



## **A new Global Leaders' Forum? Comparing and evaluating recent proposals**

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Over the past five years, interest has grown in the idea of a new 'global catalytic leadership forum' to complement or even replace the G8. The specific format and country membership of such proposals varies: from the L20 proposed by former Canadian PM Paul Martin to the G25 called for by the International Task Force on Global Public Goods and the L27 put forward by the 2006 UN High Level Panel on System Coherence. (A full breakdown of the various proposals made for such a forum, and their composition, is set out in Part I below.) What all these proposals have in common, though, is:

- a clear definition that such a forum would be at the level of leaders or heads of government;
- an aspiration to act as a forum for informal discussion of what might loosely be termed the 'management of globalisation' – in particular issues that like climate change, energy security or global economic imbalances, do not fit neatly into sectoral 'silos' – and generally not including 'hard' security issues like terrorism or non-proliferation;
- an eschewal of ambition to be a formal institution, the objective being instead to create a complement to multilateral treaty bodies that would act as a forum for informal discussion, agenda-setting and deal-making; and
- inclusion of a larger number of countries than the current G8, in particular including major emerging developing countries such as China and India.

The arguments in favour of such a forum tend to fall into two categories: effectiveness and legitimacy.

On the **effectiveness** side, proponents of a new forum point to the multilateral system's apparent failure so far to get to grips with many of the most pressing challenges posed by globalisation. Most multilateral environmental agreements suffer from an implementation deficit; the climate change objectives agreed under Kyoto are manifestly inadequate in terms both of the countries included and the emission targets for those that have signed up; the IMF has not been permitted to play a significant role in resolving global economic imbalances; some of the world's largest energy consumers are not members of the International Energy Agency; the current trade round has stalled; and so on.

Proponents of a new global leadership forum argue that part of the problem here is the increasing fragmentation of multilateral institutions into sectoral 'silos' that mirror ministers' areas of responsibility within national governments. As the 2004 UN High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change put it,

“the fragmented sectoral approaches of international institutions mirror the fragmented sectoral approaches of Governments: for example, finance ministries tend to work only with the international financial institutions, development ministers work only with development programmes, ministers of agriculture work only with food programmes and environment ministers only with environmental agencies.”

Given that globalisation has involved the erosion not only of borders between countries but also of the boundaries between political issues, such arguments go, it is only leaders that can take a strategic view across different policy areas and forge deals built on trade offs that can cut seamlessly across energy, trade, climate change, currency policy and so on.

At the same time, arguments based on effectiveness also emphasise the unwieldy nature of inclusive global governance forums such as the UN General Assembly, or the WTO General Council. Such bodies, based on the principle of one country / one vote, clearly enjoy great legitimacy. But they are not where serious business gets done; the real deal-making happens elsewhere, either in different multilateral bodies or in informal ‘Green Room’ contexts. A smaller forum is therefore seen as desirable.

On the **legitimacy** side of the equation, advocates of a new forum argue that while smaller bodies like the Security Council or the G8 do not suffer from the unwieldiness problem that afflicts the General Assembly or the UN Economic and Social Council, they are widely perceived as exclusive rich country clubs that fail to take developing country interests adequately into account. This is a problem, the arguments go, not only because legitimacy is desirable in itself, but also because emerging global players like China, India or Brazil are prerequisites for any effective management of globalisation – and will not have incentives to participate in multilateral action if they are treated as second class citizens.

This short research note tries to avoid taking a firm side in favour of or against the idea of a new global catalytic leadership forum: there is plenty such advocacy already, and given the range of different proposals for the format of such a body, and for what it would do and how it would work, it is in any case probably too soon to take a firm stance one way or the other. Instead, it briefly sets out four open questions about the nature, form and function of such a body: what would it do? Which countries would be members? How it work? And will it ever happen? Before discussing these issues, though, Part I below compares the proposals currently on the table.

## Part I: a comparison of formats for a global leadership forum

Format	Source	Membership	Roles	Status of forum
<b>G8</b>	First summit of six countries in 1975 at Rambouillet in France; Canada joined 1976; EC attended from 1977.	Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, UK, US.  European Commission and rotating EU President attend.  UN Secretary-General and heads of IMF, World Bank and WTO attended 1996, 2003, 2005, 2006 and 2007. 2005 also included African Union Commission and IEA. 2006 also included AU Presidency, IEA, IAEA, UNESCO and WHO. 2007 also included AU Commission, OECD and IEA.	G7 founded with objectives defined by Nicholas Bayne as follows <sup>1</sup> : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “To use the political leadership of heads of government to launch new ideas and overcome deadlock at lower levels”;</li> <li>• “To reconcile domestic and international pressures that were generated by growing interdependence”; and</li> <li>• “To develop collective management among Europe, North America and Japan, to replace original US hegemony”</li> </ul>	Not a formal multilateral institution but established role within international system.  Formally became G8 at Birmingham in 1998, following Russian attendance from 1994 onwards.
<b>G8+5</b>	Countries invited by UK to Gleneagles in 2005 and involved in follow-up forums.  Builds on earlier outreach from Evian in 2003.	G8 plus Brazil, China, India, Mexico, South Africa.	Not formally defined, though the Gleneagles communique stated that the five had been invited to participate in discussions on “climate change and the global economy”. They were subsequently asked to St Petersburg in 2006 and to Heiligendamm in 2007.  Gleneagles launched a formal ‘dialogue’ on energy and environment, including not only the +5 countries but also seven others: Australia, Indonesia, Nigeria, Poland, Spain and South Korea. Subsequent events have included ministerial level meetings in Mexico in October 2006 and in Germany in 2007. NB that while this makes a total of 20 countries in all, the list is not the same as for the L20 (see below).	Not yet formal enlargement of the G8, although participation of the +5 is in the process of becoming a regularly observed convention.

