

Who needs G20?

Question gets louder in Osaka

AFP, Osaka

Donald Trump's go-it-alone approach and widening global differences on issues from trade to climate change are overwhelming the G20, analysts say, raising questions about whether the grouping still has a role to play in the world.

The bloc, which expanded out of the original G7 rich-country club, has faced criticism over the years for lacking a charter, a clear mandate, or enforcement power, and holding hugely expensive yet inconclusive summits while excluding most of the developing world.

But while pressure on the bloc previously came from anti-globalisation protesters, this weekend's summit in Osaka showed that the greatest challenges to its legitimacy may come from within.

Trump flew into Osaka after hurling new trade threats at G20 partners China and India.

Japan failed to achieve a top priority of the summit's host, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe: forging a stronger, unanimous commitment to the Paris climate accords -- due to US resistance.

Russia's Vladimir Putin said in the summit run-up that the liberalism long championed by G20 heavyweights Europe and the US was "obsolete".

And the bloc looked powerless on the biggest issue faced in Osaka -- the US-China trade war, which was hashed out in a bilateral meeting on the sidelines.

"The G20 was created as a forum for cooperation and the question may well be: have we reached the point where it can no longer serve that purpose?" said Thomas A Bernes, a fellow with Canada's Center for International Governance Innovation.

The G20's baseline goal is preservation of world economic stability, but Trump has taken a sledgehammer



to that with his "America First" trade war against China, and tariffs imposed on longtime trading partners he now derides as trade cheats.

As with last year's summit in Buenos Aires, the Osaka gathering was essentially hijacked by the trade fight between the world's two biggest economies, consigning the other 18 members to the role of hapless bystanders.

After a meeting yesterday with Chinese President Xi Jinping, Trump declared the two sides would restart trade negotiations broken off weeks ago after the US accused Beijing of backsliding on earlier pledges.

While that will likely calm financial markets for now, deep differences remain and the trade war is expected to simmer on.

And the truce was worked out independent of the G20, overshadowing the summit's closing declaration, essentially a mere summary of the bloc's longtime talking points.

Unfortunately for the G20, said Bernes, there is no substitute for US leadership.

Britain is bogged down in Brexit, and China is yet to prove its global leadership bona fides. German leader Angela Merkel's career is in its twilight, and Osaka's outcomes will likely underline doubts over Japan's effectiveness.



World leaders watch as White House senior advisor Ivanka Trump attends a women's empowerment event during the G20 summit in Osaka, Japan, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

G20 agrees to disagree on tackling climate change

Agrees on tackling ocean plastic pollution by 2050

REUTERS, Osaka

After much wrangling, the Group of 20 major economies yesterday agreed to disagree on fighting climate change, with the United States dissenting from a commitment to carry out the 2015 Paris climate change agreement.

In a communique at the end of a two-day summit in Japan's western city of Osaka, the grouping said "signatories to the Paris Agreement" reaffirmed their commitment to its full implementation, referring to the 19 members aside from the US.

The United States withdrew from the Paris pact because it "disadvantages American workers and taxpayers," the grouping added in a subsequent section, adopting a two-part approach used at last year's summit in Buenos Aires.

Even before the summit started, the differences over climate change became apparent when President Emmanuel Macron said France would not accept a final text that omitted the Paris pact.

G20 officials said the negotiations to secure acceptable language on climate change were contentious. The first chunk

of text reflecting the majority view said members had "common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities" in implementing the pact.

The section on the American stance said the United States employed a "balanced approach to energy and environment" to deliver "affordable, reliable, and secure energy to all its citizens".

The US approach uses "all energy sources and technologies, including clean and advanced fossil fuels and technologies, renewables, and civil nuclear power, while also reducing emissions and promoting economic growth," it added.

The G20 did manage to agree on tackling plastic trash in the ocean. In the statement the grouping said it adopted an "Osaka Blue Ocean Vision" that aims to stamp out additional pollution by marine plastic litter by 2050.

There were no details of how the goal would be met, except that members would adopt "a comprehensive life-cycle approach" by improving waste management and finding innovative solutions while recognising the importance of plastics for society.

TRUMP ON KHASHOGGI MURDER

'No one' blames Prince Salman

AFP, Osaka

US President Donald Trump yesterday said he is "extremely angry" about the murder of a Saudi journalist but that nobody had "pointed a finger" at the Kingdom's leader.

The comments came despite a recent UN expert report that judged it "inconceivable" Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman was unaware of the operation that assassinated Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul.

"I'm extremely angry and unhappy about a thing like that taking place" Trump said, when asked about whether he had raised the murder during talks with Prince Mohammed on the sidelines of the G20 meeting in Japan's Osaka.

But "nobody so far has directly pointed a finger at the future king of Saudi Arabia," Trump added.

