

Nonsense at the G7 Summit: Russia, Greece and Convenient Threats

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Global Research, June 09, 2015

Region: [Europe](#), [Russia and FSU](#)

Oh, the misdirected fury of it all. The self-appointed elect, those states at the G7, have decided to have a chat about matters deemed critical for them. A few interlopers are also present – Nigeria, Tunisia and Liberia, for instance. Like any club whose rules vary between snooty and arbitrary, there were exclusions. On this occasion, basic arithmetic dictated that it would be a G7 summit, as opposed to a G8 one – Russia was excluded, largely because, it would seem, the member states needed something to talk about.

The agenda shaped up very quickly. The G7 chat fest did take some time out to consider the environmental side of matters, suggesting that fossil fuels were being given the heave ho. “We commit to doing our part to achieve a low-carbon global economy in the long-term, including developing and deploying innovative technologies striving for a transformation of the energy sectors by 2050.”[1]

But the members had two states in their sights. One was the superstar absentee, target of European and US morality and historical ennui: Russia. As the G7 communique outlined, “We stand ready to take further restrictive measures in order to increase [the] cost on Russia should its actions so require.” The other was Greece, target of economic opprobrium and whipping boy of Europe’s disastrous financial policies.

It was Moscow who got the biggest serve. “Does [Vladimir Putin],” US President Barack Obama observed, “continue to wreck his country’s economy and continue Russia’s isolation in pursuit of a wrong-headed desire to recreate the glories of the Soviet empire? Or does he recognise that Russia’s greatness does not depend on violating the territorial integrity and sovereignty of other countries?”

As with so much in the realm of power politics, imitation is the most sincere form of flattery. The relationship between Ukraine and Russia has been terse, vicious and rubbed by history. That tends to be patched over by the sovereignty argument, while ignoring EU and NATO complicity in undermining Kiev. The communique itself makes it clear where Ukraine should orient itself. “We commend and support the steps the Ukrainian government is taking to implement comprehensive structural reforms and urge the Ukrainian leadership to decisively continue the necessary fundamental transformation in line with IMF and EU commitments.”[2]

Independence is simply the prop for the big EU-US-Russia show. The idea that Russian “aggression” is somehow monolithic, innate and clearly demarcated is as naïve as it is dangerous. But the various parties have come to the conclusion that the peace plan outlined at Minsk in February is the one to aim for.

The German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, also gave the impression that the sanctions regime against Russia might be ratcheted up, though Germany has remained pensive about it. Much business has been lost in the endeavour. The Chancellor attempted putting a brave face on it all. The G7 front was “ready, should the situation [in Ukraine] escalate – which we don’t want – to strengthen sanctions if the situation makes that necessary but we believe we should do everything to move forward the political process of Minsk.”

Much of this seems disproportionate and more than just thinly veiled hypocrisy. Russia’s suspension from the G8 for its backing of eastern Ukrainian separatists, and the Crimean annexation, suggest a clear context for targeting a country for violating the sovereignty of others. But when one considers the other members of the same family of summitry, including France, Britain and the UK, the list of violators of sovereignty is extensive.

Proxy wars are being fought across the Middle East, ostensibly to back some form of regime against another form of threat. French, UK and US money floats into bank accounts of various militant forces who have marshalled themselves against the Islamic State. Labels such as “moderate” are used in recognising which group will get funding in the fight, either against the Assad regime itself, or the even less savoury groups connected with ISIS. Sovereignty has little to do with any of this.

Then there is that rather nasty aspect of warrantless surveillance, a sordid little understanding that seems to have been struck between intelligence services at the cost of parliamentary integrity. This did not seem to bother Merkel, who had herself been the subject of NSA surveillance and phone hacking. Let bygones be bygones. As she declared at Schloss Elmau, Germany and the US were “inseparable allies”. [3]

The gathering also did some finger wagging at Athens. Last week, the Tsipras government poured cold water on proposals for a cash-for-reforms deal advanced by the International Monetary Fund and European lenders. The summit provided the stage for the European commission president Jean-Claude Juncker to vent his spleen. “Alexis Tsipras promised by Thursday evening he would present a second proposal. Then he said he would present it on Friday. And then he said he would call on Saturday. But I have never received that proposal, so I hope I will receive it soon.” [4]

There were other gems fashioned. Terrorism, which is the background always depicted these days as a grandly dangerous foreground, featured. “In light of the Foreign Terrorist Fighters phenomenon, the fight against terrorism and violent extremism will have to remain the priority for the whole international community.” Nigeria’s President Muhammadu Buhari came with his own “wish list” hoping for a firm stance against Boko Haram.

Since states are thinking about fiendish ways to take away the citizenships of those it suspects (suspicion is everything) of being involved, or planning, terrorist acts, it has fallen to such powers as Britain and Canada to lead the way. Forms of regulation are encouraged in the name of combating “radicalisation”, noting the reach of the Internet and the scope of social media sites. Fear substitutes necessary evidence. Illusion takes the place of policy. Perfect yet predictable outcomes of such summits.

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Notes

- [1] <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/06/08/us-g7-summit-idUSKBN00M01320150608>
- [2] https://www.g7germany.de/Content/DE/_Anlagen/G8_G20/-2015-06-08-g7-abschluss-eng.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=5
- [3] <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/06/08/us-g7-summit-idUSKBN00M01320150608>
- [4] <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/07/juncker--fury-greek-bailout-talks-g7-summit-russia-sanctions>

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