Securitizing the Symptoms not Causes: The G7 Again Misses the Point on Collective Global Security

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Executive Summary

By appealing to the prudential logic of Niccollo Machiavelli, this brief argues that collective global security requires long-term solutions that focus on tackling the causes of insecurity versus securitizing their symptoms. To do so, the brief examines the recent history of G7 policy on food security and global health and ties this to their lackluster commitments made at the 2017 Taormina G7 Leaders' Summit. By doing so it is possible to understand that the sustained G7 focus on immediate responses to terrorism effectively ignores the many causal drivers of insecurity and, as a result, undermines the G7's overall ambition to enhance global collective security and stability writ large.

Introduction

The history of political thought is rife with claims demanding that the primary aim of politics is the maintenance of order and stability. Niccollo Machiavelli, often heralded as the archetype pragmatic realist, famously suggested that the role of the Prince is to maintain order and stability above all else. In doing so, Machiavelli claimed that a good leader should prepare where possible against misfortune, while seizing any opportunity to secure the longevity of the state. To protect order and stability, a leader must act like a 'political doctor', willing to immediately administer any necessary cure when signs of illness arise. For according to Machiavelli, prudence demands as much, since 'when trouble is sensed well in advance it can easily be remedied, but if you wait for it to show itself, any medicine will be too late,

because the disease will have become incurable'. He goes on to suggest that like medicine 'political disorders can be quickly healed if they are seen well in advance (and only a prudent ruler has such foresight); when, for lack of a diagnosis, they are allowed to grow in such a way that everyone can recognise them, remedies are too late' (The *Prince*, 39-40).

At the G7 Summit in Taormina, order and stability was again at the top of the political agenda with 'building the foundations for renewed trust' and 'citizen safety' listed as the overarching mission for the G7. In setting this agenda, Italy highlighted safety instead of security, which was broadly defined to include issues of economic and environmental security, as well as a broad range of issues regarding social insecurity, which if left unchecked, jeopardizes order and prosperity. In Machiavellian terms the G7 agenda seemingly reflected his sage advice to be on guard against future risks and misfortune, thus calling upon the G7 to act more prudently toward the maintenance of long-term stability and order.

However, on the heels of the Manchester terror attack, which killed 22 people and injured 59, a security focus aimed predominately on terrorism took center stage in Taormina. As with many former G7 and G20 summits, a last minute shift of focus on the immediate security risk of terrorism undervalued and undermined efforts elsewhere on the agenda, particularly in other security related areas, such as food security and global health.

This is unfortunate, since a heavy focus on terrorism is both a missed opportunity for long-term thinking as well as a misguided policy in terms of security. This is because prior to the Taormina Summit the agenda set by the Italian host offered promises to address more long-term security concerns by targeting causes of instability instead of responding only to symptoms. For example, the 2017 Taormina agenda specifically included the need to discuss the underlying factors driving the refugee crisis, to specify long-term climate change

commitments, to think ahead to the 2030 sustainable goals, to better define prior 2015 commitments for addressing food security, nutrition, health, gender equality and education. Yet, with terrorism dominating the summit, causal factors were ignored, favoring short-termism against long-term solutions.

Prudence never pays if you fail to use it

There are clear links between long-term food insecurities and their 'spillover' effect on issues of human mobility, humanitarian crisis, sustainable development, economic growth, and, importantly, terrorism. For example, the famine in South Sudan, Yemen, Somalia, and Nigeria have affected nearly 30 million people, displacing large numbers of people, which in turn strain humanitarian structures that are already burdened by the ongoing refugee crisis.

The scale of risks from food insecurity are increased by the fact that nearly 800 million people remain food insecure with 2 billion people suffering some form of malnutrition. Furthermore, although some progress against poverty was made

toward the MDGs, it is estimated that malnutrition affects over one third of the world's population with 159 million children suffering from poor dietary health. These conditions of malnutrition significantly impacts upon other health concerns and seriously reduces the productivity and capacity necessary for development. According to the [Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations](#) and the [Foresight Report](#), food security is the 'grand challenge facing humanity' with a doubling demand for food and clean water by 2050, but with predicted declines in agricultural production and an increase in water shortages driven by climate change.

As the G7 leaders acknowledged in 2015 in Schloss Elmau and reconfirmed in lse-Shima in 2016, addressing hunger and food insecurity is not only beneficial for driving economic growth and development, but will also address conditions that underwrite political radicalization, crisis caused by forced migration, and violent extremism. Yet, despite the recognition for the need to fight causes versus symptoms, the 2015

G7 commitment to lift 500 million people out of hunger and malnutrition by 2030 has so far gained little traction with a 40% rise in the number of people suffering acute food insecurity since Schloss Elmau.

The continued failure to address food security seriously was repeated again at the G7 at Taormina, with only a weak reaffirmation of earlier G7 commitments set in 2015 on food, and no articulation of any new mechanisms to help deliver on these commitments. As Oxfam noted, 'that none of the G7 countries has provided its fair share of aid to all these crises is a sad indictment of their collective failure to provide leadership. Despite much talk of security, the summit saw no mention of measures to end the conditions driving this global hunger crisis'.

