

A G20 “Non Secretariat”

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The preparatory process for G8 Summits proved to be both an art and a science. A critical role is played by each Leader’s Personal Representative – the “Sherpa”. The country hosting the event organizes the preparation of G8 summits, scheduled each year in June or early July. The incoming host takes over on January 1 and generally calls several preparatory meetings, involving officials from member countries. It is customary for the Host G8 Sherpa (the Leader’s personal representative) to visit each of his counterparts in December before its presidency to seek views and establish a personal relationship. Since 1995, the host calls a Sherpa meeting after the Summit, sometime in the fall, to review progress on the commitments made at the Leaders meeting.

The G8 summit process has been criticized for the lack of continuity and implementation monitoring. The G20 summit will have to demonstrate that it can do better. This will be difficult. The preparation of a G20 meeting is much more complex than a G8. With the increased number of participants relative to the G8, the challenge for continuity in the G20 is more extreme. The preparation and follow-up process for the G20 summit will be more demanding as it involves many more players. It would be very onerous, for example, for the host Sherpa to visit all the member countries. The preparation of an annual G20 meeting at Leaders level is also more challenging than a G20 Finance Ministers meeting. Finance ministers and their officials meet many times during the year. The G20 summit will also have a more comprehensive agenda relative to the G20 Finance ministers meeting.

The G20 will meet at leaders’ level twice in 2010—in Canada in June, and in Korea in November. The hosts plan each meeting according to their own agendas. The challenge is to manage and organize the summit to ensure continuity, institutional memory, and the implementation of plans and promises and yet be driven by capitals. The need for extensive preparation must be reconciled with the antipathy for formal bureaucracy. This must be done through a nimble, “non-bureaucratic” secretariat—controlled by Leaders—that would provide administrative and other support to the overall activities of the G20.

Currently, as the G20 Chair rotates between members, the incumbent Chair temporarily establishes an informal secretariat, composed of officials from within its government, for its term to coordinate the group’s work and organize its meetings.

At the Finance Ministers level, the G20 Chair is part of a revolving three-member management “troika” of Sherpas consisting of the current chair, as well as the immediately preceding and succeeding chairs. The management picture at Leaders level is less clear, with both Korea and Canada hosting the G20 in 2010. Currently, there appears to be a

“quintet”; the past hosts - the UK and US, Canada and Korea, and France. (On March 30, the Leaders of the five countries co signed a letter to their G20 colleagues.)

One way to address the management challenge—to reconcile the need for extensive preparation without a formal bureaucracy—is to set up a G20 summit **“non secretariat”**. Leaders would not want to see a bureaucratic structure take over the G20 summit. The existence of a heavy secretariat structure could undermine the commitment by the national government departments and agencies to the G20 summit processes. Formally, the secretariat would be located for one year in the host country. Alternatively, the secretariat could be hosted in one of the troika countries and move every three years. It would be headed by the G20 troika Sherpas, with two being non-resident. There would be no separate “Executive Secretary” or “Managing Director”.

Effective logistical and technical support for the G20 can be provided by seconding or cross-posting high-level staff from member countries of past, present, and future hosts—forming a Troika—for three-year terms. Seconded officials would maintain the essential contact with their own leaders and host government. This could ensure the secretariat work was not isolated from official policy direction. Officials would remain on their home government’s payroll. There are precedents. Some officials have been seconded ad hoc to host countries. In an effort “to make the G20 work for the future”, Shriti Vadera, a former British Cabinet Minister, left her post to assist the Korean government as a liaison between the outgoing British and incoming Korean G20 chair. The UK has seconded a senior official to Canada to assist in summit preparation.. This administrative staff could be supported by technical staff from member countries or international organizations to work on the thematic issues on the summit agendas.

When establishing the **“non secretariat”**, the advantage of creating longer fixed term positions (i.e. three year Troika terms) cannot be understated. The majority of existing secretariats operate in this manner. The ASEAN Secretary General has non-renewable term of office of five years, and is selected from among nationals of the ASEAN Member States based on alphabetical rotation. The Commonwealth Secretariat is headed by the Commonwealth Secretary-General who is appointed by Heads of Government for a maximum of two four-year terms. The Organization of American States (OAS) General Secretariat is led by a Secretary General and an Assistant Secretary General who are elected for 5-year terms. APEC had an annual rotating Secretary General but in 2010 it abandoned this structure and the appointment was made on a fixed-term basis (3 years) and was open to professional candidates from any of APEC's 21 member economies. This shift was a result of a desire to reassert APEC’s relevance.

Placing the secretariat in one location would ensure a more integrated approach between secretariat administrative, technical and logistical staff. A “permanent” secretariat would also provide a more integrated and coordinated approach to summit preparation and follow-up, to management with external relations and outreach, and to general communications. The secretariat could function with these staff carrying out their work in a

permanent location, while the Chairs, the three Sherpas forming the troika, could remain in their host countries and manage secretariat work remotely. Alternatively, quarterly meetings of the Sherpas, at the call of the host country, could act as the coordinating group to supervise a handful of staffers.

Stronger liaison contact points and implementation reporting requirements could be established in the key international institutions that are tasked with follow-up on G20 summits. Alternatively, existing structures could be asked to provide support (as was the case with the OECD in the case of the "Heiligendamm Process" of the G8). The small budget of the secretariat could be funded in equal parts by the members of the current troika.

The functions of this "non secretariat" secretariat would be to provide support for:

- Preparation of the summits (agenda and technical background)
- Follow-up of summits (monitoring of implementation of commitments)
- Managing relations with non-member countries and organizations

Linn suggests that given the sensitivity concerning expansion of international bureaucracy and the aversion toward the formality of a new structure, it may be better to refer to the proposed administrative support as "G20 Summit Staff". The staffing could be minimal; Spaventa suggests the G20 could follow the model of the International Organization of Securities Commissions (IOSCO). IOSCO members regulate more than 90 percent of the world's securities markets with their permanent headquarters in Spain staffed by only nine individuals.

As the G20 evolves, the complexity of preparation will increase, To square the circle and to provide a highly professional team, that is non bureaucratic, flexible and responsive to Leaders, only a "**non secretariat**" will do.