

Welcome to the G-20 From Hell

World leaders wrestle with a maelstrom of complex, burning issues as they prepare for November 30 summit

By [Pepe Escobar](#)

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The G-20 in Buenos Aires on November 30 could set the world on fire - perhaps literally. Let's start with the US-China trade war. Washington won't even start discussing trade with China at the G-20 unless Beijing comes up with a quite detailed list of potential concessions.

The word from Chinese negotiators is not at all bleak. Some sort of agreement could be reached on about a third of US demands. Debate on another third could ensue. But the last third is absolutely off-limits - due to Chinese national security imperatives, such as refusing to allow the opening of the domestic cloud computing market to foreign competition.

Beijing has appointed Vice-Premier Liu He and Vice-President Wang Qishan to supervise all negotiations with Washington. They face an uphill task: to pierce through President Donald Trump's limited attention span.

On top of it, Beijing demands a "point person" with the authority to negotiate on behalf of Trump - considering the mixed-message traffic jam out of Washington.

Now compare this with the [message](#) coming from the research institute fabulously named Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era under the Party School of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC): the US has started the "trade friction" essentially "to hinder China's industrial upgrading."

That's the consensus at the top.

And the clash is bound to get worse. [Vice President Mike Pence accused China](#) of "meddling in American democracy," "debt diplomacy," "currency manipulation," and "IP theft." The Foreign Ministry in Beijing dismissed it all as "[ridiculous](#)."

It's enlightening to pay close attention to what Foreign Minister Wang Yi [told](#) the Council on Foreign Relations - as diplomatically as possible: "China will follow a path of development different from historical powers." And China will not seek hegemony.

From the point of view of the US National Security Strategy, that's irrelevant; China has been framed as a fierce competitor and even a threat. President Xi Jinping will not cave in to Washington's trade demands. So expect a possible non-meeting between Xi and Trump in Buenos Aires.

The threat of a nuclear first strike

Things look even hairier on the Russian front. For all of Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's Taoist patience, Moscow's diplomatic circles are exasperated by serious American threats – as in the US Navy possibly enforcing a [blockade](#) to restrict Russia's energy trade. Or worse: the [ultimatum](#) that Russia must stop developing a missile that according to Washington violates the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, otherwise the Pentagon will destroy it.

This is as serious as it gets – because it amounts to committing to a US nuclear first strike.

In parallel, BP CEO Bob Dudley told the Oil & Money conference in London that any additional US sanctions against top Russian energy companies would be disastrous.

“If sanctions were put on Rosneft or Gazprom or Lukoil like what happened with Rusal, you would virtually shut down the energy systems of Europe, it is a bit of an extreme thing to happen,” he said.

On the BRICS front, Russia and India deftly maneuvered on their own and managed to squash some US geostrategic planning against the three major poles of Eurasia integration: Russia, China and Iran.

The Quad – US, Japan, Australia, India – was conceived to box in China across the Indo-Pacific, in parallel to confining Russia's margin of maneuver. The Quad is [not exactly in sterling form](#) after India decided to [buy](#) Russian S-400 missile systems. Trump has promised revenge.

On top of the S-400 deal, Russian companies will be building six additional nuclear reactors in India, at a cost of \$20 billion each, over the next decade. Rosneft signed a 10-year deal to sell India 10 million tons of oil a year. And India will continue to buy oil from Iran, paying for it in rupees.

On the EU front, it's all about Germany. There are few illusions in Berlin about the EU's wobbly future. The export-centered German economy is focused on Asia. Germany is doubling down on solidifying an Asian-style model – a few large companies that are national champions able to turbo-charge exports. The US market – under protectionist winds – now is just an afterthought.

Toxic tropics

Then there's the Brazilian tragedy. President Mauricio Macri ruined Argentina with a neoliberal shock. The nation is now a hostage of the IMF.

A possible scenario is a G-20 in which Argentina will be learning how to deal with a fascist leading its close neighbor and top trade partner, Brazil.

Former paratrooper Jair Bolsonaro may be xenophobic and misogynistic, but is certainly not a nationalist. The self-billed tropical “Messiah” routinely salutes the US flag. His economic hit man is a Chicago Boy bent on selling the country out – much to the delight of “investors” and “market” experts from New York and Zurich to Rio and Sao Paulo.

Forget about creating jobs or even attempting to solve Brazil's immense social problems:

acute social inequality, pressing investments in health and education, urban insecurity. Bolsonaro's only "policy" is to weaponize the population in a Mad Max remix.

Everything under Bolsonaro should proceed under the unmitigated reign of a Hobbesian "free" market. Forget about any possibility of a moderating state intervention in the complex relations between Capital and Labor.

This is the apex of a complex process unleashed years ago in Brazil via think tanks such as the [Atlas Network](#), loads of money and, last but not least, an evangelical/neo-pentecostal tsunami.

The pillars of the Brazilian carnage are powerful agro-business and mineral exploitation interests, toxic Brazilian mainstream media, evangelicals, a financial sector totally subservient to Wall Street, the weapons industry, the completely politicized judiciary, the police, intel services, and the armed forces.

And the stars of the show are of course the Beef-Bible-Bullet combo - with their scores of Congress members - overseen by the Goddess of the Market.

Neoliberalism never wins elections in Brazil. So the only way to implement "reforms" is via a sub-Pinochet. Expect widespread social-environmental havoc, indiscriminate killing of rural and native Brazilian leaders, an unmitigated bonanza for the weapons industry, banks celebrating Christmas every week, abysmal cultural repression, total denationalization of the economy, and workers and pensioners paying for all these "reforms." Call it business as usual.

Bolsonaro's fascist tendencies were normalized not only by the powers that be in Brazil. Argentina's Foreign Minister Jorge Faurie qualified him as a "center-right" politician.

Beijing and Moscow - for BRICS reasons - and the EU in Brussels are appalled by Brazil's descent into the maelstrom. Russia and China were counting on a strong Brazil contributing to a multipolar world as during the time of Lula, who was a major BRICS driving force.

For the EU, it is hard to stomach a fascist leading their top trading partner in Latin America, and the heart of Mercosur. For the Global South as a whole, the implosion of Brazil, one of its leaders, is an unmitigated tragedy.

Now picture Washington as a raging compendium of threats and sanctions. An EU fractured to the hilt - denouncing Asian illiberalism while impotent to fight the "rise of the deplorables" at home. BRICS in disarray, with two in a serious clash with Washington, one out of the game and one on the fence - among the top four. The House of Saud rotting from the inside. Iran not even at the G-20 table. Time to sing [What a Wonderful World](#).

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