

## Analysis

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## What to watch at the G7 in surfers' paradise Biarritz

The leaders of the world's richest countries will gather in the famed surfing town of Biarritz in southwest France on Saturday, worried by headwinds for the global economy and grappling with their own stark divisions. French host Emmanuel Macron is hoping skilled diplomacy, as well as sea air and sunshine at the holiday destination, will help ease tensions between the members of the elite club. Here are the main topics and expected key moments during the three days of talks amid the Old World charm of the luxury Hotel du Palais, which overlooks crashing Atlantic waves.

### The Trump riptide

The US president makes or breaks international meetings, depending on his mood and the content of his Twitter account. The last meeting of the G7 - which comprises the US, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and Canada - turned into a fiasco when Trump refused to put his name to a joint statement at the end. He left the summit in Quebec in June 2018 accusing his host, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, of being "very dishonest and weak". This year, the French have scrapped the idea of a joint statement - seen as an admission of lowered ambitions - but will hope Trump arrives with a deal-making, not summit-wrecking, disposition. "The format and even the existence of the G7 are in question because it used to be the place where the old West could speak frankly," former Italian prime minister Enrico Letta, now head of international affairs at Sciences Po university in Paris, told AFP.

### Global turbulence

The Iranian nuclear crisis, protests in Hong Kong, war in Syria and fresh tensions in the violence-wracked Kashmir region will all be on the agenda when the leaders arrive on Saturday. India's Hindu nationalist premier Narendra Modi has been invited to join the summit and is expected to explain in person his decision to revoke the autonomy of Indian-controlled Kashmir which has raised tensions with neighbor Pakistan. The Iran nuclear crisis will also figure prominently, with Trump's policy of "maximum pressure" on Tehran via crippling sanctions seen as raising the risk of conflict in the Middle East. European powers are urging the US administration to offer some sort of relief to Iran, such as lifting sanctions on oil sales to China and India, or a new credit line to enable exports. This is seen as a first step to get Iran back to the negotiating table, which could then lead to a new international agreement limiting its nuclear program that would include the United States. "To start this approach we need President Trump to agree with the idea that we need to make a pause (in the "maximum pressure" policy)," a French diplomat told reporters on condition of anonymity.

### Adverse trade winds

Fears have grown in recent weeks about the health of the global economy caused by a trade war between the United States and China. Export-dependent Germany, the economic powerhouse of the European Union, is teetering on the edge of recession and global financial markets took fright last week following alarming new economic data. Trump meanwhile continues to threaten European companies with trade tariffs, including the German car industry and the French wine sector. At the end of July, he promised "a substantial reciprocal action on Macron's foolishness" after the French parliament approved a new law that will impose a new sales tax on digital giants such as Google and Facebook.

### Brexit backwash

One of the key images of the summit will emerge from the first meeting between Trump and new British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who will be making his debut appearance as leader on the international stage. Trump has said he is eager to meet Johnson, a fellow populist maverick and rightwinger who is looking for close relations with the US - and a trade deal - as he prepares to take Britain out of the EU. Reporters will also look for feedback on Johnson's meetings this week in Paris and Berlin with Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel where he is expected to lay out his tough negotiating position on Brexit. The two sides look deadlocked, raising the prospect of Britain crashing out of the bloc on October 31 without a deal. Europe watchers are also wondering who will show up to represent Italy amid a fresh political crisis there.

### Protest swell

Every G7 meeting draws protests from anti-globalization activists, climate change campaigners and left-wing anarchists who see global leaders and their free-market capitalist model as the source of global problems. A G7 counter-summit of conferences and workshops is set to begin on Wednesday along the coast near the town of Hendaye organized by the group "G7 Ez", which means "No to the G7" in the local Basque language, and other groups. They expect 5,000 to 10,000 people at their temporary camp. More than 10,000 members of the French security forces will be deployed to guard against violent protests, while surfers and swimmers will be ordered out of the water in Biarritz for the duration of the summit. — AFP

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Members of Team OG, champion of the 2018 Dota 2 Championships, display the trophy during the opening of this year's International Dota 2 Championships in Shanghai yesterday. — AFP

## Gamers risk health in bid to be millionaires

A record \$33.5 million is up for grabs but professional eSports players like those competing in The International in Shanghai this week pay a physical price with deteriorating eyesight, digestive problems and wrist and hand damage. At first, Evgenii "Blizzy" Ri looks perplexed at the notion: "It's impossible, how can you get injuries when you play games?" Then the 24-year-old from Kyrgyzstan discloses that a doctor urged him to take six months off to give his failing vision a badly needed rest.

