

# Russia Says Summit With Trump a Victory for Putin



U.S. President Donald Trump and Russia's President Vladimir Putin shake hands during a joint news conference after their meeting in Helsinki, Finland, July 16, 2018.

MOSCOW (Reuters) -- Russia's political and media establishment heralded talks between the Russian and U.S. leaders in Helsinki as a victory for Vladimir Putin in breaking down Western resolve to treat Russia as a pariah.

"The West's attempts to isolate Russia failed," read the headline on a report on Monday's summit meeting in state-run newspaper Rossiiskaya Gazeta.

The praise from Russia's elite for Putin's performance at the summit contrasted sharply with the reaction in Washington where U.S. President Donald Trump's own Republican party accused him of failing to stand up to Putin.

In Moscow, there was a recognition that the summit did not produce any breakthroughs on issues such as Syria, Ukraine or arms control. The Kremlin, in the run-up to the summit, had played down expectations of major progress.

Instead, the focus was on the symbolism of the leader of the world's biggest superpower sitting down one-on-one with Putin after four years of international isolation triggered by Russia's 2014 annexation of Ukraine's Crimea region.

"It's funny to recall the nonsense from Obama et al about Russia being a weak 'regional power,'" Alexey Pushkov, a member of the upper house of the Russian parliament,

referring to former U.S. President Barack Obama.

"The attention of the whole world is focused today on Helsinki and it's crystal clear to everyone: the fate of the world is being decided between Russia and the United States, the leaders of the two major powers of our planet are meeting," Pushkov said in a Twitter post on Monday.

Asked by reporters in Helsinki how the talks had gone, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said: "Magnificent... Better than super."

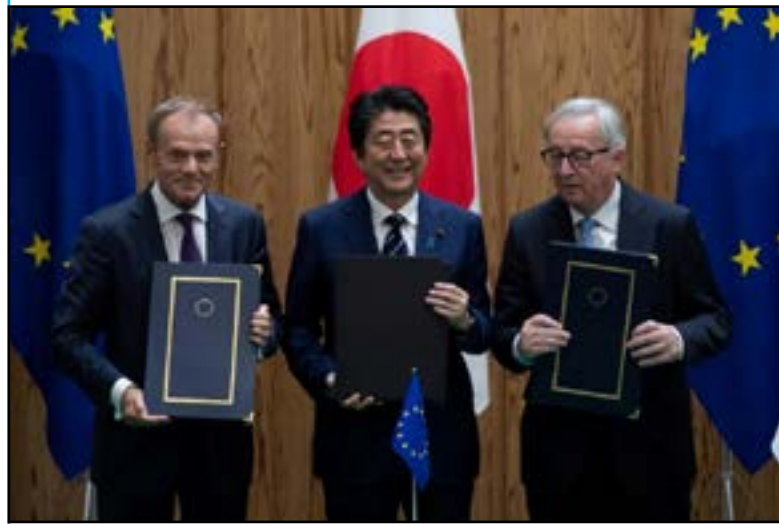
The opportunity for Putin to present himself as an equal to the U.S. president was a major objective for the Kremlin as it prepared for people close to the Russian foreign policy establishment.

Putin has based a large part of his domestic appeal - both to ordinary people and the elites - on a narrative about restoring the international heft that Russia lost when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991.

A post-summit news conference in Helsinki with Trump and Putin was "everything the Kremlin realistically could have hoped for," said Mark Galeotti, a Russia scholar at the Institute of International Relations Prague.

"Putin gets to look like the urbane grown-up, and presents Russia as peer power to USA," Galeotti wrote on Twitter.

## EU, Japan Sign Massive Free Trade Deal



Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe poses after signing a contract with European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and European Council President Donald Tusk at the Japanese Prime Minister's office in Tokyo, Japan, July 17, 2018.

TOKYO (AFP/Reuters) -- The EU and Japan signed a sweeping free trade deal Tuesday that officials called a "clear message" against protectionism, as Washington imposes controversial tariffs and threatens a trade war.

The deal signed in Tokyo by the EU's top officials and Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is the biggest ever negotiated by the EU and creates a free trade zone covering nearly a third of the world's GDP.

"We are sending a clear message that we stand together against protectionism," EU Council President Donald Tusk said.

"Together we are making -- by signing this agreement -- a statement about free and fair trade, we are showing that we are stronger and better off when we work together," added Commission head Jean-Claude Juncker.

The huge deal was signed as President Donald Trump unsettles allies and provokes rivals with his aggressive "America First" trade policy.

Both the EU and Japan have been hit with new U.S. tariffs despite their longstanding alliances with Washington.

Juncker said the deal sent a message

that "trade is about more than tariffs and barriers, it is about values".

"There is no protection in protectionism," he said.

Abe, standing alongside the two EU officials, said the agreement "shows the world the unshaken political will of Japan and the EU to lead the world as the champions of free trade at a time when protectionism has spread".

The ambitious trade pact, which creates the world's largest open economic area, comes amid fears that a trade war between the United States and China will diminish the role of free trade in the global economic order.

