

German Chancellor Merkel and Donald Trump hold tense meeting in Washington

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Yesterday's meeting between US President Donald Trump and German Chancellor Angela Merkel appeared superficially friendly. Neither held back with compliments. But on the fundamental issues discussed, the nuclear agreement with Iran and the imposition by the US of trade tariffs on the European Union, Trump made no concessions. Instead, Merkel endorsed Trump's confrontational policy towards Iran, which threatens to culminate in yet another major war in the Middle East and a direct military clash with the nuclear power Russia.

Even though the tariffs imposed by Trump on steel and aluminium are set to take effect on May 1, he was not prepared to grant a delay, let alone withdraw them. Like French President Emmanuel Macron before her, Merkel was firmly rebuffed on this issue, which threatens to escalate into an all-out trade war.

Responding to a journalist's question on where things stood with the tariffs, Merkel merely answered, "The President will decide." During the press conference, Trump repeatedly complained about the US trade deficit with the EU, which amounts to €150 billion. This is "unfair" and a "great injustice" that has to be put right, he said.

Trump also gave no ground on his possible decision to abandon the nuclear deal with Iran, with a final decision due May 12. At the press conference, Trump launched into a vicious tirade against Tehran and threatened it with war. He described the Iranian government as a "murderous regime" which encouraged "violence, bloodletting and chaos" throughout the Middle East.

Responding to a question from a journalist on whether he would go to war with Iran after leaving the nuclear deal if Tehran resumed its nuclear programme, Trump said he had no comment.

"But you can be sure of one thing, Iran will not obtain nuclear weapons," he added menacingly.

Merkel made no attempt to reject this war-mongering, but instead backed up Trump. While in the past she defended the nuclear agreement, which Germany played a large part in negotiating, she now declares that it was merely a first step that helped to slow down and better monitor Iran's nuclear activities.

Although the International Atomic Energy Agency, which oversees the deal, has confirmed that Iran is fulfilling all of its obligations, Merkel demanded that "more must be done." Iran's ballistic missile programme and influence in Syria are "objects of great concern," she added. Iran must be additionally prevented from resuming nuclear activity after the agreement expires. She called on Europe and the US to restrict Iranian influence and bring the bloodletting in Syria to an end.

Considering that the "terrible bloodletting" in Syria is continuing principally because the US, the European powers and their Arab allies are financing Islamist groups to target the Assad regime, this can only be understood as a threat of war.

Merkel also left no doubt about the fact that Germany intends to intervene more forcefully in the region. At the press conference, she repeatedly noted that the government remains determined to increase military spending to 2 percent of GDP, which amounts to a doubling of defence spending.

Asked by a German journalist about her statement from last year that the times in which it was possible to rely on the US are "to some extent over," Merkel sought to present this as a concession to Washington's demand that Germany assume more responsibility in NATO. She also highlighted the close cooperation between the US and Germany in Ukraine directed

against Russia.

Merkel's attempt to ingratiate herself with the right-wing occupant of the White House, coming just days after French President Macron's visit, cannot conceal the fact that the divisions between Washington and Berlin, and Berlin and Paris, are rising. France and Germany are jumping on the US bandwagon in the Middle East primarily because they do not want to be left empty-handed following the re-division of the region.

As history has shown, imperialist alliances are alliances living on borrowed time. The looming trade war underscores how sharp the divergence of interests and the associated tensions really are.

Behind the staged friendship, Trump treated Merkel with barely-concealed hostility. He spoke for several minutes at the press conference about the immanent moving of the US embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, while Merkel, who has opposed this step to date, looked on stone-faced.



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