Ri plays for Natus Vincere, or NAVI, and this week is competing in The International, a world championship said to have the biggest prize pool in the history of eSports. NAVI and 17 other teams will play the multiplayer battle game Dota 2 in front of thousands of fans at a major indoor stadium while hundreds of thousands more will watch online. If NAVI triumph on Sunday, Ri and his teammates will become instant millionaires - but success could come at a price.

"I didn't worry before but now I feel like my eyes are really... I can't see so much," said Ri, who practices up to 12 hours a day. "Ten years I've been playing computers so they are a bit... I've just got bad vision. Ri has been told to wear glasses but he does not find them comfortable and said that his deteriorating eyesight does not hinder his performance because the screen is up close. A doctor rec-

ommended simple eye exercises - moving them up and down, left and right - but he admits that he does not do them. "Actually he also told me not to play the computer for six months to get back my vision, but I didn't listen. I need to play."

### 'My body is so sore'

According to several players in Shanghai, the most common health complaint for pro gamers is Carpal Tunnel syndrome. Not unique to gamers, it happens through repetitive hand and wrist motions and is characterized by numbness, burning and tingling of the thumb, index, middle and ring fingers. In severe cases surgery is required. Some gamers talked about wrist injuries so severe they had to quit and lower back problems related to sitting for too long, day after day.

"I used to play and I had some arm and wrist problems so now I coach instead of playing because I can't take the strain," said Kurtis "Aui\_2000" Ling, of the Newbee team. Another hazard of eSports, a fast-growing but little-understood sport, is the mental toll, particularly with life-changing sums of money on the table. With many players so young - most are in their 20s but there is a 17 year old at The International - some struggle in the hyper-competitive environment.

"I just sometimes feel that my body is so sore," said Ryan "Raging Potato" Jay Qui of the Mineski team, who nevertheless says that his vision is still "20/20". "Most of the obstacles in this kind of environment is the mentality," said the Filipino, adding that Mineski has a "psych adviser" who helps prop up the players.

### Changing habits

While the money at the top of eSports is soaring, in other respects gaming remains well behind many other professional sports. Newbee coach Ling said that eSports is only now starting to appreciate the need for physiotherapists and other staff specializing in physical and mental well-being, though most teams have no such back-up. Cost is the major reason.

Roman Dvoryankin, general manager of Virtus.pro, said many gamers have scant appreciation of how important it is to eat well, exercise and sit properly when playing. "All the pro teams are trying to educate the players to take breaks, do some exercise, stretch properly," he said. "It's changing now, but what we face is that we get a player and realise that his digestive system is just not working properly and they have stomach problems," added Dvoryankin. "We do it, but it can be hard to change their daily habits." — AFP

## Foreign trash 'like treasure' in Indonesia's plastics village

His weathered face breaks out in a big grin as Keman explains how sifting through rubbish paid for his children's education, one of many in his Indonesian hometown basking in a waste-picking boom. Governments around the world are grappling with how to tackle the scourge of single-use plastic, but for the people of Bangun trash equals cash. Around two-thirds of the town's residents eke out a living sorting and selling discarded plastic bottles, wrappers and cups back to local companies, and after China blocked imports of foreign garbage early this year - the pile is growing.

"I have three kids - all of them go to university," Keman, who goes by one name, proudly tells AFP as he stands in a field of ankle-deep trash. "And all that was possible thanks to my hard work scavenging rubbish," the 52-year-old explains. Bangun is among several poor communities in Java, Indonesia's most populous island,



This picture taken on July 22, 2019 shows villager Keman sifting through plastic waste in Bangun. — AFP

that have carved a living from mining waste, much of it from Western nations including the United States, England, and Belgium, as well as the Middle East.

Once a giant in global recycling, China's decision to block international waste threw the industry into chaos. Huge quantities of rubbish were instead redirected to Southeast Asia. Indonesia's plastic waste imports have soared in the past few years, jumping from 10,000 tons per month in late 2017 to 35,000 tons per month by late last year, according to Greenpeace, which warns that

plastics prosperity comes at a huge environmental and public health cost. Muharram Atha Rasyadi, a plastics campaigner with Greenpeace Indonesia says the situation has "become worse" since China's ban.

Up to 40 trucks a day rumble into Bangun to unload garbage outside people's homes or in vast fields where it forms mountains of waste sometimes as high as rooftops. For years, a handful of local paper mills have been supplying the village with garbage, which is often mixed with legally imported paper scraps, according to environmental activists. Residents search through the refuse with their bare hands, rakes and shovels - often with little more protection than cheap cloth masks.

