

6. CONCLUSION: THE IMPORTANCE OF THE UNITED STATES TO THE SEVEN POWER SUMMIT

The seven power economic summit has become an important, perhaps even essential, forum for the pursuit of American foreign policy goals in the late 1980s. It is likely to retain that position in the foreseeable future. The experience of the first Reagan Administration has clearly illustrated that international economic policy co-ordination must be a part of any American administration's foreign policy agenda. Yet while the erosion of American economic hegemony continues, there can be no doubt that the U.S. still remains the world's most formidable economic power. Accordingly, it is worth examining how critical U.S. participation is to the success of the seven power summit. Does the United States remain an exceptional, and even uniquely essential power?

This paper has examined both the intensity of American participation in the seven power summit and the patterns of American success or failure within the forum. It has not attempted to determine the success or failure of each summit in furthering its primary objective: the pursuit of international economic policy coordination. Fortunately, such an attempt has been made in the seminal work on summitry, Putnam and Bayne's Hanging Together. Indeed, they have gone so far as to provide each summit with a letter grade, which are as follows: 1975-A-; 1976-D; 1977-B-; 1978-A; 1979-B+; 1980-C+; 1981-D; 1982-C; 1983-B; 1984-C-; 1985-E; and 1986-D.¹⁶⁶

Naturally, each of the grades listed above is open to some debate. Even so, this scorecard does provide a good general overview of the effectiveness of the summits over time. In combination with this paper's analysis of the American role in the summit, these grades can be used to provide some preliminary conclusions about the importance of the United States to the seven power economic summit.

It is quite clear that an active American presence at the summit does not guarantee American success. That linkage was in evidence in only five of eight summits. The United States cannot simply get whatever it wants in the summit forum, for the other summit countries can provide insurmountable obstacles to American objectives. Indeed, the United States traditionally has found it easier to score a success when it undertook a passive role at the summit. This appears to be changing, however. Each of the last two summits have seen U.S. passivity produce a failure to secure American objectives. Such a change may well be indicative of declining American influence within the summit forum.¹⁶⁷ It does suggest that the Americans may have to take an active role if they want any chance to score successes at future summits.

An active American presence is also clearly not a sufficient condition for a successful summit, as measured by effective policy coordination. Of the eight summits wherein the United States took an active role, only five received either a score of A or B from Putnam and Bayne. There is more support, however, for the argument that an active American presence may be close to a necessary condition for a successful summit. Indeed, of the six summits wherein the United States played a passive role, four ended in failure. Yet, it is worth noting that the two exceptions to this trend have both occurred after 1982. In these

instances, a successful summit was held without the presence of American activism. Accordingly, this may once again reflect the growing strength of the other summit countries within the summit.

Naturally, such conclusions are highly speculative. The sample is far too small and many factors remain relevant. Nonetheless, it does provide a foundation for future works aimed at providing much more definitive answers.