"They've taken it very seriously," the US leader insisted, referring to a trial that has been criticised for secrecy and is being conducted largely behind closed doors with even the names of the suspects unknown.

"They've been a terrific ally."

Despite the international uproar over the murder, Trump has maintained friendly ties with the crown prince, and showered him with praise during the meeting yesterday.

"You have done a spectacular job," Trump told the powerful crown prince, referring to him as "a friend of mine".

In a readout provided after the talks, the White House said the pair discussed "the importance of human rights issues", among other subjects, but gave no further details.

'Say hello'

Trump invites Kim to DMZ meeting

AFP, Osaka

US President Donald Trump yesterday invited North Korean leader Kim Jong Un to meet for a historic handshake at the demilitarised zone that divides the Korean peninsula, and said he would have "no problem" stepping over the border.

The invitation issued on Twitter caught observers by surprise. If Kim accepts, it would be the third meeting between the leaders of the two wartime enemies amid efforts to contain North Korea's nuclear ambitions.

The North's official KCNA news agency quoted Vice Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui as saying the offer was "a very interesting suggestion" but that no official request had been received.

Trump lobbied the shock invitation on Twitter from the G20 summit in Osaka, saying: "if Chairman Kim of North Korea sees this, I would meet him at the Border/DMZ just to shake his hand and say Hello(!)!"

He later said he would have "no problem"



stepping into the North with Kim -- in what would be a dramatic gesture re-enacting an extraordinary 2018 scene when the young leader invited South Korean President Moon Jae-in to walk over the Military Demarcation Line that forms the border between the Koreas.

Choe said if a meeting took place it would be "another meaningful occasion in further deepening the personal ties between the two leaders".

The North's speedy response to Trump's offer, and from such a senior figure, was seen by analysts as an indication that Kim would agree to the meeting as soon as Washington followed up with an official proposal.



Sea-Watch captain arrested after entering Italy port

The Sea-Watch 3 ship carrying dozens of rescued migrants forced its way into the Italian port of Lampedusa after a lengthy standoff and its captain has been arrested, the charity running the boat said yesterday. Sea-Watch spokesman Ruben Neugebauer told AFP German captain Carola Rackete, 31, had been arrested after manoeuvring the ship into port without permission on Friday night. Rackete -- a hero to some but a "pain in the neck" to Italy's far-right Interior Minister Matteo Salvini -- was detained for refusing to obey a military vessel, a crime punishable by between three and 10 years in jail. The 40 migrants still on board were eventually allowed to disembark early yesterday and taken to the island's reception centre, some smiling, others in tears.

US, Russia to start talks on nuke arms control

Foreign ministers from the United States and Russia will begin talks over nuclear arms control but it may not lead to an extension of the START3 nuclear disarmament treaty, President Vladimir Putin said yesterday. Putin did not say when talks would begin. START3 refers to a proposed agreement between the two nuclear powers for which negotiations broke down years ago. Intended as a successor to previous agreements, it would have required them to lower their numbers of deployed nuclear weapons. The two countries are currently covered by the New START treaty signed in 2010, which caps the number of nuclear warheads well below Cold War limits. But it expires in 2021 amid stalled talks.

Haftar vows attacks on Turkish assets in Libya

Strongman Khalifa Haftar has threatened to attack Turkish interests in Libya after suffering a serious setback in his push to take the capital Tripoli, accusing Ankara of backing his rivals. Anti-Haftar forces supporting Libya's internationally recognised government announced Wednesday they had retaken the strategic town of Gharyan in a surprise attack, seizing the main supply base for Haftar's months-long offensive. Dozens of pro-Haftar fighters were killed in the clashes some 100 kilometres south of the capital and at least 18 were taken prisoner by the GNA, a spokesman for the Tripoli-based government said. In retaliation, Haftar ordered his self-styled Libyan National Army to target Turkish ships and companies, ban flights and arrest Turkish nationals in the country, his spokesman said.

SOURCE: AFP

'Chernobyl on ice' to set sail for Arctic

CNN ONLINE

Next month, a floating nuclear power plant called the Akademik Lomonosov will be towed via the Northern Sea Route to its final destination in the Far East, after almost two decades in construction.

It's part of Russia's ambition to bring electric power to a mineral-rich region. The 144-meter long platform painted in the colors of the Russian flag is going to float next to a small Arctic port town of Pevek, some 4,000 miles away from Moscow. It will supply electricity to settlements and companies extracting hydrocarbons and precious stones in the Chukotka region.

A larger agenda is at work too: aiding President Vladimir Putin's ambitious Arctic expansion plans, which have raised geopolitical concerns in the United States.