Sitting on her haunches surrounded by mounds of trash, local mother Pumisna reached her filthy hands into a pile of refuse and began sorting through the bits of aluminium, plastic bottles and cups before her. Trash may earn her a few dollars a day, but sometimes there is another kind of prize hiding inside the rubbish: crumpled foreign currency such as dollar bills, euros and pound sterling. "I'm looking for money for shopping, my kids' school and food," said the 35-year-old under a makeshift sun awning as she placed plastic waste into three containers.

There are few other jobs going and community leader M. Ikhsan brushed off any suggestion that his town's large-scale scavenging damaged the environment or put anyone's health at risk. Rubbish that can't be recycled was sold to nearby tofu factories where it is used as fuel in furnaces, he said. — AFP

## Will Trump take a club to the G7 club again?

Biarritz is known for big Atlantic waves, but the loudest crashing at next weekend's G7 meeting in the French resort could be the sound of US President Donald Trump and his convention-wrecking diplomacy. Annual Group of Seven summits - bringing together the leaders of Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States - were always the coziest of clubs for US presidents. Until Trump.

At the G7 in Quebec last year he exploded the typically stage-managed proceedings and left in a fury, engaging in personal insults over trade with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and refusing to sign the collective final statement. G7 leaders better buckle up again, warns Robert Guttman, director of the Center for Politics & Foreign Relations at Johns Hopkins University. "He's going to be a bull in a china shop," Guttman said.

The French hosts hope they can better manage Trump this time. In particular, a French diplomat told reporters, the traditional importance of the final communique will be deemphasized, as that's "one way to avoid the situation we had in Canada last year."

### Is America 'winning'?

But French President Emmanuel Macron wants the G7 to talk about tackling global inequality. That's a topic ill-suited to Trump's fiercely America-centric - critics say isolationist - worldview ahead of elections next year. As Trump likes to tell rallies amid chants of "USA, USA", the only metric he cares about on the world stage is whether

America is "winning". Nowhere is this clearer than on climate change - a major factor, according to France, in driving economic and social inequality.

Trump pulled the United States out of the 2015 Paris climate accord on reducing carbon emissions and he remains proudly defiant over what allies saw as his abandonment of an attempt, literally, to save the world. "It was good for others. It wasn't for us," he told a crowd at a new petrochemical factory just last week. The working class audience - exactly the type of voters Trump hopes will deliver him a second term - cheered. And in Biarritz, that base will still be his audience. "Trump comes not as a statesman, but as a politician fighting very hard for reelection," Guttman said.

### 'Reassertion'

James Roberts, at the conservative Heritage Foundation, says Trump is merely correcting what Republicans consider to have been the foreign policy drift under his Democratic predecessor Barack Obama. "It's a reassertion of American resolve," Roberts said. Trump will push back on France's digital tax, imposed to plug what Macron's government says is a massive loophole in which US companies like Google operate abroad while paying almost nothing.

Branding this "foolishness", Trump has threatened to retaliate with tariffs on French wine imports. G7 leaders, especially Germany's Angela Merkel, can also expect pressure over financial contributions to NATO, the bedrock of trans-Atlantic security that Trump says

relies too heavily on US largesse. And the six partners will struggle to get flexibility from Trump on other contentious points: Washington's aggressive posture against Iran, and the roller coaster trade war with China that is contributing to jitters over a possible global economic recession. He may put another cat among the pigeons by resurrecting his call to cancel Russia's expulsion from the old G8 in punishment for its seizing of Crimea from Ukraine in 2014.

### Don't shoot the messenger?

There will at least be one new friend in the room. Freshly installed Prime Minister Boris Johnson is eager for US support as he pushes Britain through what could be a perilous no-deal Brexit. Trump has dangled the prospect of a big bilateral trade agreement and the White House will continue using that as bait to try and force Britain into shutting out Chinese company Huawei from the 5G market. Brexit and trade were among the topics discussed by the two leaders in a Monday phone call during which Trump expressed "great enthusiasm" for meeting Johnson, the White House said. But as Macron and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe have discovered, strong personal ties with Trump don't necessarily result in an easy friendship. But Roberts says that strategic challenges from China and Russia mean the G7 partners are going to have to put up with Trump whether they want to or not. "They don't like President Trump's style but you can't change the facts because you don't like the messenger," Roberts said. The European Union is "not a superpower and it still has to rely on the United States." There will be no escaping Trump for long: It's his turn to host the G7 in 2020. — AFP

