

# Trump leaves leaders fearing the future as G-20 summit closes

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By [Michael Birnbaum](#) and [Damian Paletta](#) July 8

HAMBURG — President Trump and other world leaders on Saturday emerged from two days of talks unable to resolve key differences on core issues such as climate change and globalization, slapping an exclamation point on a divisive summit that left other nations fearing for the future of global alliances in the Trump era.

The scale of disharmony was remarkable for the annual Group of 20 meeting of world economic powers, a venue better known for sleepy bromides about easy-to-agree-on issues. Even as negotiators made a good-faith effort to bargain toward consensus, European leaders said that a chasm has opened between the United States and the rest of the world.

“Our world has never been so divided,” French President Emmanuel Macron said as the talks broke up. “Centrifugal forces have never been so powerful. Our common goods have never been so threatened.”

The divisions were most bitter on climate change, where 19 leaders formed a unified front against Trump. But even in areas of nominal compromise, such as trade, top European leaders said they have little faith that an agreement forged today could hold tomorrow.

Macron said world leaders found common ground on terrorism but were otherwise split on numerous important topics. He also said there were rising concerns about “authoritarian regimes, and even within the Western world, there are real divisions and uncertainties that didn’t exist just a few short years ago.”

“I will not concede anything in the direction of those who are pushing against multilateralism,” Macron said, without directly referring to Trump. “We need better coordination, more coordination. We need those

organizations that were created out of the Second World War. Otherwise, we will be moving back toward narrow-minded nationalism.”

German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who hosted the summit in the port city of Hamburg, said there had been some areas of agreement. But she did little to hide her disappointment about U.S. actions on climate change.

“Wherever there is no consensus that can be achieved, disagreement has to be made clear,” Merkel said at the end of the summit. “Unfortunately — and I deplore this — the United States of America left the climate agreement.”

“I am gratified to note that the other 19 members of the G-20 feel the Paris agreement is irreversible,” Merkel said.

Perhaps as a way to emphasize global unity — minus the United States — Macron announced there would be another climate summit in Paris in December to mark the two-year anniversary of the climate accord.

On trade, G-20 leaders agreed to try to address what the White House claims is a global steel glut. Trump officials have threatened to restrict steel imports, risking the start of a global trade war, after it has repeatedly alleged that China subsidizes the industry, which helps it lower prices and put U.S. steel jobs at risk.

The promises to draw up policy changes on steel production were a victory, White House officials said.

But with the U.S. decision to impose steel restrictions still up in the air, Merkel said Saturday’s agreements did little to resolve the future.

“The negotiations remain difficult, but we have been able to get satisfactory results in place,” Merkel said. “Now, what’s going to happen tomorrow or the day after, I cannot make any predictions on.”

One official said that Europeans were sharply unsettled by their encounters with Trump — and they recognized that may be the intention of the White House.

“It seems clear that President Trump is committed to being less predictable and not necessarily seeing predictability as positive in foreign policy,” said the European official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to candidly assess the White House.

The summit came after Trump softened his opposition to some other multilateral institutions. After challenging the NATO defense alliance, he endorsed its all-for-one, one-for-all principles just ahead of the G-20 summit. And Trump has agreed to abide by the North American Free Trade Agreement, so long as it can be renegotiated.

White House officials also saw the potential to draw a win from the Hamburg summit, even if their expectations were measured. They hoped to explain Trump's priorities and find compromises, even small ones.

Their assessment of the outcome was sharply different from Merkel and Macron's cautious tone.

"It's been a really great success," a senior White House official who was not authorized to speak on the record said Saturday before Trump departed for the United States. "We are going to get some of the priorities of the administration" out of this summit.

White House officials pointed to several minor changes to the G-20's official statement on trade policy, saying it better reflects the Trump administration's point of view.

"We recognise that the benefits of international trade and investment have not been shared widely enough," the G-20 countries said in a joint statement. "We need to better enable our people to seize the opportunities."

Similar language was not in the G-20 agreement in 2016 before Trump's election.

The White House also won a bitter battle over its desire to include language that promoted U.S. fossil fuels in the final statement — wording that European leaders sharply opposed.

Trump also prodded other countries to intensify a review of the overproduction of steel, something Trump alleges has ravaged the U.S. steel industry because it cannot compete with cheaper prices from countries such as China. In response to the White House push, the G-20 agreed to share information about steel production by August and to publish a formal report with recommendations by November. There probably will not be consequences if the deadlines are missed, but it creates a formal process for the White House to amplify its complaints.

Global steel manufacturing has soared, with China accounting for half the world's production, compared with 15 percent in 2000, although the United States imports relatively little from China. Beijing agreed to the new G-20 steel requirements on Saturday.

Although the shifts may constitute short-term victories for Trump, one former senior official with the International Monetary Fund said Washington may have incurred long-term losses.

"It comes at a cost of eroding U.S. leadership," said Eswar Prasad, a senior professor at Cornell University. "If even in calm times such rifts are exposed, it could make it more complicated for the group to work together in more complicated circumstances."

Trump also had the chance to forge one-on-one relationships with leaders as the summit unfolded around him. It included his first face-to-face meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin, which stretched more than two hours, and also his first post-election meeting with Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto.

Relations between the United States and Mexico have been strained since Trump took office, in part because of the U.S. leader's insistence that Mexico would pay for the creation of a new wall along the U.S. border. When reporters were briefly allowed in the room for their meeting on Friday and he was asked whether he still wanted Mexico to pay for the wall, Trump responded "absolutely."

Peña Nieto did not agree to pay for the construction of the wall during the meeting, and a person briefed on the discussions said Trump did not press the issue during their talks.

There were other signs that Trump enjoyed the visit. At a dinner and reception for world leaders and their spouses Friday night, Trump was among the last to leave. At an event Saturday morning to announce an initiative to fund female entrepreneurship, Trump called Merkel "incredible," Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau "spectacular," and declared that World Bank President Jim Yong Kim "would be a great appointment."

On Twitter, Trump called the summit a "wonderful success" that was "carried out beautifully" by Merkel. He also said he had "an excellent meeting on trade & North Korea" with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Still, Trump did little to celebrate the G-20's outcome. President Barack Obama typically marked the end of global summits with a news conference, weighing in on issues he and other leaders discussed.

And on Saturday, many other world leaders, including Putin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, held lengthy briefings with reporters in Hamburg.

Trump had a different plan. When the summit ended, the president and his aides got in their motorcade, went right to the airport and flew back to the United States.

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