Format	Source	Membership	Roles	Status of forum
			Heiligendamm also agreed to launch a new “topic-driven dialogue on key world economic issues”, including investment, corporate social responsibility, innovation, energy efficiency and development policy.	
<b>L20</b>	Former Canadian PM Paul Martin; L20 project established by CFGS and CIGI. Brookings also actively following up. Also endorsed by UN High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change (2004)	G8 countries plus Argentina, Australia, Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, with European Union.  HLP called for “regular attendance” by IMF, World Bank and European Union (though EU attends G20 Finance Ministers as a matter of course); and “inclusion in the group” of UNSG and President of ECOSOC.	Defined by High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change (2004) as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “...a body that brings together the key developed and developing countries [at the leaders’ level] to address the critical interlinkages between trade, finance, the environment, the handling of pandemic diseases and economic and social development.”</li> </ul> Defined by Paul Martin in <i>Foreign Affairs</i> in 2005 as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “...to establish an environment that promotes the exchange of views rather than pre-cooked briefs and speeches”</li> <li>• “...should be results-oriented, focussing on those issues on which clear political leadership is needed to move the world forward”</li> <li>• “...a caucus of leading countries working together to build an international consensus on crosscutting economic, social, and political issues that have not yet found an appropriate place or commanded a real consensus on the agendas of bodies such as the [Security Council]”</li> </ul>	Would be an informal club grouping, explicitly not a formal multilateral institution.  Unclear whether provision would be made for potential for membership to change in future.
<b>Global 25 forum (G25)</b>	International Task Force on Global Public Goods (2006)	G20 countries (as per L20 above), plus additional African states and poorest countries, to a maximum of 25 actors.  Options for addressing imbalances in	Defined by International Taskforce on GPGs as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Initiate action on upcoming agendas and rapidly address emerging issues”;</li> <li>• “Forge political agreements and compromises on the toughest issues”;</li> <li>• “Recognise the trade-offs required across different</li> </ul>	As with L20, would be an informal club grouping, explicitly not a formal multilateral institution.

Format	Source	Membership	Roles	Status of forum
		<p>G20 mix to include adding representatives from regional organisations “beginning with the AU” and other regions if/when regional mechanisms strengthened; and/or adding one or two most populous or wealthy countries in each of most under-represented regions, starting with Africa and Middle East.</p> <p>UNSG would participate.</p>	<p>sectors”;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Generate advance commitments, thereby kick-starting supply of global public goods”;</li> <li>• “Help to secure appropriate and adequate financing for the supply of global public goods”;</li> <li>• “Challenge existing international institutions to take on issues and to perform reliably and effectively”;</li> <li>• “Monitor follow-up”</li> </ul>	<p>Unclear whether provision would be made for potential for membership to change in future.</p>
<p><b>Reform of ECOSOC</b></p>	<p>2005 World Summit Outcome Document (UNGA Resolution A/RES/60/1)</p>	<p>Existing membership of ECOSOC (54 countries elected by GA: 18 countries elected each year for 3 year terms)</p> <p>Current regional balance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Africa 14</li> <li>• Asia 11</li> <li>• Eastern Europe 6</li> <li>• Lat Am &amp; Caribbean 10</li> <li>• W. Europe / other 13</li> </ul>	<p>2005 World Summit Outcome Document recognised “...the need for a more effective Economic and Social Council as a principal body for coordination, policy review, policy dialogue and recommendations on issues of economic and social development” and recommended that it improve performance on high-level engagement with member states, IFIs, private sector and civil society on global trends; hold a biennial high level Development Cooperation Forum; ensure follow-up on outcomes of UN summits; and play a major role in overall coordination of funds, programmes and agencies.</p> <p>Charter amendment not needed for these changes, but greatly increased political will would be; so far, however, little movement towards these recommendations on the part of member states.</p>	<p>ECOSOC a formal multilateral body constituted under Article 61 of the UN Charter</p>
<p><b>ECOSOC Global Leaders’ Forum</b></p>	<p>UN High Level Panel on System-wide Coherence</p>	<p>Membership would be leaders of half of ECOSOC’s 54 member countries, “rotating on the basis of equitable geographic representation”.</p>	<p>Defined by High Level Panel on System-wide Coherence as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Provide leadership and guidance to the international</li> </ul>	<p>Unclear what the formal relationship between ECOSOC and such a subsidiary</p>

<b>Format</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Membership</b>	<b>Roles</b>	<b>Status of forum</b>
<b>(L27)</b>	(2006)	<p>Not clear that major world economies would necessarily participate.</p> <p>Heads of “the major international economic and financial institutions” would participate.</p>	<p>community on development and global public goods related issues”;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Develop a long-term strategic policy framework to secure consistency in the policy goals of the major international organizations”; and</li> <li>• “Promote consensus-building among governments on integrated solutions for global economic, social and environmental issues”</li> </ul>	forum would be, or whether it would require Charter amendment; would depend on status of L27, which is not defined in HLP report.
<b>UN Economic Security Council</b>	<p>Commission on Global Governance (1995)</p> <p>Also endorsed by UN High Level Panel on Financing for Development (2001)</p>	<p>No details given by Commission other than “structured like the Security Council, though not with identical membership and independent of it”.</p> <p>Commission also proposed for ECOSOC to be wound up, implying that the Economic Security Council would take its place.</p> <p>Panel member Jan Pronk later said that membership would be “the existing major economies as well as representatives from the regional economic groupings”.<sup>1</sup></p>	<p>Defined by the Commission on Global Governance as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Continuously assess the overall state of the world economy and the interaction between major policy areas”;</li> <li>• “Provide a long-term strategic policy framework in order to promote stable, balanced, and sustainable development”;</li> <li>• “Secure consistency between the policy goals of the major international organizations, particularly the Bretton Woods bodies and the World Trade Organization (WTO)”;</li> <li>• “Give political leadership and promote consensus on international economic issues.”</li> </ul>	Forum would have “deliberative functions only... its influence will derive from the relevance and quality of its work and the significance of its membership”. But it would also be “a distinct body within the UN family”
<b>UN Economic and Social Security Council</b>	Kemal Dervis in “A Better Globalization”, CGD (2005)	14 members: 6 seats for permanent members (EU, United States, Japan, China, India, Russia) and 8 seats for constituencies (Other Asia; Latin American, Caribbean and Canada;	<p>Defined by Dervis as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principal power would be to “appoint all heads of institutions” – but “would not interfere ... in the workings of the institutions”; “having appointed the chief executives, the UNESC would not go beyond</li> </ul>	Would be a formally constituted multilateral body and require UN Charter revision

