

The “rupture in the world order”—World Economic Forum dominated by inter-imperialist conflict

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Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney painted a stark picture of a global capitalist system roiled by inter-imperialist rivalries and hurtling towards world war in a speech Tuesday to the World Economic Forum.

Speaking before an audience of capitalist politicians, imperialist strategists, global CEOs and billionaire oligarchs, Carney declared the world to be at a “turning point.” This was not a mere transition, he insisted, but “the rupture of the world order” and the beginning of “a brutal reality where geopolitics among the great powers is not subject to any constraints.”

The collapse of the US-led, post-Second World War economic and geopolitical order has ushered in a new era of “great power rivalries,” said Carney, in which “the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must.”

Carney’s remarks were a damning admission by the leader of one of the G7 imperialist powers that an imperialist-led struggle to repartition the world economically and territorially, akin to that which culminated in the imperialist world wars of the last century, is underway.

Carney made no reference to America’s would-be dictator President Donald Trump and mentioned the United States just once. But coming after a year of escalating trade war and belligerence from Washington targeting ostensible allies and foes alike, it was clear to all that Carney was calling on the European powers to join Canada in ruthlessly asserting their own imperialist interests, including against the United States.

Just in the three weeks prior to the opening of the World Economic Forum (WEF), Trump ordered the invasion of Venezuela to abduct its president, Nicolás Maduro, and announced he was seizing the country’s vast oil reserves; repeatedly threatened to wage war on Iran; demanded Denmark, a European Union state and fellow NATO member, cede Greenland to the US; and threatened eight European countries with tariffs when they sent troops to Greenland to signal their opposition to his threat to seize the island by military force.

Carney’s attack on a rampaging US imperialism was all the more remarkable in that it was given by the head of the government of Canada, which for the past eight decades has

been America’s closest economic, geopolitical and military ally. For more than 50 years, up until 9/11, Ottawa and Washington boasted that they shared the world’s longest “undefended border,” some 5,500 miles (8,800-plus kilometers) long.

However, as part of a drive to consolidate unbridled US domination over the Western Hemisphere in preparation for war with China and other great powers, Trump has hit Canada with a barrage of tariffs, threatened to scuttle the US-Mexico-Canada trade agreement and vowed to use “economic force” to make Canada America’s 51st state.

Carney appealed to Canada’s NATO allies to recognize “reality”: The “rules-based international order,” the euphemism that US imperialism employed to mask its post-World War II global hegemony, and from which Canadian and European imperialism benefited handsomely, has irreversibly collapsed. Citing “a series of crises in finance, health, energy and geopolitics” over the past two decades, Carney stated, “great powers have begun using economic integration as weapons. Tariffs as leverage. Financial infrastructure as coercion. Supply chains as vulnerabilities to be exploited.”

Revealing more than he intended, he continued,

For decades, countries like Canada prospered under what we called the rules-based international order. We joined its institutions, we praised its principles, we benefited from its predictability ...

We knew the story of the international rules-based order was partially false. That the strongest would exempt themselves when convenient. That trade rules were enforced asymmetrically. And we knew that international law applied with varying rigour depending on the identity of the accused or the victim.

This fiction was useful. And American hegemony, in particular, helped provide public goods: open sea lanes, a stable financial system, collective security and support for frameworks for resolving disputes. ...

This bargain no longer works.

The WEF summit was itself overshadowed by a bitter dispute between American imperialism and its erstwhile European allies over the fate of Greenland, with European leaders warning that were Trump to act on his threats to seize Greenland, NATO and the trans-Atlantic alliance would collapse. While their own speeches were less bluntly worded than Carney's, and still included calls for the trans-Atlantic partnership to be revived, the leaders of the European Union and its principal states all called for massive rearmament to develop "strategic autonomy," that is, the capability to act independently of the US in the struggle to redive the world.

Trump wants full control over Greenland as part of his "America First" strategy to expel all "non-hemispheric competitors" from the Americas. He views total dominance over the Western Hemisphere, including the right to seize any assets, resources, territories or waterways deemed vital to US "national security"—the so-called "Donroe Doctrine"—as a necessary precondition to waging war against Washington's more powerful rivals—China, Russia and the European Union—to restore US global hegemony.

On Wednesday, Trump pulled back from his Greenland tariff threat, dropping the 10 percent surcharge set to come into force on February 1. He cited a "deal" on Greenland struck at a meeting on the sidelines of the WEF with NATO Secretary-General Marc Rutte, in which representatives of Denmark and Greenland took no part. No details of the "deal" have been made public, but reports suggest the US will be ceded bits of the Arctic island for an expanded network of military bases and given unlimited military control over its land mass, airspace and territorial waters.

Trump's foreign policy threats and sudden shifts resemble nothing so much as those of Adolf Hitler in the late 1930s, just as the sharpening inter-state conflicts recall the jostling between the imperialist powers in the years immediately preceding World War II. If a deal has in fact been reached over Greenland, it is likely to prove as durable as that Hitler struck in September 1938 with Italy's Mussolini, the British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and his French counterpart, Édouard Daladier, over the fate of Czechoslovakia. Chamberlain infamously claimed he had secured "peace in our time," but within months Hitler made fresh demands, carved up what remained of the Czechoslovak Republic and set his sights on Poland.

Amid the surge in "great power rivalries," Carney has drawn the conclusion that an alternative imperialist alliance is necessary to counter Trump and the US. In his WEF speech, he tried to cloak the predatory character of such a project by repeatedly referring to Canada as a "middle power," rather than the imperialist power that it is—one, as he himself conceded, that previously profited from US global domination, aggression and war. "Middle powers must act together," he declared, "because if we're not at the table, we're on the menu."

The "table" he speaks of is the high table of imperialism,

where territories are carved up, deals to monopolize the exploitation of natural resources and cheap labour are made, and the financial oligarchy extracts its pound of flesh.

Carney's alliance of "middle powers" would be a partnership first and foremost with French and British imperialism, whose colonial empires bestrided the world until 1945, and with German imperialism, which twice in the last century sought to resolve its crisis by conquering Europe. While their world power is diminished, the imperialist appetites of the European powers are, if anything, greater today.

Over the past year, Germany, France and Britain have repeatedly thwarted Trump's effort to reach an accommodation with Putin over the heads of the European powers that would give US companies and investors access to raw materials, markets and geostrategic influence in both Ukraine and Russia at Europe's expense. Having invested heavily in the war on Russia and lacking the ability to continue it alone, the European imperialist powers are determined to keep the US involved and escalate the conflict to secure their share of the loot and plunder.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, who explicitly praised Carney in his own WEF speech, heads a government committed to spending €1 trillion on war and destroying what little is left of Germany's welfare state. France's Emmanuel Macron has increased military spending and deployed the full force of the state against workers opposed to his austerity agenda. For his part, Carney boasted in his speech about his government's right-wing record at home, including tax cuts for the wealthy, public spending austerity, a doubling of military spending by 2030, and attacks on democratic rights including a massive assault on the right to strike.

Workers on both sides of the Atlantic can only oppose the revival of imperialist barbarism by unifying their struggles against all of the imperialist powers and their political representatives. The looming danger of world war is rooted in crisis-ridden capitalism, which will plunge humanity into the abyss as it did twice in the 20th century, unless it is overthrown by a revolutionary socialist movement of the working class.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and International Committee of the Fourth International fight to provide the revolutionary leadership required to unite workers' struggles internationally against war, attacks on democratic and social rights, and the growth of inequality into a mass industrial and political movement for the abolition of capitalism and the socialist transformation of society.



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