The Admiral Lomonosov will be the northernmost operating nuclear plant in the world, and it's key to plans to develop the region economically. About 2 million Russians reside near the Arctic coast in villages and towns similar to Pevek, settlements that



are often reachable only by plane or ship, if the weather permits. But they generate as much as 20% of country's GDP and are key for Russian plans to tap into the hidden Arctic riches of oil and gas as Siberian reserves diminish.

But the concept of a nuclear reactor stationed in the Arctic Sea has drawn criticism from environmentalists. The Lomonosov platform was dubbed "Chernobyl on Ice" or "floating Chernobyl" by Greenpeace even before the public's revived interest in the 1986 catastrophe thanks in large part to the HBO TV series of the same name.

Russia has been fighting against this nickname, saying such criticism is ill founded.

Russia's civilian nuclear industry also faced public questions following the Chernobyl catastrophe. Construction of dozens of nuclear plants stopped, affecting not only massive Chernobyl-scale projects but also slowing down the use of low-power reactors like the one in what would become the floating station (The Chernobyl plant produced up to 4,000 megawatts. Lomonosov has two reactors producing 35 megawatts each).

US sends F-22 stealth fighters to Qatar

AFP, Washington

The US has deployed F-22 stealth fighters to Qatar for the first time, its military said Friday, adding to a buildup of US forces in the Gulf amid tensions with Iran.

The Air Force F-22 Raptor stealth fighters have been deployed "to defend American forces and interests," the US Air Forces Central Military Command said in a statement that did not specify how many of the hi-tech planes had been sent.

A photo handout showed five of the jets flying above the Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar.

Tehran and Washington have been locked in an escalating standoff since US President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew from a multi-party 2015 nuclear deal with Iran and reimposed sanctions on the Islamic republic.

Tensions spiked last week when Iran shot down a US drone over sensitive Gulf waters following a series of tanker attacks that Washington blamed on Tehran, which has denied involvement.

Since then the arch-foes have been locked in a war of words.

In May, the US Air Force deployed several nuclear-capable B-52 Stratofortress bombers to the Gulf in response to what the Defense Department described as a possible plan by Iran to attack American forces in the region, as well as an aircraft carrier task force.



TENSIONS WITH IRAN

Wildfires, power cuts plague Europe amid record heatwave

REUTERS, Paris/Madrid

Hundreds of firefighters battled yesterday to contain wildfires in southern France as a stifling heatwave brought record-breaking temperatures to parts of Europe, killing at least three people in Italy.

In the Gard region, where France's highest temperature on record was registered on Friday at 45.9 degrees Celsius (114 degrees Fahrenheit), scores of fires burned some 600 hectares (about 1,500 acres) of land and destroyed several houses and vehicles, emergency services said.

More than 700 firefighters and 10 aircraft were mobilised to tackle the fires in the Gard, some of which caused sections of motorways to be temporarily closed. Several firefighters were hurt but no serious injuries were reported.

The extreme heat was expected to ease on Saturday in southern France but highs

were still forecast at close to 40 degrees.

The World Meteorological Organization said this week that 2019 was on track to be among the world's hottest years, and 2015-2019 would then be the hottest five-year period on record.

It said the European heatwave was "absolutely consistent" with extremes linked to the impact of greenhouse gas emissions.

Britain was predicted to see its hottest day of the year so far yesterday, with temperatures expected to reach up to 35 degrees, according to the Met Office.

For a fourth consecutive day, unusually high temperatures above 43 degrees were forecast on Saturday across Spain.

Forty of the Spain's 50 regions have been placed under weather alert, with seven of them considered to be at extreme risk, the national meteorological agency said.



NEWSIN brief

15 killed in western India wall collapse

AFP, New Delhi

At least 15 people, including four children, were killed when a wall collapsed on shacks outside an apartment complex in western India, police said yesterday. Most of those who died were sleeping when the 3 metre (10-foot) high brick wall came crashing down on several tin cabins built for a group of labourers who had work at a nearby construction site, according to police.

US slaps sanctions on son of Maduro

AFP, Washington

The United States on Friday imposed sanctions on the son of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro for serving in his father's "illegitimate regime." The action freezes any assets Nicolas Ernesto Maduro Guerra has in the United States and bars American individuals or institutions from doing business with the 29-year-old. The latest US action comes as Maduro moves to consolidate his hold on power after what Caracas called a failed US-supported coup attempt by opposition leader Juan Guaido.

IS-claimed bombing kills 5 in Philippines

AFP, Indonesian

Five people including three soldiers were killed on Friday in a bombing targeting an elite army unit in the Philippines's restive south, which the Islamic State claimed was a suicide attack, authorities and experts said. The military said the kidnap-for-ransom group and IS-affiliate Abu Sayyaf was likely behind the midday blast on the island of Jolo, which also left nine other soldiers wounded.