

The “Ukraine Issue” and Canada’s “Foreign” Minister Chrystia Freeland

The G7 meeting of Foreign Ministers in Toronto

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***Chrystia Freeland** gives a new meaning to the title ‘Foreign Minister’. Normally, it means the person in charge of a state’s dealings with foreign countries. In Canada’s case, however, it sometimes seems to mean something rather different – namely, the minister who represents the interests of a foreign country. For on occasion Ms Freeland appears to be less the foreign minister of Canada and more the foreign minister of Ukraine.*

This week, Canada is hosting a meeting of foreign ministers of the G7. But on this occasion, Freeland has made it into something of a G8 by inviting along her Ukrainian counterpart, **Pavlo Klimkin**. As *The Globe and Mail* [reports](#):

Russia is using Ukraine as a test ground for its information war against Western democracy, Ukraine’s foreign minister told G7 ministers meeting here on Sunday.

Foreign Affairs Minister Chystia Freeland wants the disruptive influence of Russia on the West to be a top agenda item, and she set the table – literally – for Ukrainian foreign minister Pavlo Klimkin to deliver that message to her G7 counterparts.

Freeland invited Klimkin to be part of Sunday’s talks, hosting him and other ministers at her home for a traditional brunch that was prepared by her own children.

“It was amazing how she organized it, in the sense of creating this friendly atmosphere of hospitality with ministers sitting around the table with her kids what they had personally prepared,” Klimkin told The Canadian Press in an interview Sunday afternoon.

Their conversation was decidedly less festive, with Klimkin pressing the G7 to make a strong, unified stand against what he described as Kremlin efforts to destabilize democracy through election interference and other cyber-meddling.

...

He called this part of a bigger war “against the democratic transatlantic community.” Supporting Ukraine, he said, should be seen “as a part of a bigger pattern.

“Fighting along with Ukraine would give an immense asset to the whole democratic community in the sense of understanding Russian efforts to destabilize the western world.”

Freeland views the clash of the forces of democracy and authoritarianism as a defining feature of our time, and she has singled out Russian President Vladimir Putin as a major disrupter.

The G7 consists of Canada, the US, the UK, France, Germany, Italy, and Japan. These countries have some serious issues to deal with: trade relations (particularly due to the renegotiation of NAFTA, Brexit, and the recent round of protectionist measures taken by the USA and China against each other); climate change and environmental issues more generally; terrorism and international security, including the wars in Syria and Iraq; and so on. Yet Ms Freeland, in setting the G7's agenda, has put Ukraine at the top of the list.

[#G7](#) brunch this morning at the Freeland household. Welcome to [#Toronto](#), dear friends! Brunch du [#G7](#) ce matin à la résidence Freeland. Bienvenue à [#Toronto](#), chers amis! [@konotaromp](#) [@FedericaMog](#) [@JY_LeDrian](#) [@HeikoMaas](#) [@angealfa](#) [@StateDept](#) [@PavloKlimkin](#) pic.twitter.com/jzH4zt7a4S

— Chrystia Freeland (@cafreeland) [April 22, 2018](#)

To say the least, it's a rather odd choice. The future of Ukraine is hardly a vital Canadian national interest; not only is it far, far away, but bilateral trade between the two countries is a pathetic \$260 million a year. The decision to promote the topic can only reflect Ms Freeland's own personal connections to Ukraine and her consequent desire to get the G7 to take action against Russia. This becomes clear in the phrases above which say that, 'Freeland wants the disruptive influence of Russia on the West to be a top agenda item ... Freeland views the clash of the forces of democracy and authoritarianism as a defining feature of our time, and she has singled out Russian **President Vladimir Putin** as a major disrupter.'

G7 members take turns chairing and hosting the meetings, so a country only gets to set the agenda once every seven times. You'd have thought that you'd use this rare opportunity to turn conversation to matters which are really vital national interests. Instead, Canada has chosen to use it to focus on Ukraine and on whipping up anti-Russian sentiment. It is extremely hard to see how this serves the Canadian national interest.

The only explanations I can come up with is that either Freeland is blinded to Canadian national interests due to her Western Ukrainian nationalist sentiments, or she really believes all that guff about Ukraine being in the front line of a Russian-led assault designed to transplant democracy with authoritarianism, and so actually does imagine that Canadian democracy is in peril because of the malign influence of Russia. If it's the former, she subordinating Canadian interests to those of a particular foreign government. If it's the latter, she is, in my opinion, quite deluded.

Take, for instance, the war in Syria. This does not fit Freeland's idea of a 'clash of the forces of democracy and authoritarianism as a defining feature of our time'. On the one side in Syria, there is the Syrian government, Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah. One can argue about this, but just for the simplicity's sake, let's take it as given that this side doesn't consist of bastions of liberal democracy. But who's on the other side? The USA, Britain, and France, plus a whole bunch of jihadists of various unpleasant sorts, plus the increasingly 'authoritarian' Turkey, plus the decidedly undemocratic Saudi Arabia and Qatar. So, how is this a war of 'democracy' versus 'authoritarianism'. It clearly isn't, as the democracies are

acting in alliance with quite definitely non-democratic actors.

Then, there's the war in Yemen: Iran supposedly backing the Houthi rebels, and Britain and the USA backing Saudi Arabia. Again, given that the democracies are working hand in hand with the Saudis, how can this be described as democracy versus authoritarianism?

One could go on and on. The authoritarianism/democracy dichotomy is not a good model for describing international relations. And it isn't a good model for describing what's happening in Ukraine either. The toppling of Viktor Yanukovich in 2014 was certainly not a democratic process, and the post-Maidan government has not exactly been a paradigm of liberal democratic government. In today's [Kyiv Post](#), I see the headline 'US State Department calls for anti-graft court, slams human rights violations in Ukraine.' Meanwhile, another of today's Ukraine-related [headlines](#) reads: 'Ukrainian neo-Nazi C14 vigilantes drive out Roma families, burn their homes.' The article which follows reveals that this wasn't a 'vigilante' attack after all: the neo-Nazis responsible were members of the National Guard working in cooperation with the local administration.

Somehow, I doubt that we'll ever see Chrystia Freeland condemning any of this. Canada's foreign foreign minister would have us believe that Ukraine is the frontline of a struggle between democracy and authoritarianism. Forgive me, but I'm not buying what she's selling.

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