trump is seeking to encourage opposition to the EU, and particularly to its dominant power, Germany, whose trade policies Trump has publicly called “really bad,” and whose auto exports to the United States he has threatened to cut off.

Trump is slated to speak today in front of a monument to the 1944 Warsaw Uprising against the Nazi occupation of Poland, which was brutally suppressed by the German military, with the loss of some 200,000 lives.

Officials of the ruling far-right Law and Solidarity

(PiS) party in Poland are planning to bus large numbers of PiS supporters to Warsaw to provide Trump with a friendly crowd. PiS leader Jarosław Kaczyński has hailed Trump’s decision to speak in Warsaw before the G20, telling a party congress on Saturday: “We have a new success, Trump’s visit... [Others] envy it; the British are attacking us because of it.”

The invitation does not reflect any broad popularity of Trump in Poland. One poll found that only 23 percent of the population trusts Trump to “do the right thing” in international politics, compared to 22 percent in Britain. Rather, the PiS hopes to use Trump’s visit to send a signal that it has powerful allies in its bitter conflicts with the EU, which has criticized the Polish regime’s moves to strip the Polish judicial system of its powers, block immigration into Poland, set up far-right militias and consolidate an authoritarian regime.

US officials made clear that Trump intends to use his speech in Poland to lay out his position on the conflicts that are emerging within Europe and within the NATO alliance between Washington and the European powers.

“He will praise Polish courage throughout history’s darkest hour, and celebrate Poland’s emergence as a European power,” said Gen. H. R. McMaster, Trump’s national security adviser, at a White House briefing last week. “He will lay out a vision, not only for America’s future relationship with Europe, but the future of our trans-Atlantic alliance and what that means for American security and American prosperity.”



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