

G7 summit convenes amid US threats against Russia

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8 June 2015

As the leaders of the seven most powerful imperialist nations assembled near the south German resort town of Garmisch-Partenkirchen for the annual G7 (Group of Seven) summit, US officials kept up a drumbeat of demands for intensified economic and military pressure on Russia over the ongoing crisis in Ukraine.

As he arrived for the talks, Obama said a major focus of the summit would be “standing up to Russian aggression in Ukraine.” He reiterated the US position that there should be no letup of economic pressure on Russia, saying, “The duration of sanctions should be clearly linked to Russia’s full implementation of the Minsk agreements and respect for Ukraine’s sovereignty.”

Obama left the more provocative saber-rattling to defense officials. Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter met Friday in Stuttgart, Germany with most of the US regional commanders, as well as with American ambassadors to NATO, Russia, Turkey, Germany, France, Estonia and Italy, to discuss military and diplomatic efforts in relation to Ukraine and Russia.

The official purpose was to draft plans ahead of a NATO summit later this month. But Carter used the occasion to make a pointed attack on Russia, claiming that NATO had to devise methods to fight a wide range of methods of subversion in Ukraine and eastern Europe as a whole. “It’s a mixture of subversion and sophisticated threat making, manipulation of information, the big lie—all this cocktail that we saw in Ukraine,” Carter said.

This language would apply more accurately to the US-German policy in Ukraine, which fomented a coup in February 2014, spearheaded by fascist groups, that ultimately brought to power the current government of President Petro Poroshenko, a billionaire oligarch, and provoked both Russian intervention in Crimea and the

conflict with pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine.

The defense secretary appeared to dismiss the effectiveness of economic sanctions against Russia, implying that other, more forceful actions might be required. “It’s clear the sanctions are working on the Russian economy, but what is not apparent is that that effect on his economy is deterring Putin from following the course that was evidenced in Crimea last year,” he said, calling Moscow “an enduring challenge.”

Obama’s deputy national security adviser, Ben Rhodes, echoed the opinion that while sanctions had delivered a “tremendous hit to the Russian economy,” they had not been effective in changing Russian behavior in Ukraine. “Clearly President Putin’s calculus has not fully shifted by any means,” he told CNN.

General Martin Dempsey, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, gave an interview to the *Wall Street Journal*, in which he said that Russia was engaged in “subversive activities” against NATO members.

“On certain issues, President Putin has actually stated his intent,” Dempsey said. “One of his clearer statements is that he considers NATO to be a threat to him and will look for opportunities to discredit and eventually undermine the alliance.”

The US and NATO members threatened by Russia had to prepare for unspecified preventive action, he said. “It is about hardening before the crisis occurs,” Dempsey told the *Journal*. “Once the crisis occurs you get into this debate about what is escalatory and what is not escalatory. This is about acting precrisis to deter and prevent crisis.”

The meaning of “hardening before the crisis” is demonstrated by the endless series of large-scale military maneuvers that NATO forces have been conducting in the Black Sea, across eastern Europe, in

the Baltic Sea and in Scandinavia—in other words, along the entire western border of European Russia—involving tens of thousands of troops, hundreds of warplanes and dozens of naval vessels.

A naval exercise involving forces from 17 countries began June 5 in the Baltic, while a 10-day test deployment of the new NATO quick-reaction strike force begins June 9 in Poland. NATO will also hold its summit next year in the Polish presidential palace in Warsaw, the city where the Warsaw Pact was signed in 1955, linking the countries of the eastern Europe Soviet bloc.

White House spokesman Josh Earnest said that Russia and Ukraine took up fully half of the meeting between Obama and Merkel that preceded the formal summit talks. He said Obama and G7 summit host Merkel “agreed that preserving the unity of the U.S. and our European allies and partners is a top priority.”

European Union sanctions against Russia are to expire June 30, but German Chancellor Angela Merkel, the G7 host, and the European leaders attending the summit—British Prime Minister David Cameron, French President François Hollande, Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi and Donald Tusk, head of the European Council—have already indicated the sanctions would be extended.

Tusk, the former prime minister of Poland, was the most aggressive. “My intention is that today we reconfirm G7 unity on the sanctions policy,” he said. “So let me state clearly given the current situation, if anyone wants to start a discussion about changing the sanctions regime, it could only be about strengthening it.”

Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper sounded a similar note, visiting Ukraine before the summit in order to emphasize his solidarity with the right-wing regime.

The other summit participant, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, is mainly concerned with imperialist provocations on the other side of the world, the intensifying clashes with China over the South China Sea.

In an interview Saturday with the leading Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera*, Russian President Vladimir Putin called on the EU and the US to pressure Ukraine to adhere to the terms of the Minsk agreement, signed in February, which imposed a limited ceasefire

in east Ukraine.

He said unnamed countries were “simply taking advantage of people’s fears with regard to Russia” in order to get military and economic aid they would not otherwise receive. “There is no need to fear Russia,” Putin continued. “Only an insane person and only in a dream can imagine that Russia would suddenly attack NATO.”

On Monday, the summit members will go on to discuss military conflicts in other parts of the world, particularly those involving Islamic fundamentalist groups like ISIS in Iraq, Syria, and Libya, and Boko Haram in Nigeria. For that purpose, they have invited Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, Tunisian President Essebsi and newly elected Nigerian President Muhammad Buhari.

As has become traditional at these summits, the meeting was held at an isolated location surrounded by a virtual wall of police, with some 22,000 deployed by the government of Germany, the host country. In the event, there were only minor clashes with demonstrators, but the leaders were nonetheless brought in by helicopter Sunday, with police claiming that protesters had blocked the access road.



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