NATO bitterly divided as London summit begins

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As heads of state of the NATO military alliance arrived yesterday in London for a two-day summit beginning today, 70 years after NATO's foundation in the aftermath of World War II in 1949, the bitter divisions tearing the alliance apart were on full display.

Originally, the London summit was intended to highlight the massive NATO military buildup that is underway, recklessly targeting major nuclear-armed powers. The Defender 2020 military exercise planned for early next year will not only see a NATO naval flotilla steam to the South China Sea, but above all a major exercise to prepare for war with Russia in Europe. Washington will also ship 20,000 US-based troops across the Atlantic for a war game in Eastern Europe to join 20,000 troops, 70 ships, 150 aircraft and 10,000 ground vehicles in Europe.

As NATO General Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg reported on Friday, the NATO powers have collectively increased their military spending by $160 billion since 2016. According to Stoltenberg, this increase in military funding, financed by intensifying social austerity targeting working people, will reach $400 billion by 2024.

This military buildup is however intensifying the divisions between the NATO powers, which twice in the last century fought each other in world wars. NATO is staggered by the ongoing impeachment crisis facing US President Donald Trump, conflicts over Turkey's invasion of Syria, a British election unfolding in the shadow of Brexit, and growing German-French conflicts over European policy.

NATO downgraded its two-day meeting in London from a "summit" to a "leaders' meeting," to avoid issuing a formal communiqué that Trump or other heads of state might refuse to sign. Last year saw a spectacular collapse of the G7 summit in Quebec, where Trump refused at the last minute to sign the communiqué agreed upon by Canada, Japan, Germany, Britain, France and Italy. Over the last year, however, the international tensions inside NATO have only grown deeper.

The NATO "allies are approaching the London summit with a sense of foreboding," reported Karen Donfried of the German Marshall Fund think tank. "Few anticipate a gathering that will unify and stop the growing cracks in cohesion."

Increasingly, Trump is not seen as the only head of state whose remarks could provoke a major diplomatic crisis. "It will be a great tribute to how much all the NATO allies value the institution if we manage to get through this leaders meeting without President Trump, (French) President (Emmanuel) Macron or (Turkish) President (Recep Tayyip) Erdogan doing something damaging to the alliance," Kori Schake, a former National Security Council official in the Bush administration, told Bloomberg News.

In the run-up to the London meeting, bitter differences inside NATO erupted into the open. On Friday, after a meeting with Stoltenberg in Paris, French President Emmanuel Macron again threw into question US calls to rally the alliance around an aggressive policy targeting Russia and China.

"Is our enemy today Russia? Or China? Is it the goal of NATO to designate them as enemies? I don't believe so," Macron said. Referring to Washington's reckless repudiation of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) arms control treaty with Russia, Macron added, "Peace in Europe, the post-INF situation, the relationship with Russia, the Turkey issue, who's the enemy?"

Macron, who will leave the summit early to return to Paris and oversee his government's response to a December 5 national protest strike against his austerity policies, claimed "terrorism" was NATO's enemy and called for better relations with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Macron's government, beyond imposing deep austerity at home, is currently seeking NATO aid for its

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bloody neocolonial war in Mali, a former French colony in Africa.

Macron's remarks followed his interview published last month in Britain's *Economist* magazine, where he threw into question the viability of NATO. Dismissing NATO as "brain-dead," he criticized aggressive US policies against Russia as "governmental, political and historical hysteria," and Turkey's invasion targeting US-backed Kurdish militias in Syria for risking a clash between Turkey and the entire NATO alliance with Syria's main ally, Russia. He called on France and Europe to keep developing a foreign and military policy independent from Washington.

This provoked criticisms in Berlin, Europe's leading imperialist power, where officials and media called for the remilitarization of Germany and Europe to continue—at least for the time being—under the aegis of NATO. They criticized Macron's more pro-Russian line for antagonizing Eastern European regimes.

"I understand your desire for disruptive politics," Merkel told Macron when they met for the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall last month. "But I'm tired of picking up the pieces. Over and over, I have to glue together the cups you have broken so that we can then sit down and have a cup of tea together."

In recent days, Macron has also traded insults with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who told Macron on Friday, "I will tell you again at NATO, first check your own brain death." Erdogan also said that it is not up to Macron to discuss whether Turkey should stay in NATO or should be expelled. Erdogan criticized Macron for backing the Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) militia, which the Turkish government has listed as a terrorist group.

Erdogan also threatened to veto NATO military plans for targeting Russia from Poland and the Baltic states if NATO did not collectively list the YPG as a terrorist organization.

Nearly 30 years after the Stalinist bureaucracy's 1991 dissolution of the Soviet Union deprived NATO of a common enemy, it is ever clearer that deep-rooted conflicts over strategic and economic interests are tearing the main NATO powers apart. Facing defeat in their eight-year proxy war in Syria and in wars across the Middle East, the NATO powers are preparing a reckless escalation with potentially catastrophic consequences. This path has been taken in an attempt to deal with growing opposition from working people at home and growing divisions among themselves.

In particular, the tactical divisions over US imperialist foreign policy underlying the Democratic Party's campaign to impeach Trump and denounce him as a pro-Russian traitor are closely linked to explosive conflicts within the entire NATO alliance.

With Merkel, Macron, Putin and Ukrainian President Vladimir Zelensky due to meet to negotiate a truce in Paris on December 9, excluding Washington, the *Washington Post* warned that the impeachment crisis could inadvertently strengthen the European powers' hand in Ukraine.

In its editorial, the *Post* wrote: "Virtually every senior official who worked on the relationship (with Ukraine) in the past two years has resigned or testified in the impeachment inquiry and been denounced by the president... All this significantly weakens Mr. Zelensky's position, particularly as he contemplates the meeting with Mr. Putin, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron. The latter two will likely lean on the Ukrainian to make concessions to the Russian ruler, because a deal would allow them to repair European relations with Russia."

The growing pessimism about NATO even among European imperialist strategists favorable to the Atlantic alliance emerged in a column by Bruno Tertrais of France's Strategic Research Foundation think tank yesterday in *Le Monde*.

Tertrais said, "It is entirely possible that NATO could celebrate its 100th birthday in 2049. But if the London summit turns into an unprecedented unpackaging of disputes between allies, it could go down in history as having been the beginning of the end of NATO."

While criticizing Macron's statement that NATO is brain dead, Tertrais wrote: "Essentially the path France has chosen is correct. The development of European capabilities is a win-win strategy that reinforces NATO and is insurance in case it collapses. We have every reason to defend ourselves against US defense contractors and those who want NATO to become too deeply involved against China."

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