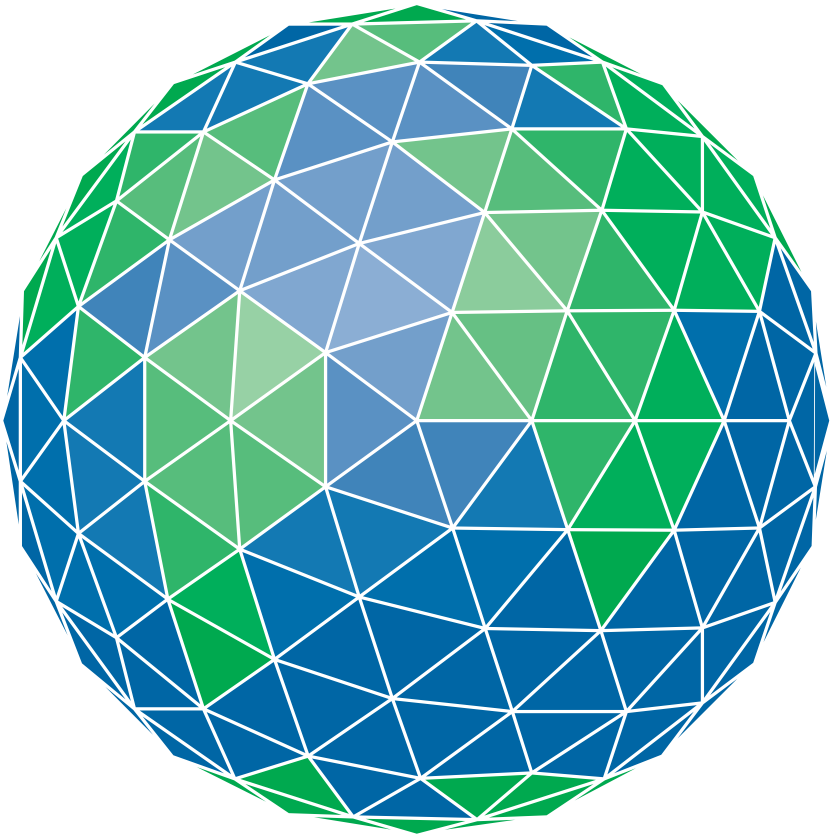

THE NEW GEOMETRY OF GLOBAL SUMMITRY

THE FUTURE OF THE G20 (AND THE G8)

CONFERENCE REPORT

CIGI

THE NEW GEOMETRY OF GLOBAL SUMMITRY: THE FUTURE OF THE G20 (AND THE G8)

CONFERENCE REPORT

The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Centre for International Governance Innovation or its Operating Board of Directors or International Board of Governors.

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CONFERENCE REPORT

Peter Heap

KEY POINTS

- The G20 has had initial and important successes but, at this post-crisis stage, has reached a critical point in its evolution.
- The G20 agenda is bound to expand over time; however, for the moment, its central focus should be on completing the extensive work program it has undertaken in the economic and financial areas.
- The G20 needs to build on its successes and take full advantage of areas of common interest.
- As much as possible, G20 agendas should encourage discussion among G20 leaders to be more political than technical.
- Development and related issues (such as food security) should continue to be on the G20 agenda. As time and circumstances permit, additional agenda items on nuclear proliferation and transnational crime may be considered.
- The G20 and the G8 can coexist, with the former continuing to have an economic orientation and the latter dealing with political and security issues. The G8 may move in the direction of being a more informal event, as opposed to the more highly structured G20 process.
- The G20 and the United Nations (UN) perform different functions and are not competitors. An effective G20 has the potential to re-energize the UN and its agencies. The UN Secretary-General should attend G20 summits.
- The G20 has an interest in ensuring there is constructive engagement with non-G20 states, both before and after summits.
- G20 leaders may wish to build domestic understanding of the activities undertaken at the summit in their respective countries.

INTRODUCTION

The Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI) has been at the forefront of research and dialogue on the institution and role of the Group of 20 (G20), and has sponsored a series of meetings to explore the issues surrounding this relatively new international grouping at the leaders' level. In cooperation with international partners, CIGI supports the G20 process with forward-looking analysis and ongoing consultation on issues confronting the global economy. In this context, CIGI hosted The New Geometry of Global Summitry: The Future of the G20 (and the G8) conference from May 2–4, 2011. At this conference, a group of experts, practitioners and eminent persons from around the world reflected and commented on the emergence of the G20 as the self-styled world's "premier economic forum" and the implications of this development for global governance.

