

## **G20 Relations with the UN, Other Institutions and Major Issues**

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This paper suggests three innovations in global governance using the G20:

- The G20 as catalyzer of UN reform, including Security Council reform.
- The G20/Major Economies/Emitters Forum as catalyzer of action on climate change.
- The G20 as a locus for considering political/security issues that warrant the attention of government leaders.

### **Assumptions**

- The financial crisis proved that the G20 leaders can cooperate to catalyze action.
- The principal world leaders need a forum in which they can address major issues—beyond finance--personally and cooperatively and, where possible resolve them, or at least narrow differences.
- Membership of that forum needs to be sufficiently broad that the day's major problems can be addressed effectively and sufficiently narrow that lowest common denominator outcomes do not become the norm.
- Global governance issues are complex and only leaders have the authority to make necessary trade-offs across portfolios.
- An effective G20 can save the most precious of all commodities: the time of Heads of State/Government.
- Variable geometry approaches--different participants for different subjects--is too confusing and too disruptive to facilitate decision-making; they also lack the positive dynamics deriving from familiarity among participants.
- In the next two or three years there is a substantial commonality of membership between the G20 and the Security Council that could be potentially helpful.
- But we are not living on the 19<sup>th</sup> Century; some way has to be found to bring other competent and directly affected countries into the discussion.

### **Rationale for a Broader G20 Mandate**

Last September, at Pittsburgh the G20 proclaimed itself “the premier forum for [their] international economic cooperation.” (There is some sentiment, notably by France, for a smaller enlargement of the G8, simply adding Beijing, Delhi, Brasilia, Pretoria and Mexico City, but that would exclude some major emerging countries such as Turkey, Korea and Indonesia and exclude as well the entire Islamic world.) Initially, at least, the agenda has been oriented nearly exclusively to the Great Recession and its aftermath. Over time, and likely not very much time, the G20 will consider its financial job done and it will broaden its agenda. Few G20 leaders are economists and will be content for long dealing exclusively with economic and financial issues. Nor will their finance minister/treasury secretaries want them to do so. Besides, experience derived from the G8 is that when leaders come together, they take advantage of each other's presence to discuss the pressing

issues of the day, whatever they are. Some see a reversion to the G8 but that group has proven manifestly too narrow to deal with many global governance issues, as would even smaller groups. An additional consideration is that the time demands of international summits—exceeding a dozen per year for some leaders-- the wear and tear of travel across time zones and the redundancy of forums seems likely to result in consolidation of groups in any case. The G20 is the best solution so far to the legitimacy/effectiveness conundrum.

The G20 accounts for 90% of global gross national product, 80% of world trade and 67% of the world's population. (The G20 also accounts for about 80 percent of current greenhouse gas emissions, although who among the members bears the primary responsibility is hotly contested.) When it reaches agreement among its members, a large part of whatever problem it is addressing is solved. It cannot bind non-members by its decisions, but it can commend its decisions to others. It can also import its agreement into more representative organizations, notably the UN, to facilitate achieving universal endorsement.

The G20 can complement the UN not substitute for it. By definition, the G 20 lacks the legitimacy that universality of membership affords the UN. The G20 ought not become a kind of Concert of Powers. When the world last tried that, at the Congress of Vienna, it ended badly—two world wars and 100 million dead. The G20 cannot replace the UN, the motherboard of international governance—but until such time as the UN surmounts its hoary ideology-riven processes, the G20 is a welcome alternative avenue of action, so long as it liaises sensitively and sensibly with those not at the table.

### **United Nations Reform**

With one or two exceptions, the gap between the power of Security Council incumbents and the actual disposition of power in the world is becoming so wide that it risks destroying the legitimacy and effectiveness of the institution. For the countries that aspire to permanent seats, an unrepresentative and anachronistic Council is an illegitimate one. Worse, it is an ineffective one.

Not everyone equates enlargement with reform. Some opponents think the Council has a performance and accountability deficit—Darfur, Rwanda, Srebrenica, etc. and are opposed to the addition of further permanent seats, or vetoes, partly as a consequence. More members do not necessarily increase effectiveness or responsiveness. There is also the issue of principle. Opponents of adding permanent seats are for accountability and democratic practices and against aristocratic privilege. They are also opposed partly as a matter of self-interest. They presume that they, themselves, will not get a permanent seat and, worse, in some cases that their regional rivals will.

There are potential solutions to this problem short of according the emerging powers as well as the Japanese and Germans permanent seats with vetoes. To accommodate the aspirants, the UN could create perhaps six or seven elected seats with renewable five year terms, albeit without vetoes. Winners could run for re-election and

serve consecutively, if that is what the membership wished and if it elected them accordingly. Something like permanency would be established, while accountability would be preserved. This is one potential solution; others might be possible.

Council reform has been debated actively for more than twenty years but reconciling the positions of those who want permanent seats for themselves and those who do not want them to have them has thus far proved impossible. All the protagonists are members of the G20. It should be easier for professional politicians, leaders for whom compromise and the politics of the art of the possible are everyday realities, to find a practical political accommodation. Leaders are blessedly far removed from the hot-house of New York and its antique ideologies, accumulated grievances and personal delusions. It happens that there is a potentially useful overlap between the G20 and the Security Council in the next period. Ten G20 members (six G8 members) will be on the Council, as will be six of the aspirants for permanent Council membership. This coincidence could be used by leaders to resolve this issue.

