

John Kirton

Coexistence, cooperation, competition: G Summits

The G8 and the G20 are both bound to succeed, existing alongside one another, complementing each other's activities and engaging in healthy competition. The founding mission of the G8 is already demonstrating a significant influence over the stated goals of the G20, and when that process is complete, the two bodies can become one.

In response to the American-turned-global financial crisis that erupted in the autumn of 2008, the G20 – group of twenty systemically significant countries – has leapt to the leaders' level, after working for a decade as a finance ministers' and central bankers' club. The first G20 summit took place on November 14-15, 2008 in Washington, with

John Kirton is director of the G8 Research Group and the G20 Research Group, and a professor of political science at the Munk Centre for International Studies at the University of Toronto.

American president George W. Bush as host. The second unfolded on April 1-2, 2009 in London, with British Prime Minister Gordon Brown in the chair.

The third is slated for the end of September, again in the US, to be led by America's much admired new president, Barack Obama. This sudden new enthusiasm for G20 summitry has been sustained by the

speed, scope, and severity of the global financial and economic crisis. The surprisingly strong success of the first two instalments helps, too. But it has raised the obvious question of what the new G20 summit's relationship with the old G8 summit will be. An answer is becoming urgent as calls for G8 expansion intensify and as both bodies struggle to solve the great global governance challenges they have taken on.

SEVERAL POSSIBLE OUTCOMES. Many have long called for a G20 summit to replace the G8 one, and now that the former has finally arrived they will expect this

to be done soon. A second school sees the G8, a proven performer since it was first formed in 1975, continuing indefinitely, even as the new G20 summit is subsumed or otherwise disappears once the financial crisis that created it is contained. A third school sees cooperative coexistence, with each concentrating on what it does best or both combining to actively work for the greater good. A fourth forecasts competition, with each seeking to globally govern the same things to different ends, with one institution or its defining ideals winning out in the end.

Even at this early stage, before there has been a single G8 summit held since the G20 one sprung to life, three conclusions are clear. First, the G20 summit will coexist with the G8 one, for both have much to offer and thus are here to stay. Second, the G20 will cooperate with the G8, for each is a club with its own dynamic, distinctive agenda. Third, the G20 and G8 summits will compete to generate effective global governance on the basis of the very different purposes at their respective cores. Here, it must be said, the G8's foundational mission of globally promoting open democracy, individual liberty and social advance has already been steadily infiltrating the work of a G20 devoted to financial stability and economic equity; therefore, the G8 ideals are likely to win out in the end.

157

COEXISTENCE. Both the G8 and G20 summits are likely to coexist for as far ahead as one can see. The G8 has the momentum of 35 years of proven performance, which has been rising in recent years. It has a well-established hosting sequence, with Italy in 2009 being followed by Canada in 2010. Dates, locations and agendas are put in place a full year ahead of meetings. The subsequent hosting cycle will start in 2011, in France, and continue in 2012 in the US. It is highly unlikely that France's Nicolas Sarkozy, not yet chosen to host a G20 at any level, would give up his place to shine in the global governance sun. Nor would President Obama, whose country had a hand in inventing G8 summitry, practiced it successfully under presidents of both political stripes, and now needs great power cooperation more than ever. As with Bush, when he hosted the G8 in 2004, Obama will be facing re-election a few months after hosting the 2012 G8. He is highly unlikely to show that he is less interested in, and worse at, high-level international cooperation than his predecessor. Nor is it likely that America's and the world's many acute problems will have receded by then.

More broadly, each of the G8 leaders knows they will have a chance to host a summit within their political lifetime. There is no such assurance that they will ever host a G20 summit, both because there are many more countries in the club and because

America and Great Britain have monopolized the first three. Getting so many leaders, their delegations, their security and their media together in one place at one time presents a scheduling and logistical challenge that privileges the larger countries at the center of the North Atlantic core. Japan, for example, out in Asia, will cling to the G8, especially as its offers to host the second and then the third G20 summits have both been politely refused. Such considerations would not matter if leaders concluded that G8 or G20 summits are not worth their increasing time, trouble and expense. But none have done so, for all know that hosting and attending helps them manage their domestic politics back home. The smaller the club, the larger a leader looms in the photo ops, after all.