The conference focused on a series of critical topics related to the G20's prospects:

- whether the G20 will become a "global steering group" and, if so, how will its legitimacy be assured;
- the challenges of global governance and the need for summitry;
- the future roles of the G8, the UN and the G20; and
- the future agenda of the G20.

THE G20 — FINANCIAL RESCUE SQUAD, ECONOMIC STEERING COMMITTEE OR POLITICAL CLEARING HOUSE?

The meeting began with CIGI Distinguished Fellow Paul Heinbecker's summary of the main points contained in his conference paper *The Future of the G20 and Its Place in Global Governance* (CIGI G20 Paper No. 5, April 2011). Participants went on to discuss the nature of, and prospects for, the G20. Most noted that the group had begun with a great success, having managed to blunt the impact of a serious global financial crisis.

There was, however, some disagreement over the extent to which countries would have acted cooperatively in self-preservation, whether or not the G20 existed. All agreed on the critical importance of directly involving the major emerging economies (China, India and Brazil, among others) in attempts to "manage" key aspects of the global downturn. Some pointed to the European experience in collective economic decision making, either

as a cautionary tale, or as a demonstration that groups of states could work their way through the difficult task of balancing national interests in order to achieve (in the European Union's case) broader regional benefits.

It was observed that the G20 contained a heterogeneous collection of states at various stages of economic development, of differing size and with varying historical traditions of governance. While some saw this as a major obstacle to effective cooperation (especially in the absence of a pressing crisis), others suggested that the group's greatest value lies in providing a forum in which competing approaches to common economic and financial challenges could be examined and reconciled. There was general agreement that the G20 fills an institutional gap in dealing with financial and economic issues at the global level. Most saw the group as an ongoing process, rather than a formalized institution that might compete with existing, rule-based organizations. Overall, the view was that, although the G20 needs a clear set of objectives and a structured plan to move its work forward effectively, the emphasis should remain on a degree of procedural flexibility and informality that allows for fruitful personal exchanges between G20 leaders.

The impact of domestic politics on G20 leaders was acknowledged. While some saw this as a limiting factor in terms of potential cooperation, others emphasized the importance of leaders bringing the political context within which they each operate to the table in a forthright manner. Greater mutual understanding was cited as a major benefit to be gained from G20 exchanges. It was noted that the G20 cannot bind members, but its deliberations could lay the foundation for coordinated activities by individual states or collective action in "hard" institutions such as Bretton Woods organizations or the UN and its agencies. An important by-product of the group's meetings could be leaders' efforts to "educate" their respective publics on the issues at stake and the benefits of cooperation. This was seen as a necessary component of political leadership at a time of rapidly changing international circumstances. Participants also suggested that the traditional line between foreign and domestic policy is being steadily eroded and the G20 provides a useful vehicle through which to fuse domestic and international politics as the role of the nation-state evolves.

The nature of leaders' discussions at G20 meetings was examined. There was general agreement that exchanges should not excessively deal with highly technical subjects, the argument being made that leaders would increasingly depend on reading prepared statements. The emphasis should be on political efforts to build consensus while not "fudging" to give the impression of progress in communiqués. Given the polarized state of US politics, the extent to which American leadership might be expected in the G20 was canvassed. There were divergent views on how much focus President Obama would bring to his G20 participation in the run-up to the 2012 presidential elections.

Overall, the discussion in this session reflected agreement that the G20's initial activities as a financial rescue squad were quite successful, but that the leaders' group was now moving on to a new stage — one that should focus on building political commonalities rather than formal economic institution building.

THE G20 AS SEEN FROM…

The second session involved a discussion of the attitudes of key states and regions towards the G20.

Africa

While recognizing that the G20 is a very important new mechanism, African countries are concerned that the G20 could devalue some key existing international agencies, notably the UN. The G20 will become relevant in Africa as soon as the agenda moves beyond technical financial issues (however important they may be). Only one African country (South Africa) is a G20 member; advance briefing of non-G20 members from the region would be very helpful in building the group's credibility in the continent. Other participants suggested that African interests have not been forgotten, at either the G8 or the G20, noting that South Korea had introduced development onto G20 agendas. It was acknowledged, however, that there was huge public indifference to the G20, especially in non-G20 countries (and not only in Africa)

China

China's approach to the G20 has been to focus on the issues that might unite its members. China's aversion to activities that might be considered interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign state is based on the country's historical experience. That being said, China believes that the G20 has succeeded by building consensus on common ground. China has little interest in pursuing the governance issues often espoused by Western countries. It believes that the G20's agenda should, for the time being, remain limited.