### **G20/Major Economies/Emitters Forum and Climate Change**

No one said stopping and reversing Climate Change, the mother of all Tragedies of the Commons, was going to be easy. There are precious few examples of humanity managing to come together in its own enlightened self-interest to collectively change course on a major governance issue. But there are some examples. Notably, World War III has been avoided (so far), the proliferation of nuclear weapons has (largely) been averted and the Ozone layer has been (mostly) preserved.

The United Nations, with its 192 members, is too big and unwieldy, and too sensitive to conflicting interests and ideologies to reconcile the competing and diverging climate change interests on its own. On the other hand, the Copenhagen solution, a deal cut by five countries--the US, China, Brazil, India and South Africa-- and offered to others on a take it or leave it basis, was inadequate substantively and procedurally. The European Union, Japan, South Korea, Mexico and not least, Canada (as the US's major foreign supplier of oil, gas, electricity and uranium) are too important to an equitable and sustainable solution to be ignored. The Copenhagen deal lacked targets and timetables for the nations that signed on. And Copenhagen's promises of finance for mitigation and adaptation are a little too vague and back-end loaded to be taken at face value. But the Copenhagen glass was perhaps only half empty. Some very helpful progress was made inasmuch as more than 70 countries including 35 developing countries, including China, India and Brazil are part of the deal, and have pledged to take "nationally appropriate actions".

Still, this deal and its disparate actions will not save us from climate change. And, if the world is not to become a crazy quilt of regulation and trade protectionism masquerading as climate sensitivity, and if the "deal" is to be accepted by the rest of the world, it will have to be brought into the legitimizing processes of the UN. But first, a better deal has to be created. And, the world has to be brought to "yes".

What is needed is a group big enough to include all the nations whose cooperation is indispensable, but still small enough to facilitate getting agreement, i.e., to be effective on substance and efficient in negotiation. There are two alternatives which happily can add up to one solution: the Major Economies/Emitters Forum and the G20. The MEF has the requisite vocation—reducing emissions-- and the G20 has the requisite focus: economics and finance. The G20 is by its own declaration the world's "premier economic forum", and climate change carries drastic economic consequences for us if we fail to deal in good time with climate change, as Nicholas Stern has persuasively shown. For both substantive and procedural reasons, it would make sense for the MEF to morph into the G20 (all the MEF countries are already in the G20) and for climate change to be a constant item on the G20 agenda until there is an agreement. If nothing else, having one forum not two would save HOG/S' time.

The Leaders'G20 was created to deal with the last economic crisis stemming from sub-prime loans and totally inadequate regulation of financial institutions. The next economic crisis might well be driven by an inadequate response to climate change. If that is to be avoided, the elements of a climate change "deal" will need to include financing, energy policy, research, technology transfer, adaptation, perhaps global public health, surveillance and monitoring.

Recognizing climate change's multifaceted nature, the G20 could promote a further possible institutional innovation. Recognizing that climate change is much more than an environmental policy issue, the G20 could advocate upgrading the secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Bonn to a full-fledged UN fund or agency. It could dispose of a secretariat capable of addressing the macro-economic, financial, ecological, scientific, statistical, energy and development facets of the issue. It would be accorded international institutional leadership on this file, liaising with UNEP in Nairobi, the World Bank and UNDP, and with other organizations, notably the OECD, the IEA and the IAEA.

Other innovations are possible but the point is that it would likely be easier to reach agreement on them in a G20 context and then import them into the UN, the World Bank, and elsewhere for deliberation and adoption.

### **International Security Developments**

The UN Security Council is arguably the most important political body in the world, equipped by Chapter VII of the UN Charter with the power to "legislate" in member countries, a power that the G 8 and G20 do not (and should not) have. The decisions of the Council taken under Chapter VII are binding on member countries whether they are Council members at the time or not. The Council's writ covers peace and security, fairly broadly defined. Major international political and security issues continue to be brought to the UN for deliberation and decision. The Iraq war, the Israeli-Lebanese war and the Iranian nuclear program are high profile examples.

There is no need for the G20 to try to supplant the Security Council and probably less international support for its doing so. But there is an argument for the G20's injecting high level energy into the Council, as President Obama himself did last fall in chairing an arms control and disarmament session.

In any case, whatever is done vis-à-vis the Council, high level political discussions need to take place. For many years the G8 was a locus for discussion among leaders, notably on terrorism, arms control and disarmament, regional crises, etc. For example, in Birmingham in 1998, leaders discussed the Indian and Pakistani nuclear tests. At Kananaskis in Canada in 2002, the Global Partnership Program to safeguard loose nukes and employ footloose Soviet scientists was launched, as was a major partnership program with Africa. The same high level political engagement on the major issues of the day could readily take place in the G20, which also presents very useful opportunities for bilateral meetings. The greater the diversity of membership of the G20 and the less the commonality of interest the less agreement there might be at the end. But there would be offsetting advantages in terms of acquainting leaders with each other's aspirations, interests and bottom lines, determining the ballpark of common interest, and implementing the result effectively. In any case, as the G8 continues to atrophy as seems likely, political-military-development issues will need to find a locus for discussion by HOG/S. The G20 is the likeliest forum.