Similarly this abdication of leadership was repeated again in areas of global health, despite the fact that the G7 has a more sustained and robust history of past action. For example, in 2016 Japan placed global health high on the lse-Shima Summit agenda and in their Vision for Global Health, with an explicit aim to continue the momentum garnered at the previous G7 Summit in Schloss Elmau, Germany in 2015. In Japan the G7 restated their fullest support for reinforcing the global health architecture and to strengthening a global response to public health emergencies. This culminated in restating the G7's commitment to the Global Health Security Agenda (GHSA) as well as the Contingency Fund for Emergency (CFE), the World Bank's Pandemic Emergency Financing Facility (PEF) and gave explicit recognition for the importance of universal health coverage (UHC) and its necessary connection to health systems strengthening and the Sustainable Development Goals. Yet, what was perhaps most promising is the fact that the lse-Shima G7 Declaration clearly linked the GHSA as being reliant on strengthening health systems, and that UHC is a way of thinking about long-term global health which can also link the two concepts of security and HSS together. This underscored the significance of linking HSS to long-term health security,

since a failure to due so in the past has often been a criticism – where health security favored surveillance and containment rather than long-term preventative strategies aimed to remove threats through strengthened health systems. Again, in Machiavellian terms, this thinking seemingly confirmed the notion that 'when trouble is sensed well in advance it can easily be remedied, but if you wait for it to show itself, any medicine will be too late, because the disease will have become incurable'.

Nevertheless, the delivery of these promises continued to be lackluster after the 2016 lse-Shima Summit and seemingly died on its feet at Taormina. For example, despite agreement in 2015 to strengthen health systems and to create better mechanisms to respond to health pandemics and emergencies, the number of health professionals employed within the health sector remains insufficient. As presented in a recent [World Health Organization report](#), in low to middle income countries, there is an 18% deficit in the health personnel required for minimal health delivery. In addition, there

has been underwhelming compliance on instituting the International Health Regulations, with 84 of the 196 member states unable to meet the 2016 deadline.

These concerns are compounded by insufficient progress on commitments made in 2015 to tackle neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) and antimicrobial resistance (AMR), which if left unchecked, threatens all of global health. Part of the problem with epidemics like Ebola is that many health systems are too weak to properly monitor, track and respond to emerging threats. This is aggravated by the fact that many diseases are 'neglected' by global public health and get inadequate attention until it is often too late to avoid large-scale outbreaks (like in the case of Ebola). In particular, there is a diverse set of WHO recognized neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) that thrive mainly among the poorest populations. It is estimated that 17 of the main NTDs affect more than 1.4 billion people and are endemic in 149 countries.

Of particular importance in health security is building health systems and new

technologies that can properly respond to AMR. AMR is the ability of microbes to resist the effects of drugs. As a result, AMR threatens the prevention and treatment of infections caused by bacteria, parasites, viruses and fungi. AMR poses a threat to every state and resistance is reported in all countries that monitor AMR. As one example of the seriousness of this threat, according to the WHO, there have been 480,000 new cases of multidrug-resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB) and extensively drug-resistant tuberculosis (XDR-TB) is now reported in over 100 counties. Another growing concern is AMR bacteria associated with common infections, with growing hospital infections like methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) seriously threatening national health systems. In many ways, AMR represents one of the most serious threats to long-term global public health and will require considerable coordinated effort by all governments.

In other words, the world faces clear collective action problems in relation to food and health security, and there is a pressing need for increased cooperation, coordination and, in relation to the G7 and G20 (which together accounts for 85-90% of global GDP), more leadership and commitment. Tackling these issues now, versus waiting for their symptoms, would help to heed Machiavelli's warning for prudent strategic thinking in the face of emerging threats.

The G7 again misses the point on collective global security

Nonetheless, like food security, the [Taormina G7 Leaders' Communiqué](#) gave only stunted lip service to these priorities in global health and health security overall, dedicating a mere paragraph to the subject. In the Leaders' Communiqué the G7 reconfirmed the importance of taking health seriously, but offered nothing new, with no governance or financial mechanisms designated, simply pledging to have G7 ministers 'follow up on these issues during their November meeting'.

The explanation for inaction at the Taormina G7 Leaders' Summit can be understood as representing a combination

of three factors. First, four of the seven leaders have been recently elected. As a result, it is safe to assume that leaders such as Macron and Trump have not fully developed their foreign policy positions on 'lower order' issues such as climate change, food security, health and gender equality. This uncertainty would have affected the earlier ministerial meetings in the build-up to the summit, effectively hand-tying the diplomatic process. Second, given recent shifts toward state-centric policies by both Trump and May, domestic issues have come to supersede what would be seen as secondary concerns such as food security beyond borders, thus helping to explain why terrorism and domestic security dominated the summit. Finally, the Manchester terrorist attack days before the summit in effect hijacked the deliberations at the 2017 Taormina Summit, again explaining why terrorism became the predominant topic and why it was the only area where consensus was undeniably expressed.

Yet, focusing on immediate security risks instead of more holistic long-term solutions is both shortsighted and a clear lack of leadership of the G7 in Taormina. As Machiavelli states, 'nothing is more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things'. This suggests that leadership on addressing global collective action problems will ultimately be a challenging endeavor that is filled with uncertainty, risk and the need to seize unforeseen opportunities. However, as Machiavelli also points out, inaction in the face of necessity cannot wait until the symptoms are obvious since 'remedies are too late' often making the symptoms 'incurable'. As the Taormina G7 Summit in 2017 unfortunately indicates, another chance for leadership on real global stability, order and security has again been missed.

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