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Trump denounces Germany and Europe at NATO summit

The two-day NATO summit opened yesterday in Brussels in a crisis atmosphere, as US President Donald Trump denounced Germany and other European countries in the NATO alliance. A month after the G7 economic summit in Quebec collapsed amid bitter recriminations over US trade war measures against Europe, diplomatic and military relations between Washington and the European Union (EU) are also disintegrating.

Trump began the day with a tirade against the major EU powers at a joint breakfast with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg. He made clear that repeated US demands for more European military spending were part of a broader strategy of demanding stepped-up attacks on the working class internationally, and vast EU concessions to US economic interests.

Trump began, “It’s public. And many countries are not paying what they should. And, frankly, many countries owe us a tremendous amount of money for many years back, where they’re delinquent, as far as I’m concerned, because the United States has had to pay for them. So if you go back 10 or 20 years, you’ll just add it all up. It’s massive amounts of money is owed. The United States has paid and stepped up like nobody. This has gone on for decades, by the way. This has gone on for many Presidents. But no other President brought it up like I bring it up.”

Trump dismissed the EU powers’ pledges to spend \$266 billion more on defense by 2024, financed by deep attacks on jobs and social services, as grossly insufficient. He said, “This

year, since our last meeting, commitments have been made for over \$40 billion more money spent by other countries. So that's a step, but it's a very small step."

Flanked by US Secretary of Defense James Mattis, White House Chief of Staff John Kelly, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, and US Ambassador to NATO Kay Bailey Hutchinson, Trump then launched an extraordinary tirade against Germany.

He said, "I think it's very sad when Germany makes a massive oil and gas deal with Russia, where you're supposed to be guarding against Russia, and Germany goes out and pays billions and billions of dollars a year to Russia. So we're protecting Germany. We're protecting France. We're protecting all of these countries. And then numerous of the countries go out and make a pipeline deal with Russia, where they're paying billions of dollars into the coffers of Russia."

Trump had previously attacked the Nordstream-2 gas pipeline from Russia to Germany via the Baltic Sea, insisting that Europe buy more expensive natural gas from America. Last year, he even threatened to impose sanctions on German and Austrian firms involved in the Nordstream project. Yesterday, Trump warned, "Germany is totally controlled by Russia, because they will be getting from 60 to 70 percent of their energy from Russia and a new pipeline."

Trump brushed Stoltenberg aside when the NATO general secretary made a brief plea for NATO unity: "I think that two World Wars and the Cold War taught us that we are stronger together than apart. ... We understand that when we stand together, also in dealing with Russia, we are stronger."

Trump interrupted Stoltenberg, saying: "No, you're just making Russia richer. You're not dealing with Russia. You're making Russia richer."

Unfazed by Stoltenberg's reference to two world wars in which the United States fought European powers led by Germany, Trump made clear his demands are non-negotiable. He said, "And you have a country like Poland that won't accept the gas. You take a look at some of the countries—they won't accept it, because they don't want to be captive to Russia. But Germany, as far as I'm concerned, is captive to Russia, because it's getting so much of its energy from Russia."

After making these extraordinary statements, however, Trump nevertheless signed a 20-page communiqué outlining a detailed and aggressive world policy for NATO. The sprawling document brands Russia, Syria, and "irregular migration" by millions of refugees fleeing NATO wars in the Middle East and Africa as major threats. It also lays out plans for ballistic missile defense bases aimed at Russia, NATO operations in

Afghanistan, the Balkans, Ukraine and the Caucasus, and a vast network of prison camps for refugees across Europe and North Africa.

As Trump heads to Britain after the NATO summit and then to Helsinki for a summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin, it is unclear what arrangements if any Washington and its nominal EU allies will ultimately agree upon. However, whether the NATO summit collapses as the G7 did or reaches a shaky consensus based on unbridled militarism and attacks on the working class, what is clear is that relations between the world's major military and economic powers are breaking down.

Trump speaks for a broad faction of the American capitalist class dismayed by the crumbling of US world hegemony due to its long-term economic decline. Their policy, pursued over a quarter of a century since the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union, of counterbalancing US industrial weakness with military strength, has failed. What is emerging ever more clearly is that these endless wars were not a "war on terrorism" but, as the world wars of the 20th century, a bitter struggle for the division of markets, profits and strategic advantage between the imperialist powers.

The danger that such wars could, as in the 20th century, escalate into a world war between the major powers, this time armed with nuclear weapons, is increasingly acknowledged even in ruling circles. After the joint US-UK-French bombing of Syria in April, a group of top German officials signed a statement of the Weizsäcker Foundation declaring: "None of the structural reasons which led to World War I have actually been vanquished."

What is emerging ever more openly is the historic bankruptcy of capitalism. The danger that NATO operations targeting Russia could trigger a global conflict, amid escalating military drills and deployments across Eastern Europe, is very real. However, what predominates at this summit are the bitter divisions between the NATO powers themselves.

Trump has not bothered to conceal his longstanding hostility to Germany, branding German car exports to the United States as "bad" during his election campaign. The *Wall Street Journal* reported on Sunday that Trump greeted German Chancellor Angela Merkel on her first visit to Washington after his election by telling her, "Angela, you owe me \$1 trillion."

The initial response of German officials to Trump's demand that they scrap Nordstream-2 indicated they would make no concessions to Trump. "I myself have also experienced a part of Germany being occupied by the Soviet Union," Merkel said as she arrived at the Brussels summit. "I am very glad that we are united today in freedom as the Federal

Republic of Germany and that we can therefore also make our own independent policies and make our own independent decisions.”

German Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen dismissed Trump’s criticisms, telling the BBC: “We can cope with it. We’ve heard him before and seen the tweets. We have an independent energy supply, we are an independent country, we are just diversifying.”

The growing US-German conflict will no doubt intensify Berlin’s drive to wage drastic attacks on the working class to finance a military build-up allowing Germany and other EU powers to rival the United States. German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier told the *Neue Osnabrücker Zeitung*, “We Europeans must take on more responsibility for ourselves. ... We have a transformed security situation in Europe, we are experiencing transformations in European-American relations.”

At the same time, the Trump administration is aggressively moving to undermine Germany’s strategic position in Europe. Trump has endorsed a “hard Brexit” policy to cut off Britain’s ties to the EU.

Moreover, reports have emerged that during French President Emmanuel Macron’s visit to Washington in April, Trump made the explosive proposal that France—Berlin’s leading partner in its plan for a new EU army—could also leave the EU. In exchange, Trump offered France closer relations and better terms for trade with the United States.

Macron declined to comment on these reports, saying, “what was said in the room, stays in that room.”