

Rocking the G7: Trump Stomps His Allies

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Region: [USA](#)

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Disruption, disturbance, eruption, the words crowning the presidency of Donald J. Trump, who has effectively demonstrated an idea made famous by Nazi doodler of law and political theorist Carl Schmitt: politics is defined, not by identifying with friends in cosy harmony but with enemies in constant tension.

There are many ways that Trump might be seen as a creature of Schmittian reaction. Alliances may well be lauded as good (the diplomat's clichés of "eternal friendship", "special bonds" and the treachery covering that comes with it), but then again, potential adversaries can also be considered in accommodating fashion. In every enduring friendship between states is a potential enemy in wait, a dormant instinct that, given certain circumstances, might awake. In every alliance, a potential shift might undermine, if not threaten the national interest.

In short, the current US president likes the bruising, the bullying and the cajoling in the abstract name of US self-interest. Forget the distinctions and the similarities. There are no values in any shared sense. There is only his road.

The press conference concluding the summit with Kim Jong-un on Sentosa Island provided the platform for Trump to round on his supposed allies even as he praised Little Rocket Man as his newly made friend, Chairman Kim, no less. The spectacle was terrifying for groupies of the US empire, those who have praised the virtues of alliances and bonds with Washington as necessary for the Pax Americana. Before them, the spectacle of US hegemony was being challenged with a brazen confidence. The Chairman seemed to be getting what he wanted, even if it all seemed a touch vague.

As the Kim-Trump show unfolded, the rubble at the G7 seemed to be growing, a sentiment captured by the satirical [Borowitz Report](#) in *The New Yorker*. The meeting preceding the gathering in Singapore had put many a nose out of joint. After leaving the Quebec summit, Trump got his fingers busy by tweeting that he had asked US representatives not to endorse the customary joint communiqué from the G7 leaders calling for "free, fair, and mutually beneficial trade" over the devil of protectionism.

The [cooling towards](#) Canada's Justin Trudeau was a case in point, mixed with the usual air of berating condescension and sulkiness. Much of it had arisen because of a disagreement on whether a sunset clause would find its way into any renegotiated trade agreement between Mexico, Canada and the United States. Trump's own version of reality was that negotiators were "pretty close on the sunset provision". Trudeau differed on such a reading, wanting nothing of the sort. The bad blood was taking time to dry.

"Based on Justin's false statements at his news conference, and the fact that Canada is charging massive Tariffs to our US farmers, workers and companies,

I have instructed our US reps not to endorse the Communique as we look at tariffs on automobiles flooding the US market!"

In Singapore itself, Trump wished to add some flesh to the remarks, getting a few jocular asides in.

"When I got onto the plane," considered Trump, "I think that Justin probably didn't know that Air Force One has about 20 televisions, and I see the television. And he's giving a news conference about how he will not be pushed around by the United States. And I say, push him around? We just shook hands. It was very friendly."

Then came that picture, poured over by aroused pundits and eager commentators, showing Trump sitting down like a bemused, bright coloured Buddha, seemingly defiant, with Germany's Angela Merkel leaning across with grave school teacher disapproval.

"In fact," he explained, "the picture with Angela Merkel, who I get along with very well, where I'm sitting there like this, that picture was we're waiting for the document because I wanted to see the final document as changed by the changes that I requested."

For Trump, the visuals are nigh everything, and this titillates the pundits he lures like starving waifs to a banquet. Academics are also getting on board, being brought into Trumpland's sordid undergrowth.

"Critics of President Trump say this is President Trump isolated," suggested [Dan Nexon](#) of Georgetown University on the G7 snap, "so it feeds into the pre-existing narrative."

But then came the other side, those supporters who considered the show "a sign of American strength, status and position in the dominance hierarchy."

Others have also fallen for tissue-like substance and liberal readings, suggesting that Trump is seducing those who should know better.

"The symbolic meaning of a 13-second handshake in the visual form is the establishment of a physical and therefore a personal bond between the two leaders," came the distinctly [unscientific observation](#) of political science professor Bruce Miroff.

The G7 meeting did the opposite of the Sentosa Island summit, suggesting a spectacle "of alienation, opposition and even international condemnation of Trump."

Any amount of time might be spent on such performances, but Trump, for all the displays, remains heartily consistent in what superficially seems to be jolting anarchy. On the issue of mistrusting, badgering, even punishing allies economically, he has remained true to his word, carrying through attitudes nursed since the 1980s.

"I'd throw a tax on every Mercedes-Benz rolling into this country," he claimed in his 1990 [Playboy](#) interview should he ever become President, "and on all Japanese products, and we'd have wonderful allies again."

And, prophetically, he promised a Schmitt-inspired attitude: don't "trust our allies" and "perfect" that "huge military arsenal".

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