

NATO, at war with itself, rearms for war with the world

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Media coverage of this week's NATO summit was dominated by the deepening tensions between US President Donald Trump and Washington's military allies, in particular Germany, amid a mounting international trade war launched by the White House last month.

Despite the displays of division, capped by Trump's mafioso-like demands for greater military spending by his "delinquent" NATO allies, all members of the alliance reaffirmed their commitment to massive military rearmament, to be paid for with sweeping cuts to public infrastructure and attacks on the social position of the working class.

Jens Stoltenberg, the Secretary-General of NATO, declared at the end of the summit that "after years of decline, when Allies were cutting billions, now they are adding billions." He boasted that over the past year and a half, "European Allies and Canada have added an additional 41 billion dollars to their defense spending."

The most immediate and tangible outcome of the summit was a NATO plan to expand the number of high-readiness military forces ready to attack Russia, or any other country, at a moment's notice. The summit resolution declared that "Allies will offer an additional 30 major naval combatants, 30 heavy or medium manoeuvre battalions, and 30 kinetic air squadrons, with enabling forces, at 30 days' readiness or less."

The resolution reaffirmed NATO's moves to deploy "four multinational combat-ready battalion-sized battlegroups in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland," including "over 4,500 troops from across the Alliance, able to operate alongside national home defence forces," all within hundreds of miles of Russia's second-largest city, St. Petersburg.

The summit further agreed to create two new command headquarters: one in Norfolk, Virginia, "to

focus on protecting the transatlantic lines of communication," and a new command center in Germany to "ensure freedom of operation and sustainment in the rear area in support of the rapid movement of troops and equipment into, across, and from Europe."

The summit resolution reaffirms the expansion of NATO's nuclear arsenal, declaring, "As long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance. The strategic forces of the Alliance, particularly those of the United States, are the supreme guarantee of the security of Allies."

It further vowed to continue NATO's eastward expansion, reiterating NATO's plans to invite Macedonia, Ukraine and Georgia to join the anti-Russian alliance.

The massive military build-up throughout Europe will be paid for with stepped-up attacks on the working class, through the dismantling of social safety nets and, as pioneered by the government of French President Emanuel Macron, wage and benefit cuts for state workers and the privatization of state assets.

Trump made clear that his demand for greater European military spending is inseparable from his mercantilist economic policies aimed at improving the US balance of trade with Germany, the world's third-ranking exporter after China and the United States.

His denunciations of Germany for its purchase of natural gas from Russia became a focal point of the summit. In Trump's view, Germany, which exports twice as much to the United States as it imports, must buy US natural gas at premium prices if it is to receive "protection" from the US military.

In pursuit of his trade conflict with Germany, Trump has consciously sought, as with his statement in support of a "hard" Brexit Thursday, to destabilize the

European Union. He has promoted far-right, Eurosceptic political movements, whose denunciations of the “Brussels bureaucracy” are little more than a cover for national antagonisms with Germany, the dominant power within the EU.

But this is a dangerous game. Stratfor, in an analysis of the NATO summit, warned that Europe is a “continent riven with rivalry.”

“The U.S. strategy to deal with Russia will remain inextricably linked to how it manages a balance of power on the European continent,” it continues. “The United Kingdom is too consumed with its divorce from the bloc to assume its traditional balancing role for the Continent. That knocks out the third leg of the triad of great European powers, leaving an uneasy pair in France and Germany to prevent the Continent from descending into an all-too-familiar pattern of conflict.”

Stratfor adds, “But it is one thing for the U.S. president to recognize and operate within the limits of an uncomfortable reality without losing sight of its core imperative: maintaining a balance of power in Europe is still essential to the United States’ ability to manage growing competition with Russia and China and any peripheral distractions that may emerge. It is another thing to actively stoke nationalist embers on the Continent and encourage the unraveling of an imperfect bloc through trade assaults and transactional security threats. The latter is playing with fire.”

But “playing with fire” is exactly Trump’s strategy in both domestic and international politics. Trump, expressing the instincts of a semi-criminal real estate speculator, is intent on calling everyone’s bluff – allies and enemies alike.

Edward Luce, commenting Thursday in the *Financial Times*, noted that “Trump knows more than his critics give him credit for” because “he instinctively grasps other people’s bottom lines.” He adds, “The most lethal demagogue is one who grasps an underlying reality. Mr. Trump knows that Europe needs America more than America needs Europe.”

While “wrecking” alliances “reduces Washington’s global clout,” the “bigger loser is Europe. Its survival depends on America’s guarantee.”

In other words, Trump’s actions, “unconventional” as they are, reflect something objective in the US position in the world geopolitical and economic order. Recognizing the United States’ role as the reactionary

keystone of global imperialism, Trump is demanding “protection” money from its “allies,” no matter the cost to the stability of the geopolitical order.

The American president, in the whirlwind of the past month, in which he scuttled the G7 summit, launched a trade war against Europe and China, held a summit with North Korea hoping to turn it against China, and is on the verge of a summit with Vladimir Putin aiming to turn Russia against Iran, has thrown all international alliances up in the air, aiming to extract maximum trade, economic and military concessions from “ally” and “enemy” alike.

This turbulent and chaotic world order recalls nothing so much as the geopolitics of the 1930s, with an endless parade of alliances created one day and overturned the next. In that period, each alliance created, no less than each alliance broken, was the prelude to the eruption of world war.

And in the 1930s, as now, every country was re-arming to the teeth amid the eruption of trade war and the rise and promotion of fascist movements throughout Europe.

The outcome of the NATO summit, with its peculiar combination of massive rearmament and explosive divisions, substantially heightens the risk of world war. Who will be the combatants in such a conflict, over what nominal cause, cannot be foretold. But all those who claimed that, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, NATO would be converted into a “peaceful” and “democratic” alliance have been exposed as charlatans.



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