<sup>1</sup> Remarks by Jan Pronk at World Summit on Social Development, Copenhagen, 7 March 1995, cited at <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/conf/166/ngo/950307140407.htm>

Format	Source	Membership	Roles	Status of forum
		<p>Africa; Arab League; other Europe), all with votes weighted by share of world population, GDP and contribution to UN global public goods budget. Members would be elected every two years by UNGA, for a two year term, with voting strengths as described above.</p> <p>Would meet at level of heads of government of the 14 member countries, once a year, during UNGA; <i>and</i> very regular meetings of UNESCO council members: “senior officials with distinguished careers in the economic and social sphere” who would “have to satisfy certain [explicit and binding] criteria in terms of experience with designing and implementing economic and social policies”: should not be member countries’ UN Perm Reps.</p>	<p>providing strategic guidance, promoting communication and public discussion, and evaluating performance ... the UNESCO would not have any executive function”.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Would be “the governance umbrella for <i>all</i> specialised economic and social agencies currently in the UN system”, plus Bretton Woods institutions and WTO</li> <li>• “Provide an overall framework of coherence and efficiency to international institutions and cooperation in the economic and social sphere”</li> <li>• “Elaborate guidelines to avoid duplication, work on long-term reform and cooperation strategies, evaluate the effectiveness of all institutions and their programs, conduct some comparative research focused on effectiveness”</li> </ul>	

## Part 2: a discussion of the proposals

### I. Mandate and issue coverage

One feature common to most of the proposals set out in Part I above is the rather vague description of precisely what their role would be. An L20, for example, would “address critical interlinkages”, “promote the exchange of views”, “be results-oriented” and “build an international consensus on cross-cutting issues”; a G25, for its part, would “initiate action”, “forge political agreements”, “recognise trade-offs”, “generate advance commitments”, “help to secure financing” and “challenge existing international institutions”.

Meanwhile, an L27 would “provide leadership and guidance”, “develop a long-term strategic policy framework” and “promote consensus-building among governments”; and as for the UN Economic Security Council proposed by the 1995 Commission on Global Governance, it too would “provide a strategic policy framework” and “give political leadership” – but it would helpfully also “continuously assess the overall state of the world economy” and (in its spare time, presumably) “secure consistency between the policy goals of the major international organisations”.

In each case, the reader is tempted to respond simply: “Fine. How?” For the first question for any deliberative global leaders’ forum is what reason there is to suppose that it would be any more than a talking shop. It is hard to argue against the need for consensus, consistency, strategic frameworks and exchanges of views, and it is also clear that the world needs to do much better than it is currently doing in managing certain critical risks that have emerged in the last decade or two. But overcoming these challenges has to do with hard-edged questions of power and interests. Is it clear that the key obstacle to better management of global risks is the lack of an enlarged leaders’ forum – as opposed to (say) a lack of political will or a perception on the part of heads that interests are simply too divergent to allow for far-reaching deals to be made?

The answer to this question really depends on what are the specific global risks that a new forum would be expected to help to manage. And this, perhaps, is the strongest critique to be made of the various proposals for a new global leaders’ forum: that proponents of such a forum can easily fall into the trap of designing the *form* of such a body without necessarily having defined its *function* beyond a vague reference to ‘managing globalisation in an interconnected world where everything is connected to everything else’.

This is not to say that a leaders’ forum should be written off. This is an interconnected world, issues *do* overlap; leaders are not yet managing global risks effectively; and the ability to forge cross-issue deals is probably essential to doing so. Rather, it is to say that in order to evaluate the contribution that such a forum would make, there needs to be very much more clarity and specificity on exactly what are the cross-issue deals that it might forge.

However, the principal advocates of (for example) the L20 avoid giving a clear answer to the question of what is the deal that such a forum might forge. Johannes Linn and Colin Bradford at the Brookings Institution accept that an L20 summit would require an early win, and go on to suggest that it could usefully look at:

- trade and the Doha Round talks;
- management of epidemics like avian flu;
- Iran’s nuclear ambitions;
- global poverty;
- the “global energy crunch”;
- global environmental threats, such as global warming;

- preparedness and response for natural disasters;
- global security issues “including weapons of mass destruction, terrorism and failed states”; and
- reforms of existing international institutions (“especially reform of the UN and the IFIs”).<sup>2</sup>

This is certainly a comprehensive list – indeed there are not very many issues left off the list – but it does not really help to answer the question of just what sort of deals that an L20 might be able to forge. The High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change does not help much either in saying that an L20 would address the linkages between “trade, finance, the environment, the handling of pandemic diseases, and economic and social development”.<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps the most helpful starting point is Paul Martin’s argument that a leaders’ forum could focus on those political issues “that have not yet found an appropriate place or commanded a real consensus on the agendas of bodies such as the Security Council”.<sup>4</sup> What list of issues might we come up with if we began by asking which ones clearly lack a global home at the moment?