India

India regards the evolution of the G20 as a very positive development — a sign of the democratization of the international order. The G20 provides a forum in

which the voices of developing countries can be heard; however, some of these positions may not be welcomed by developed countries. In India's view, the G20 can maintain its credibility only if it delivers on its existing commitments. Over time, the G20's structure and practices may consolidate, but for the moment, India regards the G20 as more of an evolving process.

The United States

The current political situation (centred on deficit/debt-related considerations) in the United States will likely restrict President Obama from being as active as he might be in the G20. That said, US involvement will not noticeably decline.

Participants had a lively, but inconclusive, debate about the extent to which leadership within the G20 might be expected from key countries such as China, India or the United States. The need to overcome public indifference was stressed, and it was suggested that developing a range of more "non-technical" agenda items may be required. In this regard, the work of the G20 must be made relevant to the everyday life of individuals. One participant stressed the need to keep the summit agenda's "space" more open for leaders — he suggested that officials were so afraid of failure that they were condemning the G20 to empty success. Others maintained that Western countries were still trying to control agendas, notwithstanding the G20's broader composition. Many participants believed that open disagreement at G20 meetings in such key areas as climate change, responsibility to protect and poverty related to governance is healthy and mutually instructive. Most agreed that leaders need to get to know each other on a personal level, in order for progress on difficult issues to be made.

THE G20 AND THE G8: IS PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE POSSIBLE?

Overall, discussion of this subject resulted in the general conclusion that the G8 and the G20 will continue to exist for now and the two groups are developing separate and useful vocations. The question of whether the G8 will continue indefinitely was left open.

The exchanges began with one participant's observation that the two groups are no longer in competition. The G8 has moved away from economic and financial issues, and focuses on peace and security and development (that is, the mobilization of financial resources). It was further suggested that the G20 is a nascent institution, whereas the G8 is, increasingly, an event. The division of labour between the two groups flows from that distinction. Co-existence is clearly possible, and most G8 members are still committed to meeting. In contrast, another view put forward was that the two agendas are, in fact, conflicting, and represent the divergence of interest between the "traditional" and the "new" industrial powers. One participant suggested that the strength of the G20 lies with the opportunities its meetings provide for alliances to spring up among diverse countries that would not normally work together.

From a European perspective, ending the G8 meetings might cause apprehension (from Europe) that its special relationship with the United States was in jeopardy. Even within the G20, and on some specific topics (such as International Monetary Fund governance), there is some tension between Europe and the United States. Nevertheless, the likelihood that the G8 will be terminated now seems lower. The G8 countries, as a group, are still a powerful economic factor, although over time, the G8 summits may become more low-key and informal events.

Some participants did not accept that some issues currently on the G8 agenda (for example, cybercrime and nuclear proliferation) could not be usefully discussed at the G20 as well. Others emphasized the need for the G20 to consolidate, through successfully completing its considerable agenda and commitments in the financial and economic areas.

THE G20 AND THE UNITED NATIONS: PARTNERS OR COMPETITORS?

Participants discussed the significant differences between the G20 and the UN. It was noted that the UN's core mandate is to prevent war and it is not a serious economic actor. The G20's focus is the management of global macroeconomic issues; peace and security were not on the original G20 agenda. The UN has legal legitimacy and the G20 does not. The UN is an operating agency, while the G20 is not. These differences notwithstanding, both the UN and the G20 suffer from a crisis of communications. There would be a backlash, for example, if the G20 was seen to be damaging the international rules-based system that is so critical for smaller states. A weakened UN would have no obvious successor, which would be dangerous for the state of international relations. The general conclusion was that the UN and the G20 are very different, that they are not (and should not be) competitors and that ways to ensure that their roles are complementary should be found (one participant maintained that the two are so unalike that they could not, strictly speaking, be partners, much less competitors).

Several participants noted the G20 is still evolving and, therefore, it should not overreach. It was suggested that, in general terms, the areas of crossover between the G20

and UN address the underlying causes of conflict and encourage the development of good governance and the rule of law. There was general agreement that neither the G20 nor the UN is a substitute for the other.

There was a discussion of US attitudes towards the UN and the G20. Participants disagreed on the extent to which the US financial contribution to the UN was under threat from US Congress. It was suggested the greatest threat to the UN comes from the UN itself. The United States will continue to "forum shop," work constructively in both the G20 and the UN contexts, and not end its support for either the G8 or the Bretton Woods institutions.

