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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

30 November 2018

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01.12.2018

Trump cancels G20 meeting with Putin amid rising tensions

As world leaders head to the G20 Summit, the United States is poised to intensify its conflicts with Russia, China and Europe.

Commenting on the fast-approaching event, the German weekly *Der Spiegel* called American President Donald Trump the “terror” of the assembled world leaders. No one, perhaps least of all Trump, knows the outcome of the summit in advance, or which part of the world will be the main target of US threats.

Russia

The explosive and unpredictable character of the summit was demonstrated by Trump’s hairpin turn Thursday on a planned meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

“I probably will be meeting with President Putin,” Trump told reporters as he was leaving the White House for Buenos Aires. “I think it’s a very good time to have the meeting.”

Just an hour later, Trump took to Twitter to declare that he would not meet Putin, allegedly in protest over the Russian coast guard’s seizure of three Ukrainian Navy ships after they entered and refused to leave Russian-claimed waters for 12 hours.

In the hour between the statements, Trump spoke with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and John F. Kelly, the White House chief of staff, who were on the plane, and by telephone with National Security Adviser John Bolton.

Over that hour, another event had transpired. Michael Cohen, Trump’s former personal lawyer pled guilty to lying to Congress and declared that Trump had, in the words of the

New York Times, “negotiated to build a tower in Moscow much later during the 2016 presidential election than previously acknowledged.”

Figures both inside and outside the White House made clear the connection between Trump’s trip and the latest stage in the investigation by Special Counsel Robert Mueller.

Trump lawyer Rudy Giuliani said it “is hardly coincidental” that Mueller “once again” filed charges against Cohen “just as the president is leaving for a meeting with world leaders” at the annual summit. “The special counsel did the very same thing as the president was leaving for a world summit in Helsinki,” Giuliani noted.

A former Pentagon official under Obama drew the same connection. “It’s all about the political optics in light of the Trump Tower Moscow news and the fact that Trump simply can’t bring himself to ever confront Putin in public,” he told the *Times*.

Trump’s last meeting with Putin took place in Helsinki, Finland last summer, just days after Special Counsel Mueller had indicted 12 Russian intelligence officers related to the unproven charges of Russian hacking of the Democratic Party during the 2016 election. Trump’s refusal to “confront” Putin regarding the bogus accusations was declared by most of the American and European media to be the “low point” of his administration.

Since then, Trump has substantially intensified the United States’ bellicose actions against Russia, initiating a major new round of sanctions and announcing last month that the United States would leave the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty.

There can be little doubt that the acceleration of Mueller’s investigation and Ukraine’s triggering of a crisis in the Azov Sea were closely coordinated with sections of the US political establishment seeking a more confrontational posture by Trump against Russia.

Shockingly reckless actions are being proposed in response to the crisis. The Atlantic Council, for example, advised Ukraine to “invite the United States and NATO to send a fleet of armed ships to visit Mariupol, the main city on the Sea of Azov coast and defy Russia to fire on or block NATO from exercising the right to visit Ukraine’s ports. Those ships should be armed and have air cover but be instructed not to fire unless fired upon.”

China

Prior to Ukraine’s provocation, Trump’s central focus was to have been trade negotiations with China. The United States is scheduled to massively expand tariffs on Chinese goods, from the current level of 10 percent to 25 percent, on January 1.

The summit will be the first Trump has attended since US Vice President Mike Pence announced a China policy that the American press has dubbed a “new cold war,” in which

the United States is actively working to block China's development of high-value manufacturing as a strategic and military priority.

The G20 summit has been preceded by a furious anti-Chinese campaign in the American media. The *New York Times* this month published a scaremongering five-part series on the rise of Chinese economic influence, while, on Thursday, the *Washington Post* published a hysterical op-ed declaiming "China's ominous plan to 'penetrate and sway' the United States."

Even as Trump was shooting immigrant children with tear gas and rubber bullets, both newspapers ran editorials denouncing alleged Chinese human rights violations against the Uighur population of Western China.

While sections of the American press have speculated that Trump might pull back from escalating the tariffs, Trump said Monday that the prospect of any accommodations was "highly unlikely."

Europe

Given Trump's past behavior at international summits, further clashes with the United States' NATO allies are entirely possible. Trump is scheduled to meet with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who he will pressure to increase military spending, while threatening the European Union with auto tariffs.

No one can predict the exact contours of the G20 Summit and who Trump will target for military aggression, trade war, threats and intimidation. What is clear, however, is that Trump, while representing a definite faction of the US political establishment, channels the sentiments of the whole spectrum of American politics for an escalation of "great-power competition," whether against Russia, China, Europe or all three.