To start with, we could probably strike security issues off the list proposed by Linn and Bradford (as most other proponents of a new leaders’ forum do). The Security Council guards its role on areas such as arms proliferation and conflict response jealously, and suggesting that a new leaders’ forum might tackle such issues would probably guarantee stiff(er) P5 opposition to such a proposal. One might still argue that a leaders’ forum might tackle the ‘softer’ end of security – peacekeeping, post-conflict reconstruction and conflict prevention – but the first of these is clearly a Security Council issue; the new Peacebuilding Commission ought to be given at least a chance to demonstrate its effectiveness on the second; and the third is probably the domain of ad-hoc contact groups and peace processes in the short term sense, and of development cooperation more generally in the long term sense.

Perhaps more controversially, and despite the frequent references to ‘managing globalisation’ in the literature on a global leaders’ forum, we might perhaps also question how much of a role national leaders really have on global finance and economic issues. If one looks at the history of the G8, it is clear that while the group began life between oil shocks in the 1970s with management of the global economy very much to the fore, this role has receded considerably from the G8’s agenda in more recent years. In the ten years since it formally became the G8 at Birmingham in 1998, G8 heads of government did not agree on any significant action on the global economy or international financial architecture. Instead, G8 heads focused between 1998 and 2006 on areas such as crime (1998), Kosovo (1999), information technology (2000), the Middle East (2004) and above all debt relief, development and Africa (in particular in 1999, 2001, 2002, 2004 and 2005).

Where finance and economy issues on the heads’ agenda did result in concrete action, as in 1999 at Cologne when the Financial Stability Forum was agreed, heads did no more than to endorse what their finance ministers had worked up in advance.<sup>5</sup> In the meantime, G8 finance ministers have by contrast proved much more active than heads of government on the global economy over the same period from 1998 to today. As noted a moment ago, it was finance ministers who in the wake of the 1997 South East Asian economic crisis agreed in 1999 the Financial Stability Forum to bring together regulators of financial markets. And from Kananaskis in 2002 onwards, even the practice of finance ministers supplying formal reports of their own G8 meeting to heads has lapsed.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Linn and Bradford (2006)

<sup>3</sup> UN High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change (2004)

<sup>4</sup> Martin (2005)

<sup>5</sup> Bayne (2005)

<sup>6</sup> Bayne (2005)

At the same time, the agenda of the International Monetary and Financial Committee (IMFC) has also proved a reliable indicator of which issues are 'live' in the international economy, and has a track record of agreeing substantive commitments. Finally, and most recently, it is between finance ministers that the liveliest strategic dialogue between the United States and China is arguably to be found: new US Treasury Secretary Hank Paulson has initiated a new dialogue with his opposite number in China, and while it has yet to generate concrete results, it represents a considerably livelier and more substantive discussion than is to be found between President Bush and Premier Hu Jintao.

So if a new global leaders' forum larger than the G8 were to concentrate on cross-sectoral bargaining other than security and global macroeconomic questions, what would this leave?

Part of the answer could be trade policy. Here, G8 leaders have taken an interest since 1998, even if arguably not to any great effect, and the current travails of the Doha Round suggest that there is a case for elevating negotiations to heads level (as indeed happened when EC President Jose Manuel Barroso visited Washington in January 2007).<sup>7</sup> Another possibility, as both Paul Martin and Linn and Bradford have suggested, is infectious disease and public health systems in developing countries – although progress in developing country governance systems is probably at least as important as development finance commitments from donor countries. Two further options suggested by the GPG task force include helping to forge deals on multilateral reform; and dealing with links between security and non-security issues (such as potential implications under WTO rules of enhanced shipping container security procedures).

But perhaps the most obvious and pressing area where global leaders could have an impact is the cluster of issues around global climate change and energy security. This field clearly and comprehensively transcends sectoral or departmental boundaries; it is urgent; it requires the engagement of a wider group of countries than just the G8; and (especially on energy security, given that China and India are not even members of the International Energy Agency), it is at risk of falling down a crack between international agencies' mandates.

While the exact nature of a global deal on this area would be for heads to work out themselves, the logical outline of what is required on climate change is already fairly clear: international agreement on a safe 'ceiling' for levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, and then agreement also on how to share out the year-on-year global 'emissions budget' allowances – which would, given the likelihood of global emissions trading, be a highly valuable new tradable asset – consistent with staying beneath that level. There is still, however, a dearth of research on what a post-Kyoto deal might look like, with more political energy currently concentrated on more modest incremental initiatives on clean energy or sub-global emissions trading arrangements.

Energy policy is similarly complex, not least because of the sheer breadth of the issue: from global oil markets to regional pipeline politics, and also including issues specific to power generation such as the civil nuclear fuel cycle. Probably the most pressing issue that sits specifically at the global level, though, is the situation of rapidly rising demand for oil at a time when it is unclear that new exploration & production investment is keeping pace with the rate of demand growth. Friction between the US and China over oil supplies is already evident. The US National Security Strategy of 2006 criticises China for attempting to 'lock up' oil supplies through the use of long-term contracts. The US is also exercised by China's sourcing of oil from states including Venezuela, Sudan and above all Iran. China, for its part, has expressed concern of its own at the US military presence in the Middle East and the Gulf, and over the US Navy's blue water maritime dominance given China's dependence on tanker-borne imports.

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<sup>7</sup> Callan et. al. (2007)

These, then, are some of the considerations and options that exist on the initial question of a new global leaders' forum would do, and the issues that it might look at. The next question is who would participate in such a summit.