Participants discussed the concerns of those states that are not part of the G20. Particular notice was taken of the work of the Global Governance Group (3G), a group of 28 smaller UN member states that are concerned about the impact of G20 decisions (a statement from the 3G can be found at www.un.org/esa/ffd/events/2010GAWGFC/7/Stmt_Singapore.pdf). The 3G generally supports the G20's efforts, but stresses the need for non-G20 members to be consulted, urges the participation of the UN Secretary-General and his Sherpa at G20 summits and preparatory meetings, supports the regular inclusion of regional organizations in G20 summits and proposes a "variable geometry" approach to allow small- and medium-sized states to participate in G20 meetings on specialized subjects that are of direct interest to them.

Practical ways in which the G20 could engage with UN member states were canvassed. It was noted that G20 host countries have already undertaken a variety of forms of consultation and the effort to find the most effective mechanisms is ongoing. The importance of debriefing following G20 summits was stressed. Some warned that G20 "outreach" will inevitably bring with it pressures to extend the summit agenda at a time when consolidation might be more advisable. Others suggested that the "hiving off" of peace and security issues was artificial and that once in the same room, G20 leaders would discuss whatever they felt was most important at the time. Participants generally agreed the UN Secretary-General should attend G20 summits, but as the representative of that organization rather than as the representative of the non-G20 states. The G20 needs to listen and respond to G172 concerns; however, it was pointed out that the G20 countries are also key members of the UN and, accordingly, are in a strategic position to mobilize constructive change in the latter.

WHAT SHOULD BE ON THE G20'S FUTURE AGENDA (2012 AND BEYOND)?

Six items that might usefully be added to future G20 agendas were examined: climate change/energy security, food security, transnational crime/cybercrime/terrorism, development/global poverty reduction, support for "Arab awakening" and nuclear proliferation. It was suggested that five criteria should govern the selection of additional topics. There should be:

- an evident need for collective action;
- an immediate crisis;
- a clear leadership vacuum;
- no existing organization capable of taking action; and
- good prospects for success and win/win outcomes.

Participants discussed each of the six possible agenda additions in turn. Development (which is already on the agenda in the wake of the Seoul G20 Summit) received the most support around the room. Certain aspects of food security are already being addressed by the G20, and the topic certainly fits under the general rubric of development. Nuclear proliferation and transnational crime both had strong advocates. Climate change and the "Arab awakening" were not seen as "ready for prime time" at the G20.

The discussion of new agenda items prompted a lively debate over two key, interrelated issues — which countries should take the lead in driving the G20 agenda, and how broadly and how quickly should the G20 agenda expand. On the first matter, some participants felt that the emerging economies (especially China and India) should play a more active role, while others maintained that these countries had already shown leadership.

On the issue of consolidation versus expansion, strong views were heard on both sides. Some were very concerned that the credibility of the G20 depends on successfully completing the ambitious work plan related to the recent (and perhaps continuing) global financial crisis. Practicality demanded a measured approach to core issues. The new development item is huge, generating some 20 working groups. There are already 40 "report back" requirements coming out of Seoul.

Others suggested that the G20 summit gatherings afford an opportunity, that should not be missed, to develop a key new instrument of global governance. One participant maintained that the future of the planet is at stake and the G20 is the one unique political institution

that could meet the environmental challenges generated by climate change, and the related widespread threats to marine life.

The weight of opinion rested on the side of ensuring that the existing G20 agenda is worked through as effectively and expeditiously as possible. It was accepted, however, that the agenda will inevitably expand under the pressure of events (and as leaders' domestic political focus shifts). A disturbing reality is that the time available to leaders at G20 meetings is about half of that customarily devoted to G8 meetings, while the problems the G20 leaders address are increasing in complexity and number. The long-term success of the G20 process still hangs in the balance.

Peter Heap is a senior researcher at the Centre for Global Studies at the University of Victoria. A former foreign service officer, assistant deputy minister with the federal and British Columbia governments, and director at the Institute for Research on Public Policy, he is the author of Globalization and Summit Reform: An Experiment in International Governance.

THE NEW GEOMETRY OF GLOBAL SUMMITRY: THE FUTURE OF THE G20 (AND THE G8)

AGENDA

Monday, May 2, 2011

18:00 Reception

19:00–21:00 Dinner

Tuesday, May 3, 2011

Is the G20 Up to the Challenge?