The United States this month imposed 25% tariffs on \$34 billion of Chinese goods to lower the U.S. trade deficit, and China quickly retaliated with an increase in tariffs on U.S. goods.

The Japan-EU trade deal is also a sign of shifting global ties as Trump distances the United States from long-time allies like the EU, NATO and Canada.

A China-EU summit ended on Monday with a communique affirming the commitment of both sides to the multilateral trading system.

Trump pulled the United States out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership with Japan and 10 other states on his first day in office in January 2017 and has pushed to renegotiate a free trade pact with Canada and Mexico.

## Sharif Party Candidate Escapes Assassination Attempt

ISLAMABAD (AP) -- A candidate running for a seat in Pakistan's parliament from former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's political party escaped an assassination attempt in eastern Punjab province, police said Tuesday.

Local police official Muhammad Afzal said that Sheikh Aftab Ahmed, who served as a minister in Sharif's former government, came under attack late Monday in Attock district while returning from a rally. He said Ahmed was safe.

The incident is the latest election-related violence in Pakistan after Friday's carnage that saw an election

candidate and 152 others killed in all, in bombings in the country's southwest and northwest.

Ahmed is from Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League party. Sharif was arrested on Friday upon returning from London to face a 10-year prison sentence for corruption.

Also Tuesday, the counter-terrorism police in Punjab province arrested four suspected militants from the Pakistani Taliban, or Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, and the Lashker-e-Jhangvi group near the central city of Multan.

Mustafa Kamal, a spokesman for counter-terrorism police, said

explosives and weapons were found in the suspects' possession. The four had planned to carry out attacks on political rallies and security forces, he said.

Meanwhile, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari - the son of slain former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and former President Asif Zardari - held a string of rallies Tuesday, including in Islamabad suburbs, the nearby town of Gujar Khan and elsewhere.

The young Zardari is trying to revive support for his Pakistan People's Party, which once had a strong following in Punjab, the country's largest province.

## Former Prime Minister Blair: Brexit 'a Total Mess'



Anti-Brexit campaigners in London

LONDON (AFP) -- "It's a total and complete mess." Former prime minister Tony Blair does not hold back when asked in an interview with AFP what he makes of the British government's approach to Brexit.

Blair, who held the office for 10 years, said he sympathizes with Prime Minister Theresa May as she seeks to unite her party behind a plan for leaving the European Union, suggesting she has "the least enviable job in Western politics".

But the former Labor leader warned that with the scheduled date for Brexit approaching in March next year, it is time for her to admit "there's no way out" and call another referendum -- with the option of staying in the EU.

"Once this thing has been started by a referendum it can frankly only be finished by a fresh vote," he said.

Blair left office in 2007 and spent many of the following years abroad, including as an international envoy to the Middle East.

But these days he is more often found in London, where he has plunged back into British politics.

"I'm passionately opposed to Brexit and I still believe it can be changed," the 65-year-old told AFP in the offices of his non-profit organization, the Institute for Global Change.

After two years of wrangling with her Conservative party, May finally presented her

plan this month for economic ties with the EU after Brexit, sparking outrage among hardliners in the party for giving too much away to the EU.

Blair himself said it was a "mush", an "incomplete half-in-half-out" plan that pleased no one -- and was unlikely to be accepted by Brussels.

He noted the inherent dilemma in Brexit -- stay close to the EU to protect trade but forfeit the opportunities of going it alone, or cut ties altogether and risk damage to the economy.

With parliament "paralyzed" on the way forward, "the only way in the end this is going to be resolved is putting it back to the people", he said.

Blair's interventions on Brexit have not always been well received in Britain, where his decision to join the United States in invading Iraq in 2003 remains hugely controversial.

But while the prime minister who called the Brexit vote in 2016, David Cameron, has retired from the public eye to write his memoirs, Blair refuses to stay silent.

Some have suggested Blair had a role in Brexit by failing to limit migration from new EU member states from central and eastern Europe when they joined in 2004, leading to a huge influx of workers that sparked public alarm.

## Kim Blasts Officials Over Unfinished Projects



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un (left) inspecting the construction site of an electrical power plant at the Orang river in the North Hamgyong Province of North Korea.

SEOUL, South Korea (Dispatches) -- North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has blasted local officials over a delayed construction project, state media reported Tuesday, his second such rebuke over the economy in recent weeks.

It's unusual for state media to carry dispatches showing Kim's criticism of officials. Some experts say Kim possibly wants to launch new economic policies.

The latest fury, as Kim negotiates with the United States over abandoning his nuclear weapons programs, came during a visit to the power plant's construction site in the northeast. After officials briefed him about the project and its delays, he was "speechless" and "extremely enraged," the Korean Central News Agency reported.

The plan originally was ordered in the early 1980s by Kim's late grandfather, North Korean founder Kim Il Sung.

"Kim pointed out that the cabinet has specified the project as a target project that should be accelerated," the KCNA report said. "He criticized the officials of the province and county for having not sent a letter to him about the situation."