Moreover, leaders value the small cohesive G8 club for the enhanced opportunities it gives them to speak freely and frankly, to listen and learn seriously, to come to consensus on core principles, to take timely, well-tailored, ambitious collective decisions, and to call their colleagues to account face-to-face if they fail to deliver on promises made. The larger the group, the fewer the chances for spontaneity, for the leaders of lesser powers to be heard, and for the club to move away from being mere-

158 ly another forum for delivering prepared speeches (like the General Assembly of the UN). While such features may matter less to the G8's big four powers from Europe, they are of central importance to a Canada, next door to a much larger US, and to a Japan, with a rising China at its side. That is why some G7 finance ministers still speak far more fondly of their own October 2008 action in combating the current financial crisis than they do of their simultaneous G20 gathering.

Finally, as an institution, the G8 has a much longer and in some respects larger record than the G20 in expanding to absorb rising and reforming powers as full members and participants. The G8 has done so in ways that include more global regions, poor countries and international institutions, all designed to achieve the central task at hand in the best way possible. Since its start as a summit of four leaders at the British Embassy in Helsinki in July 1975, the G8 has more than doubled its membership. Its first major expansion, from the four participants at the "Berlin Dinner" (US, UK, France, Germany) to the six at the first regular summit (Rambouillet, November 1975) was already a major advance. Adding Japan and Italy brought the world's second and fifth ranking powers in, turned a Euro-Atlantic club into a Mediterranean, Asian-Pacific, and thus global one, and significantly expanded the G8's geographic, linguistic and religious diversity. Adding Canada, with the second largest territory in the world, in 1976 made the G8 more of a Pacific and Arctic as well as an Atlantic and Americas

club. Adding the expanding multicultural EU in 1977 and, in 1998, Russia, reinforced the power, geographic reach, and diversity of the club, especially by bringing less economically developed countries in.

The G8 thus stands in sharp contrast with a UN Security Council that has been frozen with the same permanent five members for 64 years, and with an International Monetary Fund and World Bank whose executive boards are largely unchanged since 1944.



GREATER PARTICIPATION. Much the same can be said of partial participation in the G8 summit. Since this process began in 1996, a total of 11 different multilateral organizations have had their executive heads attend the G8 summit. The UN, representing virtually the entire global community, has come to all but one since 2001. Through their multilateral organizations, all of the world's countries have been represented at a G8 they consider sufficiently effective and legitimate to allow their organizations to attend. In addition, the leaders of 31 individual countries have participated in the summit since 2001. They are led by South Africa and the other emerging powers of India, China, Brazil, and Mexico, now gathered in their own group (G5). But they also include a wide range of democratic powers from all regions of the world, such as Nigeria, Senegal and Algeria, and even a very poor and distant Afghanistan. Starting in 2003 and steadily since 2005, the G8 summit has increasingly involved the G5 powers. In 2007 they began the Heiligendamm process of an official-level structured dialogue that is due to report and move to the next stage at Italy's 2009 summit.

Moreover, in 2008, the G8 invited the 16 “major economies” to its summit session on climate change, which added the rising Asian powers of South Korea, Indonesia and Australia to the G8-plus-5. It is not clear why adding the remaining G20 powers (Argentina, Turkey and Saudi Arabia) would be critical to make the G8-centered summit a more effective global governance club.

The G8 has also reached down to involve civil society in its global governance to a much greater extent than the G20 has. “The Other Economic Summit”, for oppositional NGO activists, was first held in 1984, and by 1998 civil society had become much more organized, connected and influential. The *ad hoc* coalition of religious, labor and NGO groups in Jubilee 2000 mounted a multi-year campaign, met with G8 host Tony Blair at the Birmingham Summit, and pushed the G8 to go further and faster on debt relief for the poorest. At Okinawa, in 2000, civil society groups were granted space on the summit site to hold briefings, and met with the host prime minister, Yoshiro Mori, during the summit itself. In 2002, the Forum International de Montréal organized a meeting of global civil society leaders with G8 sherpas, starting an engagement that strengthened in subsequent years. In 2005, the multi-stakeholder

160 Commission for Africa supported the work of host Tony Blair and some summit colleagues on this agenda priority. The Make Poverty History campaign mobilized many across Britain and the “Live 8” rock concert connected with up to a billion citizens around the world.

2006 saw a formal year-long “Civil 8” institution and process that culminated with 700 global civil society leaders meeting G8 host Vladimir Putin in a freewheeling, public session just before the summit’s start. In 2006, G8 religious leaders also gathered for the first time, as did the “Moscow Club” of representatives of G8 news agencies, meeting with G8 governors just before the summit’s start. There is even a “University 8” now – a process for national academies of science to gather. Only the business community has yet to organize to influence G8 governance in an effective way.