9:30–9:45 Morning Conference Charge

9:45–11:45 **Session One: The G20 — Financial Rescue Squad, Economic Steering Committee or Political Clearing House?**

This session will assess the role and process of the G20. What kind of G20 is needed? What, if anything, should the group be doing differently? Further, this session will consider if G20 meetings at the leaders' level are still required — if so, what can be done to engage the interest of leaders in the discussions of the G20? With respect to the G20 preparatory process, the session will also discuss whether the G20 needs a secretariat and/or a better-functioning troika, as well as the concept of variable geometry.

11:45–12:00 Break

12:00–13:30 Lunch

13:30–15:30 **Session Two: The G20 as Seen from...**

This session will illuminate different national perspectives on the future of the G20 and the needs of global governance. It will explore the perceptions of global leadership in a variety of G20 administrations. We shall also address media and public assessments of the G20 on the one hand and official opinion on the other: Is there a gap? If so, what, if anything, can be done to close it?

15:30–15:45 Break

15:45–17:45 **Session Three: The G20 and the G8: Is Peaceful Co-existence Possible?**

This session will discuss whether there is a continuing role for the G8.

19:30 Reception

20:00–22:00 Dinner

Wednesday, May 4, 2011

Summitry and Breaking Global Deadlocks

9:00–11:00 **Session Four: The G20 and the United Nations: Partners or Competitors?**

This session will look at what challenges, if any, the G20 poses to the United Nations and how the two entities can help each other. It will also consider how G20 countries should relate to those countries and institutions not at the table or not in the room.

11:00–11:15 Break

11:15–13:15 **Session Five: What Should Be on the G20's Future Agenda (2012 and Beyond)?**

There is general agreement that even if the G20 graduates from "fire brigade" to agenda setter or steering group, it should deal with a limited number of issues at a time. Il SaKong warned against adding new "heavyweight issues" that would dilute the G20 focus. Others, though, think that broadening the focus is advisable. Criteria could be developed to help determine which issues should be put on the G20 leaders' agenda. They could include, for example:

- Whether the issue has major implications for both advanced and emerging economies;
- Whether any other organization is dealing adequately with the issue;
- Whether G20 leadership is imperative; and
- Whether reasonable prospects exist for success on the issue.

If the G20 expands its mission beyond core economic issues already on its agenda, which issues are ripe for inclusion on the G20 agenda?

13:15 Closing Remarks and Lunch

PARTICIPANT LIST

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Thomas A. Bernes, Executive Director, CIGI

Colin Bradford, Senior Fellow, CIGI; Nonresident Senior Fellow, The Brookings Institution

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G20 PAPER SERIES

The Financial Stability Board and International Standards
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Making the G20 Summit Process Work: Some Proposals for Improving Effectiveness and Legitimacy
Barry Carin, Paul Heinbecker, Gordon Smith, Ramesh Thakur, CIGI G20 Paper No. 2 (June 2010).

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Paul Heinbecker, CIGI G20 Paper No. 5 (April 2011).

G7 to G8 to G20: Evolution in Global Governance
Gordon S. Smith, CIGI G20 Paper No. 6 (May 2011).

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Benefit Sharing for the French G20: The Role of Asia
Gregory Chin (February 2011).

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Badye Essid and Paul Jenkins (April 2011).

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Colin Bradford (April 2011).

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National Perspectives on Global Leadership: Soundings Series — Summitry and Public Perceptions
A joint CIGI-Brookings Institution Project, Colin Bradford et al. (March 2011).

NPGL Soundings Series: www.cigionline.org/npgl

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The Centre for International Governance Innovation is an independent, non-partisan think tank on international governance. Led by experienced practitioners and distinguished academics, CIGI supports research, forms networks, advances policy debate and generates ideas for multilateral governance improvements. Conducting an active agenda of research, events and publications, CIGI's interdisciplinary work includes collaboration with policy, business and academic communities around the world.

CIGI's current research programs focus on four themes: the global economy; the environment and energy; development; and global security.

CIGI was founded in 2001 by Jim Balsillie, co-CEO of RIM (Research In Motion) and collaborates with and gratefully acknowledges support from a number of strategic partners, in particular the Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario.

Le CIGI a été fondé en 2001 par Jim Balsillie, co-chef de la direction de RIM (Research In Motion). Il collabore avec de nombreux partenaires stratégiques et exprime sa reconnaissance du soutien reçu de ceux-ci, notamment de l'appui reçu du gouvernement du Canada et de celui du gouvernement de l'Ontario.

For more information, please visit www.cigionline.org.

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