Earlier this month, during visits to two textile factories, Kim also lambasted officials for poor building maintenance, failing to modernize production lines, a lack of

expertise and other problems.

"Kim is probably hinting at changing his policy after confirming North Korea's economy has lots of problems during his inspection tours," said Koh Yu-hwan, a professor at Seoul's Dongguk University. "He has vowed his people won't tighten their belts again so he also may be passing the buck to officials after accusing them of being negligent."

Since taking power when his dictator father Kim Jong Il died in late 2011, Kim, 34, has promised to boost living standards and sought to project an image of youth and modernity while pushing hard to build up North Korea's nuclear capabilities.

Under his rule, the North's economy has gradually improved with the expansion of outdoor markets. But it is still one of the poorest countries in the world, and tough UN sanctions imposed after its nuclear and missile tests last year could take a huge economic toll if they continue, foreign experts say.

After entering disarmament talks with the United States earlier this year, Kim met in June with President Donald Trump and agreed to commit to "complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula." But there has been no major progress in the North's disarmament.



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) -- President Donald Trump on Tuesday took personal credit for the strength of NATO, an organization he has frequently criticized, and cast his recent meeting with ally countries in a positive light. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization is better-funded "only because of me," said Trump in a tweet. "I had a great meeting with NATO," he said in the same tweet. "NATO was weak, but now it is strong again (bad for Russia). The media only says I was rude to leaders, never mentions the money!"

LONDON (AP) -- Millions of people in northern England are facing a ban on using garden hoses or sprinklers amid one of the longest spells of hot, dry weather in years. The United Utilities water company said the temporary ban, which affects seven million domestic customers in northwestern England, will help "safeguard essential water supplies for longer." It said Tuesday that despite recent rains, reservoir levels are still lower than average and hot, dry weather is expected to continue for the rest of the month. The ban, which takes effect on August 5, restricts the private use of hoses or sprinklers for watering gardens and washing cars. Earlier this month Irish authorities imposed a similar garden hose ban in the Dublin area amid a rare drought.

ABUJA (AFP) -- Flooding caused by torrential rains on Nigeria's border with Niger has left 49 people dead and another 20 missing, the emergency services said on Tuesday. Five villages in Jibia district were affected after a river burst its banks following hours of heavy rains overnight Sunday, Aminu Waziri, the head of the Katsina state emergency management agency, told AFP. "We have recovered 49 dead bodies from the five villages and we are still searching for 20 others," he added. Twenty-four of the victims were washed away by to Mada Rumfa and Kantumi villages in neighboring Niger. "Some of the victims were pulled from the rubble of their collapsed homes," said Waziri. More than 2000 people displaced by the flooding were sheltering in primary schools in Jibia, while 27 injured had been taken to hospital. Flooding is common in many parts of Nigeria during the rainy season which runs from May to September. In 2012, Nigeria suffered disastrous floods across 30 of its 36 states, in which hundreds of people died and about two million were left homeless.

NEW YORK (AP) -- It's getting more crowded around Jupiter. A team of astronomers is reporting the discovery of a dozen new moons circling the giant gas planet. That brings the number of moons at Jupiter to 79, the most of any planet. Saturn is next with 61. The astronomers were looking for objects on the fringes of the solar system when they spotted the Jupiter moons. They found a dozen small moons. The confirmation of 10 was announced Tuesday; two were confirmed earlier. They're calling one moon an "oddball" because of its unusual orbit. The scientists say the moons weren't seen before because they are tiny - the biggest ones only about two miles across. Telescopes in Chile, Hawaii and Arizona were used for the discovery and confirmation.

BRUSSELS (AFP) -- The EU is set to fine U.S. internet giant Google several billion euros this week for freezing out rivals of its Android mobile phone system, sources said, in a ruling that risks fresh tensions with Washington. Competition Commissioner Margrethe Vestager is expected to say on Wednesday that Google abused its dominant position in the market by making tie-ups with phone makers like South Korea's Samsung and China's Huawei. The long-awaited decision comes as fears of a transatlantic trade war mount due to President Donald Trump's shock decision to impose tariffs on European steel and aluminum exports. Two European sources told AFP the fine would be "several billion euros" without giving further details. EU rules say Google could be fined up to 10 percent of parent company Alphabet's annual revenue, which hit \$110.9 billion in 2017.

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AFP) -- The International Criminal Court Tuesday marked its 20th anniversary Tuesday urging all nations to help its "vital work" seeking justice for war crimes victims, despite its controversial acquittal of a former Congolese militia chief. "Two decades after the Rome conference, the system of international justice created by the Rome Statute continues to make waves towards building a culture of accountability," insisted chief prosecutor Fatou Bensouda. Even though the tribunal, based in The Hague, faced many challenges "its work is increasingly shaping norms, casting a deterrent shadow across the globe," she said. The tribunal's guiding Rome Statute was agreed in July 1998, and it opened its doors in 2002 as a court of last resort, to prosecute those behind the world's worst atrocities in places where national authorities could not or would not step in.