

# China: The Absent Presence at the G7 Summit in France

(Translated)

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When G7 leaders gathered in France for a three-day summit starting June 15, 2026, China's seat was empty at the table; yet, China was present in every corner of the hall, in every agenda item, and in most of the concerns Western leaders brought with them to the summit.

The picture appeared strikingly different this time. The G7—established in the 1970s as a club for major industrial economies and a guardian of the Western capitalist order—found itself discussing a non-member state that had become too big to ignore and too powerful to be pigeonholed merely as a traditional rival.

Perhaps the most telling indication of this shift was the virtual meeting convened by French President Macron on June 11, 2026—days before the summit began. It brought together the United States, China, Europe, international financial institutions, most notably the International Monetary Fund, and several invited nations. This was not merely a ceremonial gathering; it was a political and economic acknowledgment that the global system had reached a stage where its imbalances could no longer be addressed without China.

Macron did not speak of a “Chinese problem” requiring containment; instead, he spoke of “global imbalances” necessitating urgent coordination among Europe, the United States, and China. Crucially, he warned that a lack of such coordination could lead to “harsh economic and financial adjustments” that threaten global stability. Underlying this rhetoric is an unmistakable admission: the West—now in retreat—is no longer capable of managing the global economy on its own. For decades, the G7 was accustomed to setting the rules of the economic game and then demanding that others abide by them. Today, however, one of its prominent leaders is calling on China to participate in reshaping the very balances the West once established. These two contrasting images encapsulate the story of the profound transformation currently reshaping the global capitalist system.

China—which four decades ago was merely a developing economy on the periphery of the global market—has evolved into the “world's factory,” a central hub for international supply chains, a top trading partner for dozens of nations, and a technological powerhouse challenging the West in fields that were, until recently, its exclusive domain. Consequently, the West's concern lies not merely in the sheer size of the Chinese economy, but in its rapid pace and trajectory.

Europeans, who for decades welcomed China as a vast market and a source of low-cost labor, have begun to realize that the giant they helped integrate into the global capitalist economy has transformed into a strategic rival threatening their industrial and technological supremacy. This context explains the escalating European rhetoric regarding Chinese electric vehicles, green industries, semiconductors, and an over-reliance on Asian supply chains. Yet, what worries the West even more than Chinese exports is Chinese influence.

A report issued by the Canadian Macdonald–Laurier Institute (MLI)—released just days before G7 leaders convened in Évian, France—indicated that Beijing is pursuing a long-term strategy to penetrate the G7 sphere through a variety of economic, academic, technological, and cultural channels. The report characterizes this strategy as “systematic, adaptable, and deeply rooted.” France warned of this scenario in its media coverage of the report's findings via the France 24 channel. Under this approach, China does not rely on direct confrontation with the West; instead, it pursues gradual infiltration into Western economic, scientific, and commercial structures, enabling it to build enduring influence that would be difficult to contain later.

This strategy encompasses investment in critical infrastructure, an expanded presence in universities and research centers, and the deepening of trade ties and supply chains. It also involves fostering interdependence, making it difficult for Western nations to decouple their economies from China's without incurring heavy costs.

In other words, while the G7 viewed China as a foreign actor, China was quietly entrenching itself within the very economic sphere represented by the group. Thus, this Chinese expansion coincides with a period of relative decline in the West's ability to impose its will on the international order.

The war in Ukraine has drained a significant portion of the West's political and economic energy. Meanwhile, escalating tensions in the Middle East—alongside open conflict with Iran and its regional proxies—have exposed the limits of American influence and its capacity to manage multiple, simultaneous crises. Until recently, the U.S. was preoccupied with the movements of its warships and aircraft. Furthermore, divisions within the Western camp itself have become more pronounced than ever—highlighted by incidents such as Trump publishing a map depicting Canada and Greenland as parts of the United States, and the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Germany—thereby further fracturing relations among NATO allies.

In contrast, China continues to build its influence at a different pace. It does not wage foreign wars or deploy military bases on the scale that the United States does. Instead, it relies on the economy, trade, investment, and diplomacy as primary tools to expand its sphere of influence. Consequently, it is now positioned to emerge as a key player in matters that were once the exclusive domain of Western powers—with the Iran dossier serving as a prime example.

China is not only Iran's largest trading partner but also maintains strong ties with Arab Gulf states and keeps open channels of communication with various international powers. This unique position grants it a growing capacity to play diplomatic roles—roles likely to become increasingly significant as regional crises grow more complex and the effectiveness of traditional Western tools diminishes.

It is quite possible that major powers may eventually find themselves in need of Chinese mediation, or require China's participation in new security or economic arrangements concerning Iran—particularly those related to the nuclear issue.

Perhaps the most striking matter lies in the issue of global economic imbalances—a matter the G7 insists on placing at the forefront. The issue topping the agenda will not conclude with the end of the France summit. Instead, it will carry over to the G20 summit scheduled for the end of the year in the United States—where China will be present at the table, not sidelined. This fact alone reveals the magnitude of the transformation the international order is undergoing. Western powers, accustomed for decades to managing the global economy from within their own institutions and alliances, now find themselves compelled to acknowledge that any attempt to rebalance the global economy or rectify its major imbalances cannot succeed without China's participation. Between the G7 summit—which discusses China in its absence—and the G20 summit—which will address the same issues with China present—a rapidly changing world comes into view: a world where China is no longer merely a rising power seeking its place in the scenario, but an international power around whose economic and political equations the scenario itself has begun to orbit. Thus, the true absentee at the G7 summit was not China, but rather that era when the West could manage the world single-handedly.

Amidst the waning of the era of Western hegemony and the emergence of a more multipolar international order, the Islamic Ummah stands at a rare historical juncture. The issue lies not so much in China's rise or the West's decline, but in the opportunity these shifts offer to break free from the legacy of dependency and colonialist hegemony. It is a chance to embark on building an independent Islamic civilizational project—one that severs its reliance on the West and derives its strength from its own human and economic resources, legislative framework, doctrinal tenets, and civilizational values. If great nations are defined by their ability to seize moments of profound transformation, the present moment may well be one of those rare instances where the doors of history open but once. Allah (swt) said, ﴿وَتِلْكَ الْأَيَّامُ نُدَاوِلُهَا بَيْنَ النَّاسِ﴾ **“And We alternate these eras amongst peoples”** [TMQ Surah Aali Imran: 140].