## **2. Participation**

### *Country membership*

Part I above has already discussed the membership configurations set out in the various proposals for a global leaders' forum. From this it can be seen that there are broadly three sets of proposals: those that would reform or enlarge the G8; those that would set up a new forum parallel or similar to the Finance G20, but at the leaders' level; and those that would be nested formally or semi-formally within the UN system, as either an adjunct to or replacement for ECOSOC. The composition of forums in the latter category are not assessed in this section since it is at this stage impossible to say which countries would be members. It is, however, worth noting that there is no guarantee that the world's leading countries by GDP, population, carbon emissions or any other quantitative metric would be represented.

Starting with the first category, the G8+5 arrangement begun at Gleneagles in 2005 (with Brazil, China, India, Mexico and South Africa attending as guests) has proved reasonably durable, with all five countries asked back to St Petersburg in 2006 and Heiligendamm in 2007. (G8 outreach to emerging economies began at Evian in 2003, when the +5 countries were part of a much larger group also including Algeria, Egypt, Malaysia, Nigeria, Senegal, Morocco as chair of the G77 and Switzerland as a reward for help with organising the summit.) It seems likely, therefore, that the practice will continue in Japan in 2008, Italy in 2009 and Canada in 2010. However, it is important to bear in mind that the emerging convention is for +5 countries to attend as guests as opposed to participants, and take part in a dedicated outreach session rather than the full summit.

Whether G8 will expand to become G9 or G10 with the addition of China or India is much more uncertain, not least because of the convention to date that G7/8 members are all democracies. There is also an open question about China's own attitude towards the G7/8; Yu Yongding of the Institute of World Economics and Politics at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences observed in a paper for the L20 Project that "China sees no necessity to join in the G7 at this moment even if it were to be invited ... China does not want to bear the responsibility that is not its to bear".<sup>8</sup> The fact that G8 leaders decided at Kananaskis in 2002 to issue a schedule of host nations for the full G8 cycle through to 2010 also seems to imply that G8 leaders are in no hurry to enlarge their club formally.

On the second category of groupings – proposals for an L20 or for a variant on the same lines such as a G25 – the range of countries involved varies. For the L20 itself, the list would be the same as for the Finance G20: namely the G8 plus Argentina, Australia, Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea and Turkey, together with the European Union. But as noted in the comparison of proposals above, other lists of the '20 key countries' also exist: the G8's 'Gleneagles Dialogue' includes 20 countries, for instance, but not the same ones as in the Finance G20. In the case of a G25, membership would be the L20 plus additional African states and least developed countries up to a maximum of 25 countries.

In all cases, the question in the background is inevitably: why these countries? To take the creation in 1999 of the Finance G20, for instance, Paul Martin – who as Canada's finance minister at the time

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<sup>8</sup> Yongding (2004)

was closely involved in the selection process – has admitted that there were (and still are) anomalies with the membership:

“Indonesia did not become part of [the Finance G20] at the beginning because of the huge upheaval that was happening, and because there was a democratic deficit within Indonesia at that time, which they cleared by the time we had the meeting, which was the reason we were able to invite them in. In other words, [the G20] was announced, but then there was a time period between when it was announced and when the first meeting was. Indonesia basically named its new government in that interim period so we were able to ask them. Other countries that were very seriously considered, such as Nigeria, basically solved their democratic deficit, but unfortunately it was well after the creation of the G20.”<sup>9</sup>

There is therefore a question about whether decisions taken in 1999 over membership of the Finance G20 should necessarily form the basis of a new L20 or G25, especially if (as with Nigeria) there are some countries that would have been members of the G20 in 1999 but that have since arguably resolved the problems that kept them out. Another dimension to this is how changes in relative economic power since 1999 should be reflected in the composition of an L20. Argentina may have been one of the 20 largest economies (with all G8 members included and non-G8 EU member states represented by the EU itself) in 1999; but on IMF 2005 nominal data, Iran’s economy has since grown to outstrip that of Argentina.

There is also the question of why GDP, rather than some other metric, should be the principal basis for inclusion (even leaving aside the question of whether GDP adjusted for purchasing power parity would be fairer than nominal GDP). Such a basis might make intuitive sense for a forum of finance ministers; but is it a fair basis for deciding the world’s twenty key leaders?

If, by contrast, the membership of an L20 were selected on the basis of population, then the list would look very different, and would comprise China, India, the United States, Indonesia, Brazil, Pakistani, Bangladesh, Russia, Nigeria, Japan, Mexico, the Philippines, Vietnam, Germany, Egypt, Ethiopia, Turkey, Iran, Thailand and France.<sup>10</sup> Then again, there are metrics other than GDP or population, such as the countries’ contributions to the financing of global public goods.<sup>11</sup>

Such arguments can go round and round forever, and there will be at least as many answers to the question of which countries should be included as there are states at the UN. As in the last section about what a global leaders’ forum would actually do, ultimately form must follow function: perhaps the only sensible way to answer the question of which countries should be seated around the table is to ask first what it is that they are supposed to discuss.

If, as suggested in Part I above, an L20 were regarded as a potential forum for discussing global climate change and energy policy, how relevant would its membership be? The answer, interestingly enough, is that the list of twenty countries included in the Finance G20 (and hence the L20) is actually a closer match with the world’s top 20 emitters of carbon dioxide than it is with the world’s 20 largest economies.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Tamar Paltiel (2001)

<sup>10</sup> Source: CIA World Factbook 2005

<sup>11</sup> Dervis (2005)

<sup>12</sup> Carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuel combustion only; other greenhouse gases are not included (source: International Energy Authority, [www.eia.doe.gov/iea/carbon.html](http://www.eia.doe.gov/iea/carbon.html); 2002 data). GDP data nominal \$US not adjusted for purchasing power parity (source: International Monetary Fund, World Economic Outlook Database, September 2006; 2005 data).

