

Tackling regional security conflicts: sanctions or military force?

An examination of past tactics used in response to regional security conflicts may be useful in reaching consensus on the crisis in Ukraine

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Since the first G7 summit in Rambouillet, France, in 1975, the G7/8 has been committed to promoting and protecting democracy around the world.

United by the principles of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, the G7/8 members have made clear the forum's willingness to intervene in the internal political character of states if those principles were compromised.

In the post-Cold War years, the G7/8 has increasingly endorsed military intervention to address regional security conflicts, most notably in Iraq in 1991, Kosovo in 1999, Afghanistan in 2001, Libya in 2011 and Mali in 2013. In other conflicts and more frequently, the G7/8 has chosen instead to endorse the use of sanctions; for example in Iran in 1980, Sudan in 2004, North Korea in 2006 and Syria in 2011.

A number of factors contribute to the G7/8's decision to use a particular tactic in an attempt to halt the escalation of regional security conflicts and bring them to an end. A comparison of the cases in which the G7/8 has authorised force and sanctions offer some initial explanations. The first is that when G7/8 members are collectively more powerful than the target country they have been far more likely to use force than sanctions. The same is true if the forum has the support of the relevant regional organisation, specifically the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and the relevant multilateral one, the United Nations. The proximity of members to the target country and any former colonial relationships can also make the use of force more likely.

The effectiveness of these specific cases has been mixed. Among the cases involving the use of force, the G7/8 has been more successful, achieving its desired results four out of five times. It was successful in removing Saddam Hussein's armed forces from Kuwait during the first Gulf War, removing troops

from Kosovo in 1999 and overthrowing Muammar Gaddafi's government in Libya in 2011. Although it had some success in Afghanistan and Mali, it was unable to achieve the goal of bringing peace and stability to either region. However, in the four cases in which sanctions were used, the G7/8 did not achieve clear success.

Success is also measured by how well G7/8 members comply with the regional security commitments they collectively make. Of the 16 regional security commitments assessed by the G8 Research Group from 1996-2011, G8 members have an average compliance score

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of 78.5 per cent, just above its average for the total 397 commitments assessed, at 75.5 per cent. Compliance with regional security commitments has been led by the United States at 90.5 per cent, followed in turn by Italy at 82 per cent, Canada and Japan each at 81.5 per cent, the European Union at 81 per cent, the United Kingdom at 78 per cent, Germany at 72 per cent and Russia at 64.5 per cent. What is notable is the unusually high compliance of Italy, which is most often the member physically closest to the target where force or sanctions are used and whose compliance with commitments in all issue areas tends to be very low.

In the six specific commitments on cases where force was used, the G7/8's average compliance was 77 per cent. The distant, but highly capable, US achieved a score of 100 per

cent, and the score of the proximate, but less powerful, Italy was 80 per cent. And in the 46 commitments from 1996-2008 relating to cases involving sanctions (including the few that ended up using force), average compliance was 75.5 per cent. That of the US was 81 per cent, while that of Italy was 67.5 per cent.

Protecting Ukraine's territorial integrity

At the time of writing, G7 leaders are preparing to assemble, without Russia, for a summit in Brussels on 4-5 June 2014, following their decision not to participate in the Russian-hosted Sochi Summit set for the same time. The leaders will face one of the most complicated regional security conflicts since they began meeting, as they have agreed on sanctions against fellow G8 member Russia. Admitted in 1998 after committing to democratisation, Russia has been an active G8 member ever since. However, in February 2014, Russia began actions in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine in a manner directly contradicting the principles of the G8, including the respect for the rule of law.

The sanctions agreed on by the G7 have not yet halted what is perceived to be Russia's expansion into Ukraine. The escalation of the crisis in eastern Ukraine, which has included the occupation of government buildings by pro-Russian militants, the mobilisation of Russian troops on Ukraine's border and the seizure of seven members of an observer mission sent to Ukraine by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, will undoubtedly be a primary agenda item at the Brussels Summit.

At a G7 meeting in Rome on 5-6 May, in the lead-up to Brussels, energy ministers considered solutions to reduce European dependence on Russian gas. Improving European energy security by diversifying supply will diminish Russia's energy superpower status and allow for a more intensive and effective use of sanctions. Without any sign at the time of writing of diplomatic or military retreat by Russia, G7 members must use the Brussels Summit to reach a consensus on how to protect the territorial integrity of Ukraine and prevent any further Russian expansion in the region. Anything short of this will leave European security vulnerable to what has been called the greatest threat since the end of the Cold War. ■



A French soldier talks with a civil society leader in Mali, 2013. The G7/8 has, on occasion, endorsed military intervention to address regional conflicts

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