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G-8 Movie Night

Kenneth Rogoff

Many people rightly regard the annual G-8 (Group of Eight) presidential summit as the closest thing we have to a functioning world government. So it is a shame that these meetings tend to be so scripted and dull, with so little room for the informality needed to make genuine progress on tough issues involving world peace and prosperity.

True, this year is a bit better thanks to having Russia's Vladimir Putin as host; there is simply too much tension between him and his Western counterparts to keep all emotions under wraps. But if these meetings are ever to be really effective, we need a change in format to spice things up. I have a suggestion. Why not have George W. Bush, Putin, and the other leaders share a G-8 movie night, and then discuss their reactions over drinks afterwards? That should get a conversation going!

Of course, there is the question of which movie to pick. This year, the clear first choice has to be the 1963 James Bond spy thriller "From Russia with Love." The name itself makes it a winner, and the presidents can enjoy watching the fireworks between suave British spy Bond (Sean Connery) and his fetching Russian KGB counterpart Tatiana (Daniela Bianchi). In case you are worried that the Bond-Tatiana affair would spark too many off-color remarks from the collective eminences, the presence of German Chancellor Angela Merkel should keep things under control.

Perhaps after a couple drinks, Putin might spill the beans on whether, as a real-world KGB agent, he ever directed any remotely similar operation. And Bush, while of course having no such experience of his own, could retell some of his father's stories when he was the head of the CIA in the 1970's. Not to be left out, Europeans could use the film's romantic shots of Istanbul to open up about whether Turkey will ever join their club.

There are countless other possibilities. It would be a bit awkward, but the esteemed guests could also view "An Inconvenient Truth," narrated by Al Gore, the man Bush narrowly defeated in the 2000 US presidential election. Gore's deeply earnest film plots the relentless, and potentially disastrous, warming of the earth during the industrial era. He attributes, debatably, the entire problem to higher carbon emissions from cars, power plants, etc.

Gore's film would give the Europeans, always in danger of being marginalized at these meetings, the chance to boast about how they, unlike the Americans and Russians, are already doing their part by heavily taxing gas consumption. Bush's reaction is less predictable.

On the one hand, his new star Treasury Secretary, Hank Paulson, the former chairman of Goldman Sachs, has long been deeply committed to environmental causes. Paulson's appointment presumably shows that Bush is far more concerned about environmental issues than is commonly believed. But, on the other hand, some of Bush's more intemperate Republican colleagues might have told him that global warming will lift ocean levels to the point where many of the coastal "blue" states, which tend to vote for the opposition Democrats, will be washed away, leaving only "red" Republican states in the center of the country.

Putin's position on global warming would be less ambivalent. With his country so totally – indeed, embarrassingly – dependent on oil and gas revenues, he is hardly likely to want to spark a big push towards energy conservation.

One could go on forever with possible films, but clearly G-8 movie night might rekindle life in the organization's moribund framework, and keep it going for many years to come. And there are so many other

advantages.

Consider the dubious results from the G-8 summit in Gleneagles, Scotland, in 2005. Desperate to capture some of the star power of the rock star-driven campaign to reduce poor countries' debt, the leaders agreed to forgive Third World debt that no one ever expected to be repaid. Rather than making really substantive improvements in the quantity and quality of aid delivery, not to mention finding a path towards better governance in Africa, they chose a desperate plea for photo ops with Bono and Angelina Jolie.

With a movie night, there would be a ready-made excuse for inviting glitterati to attend G-8 events to help spark discussions. Don't we all want to know how Bond (oops, I mean Sean Connery) would deal with Iran or North Korea?

To be sure, there could be glitches. What if Russia were to inadvertently use a copy of the film that was pirated, as one imagines is true of most copies floating around in Russia? That would hardly look good given all the bashing China takes for not enforcing intellectual property rights more vigorously. Or what if, after a few years, the whole thing devolves into an empty exercise in political correctness?

Still, I say let's give G-8 movie night a chance. It would certainly be more entertaining than the current framework, and, who knows, it might even inspire better policy.

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