Indeed, of the top 20 carbon emitters in the world, the only ones not included in the G20 are Iran, Spain and Ukraine. On energy, the L20 would include all of the world's ten largest importers of oil, and four of the world's ten largest oil exporters (Saudi Arabia, Russia, Mexico and Canada, leaving out Norway, Nigeria, Iran, United Arab Emirates, Venezuela and Iraq).<sup>13</sup> As far as relevance to climate change and energy is concerned, then, the L20 could be a highly relevant forum. The G8+5, by contrast, is less obviously well suited to discussing climate policy: it misses out South Korea, Iran, Australia, Spain, Indonesia and Saudi Arabia, all of which are larger emitters than South Africa.

*Would a larger forum be unwieldy?*

One of the arguments often advanced for a leaders' forum of 20, 25 or 27 countries is that it would strike a good balance between forums that are more effective but less legitimate on one hand (such as the G8 or the Security Council), and those that are more legitimate but less effective or relevant on the other (such as the UN General Assembly or the WTO General Council).

However, there is also a counter-argument that a forum of 20 or 25 countries would itself be unwieldy. Perhaps the strongest evidence for this can be found in the European Union, where a Council of Ministers of 25 (and, as of January 2007, 27) has been perceived by many as cumbersome. Tony Blair commented in early 2006 that "a European Union of 25 cannot function properly with today's rules of governance"; former French Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin said at around the same time that enlargement had contributed to a sense of "disarray" in Brussels; and Andrew Duff, a British MEP who helped to draft the now rejected European Constitution, commented that "everyone can see how problematic decision-making has become at 25".<sup>14</sup>

While the European Council does at least have the option to use qualified majority voting, a global leaders' forum – as a relatively informal body with no executive powers – would have no such capacity, calling into question its ability to reach deals. Moreover, each of the key Councils of Ministers meets around four times a year, rather more frequently than an L20 could hope to; another reason why the forum's likely unwieldiness might prove a problem. A similar observation could be made in the light of emerging experience at the UN Peacebuilding Commission, where achieving agreement between 31 countries is not always straightforward.

This is perhaps a good reason to be wary of the suggestion, made for example by Linn and Bradford, that the G8 should "eventually give way to" an L20.<sup>15</sup> The underlying assumption, that one single forum could act not only as a forum for a discussion but also as a "global steering mechanism", is arguably belied by the distribution of strategic dialogue among finance ministers between a range of different forums. Achieving effective interoperability between a range of global governance forums (both formal and informal) may ultimately be a better objective than trying to come up with 'the right answer'.

### **3. Agenda management and follow-up**

*Preparation and summit chairing*

Once the mandate and membership of a global leaders' forum is established, the next question to arise is how its agenda would in practice be prepared and managed. It goes without saying that leaders' time is a commodity in short supply. Recent meetings of the G8, for example, have provided leaders with at most two days' worth of discussion. The 2005 Gleneagles Summit, for example,

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<sup>13</sup> Source: International Energy Agency, *World Energy Outlook 2007*

<sup>14</sup> Parker (2006)

<sup>15</sup> Linn and Bradford (2006)

began with a formal dinner on 6 July, ran throughout the 7 July, and wound up at 1pm on 8 July (the summit had been due to run to mid-afternoon but was shortened following the London bombings on 7 July).<sup>16</sup>

So effective preparation and chairing of meetings is essential. While there are examples of G8 heads agreeing action between themselves without any preparation on the sherpas' network (as with agreement of the Africa Action Plan in Genoa in 2001), these are very much the exception rather than the rule. As G8 historian Nicholas Bayne writes, "most cooperation at the summit still emerges from the work of the supporting apparatus, whether by the sherpa team or the growing network of ministerial groups".<sup>17</sup> How then might the agenda for a global leaders' forum larger than the G8 be set and managed during the summit?

There are a number of different variables that would have a bearing on this question. First, who would chair summit meetings? The options here include:

- annual rotation between member countries (as with the G8);
- rotation between member countries within the context of a 'troika' arrangement, as used by the Council of Ministers in Europe or by the Finance G20, whereby the current chair works in close cooperation with the previous and next chairs;
- members electing a chair either for a fixed term (as with the Presidency of the UN General Assembly) or indeed on a more or less indefinite basis (as with the IMF's International Monetary and Financial Committee, which has been content with the UK's Gordon Brown as chair for all seven years of its existence so far).

Second, there is the question of who is responsible for preparing the agenda to go to heads at the main summit. Here, the options include:

- formal preparatory meetings at (for example) ministerial or foreign policy adviser level, as with preparations for UN summits;
- a less formal network of personal representatives acting as 'sherpas', meeting several times in the spring before the summit, and possibly supplemented by deputies or 'sous-sherpas' (in the G8, each country has one foreign affairs sous-sherpa and one finance sous-sherpa);
- delegation of some or all agenda-setting functions to a secretariat with a degree of operational autonomy (for example, the Peace Building Support Office that supports the UN Peacebuilding Commission).

Finally, there is the question of who – if anyone – is present at the summit table during the heads' meeting, other than the heads themselves. In its thirty or so years of existence, the G7/8 has tried a range of configurations including (at the very beginning) each head having not only their sherpa at the table, but also both their foreign and finance ministers.<sup>18</sup> More recently, G8 heads have tended to value a more intimate discussion between themselves, and the UK reformed the process in 1998 to a summit that was largely heads-only, even if the preparatory process were more intensive and detailed than ever before.<sup>19</sup>

If the role envisaged for a new leaders' forum is to have a genuine, substantive and long-term impact on the issues that it takes on, then perhaps the key risk to be managed is that of heads opting for media-friendly 'initiatives' rather than agreements that drive real change (including domestic policy implications) that is sustained over time. Here, the record of the G8 is not altogether encouraging.

