



COVER STORY

# A SHIFTING PARADIGM

Behind the G20 Summit, major powers regroup By An Gang

Leaders and their spouses pose for a group photo in Hamburg, Germany, on July 7



The author is an op-ed contributor to *Beijing Review* and a researcher at the Pangoal Institution

**T**he annual summit of the Group of 20 (G20) has always been the center of the world's attention ever since it was first held in 2009. The international community anticipates progress from these meetings in terms of cooperation on fostering world economic recovery and global governance.

But growing differences in policies and subtle changes in relations between major powers have influenced the solidarity of the G20—the summit hosted by Germany in Hamburg on July 7-8 hinted as much. The world wonders where a changing G20 will lead it.

## Changing landscape

The U.S. presidential election and Brexit last year caused dramatic political changes in the United States and Western Europe. These changes also had an impact on international relations.

To “make America great again,” U.S. President Donald Trump has taken a series of measures to reduce the United States’ “burden” as global leader. Most noteworthy among those actions was the retreat from some multilateral arrangements such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. Trump is also urging European partners to shoulder more responsibility for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) framework. But this policy shakes the foundation of transatlantic relations.

In late May, during the NATO Summit in Belgium and the following G7 Summit in Italy, Trump did not mend the policy gaps between the United States and the EU on refugees, climate change, trade and defense spending. On the contrary, the contradiction between the two sides became sharper, which made Trump’s first European trip quite awkward. Following Trump’s decision to exit the Paris agreement, German Chancellor Angela Merkel on May 28 said that the time of complete mutual trust has passed and Europeans must master their own destiny. ▶▶



Chinese President Xi Jinping attends the G20 summit in Hamburg, Germany, on July 7



Rex Tillerson said that the two sides would cooperate on the Syria issue. Furthermore, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said the two sides reached consensus on a number of issues including Syria, Ukraine and cybersecurity.

However, Washington-Moscow relations have been plagued by their strategic and geopolitical disputes on Syria, Ukraine and Iran. Moreover, the relationship has become politicized by Democrats and some Republicans—bilateral relations can't be mended by a meeting between the two leaders.

In fact, prior to the meeting with Putin, Trump on July 5 had criticized Russia's interference in Ukraine and its support for Syria and Iran in a speech made during his visit to Warsaw, Poland.

### China's growing role

As Washington becomes more divided, the EU and Russia's relations with China are getting closer. Today, from Western Europe to Russia, many countries are increasingly keen on taking advantage of the development opportunities provided by China's growth. It is only natural for European powers to seek leverage in China to balance the impact of the uncertainties from the other side of the Atlantic Ocean.

Chinese President Xi Jinping paid state visits to Russia and Germany before attending the G20 Summit. During Xi's stay in Moscow, Xi and Putin had a meeting for the third time this year. The two leaders signed a joint statement on further deepening the China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination and another joint statement on the current world situation and major international issues. They also ratified the 2017-20 implementation guidelines for the China-Russia Treaty of Good-Neighborliness, Friendship and Cooperation.

During the visit, China and Russia also reached agreements on trade, agriculture, energy, infrastructure, finance, media and people-to-people exchanges.

On the sidelines of the Hamburg Summit, Xi hosted an informal meeting of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South

Trump also paid a state visit to Poland and France before attending the G20 Summit in an attempt to find European partners aligned with U.S. policies. But that was not an easy task, as far-right political parties have failed to win elections in some EU states. However, Europe remains important in U.S. foreign policy. The strong and long-standing U.S.-EU partnership cannot be changed overnight as a result of policy disputes.

Moreover, Trump failed to achieve progress in improving relations with Russia. He vowed to mend U.S.-Russia ties during the

presidential campaign. Nonetheless, he is hindered by an aggressive media and the Democratic Party, which speculate that the presidential election was manipulated by Russians and accuse Trump and his team of links to Russia.