While these features endow the G8 with enormous staying power, G20 summitry is also here to stay. The crisis that created it will not soon fade away. Nor will the need for the G20 summit’s promise to prevent the next crisis. This is a task that can no longer be left to mere ministers, as happened in 1999. G20 leaders will probably start meeting less frequently, however, as the scheduling and other difficulties in arranging the third summit suggest. One possibility is that they will follow APEC and add a leaders’ event to their annual autumn ministerial meeting. But in some form G20 summitry is likely to live on – perhaps even as an annual event.

COOPERATION. The G8 and G20 will continue to thrive and will continue to cooperate. Although the G8 created the G20 in 1999 (as an annual meeting of finance ministers and central bank governors), it played no such role when the G20 leapt to the leaders' level in 2008. At that time, the Bush administration recognized that the capabilities of all the rising emerging economies were required to cope with a financial crisis that was so strongly attacking the established powers in the G8. Even at the ministerial level during the previous decade, the G20 had begun to change from a club in which the G8 led the G20 consensus; in recent years, the G20 approved the deal to give emerging powers a greater voice and vote at the IMF and World Bank. At the 2009 G20 London summit, the emerging powers were the biggest winners, as the 1.1 trillion dollars in new money mobilized was all directed to support them and their developing country friends. They are bound to retain their real leverage on key G20 issues, such as raising new IMF resources for development, trade liberalization and climate change control.

Moreover, each of these autonomous bodies has its own distinctive agenda and global public goods to provide. For the G20, it is financial stability, fiscal and monetary stimulus, financial regulation and supervision, and trade and investment liberalization – all issues that the G8 abandoned any serious effort on years ago. The G8, but not the G20, has focused instead on African development, climate change, health, energy and education, as well as critical political security issues such as nuclear non-proliferation or encouraging the establishment of stable democracies. In those few areas of interest to both – such as meeting the Millennium Development Goals and defining a new post-Kyoto regime for effective climate change control – the tasks are so large it will require the full energies and cooperation of both.

COMPETITION. But there will also be competition, as the G20 and G8 summits seek to generate effective global governance as a whole on the basis of their very distinct purposes. Today's G8 was invented – as its first communiqué proclaimed – for the pre-eminently political purpose of protecting its members and promoting the values of “open democracy, individual liberty and social advance” on a global scale. These goals were to be sought even, if necessary, by intervening in the internal affairs of sovereign states. Starting with Spain in 1975 and Italy in 1976 it has done so, with its greatest success being the surprisingly peaceful end of the Soviet empire.

The G20's foundational mission is the very different, essentially economic purpose of providing financial stability to a single global economy – an economy in which once

self-contained sovereign countries are now vulnerable to shocks that can originate anywhere. The G20 indeed succeeded in helping prevent serious systemic economic crises at the turn of the century. But it has not prevented or yet contained the much bigger one that exploded in the autumn of 2008.

The two very different ideals of the G8 and G20 could coexist with minimal contact and competition were it not for the growing recognition by the global community that open democracy, individual liberty and social advance are desirable instruments to achieve financial stability, especially now that the state has acquired a much greater role in bailing out financial firms, markets and national economies. The scale of state support now needed will require political support from the people and their legislatures if it is to be provided with sufficient speed and sustained for the required time. Open democracy and human rights are increasingly seen, for good reason, as essential for generating global health and for the development and climate change goals that both the G8 and G20 summits have come to share.

Moreover, both the G8+5 and the G20 summits are bodies driven by leaders who are ultimately charged with decision-making. And it is largely the same leaders in both

162 the G8 and the G20 clubs who, each year, will define the overarching ideals that will guide and govern us all.

In this inevitable competition over which club's core ideals will prevail, it is likely that the G8's open democracy will win. Since 1999 the G20 finance ministers – not all from democratically elected governments – have quickly and increasingly adopted democratic principles, starting with transparency, to guide their work. At their first summit, G20 leaders affirmed the principles of the rule of law in both its political and economic dimensions, and expressed support for free, competitive and open markets as well as respect for private property. The second G20 summit confirmed these convictions. Thus, an expanding and democratizing G8 will steadily socialize the G20 and see its ideals win in both institutions. When they do, the two bodies will become one.