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<sup>16</sup> Bayne (2005b)

<sup>17</sup> Bayne (2005a)

<sup>18</sup> Bayne (2005a)

<sup>19</sup> Bayne (2005a)

While the G8 has agreed some useful innovations since its enlargement in 1998, such as the Proliferation Security Initiative, the Global Fund on AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria or the \$50 billion aid increase secured at Gleneagles, its record on agreeing measures that have require changes in domestic policy has been weak.

By contrast, if a new global leaders' forum wanted to play a real role on actually *solving* climate change – i.e. agreeing a treaty framework based on a clear ceiling on greenhouse gases in the atmosphere and allocating emissions permits between all countries – rather than for example merely setting up a task force on renewable energy, as the G8 did in 2001 – then this would imply a much more intensive preparatory process, with a great deal more specialist expertise and interaction with other forums and arms of government (such as environment and energy ministers).

Ensuring some degree of continuity between summits therefore becomes a top priority in devising the management systems of a new forum. This might militate in favour of at least a troika system, and possibly a chair elected for a term of longer than a year, and perhaps a permanent secretariat too. But there would be sizeable political obstacles in the way of agreeing such a system, given that member states would inevitably be wary of creating any system that might then 'bounce' them into decisions, and there could therefore well be a direct trade off between effectiveness and feasibility.

At least at the outset, a more modest approach would probably be essential. But an interim option that might be more workable might be to seek ways of working within and across existing institutions that would help to prepare the summit agenda. If it were possible to forge a 'virtual secretariat' function, involving staff from agencies such as the UN Secretariat, the international financial institutions, relevant UN funds, programmes and specialised agencies and perhaps regional organisations. Making such an approach work would still involve major improvements in international agencies' coherence with one another, compared with current performance; but would certainly be easier than attempting to persuade member states of the need for a new international bureaucracy.

#### *Compliance and follow-up*

Another issue to consider is that G8 members' record of delivering action agreed at summits is not impressive: leaders often lose interest in following up on earlier commitments, preferring instead to innovate and devise their own initiatives. Part of the reason for the G8's failings in this area arguably resides in the nature of the sherpa system, which is designed to pull together an *agreement* rather than measures then to deliver and implement that agreement. There is no doubt, in principle at least, that a permanent secretariat (as opposed to a secretariat function that rotates between national bureaucracies in line with which country holds the chair) might create more capacity for monitoring compliance.

However, the two pitfalls here are first, that it is again far from clear that member states would accept the creation of a new secretariat, particularly one with any degree of operational autonomy; and second, that the G8's failings in compliance are arguably part of a much broader trend of non-compliance with international agreements. UN member states are very strongly committed to the Millennium Development Goals, for example, but have conspicuously failed to deliver the necessary resources. Most multilateral environmental agreements (other than the Montreal Protocol on ozone-depleting substances) lack adequate compliance provisions and suffer from major implementation gaps; and many arms control treaties have also been eroded by non-compliance in recent years. Compliance is therefore a major hurdle that any new leaders' forum would have to address, but the problem is not limited to design issues associated with a new summit forum.

#### **4. Will it ever happen?**

The last, and perhaps most fundamental question about any new global leaders' forum is: does it actually stand any chance of happening?

At the moment, prospects appear less than hopeful. With Paul Martin's departure from office in Canada in 2006, the proposal for an L20 (which was probably the idea for a new forum that enjoyed the highest profile and traction) lost its most important high level proponent. There are also good reasons to suppose that the majority of other G8 members would oppose (or at least not support) the creation of a new body that might rival their club. As Nicholas Bayne summarises,

“...the process of creating a larger representative group, whatever its merits, would destroy the present advantages of personal contact and informality, which enable the G8 to strike deals that are not attainable elsewhere. The G8 still value the summit as a vehicle for resolving disputes among themselves and for launching new collective ideas, without which no progress will be possible as a wider circle.”<sup>20</sup>

Perhaps surprisingly, there are also suggestions that China – perhaps the single country most often cited as a rationale for moving from the G8 to a larger leaders' forum – might not support an L20. Yu Yongding, the Chinese academic involved in the L20 Project and cited earlier in this paper, has written,

“...the size of 20 countries seems too big to form consensus on important and controversial issues that by definition is difficult to form. APEC's failure in reaching significant agreements is a good reference. Therefore, to upgrade the G20 at the level of heads of states seems unwarranted ... to talk about the G20 at heads of states level seems [to] be premature.”<sup>21</sup>

Finally, obstruction to the formation of a new forum could well come from countries that would not be included in a new leaders' forum. The debate on Security Council reform in advance of the 2005 World Summit gives a clear demonstration of how countries can unite to oppose the creation of a new club in which they are not included: even if a global leaders' forum such as an L20 or a G25 would not need a formal General Assembly or other multilateral mandate, countries not included can still seek to obstruct or refuse to respect consensus views emerging from the new forum.

These kinds of obstacle to the formation of a new global leaders' forum become more acute as the forum being considered becomes more formal, and particularly as soon as there is any suggestion of a new forum residing within the UN system, given member states' current bias towards stasis. The failure of Security Council hence raises corollary questions about the viability of an L27, much less an Economic Security Council of the kind proposed in 1995 by the Commission on Global Governance.

Yet despite all of these problems and challenges, there are still a number of reasons why it is too soon to rule out the emergence of a new global leaders' forum.

