

G7 foreign minister discuss anti-Russia and China agenda amid global pandemic

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Foreign ministers from the G7 nations—the United States, the UK, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and Canada—met in London this week ahead of the full G7 summit this June. The event made clear that the meeting next month will be used to strengthen an anti-Russia and anti-China axis, led by the US.

Britain is using its position as host this year to confirm its wholehearted commitment to President Joe Biden’s aggressive foreign policy and push other nations, especially the European powers, to adopt the same stance.

On Monday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab held a joint press conference. Raab declared that the two countries stand “shoulder to shoulder” and Blinken hailed their “special relationship”, saying the US had “no closer ally, no closer partner”. Blinken met with Prime Minister Boris Johnson Tuesday and discussed “the close alignment between UK and US foreign policy,” according to a Downing Street spokesperson.

In a statement ahead of the talks, Raab said, “The UK’s presidency of the G7 is an opportunity to bring together open, democratic societies and demonstrate unity at a time when it is much needed to tackle shared challenges and rising threats.” At his press conference with Blinken, he called for “agile clusters of like-minded countries that share the same values and want to protect the multilateral system” and the “international rules-based order”—that is, based on US hegemony.

Both emphasised that the purpose of such an alliance would be a confrontation with Russia and China. Raab demanded Russian President Vladimir Putin end his “brinkmanship sabre-rattling on the border of Ukraine, the cyber-attacks and misinformation and the poisoning of Alexei Navalny, that was not just a human rights abuse but a use of chemical weapons on Russian soil”. Blinken warned that “if Russia chooses to act recklessly or aggressively, we’ll respond,” while claiming the US was

“not looking to escalate”.

It is the US orchestrating provocations against Russia through NATO and the right-wing, nationalist government in Ukraine, which has endorsed a strategy to “recover” Crimea—territory now held by Russia. Blinken travelled to Ukraine from the UK yesterday to “reaffirm” America’s “unwavering support for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine.”

The G7 communique accuses Russia of “irresponsible and destabilising behaviour”, including “the large build-up of Russian military forces on Ukraine’s borders and in illegally-annexed Crimea, its malign activities aimed at undermining other countries’ democratic systems, its malicious cyber activity, and use of disinformation.” It states threateningly, with reference to allegedly poisoned Putin critic and imperialist stooge Alexei Navalny, “There must be accountability for those that use chemical weapons.”

To help counter popular opposition to the imperialist powers’ warmongering, Raab encouraged the G7 to “come together with a rapid rebuttal mechanism” to shut down media coverage and discussion which cuts across the group’s objectives, labelled “lies and propaganda or fake news”. The communique commits to deterring “those who target our democratic institutions and processes, seek to undermine public confidence in the integrity of our democracies, and attempt to interfere in the information space.”

China was the main focus of the foreign ministers’ meeting, allotted a two-hour slot for discussion, versus 90 minutes for Russia and 30 minutes for Myanmar and Syria, according to the *South China Morning Post*. A working dinner was held on the Indo-Pacific region.

Blinken claimed, “It is not our purpose to try to contain China or to hold China down. What we are trying to do is to uphold the international rules-based order... And when any country—China or otherwise—takes actions that

challenge or undermine or seek to erode that rules-based order and not make good on the commitments that they've made to that order, we will stand up and defend the order."

The "order" referred to by Blinken is one in which the US and its allies seek to isolate China internationally and stage repeated provocations in the South China Sea and Taiwan, while deploying ever larger military forces to the region. The US is moving forward with plans to deploy missiles previously banned by the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty in Japan, Taiwan and the Philippines. The UK is increasing its number of nuclear warheads and sending a strike group, including an aircraft carrier and nuclear submarine, to the South China Sea.

Both countries had the gall to sign a communique which claims, "We are committed to the ultimate goal of a world without nuclear weapons" and lauds the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

According to a European Union statement, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell held a private meeting with Blinken during the week to discuss relations with China. Key European powers, notably Germany and France, have been reluctant to fully embrace Biden's hardline anti-China strategy, which would mean sacrificing significant economic interests. On Tuesday, in an indication of the ongoing dispute in Europe over this issue and a clear concession to the US, the EU announced that it had halted progress on an investment deal with China. The deal was pushed by Germany, which has substantial commercial interests in China, but faced opposition from the European nations most closely aligned with the US.

German Foreign Minister Heiko Mass alluded to these divisions in a statement before the meeting, saying it was "high time" for the G7 to "counter authoritarian states trying to play us off against each other and breaching the rules is becoming the norm".

The G7 communique struck a less belligerent tone than against Russia, but still registered "concern" over "human rights violations and abuses in Xinjiang and in Tibet", "China's decision fundamentally to erode democratic elements of the electoral system in Hong Kong" and "practices that undermine such free and fair economic systems, including on trade, investment and development finance." It called on China "to uphold its commitments to act responsibly in cyber space, including refraining from conducting or supporting cyber-enabled intellectual property theft."

To broaden the anti-China axis, the UK invited the foreign ministers of Australia, India, South Africa and

South Korea to the talks, along with the chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Raab explained the invitation reflected "the growing significance of the Indo-Pacific region for the G7." The expanded list of foreign ministers included all four members of the "Quad", an alliance of the US, Japan, Australia and India, directed against China.

The invitation of the Indian foreign minister underscored the utter disregard for the effects of the pandemic shared by the G7 powers. Representing close to half the world economy, with a combined GDP of around \$40 trillion, their representatives barely even mentioned the coronavirus and offered only empty words when they did, under conditions in which at least 13,000 are being killed by the virus every day. India, the epicentre of this global humanitarian catastrophe, was not invited to discuss emergency measures to save millions of lives, but war plans threatening countless millions more.

The G7's commitment to the murderous policy of "herd immunity", or "learning to live with the virus", was highlighted by the intervention of UK Transport Secretary Grant Shapps. The government minister chaired a meeting of his G7 counterparts and the EU Commission to organise the reopening of international travel. Just a few hours before, the entire Indian delegation to the UK had been forced to self-isolate after several tested positive for Covid-19.

As for the economic catastrophe looming over billions of people across the world, the sum total of the G7's new commitments towards a "sustainable recovery" was a \$15 billion fund "to provide women in developing countries... with improved economic opportunities" and to agree to a target of getting 40 million more girls into school by 2026. In a year when trillions have been looted from the working class and handed over to the corporations and the super-rich, this barely qualifies as window dressing.



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