On July 7, Trump and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin had their first meeting in Hamburg. The meeting lasted over two hours, much longer than scheduled. Both sides commented that the meeting was "constructive" and "practical." The two sides announced a ceasefire agreement for southwest Syria from July 9. U.S. Secretary of State



Chinese President Xi Jinping hosts an informal BRICS leaders' meeting attended by South African President Jacob Zuma, Brazilian President Michel Temer, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Hamburg on July 7

Africa) leaders to prepare for the BRICS Summit to be held in September in south-east China's Xiamen City. At the meeting, the BRICS leaders underlined the importance of an open and inclusive multilateral trade system based on transparent and non-discriminatory rules. The five leaders called on the international community to implement the Paris Agreement and fulfill the commitment to providing developing countries with funds and technology to help them deal with climate change.

During his meeting with Merkel in Berlin, Xi said China is the world's second largest economy and Germany is its fourth, and they are also two stabilizing forces with major influence in Asia and Europe.

Xi proposed that Beijing and Berlin step up coordination and cooperation at the China-EU level as well as within international organizations and multilateral frameworks such as the UN and the G20.

Xi stated that a stronger China-Germany comprehensive strategic partnership serves both sides' fundamental interests and can help promote the development of China-EU relations and add more stability and predict-

ability to the world.

China and Germany have vast potential to cooperate in terms of hi-tech research, manufacturing and third-party markets. In May, during Chinese Premier Li Keqiang's visit to Germany, China and Germany signed more than 20 bilateral cooperation deals and pledged to advance economic globalization, free trade and investment as well as tackle the climate change challenge.

## Coordination

On July 8, Xi and Trump met to discuss bilateral ties and global hotspot issues on the sidelines of the Hamburg Summit.

Xi said to Trump that the two countries have made progress in bilateral cooperation in many fields since their first meeting in Mar-a-Lago, Florida, earlier this year, despite some sensitive issues. Xi urged joint effort to keep bilateral ties on track and coordination in international affairs.

During Xi's trip to the U.S. in April, he and Trump established a close communication mechanism and further developed China-U.S. dialogues. Since their first meeting, the two leaders have talked frequently via a hotline

linking Beijing and Washington.

Stable dialogue and close high-level communication are undoubtedly helpful to promote mutual trust and cooperation between China and the United States.

Over the past months, China and the United States have achieved a number of successful outcomes. The two sides held the first round of their diplomatic and security dialogue in Washington, D.C. on June 21. In addition, China has taken steps to implement the 100-day plan that the two sides reached at the Mar-a-Lago meeting to avert a trade war. China has resumed beef imports from the United States.

However, the two countries have not made substantial progress on the Korean Peninsula issue, on which the Trump administration often pressures China. In late June, the U.S. Government announced a \$1.42-billion arms sale to Taiwan authorities, irritating Beijing and making the cross-straits relationship more strained. Furthermore, U.S. military vessels and airplanes intruded in China's territorial waters and airspace of the Xisha Islands in the South China Sea, stoking tension in the region.

In the next phase, China and the United States must exercise self-restraint and avoid conflicts. Uncertainty remains as Beijing and Washington encounter political obstacles over the Korean Peninsula, trade, Taiwan, and South China Sea issues. Many are wondering about the sustainability of the high-level working relationship between the two leaders.

The United States is trying to build a defense alliance with Japan, Australia and India in the West Pacific Ocean around China, which serves to add tension in the region

and is detrimental to bilateral cooperation. Under such circumstances, China is seeking to expand partnership with other major powers in the region and maintain leeway in dealing with the United States.

The Korean Peninsula nuclear issue will affect Trump's policy on China in the future. He has always argued for a greater role by China, even though it is in effect an issue between Pyongyang and Washington. On July 8, while meeting Xi in Hamburg, Trump said, "as far as North Korea is concerned, we will have, eventually, success. It may take longer than

I'd like. It may take longer than you'd like. But there will be success in the end, one way or the other."

The United States is seeking to reduce its presence in issues of global importance and is increasingly turning inwards. No country or region, neither the United States, the EU, Russia nor China, can deal with global challenges alone. All parties must enhance coordination and collaboration. ■