First, there is the simple fact that there are a number of critical global issues that suffer from the lack of a clear home in the international system or where sectoral ministers have proved unable to agree or deliver action on the scale needed. As noted earlier, climate change and energy are obvious examples, but there are others too. Such issues also by and large require the involvement of a wider range of countries than just the G8 in discussions. Given the lack of a clear forum in which to hold such discussions, there is a certain logic to the evolution of a new forum that can (without

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<sup>20</sup> Bayne (2005a)

<sup>21</sup> Yongding (2004)

necessarily broadcasting the fact) move beyond the usual developed world versus G77 rhetorical battle lines, which proved to be such an obstacle in the 2005 World Summit and in ongoing UN reform discussions.

Secondly, despite the opposition of some countries, there are others that do support the development of a new forum, notably France and India.<sup>22</sup> France's support is of particular interest, given France's historical role on several occasions as a catalyst for structural change within the G7 and G8. It was France that first proposed and chaired the G8, at Rambouillet in 1975; France that at Versailles in 1982 began the convention of inviting the country holding the rotating EU Presidency to attend the G7<sup>23</sup>; France that first asked heads of international agencies such as the UN, IMF, WTO and World Bank to attend the G7, at Lyon in 1996; and France that first asked developing countries to attend the G8 as guests, at Evian in 2003. While the forthcoming Presidential election means that France's position is not certain, its historical roots as an innovator in global governance go further back than Jacques Chirac's time in office.

Third and finally, there is the important point that there is no rule that new global leaders' forums must be worked up, defined, agreed and then proclaimed as a fully developed proposition. On the contrary, a more evolutionary approach is both a more practical and probably a more desirable approach. Conventions and customary practice in international relations tend to develop first and be codified later (if at all). For instance, Russia's formal accession to the G8 followed its attendance as a guest at five previous summits; and it is nowhere written down that an American should run the World Bank, or a European the IMF, or that continental regions should take turns to provide a Secretary General for the UN.

In this regard, the apparent lack of movement towards an L20 may be much less significant than the fact that attendance of a +5 group at the G8 is heading towards its third summit in a row at Heiligendamm in the summer of 2007. As noted a moment ago, it only took Russia five summits as a guest before G7 grew into G8. On that basis, at least, Brazil, China, India, Mexico and South Africa will be summer 2007 be sixty per cent of the way there.

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<sup>22</sup> Statement by Manmohan Singh, available at [www.l20.org](http://www.l20.org)

<sup>23</sup> Assuming, of course, that the holder was not already a G7 member.apart

### Part 3: conclusion

This paper has compared proposals for a range of different options for a new global leadership forum, concentrating in particular on informal enlargement of the G8 and the idea of a new L20 or G25 forum to complement or replace it.

It argued that to start with ideas for how to structure such a forum that lack a clear sense of what it such a forum is actually for – without a clear problem definition, in other words – is to put the cart before the horse. Instead, it is essential to begin with an assessment of which global issues are currently going unaddressed or require the involvement of a larger group of countries than just the G8 or the Security Council, and ideally some objective prioritisation of them. While this paper has not attempted to assess the full range of global risks systematically from this perspective, it has suggested that security and macroeconomic issues are covered adequately in other global governance forums, but that climate change, energy, infectious disease and trade could potentially benefit from discussion in an enlarged leaders' forum.

The paper then assessed the question of which countries should participate in any new global leaders' forum, and argued that here too, form must follow the function defined for the group. The paper particularly flagged up that attempts to defined the '20 key countries' are fraught with difficulty, not least because any attempt to pin down objective criteria (such as GDP or population) will be open to regular calls for revision. The paper acknowledged, however, that the Finance G20 countries present a reasonable if not perfect match with the list of the world's 20 largest emitters of carbon dioxide (in absolute rather than per capita terms), and represent some of the world's key energy consumers and, to a lesser extent, producers.

The paper then discussed the question of how the summit agenda for a leaders' forum would be prepared and managed. Decisions would in particular need to be taken about who would chair summit meetings, and whether the agenda would be prepared by deputies, by a less formal system of sherpas, or by a permanent secretariat. The paper argued that in order for any leaders' forum to make a robust contribution to managing global issues, it would be essential to move beyond packaged 'initiatives' and towards longer-term frameworks for action that involved domestic implementation as well as international spending commitments or declaratory action. A 'virtual secretariat' bringing together staff from international agencies (and perhaps governments too) could be a compromise means of ensuring a degree of continuity between summits, but would likely encounter fierce operational difficulties in practice. The paper also highlighted the G8's poor record of implementing and following up its commitments, but noted that this was arguably part of a broader problem of implementation gaps in international politics, and especially in the area of sustainable development.

The paper concluded by arguing that momentum towards an L20 or G25 was limited, despite the regular endorsement of such proposals by international commissions, task-forces and high level panels. Yet there is potentially momentum towards *de facto* enlargement of the G8 through the regular attendance of the G8+5 group, and this could easily evolve over time to include other countries, perhaps in a variable geometry arrangement depending on the issue under discussion. While it is not clear that the G8+5 is necessarily the best forum for addressing climate and energy issues – given the lack of key emitters, oil producers and energy consumers – it does have the key advantage of momentum.

Ultimately, questions and debates over the utility of a new global leaders' forum can only be resolved by scrutiny of an actual track record. The imponderable of political will and circumstances at the time of the summit mean that design work on a new international forum is much like leading a horse to water without any foreknowledge of whether or not it will choose to drink. In the end, leaders

will come together to talk about particular global issues when they perceive it as essential to do so. So far, that perception has not been much in evidence. But it is not hard to imagine circumstances in the not too distant future in which such a conversation might come to be seen as more urgent.

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