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G-7 Summit Off to Rocky Start as U.S. Officials Assail France

French president is accused of ignoring Washington's input and focusing event on 'niche' issues

From left, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, French President Emmanuel Macron, Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte and European Council President Donald Tusk. CHRISTIAN HARTMANN/REUTERS

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By [Rebecca Ballhaus](#), [Noemie Bisserbe](#) and [Stacy Meichtry](#)

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BIARRITZ, France—The Group of Seven summit got off to a turbulent start Saturday as U.S. officials privately criticized President Emmanuel Macron for his handling of the meeting after the French leader invited President Trump to

Hours after Mr. Trump arrived in France, U.S. officials privately accused Mr. Macron of ignoring Washington's input ahead of the event and of focusing its agenda on "niche" issues, such as climate change and development in Africa, to appeal to the French president's political base.

Climate change was a major focus of last year's G-7, too, and other world leaders said the issue was a priority ahead of this year's summit, particularly as [fires raging in the Amazon](#) have prompted concerns about damage to the region's ecosystem and the global environment.

The flurry of criticism came after Mr. Macron intercepted Mr. Trump moments after his arrival in Biarritz, inviting him to a tête-à-tête lunch without any of their aides at the table. The two hadn't been scheduled to meet one-on-one.

Mr. Macron used the lunch to explain his position on contentious issues, such as global trade tensions, [France's tax digital services](#) and his push to de-escalate tensions between the U.S. and Iran, according to a senior French official. Mr. Macron also pressed Mr. Trump to help preserve and manage the Amazon rain forest, the official said. Mr. Trump has said the U.S. is ready to assist.

The leaders also discussed the European Union's "unfair trade tactics," according to a U.S. official, who added that the U.S. president raised France's "discriminatory" tax on U.S. tech companies.

Mr. Macron has taken an untraditional approach to this year's G-7 by forgoing months of negotiation over the statement the club of nations usually issues at the end of the summit, and opening up the sessions to more informal debates. Mr. Macron decided to ditch such conventions after last year's G-7 when Mr. Trump directed his representatives not to sign the communiqué after he had departed the summit.

On Saturday, U.S. officials accused the French of privately blaming the White House in conversations with other countries for not wanting to reach a consensus ahead of the summit—a notion U.S. officials rejected. The U.S. does, however, support not issuing a joint communiqué this year, saying such statements have become a "catchall," officials said.

A close aide to Mr. Macron denied that French officials had blamed the U.S. for the lack of consensus. France never intended to antagonize the U.S. and the

brought to a small table bedecked with a white tablecloth, pink roses and two chairs. TV cameras also awaited.

"We actually have a lot in common. We've been friends for a long time. Every now and then we go at it a little bit, not too much," Mr. Trump said before the media was whisked out of the area.



President Trump has lunch with French President Emmanuel Macron, on the first day of the G-7 summit at the Hotel du Palais in Biarritz. PHOTO: LUDOVIC MARIN/POOL/SHUTTERSTOCK

The previous evening, as he departed for France, Mr. Trump threatened that if Mr. Macron moved forward with a tax on U.S. tech companies, "we'll be taxing their wine, or doing something else."

U.S. and French officials also clashed Saturday over whose idea it was to hold a session on Sunday focused on the global economy. U.S. officials said that the session wasn't on the draft agenda the White House received in early July and that it subsequently enlisted Germany and Japan to jointly request such a meeting. They added they were surprised by the absence of such a session given that the economy has typically been a focus for the summit.

A copy of a draft agenda in June viewed by The Wall Street Journal included a session on the global economy and trade on Sunday morning. European officials disputed that it was added at the U.S.'s request.

succeed in having a de-escalation and avoid this commercial war that is spreading everywhere.”

German Chancellor Angela Merkel before traveling to Biarritz also called for joint problem solving. “Talking with each other is certainly better than talking about each other, and the G-7 is an excellent opportunity for that,” Ms. Merkel said in a video message published on Saturday.

European Council President Donald Tusk earlier Saturday criticized Mr. Trump for using “tariffs and taxation as a political instrument” that risks destabilizing the global economy and criticized the president’s call for Russia to rejoin the G-7, saying Ukraine should be invited to join instead. But Mr. Tusk also warned against focusing on “senseless disputes among each other.”

“The last years have shown that it is increasingly difficult for all of us to find common language when the world needs our cooperation more, not less,” he said in a news conference.

Tensions aren’t expected to abate in the remaining two days of the summit, which in recent years has become an annual tug of war between leaders trying to preserve decades of international cooperation and ones like Mr. Trump, who wants to use the forum to push his nationalist agenda.

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Beyond the U.S. and France, the G-7 includes Japan, Germany, Italy, the U.K. and Canada.

The Sunday morning session on the economy is expected to be particularly combative. There, Mr. Trump is expected to tout his economic policies to a group of leaders that have largely rebuked his approach, while contrasting his efforts with those of fellow G-7 members.

Mr. Trump arrived in France after a turbulent week in Washington, where the trade war with China sent stocks and government bonds tumbling amid new concerns about global growth and the potential for a recession.

cut if he were re-elected next fall. He promised the same thing ahead of the 2018 elections; no such tax cut has materialized in the nine months since.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who is making his G-7 debut, Saturday warned that rising trade barriers risk hampering global growth. He also sought to play down fears that Britain's departure from the European Union would lessen the U.K.'s clout on the global stage. Mr. Johnson is expected to use the G-7 as a platform to burnish Britain's close relationship with the U.S., as his administration hopes to sign a trade deal soon after Brexit.

On Friday, France threatened Brazil with pulling out of the trade deal between the European Union and the Mercosur group of South American nations, accusing Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro of lying about his country's efforts to protect the environment.

The trade deal between the EU and Mercosur would create a bloc of 780 million people representing a quarter of the world's economy. The accord still requires the approval of member states and the EU's legislature, a difficult undertaking if powerful EU countries such as France are opposed.

About 370 square miles of Amazonian forest, equivalent to the size of Indianapolis, were lost in June, an 88% increase from the same month a year earlier, according to preliminary data from Brazil's Space Agency, Inpe, which is in charge of monitoring deforestation.

Forest fires, most set intentionally to clear land, have also ravaged the Amazon over recent weeks, blanketing Brazilian cities in thick smog. While forest fires are common in Brazil during the drier months in the middle of the year, environmentalists say Mr. Bolsonaro's efforts to reduce enforcement action against deforestation have encouraged land grabbers to slash and burn the forest.

Ms. Merkel said one of the goals of the meeting is to make sure everything is done to stop the rain forest from burning. "Emmanuel Macron is right: Our house is burning and we mustn't remain silent about it," she said.

—Valentina Pop, Max Colchester in Biarritz, France, and Ruth Bender in Berlin contributed to this article.

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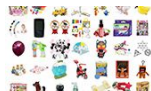


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