

## **MNI POLITICAL RISK ANALYSIS-G7-COVID, China, Brexit In Focus**

*by Tom Lake*

The first in-person G7 summit since the that held in Biarritz, France in August 2019 takes place from 11-13 June in Cornwall, England in a meeting that could result in significant decisions being taken on topics as diverse as Brexit, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the West's relations with China.

In attendance will be the following G7 state leaders: Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi, Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, and US President Joe Biden. In addition, European Council and Commission Presidents Charles Michel and Ursula von der Leyen will be at the summit. Finally, the leaders of four more countries will also be at the summit as invited guests: Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, South Korean President Moon Jae-in, and South African President Cyril Ramaphosa. Australia, India and South Korea come as part of efforts by UK PM Boris Johnson to broaden the G7 into a D10 format involving the largest democratic economies that can act as an economic and geopolitical counterweight to China.

### **Host Faces Fire On All Sides Over Brexit**

The host of the event, the UK's Boris Johnson, is likely to try to keep the tone of the event jovial but is likely to find himself under fire from the EU institutional leaders, heads of EU member states, and US President Biden over the UK's potential non-compliance with some aspects of the Northern Ireland protocol. Relations between the UK and the EU have deteriorated in recent weeks as the UK threatens the unilateral extension of grace periods on certain products being exported from Great Britain to Northern Ireland. The EU has threatened to retaliate with legal action.

The US, while not involved directly in the dispute, will likely weigh in given President Biden's frequently discussed Irish Catholic heritage. The White House has often voiced its demand that the Good Friday Agreement and the Northern Ireland peace process be protected at all costs – something the UK government's actions are viewed to be threatening.

### **No Sign Of Agreement On Vaccine Waivers, But Potential Deal On EM Vaccine Supplies**

French President Emmanuel Macron is the latest G7 leader who has come out in support of providing waivers on patents for COVID-19 vaccines, which he says will allow for greater production of vaccines in emerging markets. He joins the governments of the US and Italy who have backed a removal limited specifically to vaccines. They will come into conflict with the EU, Germany and the UK, which have all opposed the removal of patent waivers at the WTO. Given the short timeframe of the summit, reaching a deal on such a contentious subject seems an unlikely prospect.

On a less contentious area – the provision of vaccines to emerging markets – a more comprehensive deal is more likely. Before leaving for Europe, the White House announced that the US would purchase 500mn doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine for emerging markets, while UK PM Johnson has said that an aim of the summit is to get the participating nations to commit to having the world vaccinated against COVID-19 by end-2022. The huge external political pressure on developed nations with high vaccination rates to donate doses to emerging markets dealing with significant COVID-19 outbreaks will likely push leaders to committing to some sort of mass donation.

### **Taiwan Inclusion In Communique Would Signal Hardline G7 Stance On China**

At the end of the summit on 13 June, the UK government – on behalf of all the G7 nations – will release a communique agreed upon by the leaders present. This missive is usually pored over for the language used or topics that came up in discussion. One of the potential rumoured inclusions in the communique is a comment on Taiwan, something that has previously been skirted by G7 summits due to the sensitivity of the subject in China. Should comments on Taiwan (or indeed Hong Kong and/or Xinjiang province) come up in the communique it would be the clearest example yet of the intention among leaders in the G7 for the group to become an explicit counterweight to China in economic and geopolitical terms.

Another sign of a more cohesive Western alliance would be confirmation of work towards the official establishment of a 'D10' or 'Democracy 10' group, encompassing invitees Australia, India, and South Korea. Should there be a shift towards such a body, it would be another clear signal of intent from the US, Europe, and democratic nations in Asia of a desire to seek a more comprehensive economic and political decoupling from China in the years ahead.

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