

A Tale of Two Summits

by Finian Cunningham via dulcimer - Strategic Culture Foundation *Wednesday, Jun 13 2018, 1:14am*
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It's almost a surreal spectacle to see the world order shifting before our very eyes. The sight of the Western G7 summit collapsing in acrimony at the weekend was in stark contrast to a positive, resplendent Shanghai Cooperation Organization conference hosted at the same time in China.

Over the weekend, the tale of two summits illustrated more than ever an historic shift in the global order. The US-led Western order is evidently breaking down, giving way to a new multilateral paradigm led primarily by China and Russia. Potentially, the latter trajectory is one marked by genuine cooperation and peaceful relations, as opposed to the old US-led order marked by hegemony, perpetual war and unipolar ambitions which inevitably foment evermore conflicts.

US President Donald Trump's abrupt and abrasive departure from the G7 summit in Canada spoke volumes. Over the weekend, Trump sparred with the other Western leaders plus Japan's Shinzo Abe over various trade disputes. Then Trump pointedly bailed out early from the gathering in a snub to host Canadian premier Justin Trudeau, bound for Singapore to meet North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un.

The symbolism was expansive. It was as if the American leader was showing disdain for an ineffectual forum, pursuing far more important matters. The rendezvous for Trump and Kim in Singapore also spoke of the Eastern impetus of a new geopolitical energy.

Trump is the first serving American president to ever meet a North Korean leader. Technically, the two countries are still at war from never having signed a peace treaty to end the 1950-53 war. That animus could all change this week if the two leaders strike up a rapport, possibly leading to de-escalation of military forces on the Korean Peninsula.

Kim arrived in Singapore two days before his scheduled historic meeting with Trump on Tuesday. The latter also arrived a day early. Kim's highly unusual overseas trip - reportedly his third-ever as North Korean leader - was on board an Air China 747 courtesy of the Beijing government. Again, the symbolism was resonant. China was pragmatically facilitating this crucial encounter between the two adversaries.

The G7 summit Trump left behind was an embarrassing debacle. The leaders of Britain, Germany, France, Canada as well as European Union senior officials were incensed by the American president's high-handed disdain for multilateral accord. Trump boorishly browbeat the supposed American "allies" with complaints about "unfair" trade tariffs. It's hard to know who is right in the trade dispute. But one thing was clear: the G7 group of Western nations plus Japan - a forum set up some 43 years ago - was in complete disarray from deep disaffection.

Trump's combative stance threw the summit sideways before he even arrived in Quebec when he announced while leaving Washington that Russia should be readmitted to the G7. Russia was expelled from the former G8 back in 2014 over Western claims about Moscow interfering in Ukraine's sovereignty.

The other G7 members, especially Britain's premier Theresa May, were indignant at Trump's offer to Russia. Only Italy's newcomer populist Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte agreed with Trump's position, which is consistent with how the new government in Rome wants to restore European relations with Russia. Another telltale sign of Eastward movement in international politics.

When the American president ambled into the G7 summit to be greeted by Canada's Trudeau the body language was one of reluctance and awkwardness. The weekend descended into spats and insults. Trump even called Trudeau "dishonest" and "weak". Meanwhile, French President Emmanuel Macron showed no fawning bromance as he had previously done towards Trump. Macron even called for a new G6 format without US "hegemony".

The contrast with proceedings at the SCO summit in China could not have been greater. President Xi Jinping warmly greeted Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin as well as the leaders of India, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Iran. The convivial unity of those leaders was in sharp contrast to the disunity and bickering at the G7.

The presence of India and Pakistan as two new members of the SCO seated together after decades of war and conflict was a powerful testimony to the new geopolitical paradigm rising in the East.

The SCO nations vowed to redouble efforts for partnership in economic development and mutual security. President Xi said a new global order beckoned, based on partnership, not hegemony of one power asserting itself over the others, as is the case of the US-led order.

Iran's President Hassan Rouhani expressed gratitude to Xi and Putin for leading the way in building a new global format based on multilateral respect. The Iranian leader thanked China and Russia for their steadfast support of the international nuclear accord, which Trump is trying to undermine by unilaterally withdrawing the US. It remains to be seen if the Europeans will adequately support the nuclear accord; but their ineffectualness in standing up to Trump at the latest G7 summit suggests that they won't have the mettle to deliver on their avowed commitments.

Xi and Putin rightly reminded through public statements during the SCO gathering that the Trump-Kim meeting in Singapore this week is following their earlier endorsements for peaceful dialogue between the US and North Korea. Last year, when Trump and Kim were engaging in fiery rhetorical exchanges threatening nuclear war, it was China and Russia that both admonished peaceful dialogue as the only way forward.

The post-Second World War Western order that prevailed for over seven decades is undoubtedly waning. That order, dominated by the US, was always something of an illusion. Far from mutual partnership and high-browed virtuous claims, the US-led order was always about the dominance of American capitalism and imperialist objectives.

The Europeans were never really allies. They were appendages to American power. Now that American power has ebbed, the inter-Western rivalries are gaining sharper edges. American desire for hegemonic control is limited by its waning power, and so Washington is resorting to more brazen bullying tactics towards its supposed allies who are now realizing their true role as nothing more than vassals.

However, American unipolar "exceptionalism" is anathema in today's world of global interconnectedness and consciousness of the principles of equality and diplomacy.

China and Russia, under the leadership of Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin, are on an evolutionary level

of political awareness that exceeds that of the US and its coterie of Western flunkies.

The SCO summit demonstrated starkly the new global order of partnership for progress and peace. The squabbling, backbiting G7 is the ashes of an old order.

This does not guarantee that world peace will prevail. The vision is surely there and growing thanks to China and Russia and others from the Eastern hemisphere. The crucial challenge is how the dying US-led Western empire of capitalist hegemony and imperialism can be safely transformed into peaceful, multilateral partnership.

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