

Mission Creep? The Nontraditional Security Agenda of the G7/8 and the Nascent Role of the G-20



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In 2008–2011, the Group of 20 swiftly eclipsed the Group of 7, created in the mid-1970s as an informal mechanism for stabilizing markets and facilitating transnational currency exchange and investment. Several observers have expressed the view that the former, broader group is also destined to appropriate the role of the Group of 8, the G7's pioneering successor in the realm of nontraditional security. This article examines the G7/8 legacy of forging quasi-permanent institutional arrangements and frameworks in this policy area and goes on to gauge nontraditional security initiatives subsequently launched by the G-20. Having juxtaposed the past record of these bodies and analyzed the interests and power dynamics that influence member state action in the short and long term, the article outlines three basic options for how the relationship between the G-20 and the G7/8 may evolve. KEYWORDS: G7, G8, G-20, nontraditional security, summit diplomacy.

GARDELS: The advanced economies organized around the U.S. and the G7 are increasingly unable to provide global public goods—stable financial flows, a stable reserve currency, security, fighting climate change—yet the emerging economies led by China are not yet able to do so.

Is the G20, now meeting in Cannes, the mechanism of adjustment of this shifting world order since it contains both the advanced and the emerging economies? Can it collectively provide global public goods neither can on their own?

KISSINGER: Yes, the G20 is the forum for this adjustment. But it will be a big and difficult effort for it to do so. There is no certainty of success, but the effort is critical if we want a stable world.¹

After two meetings of heads of state and government held in 2008, it was the 2009 Pittsburgh summit that first designated the Group of 20 (G-20) “the premier forum for our international economic cooperation.” In this capacity the G-20 swiftly eclipsed the Group of 7 (G7), created in the mid-1970s as an informal mechanism for stabilizing financial and energy markets and facilitating transnational currency exchange and foreign investment. Merely five years into its existence, that is, the G-20 was providing two of the global public goods enumerated by editor Nathan Gardels in his interview with former US secretary of state Henry Kissinger, as it oversaw regulatory regimes in banking, securities, insurance, and trade.²

By the mid-2010s, the initial hype surrounding the G-20 had subsided.³ Yet according to extrapolations of global economic growth, the gap between established and emerging great powers is expected to continue narrowing in the coming decades, albeit not at the accelerated pace predicted at the height of the 2008–2009 financial crisis.⁴ Given this general trajectory, the question is whether the stability of financial and currency markets constitutes satisfactory ambitions for a group of leaders who collectively represent some four-fifths of the gross world economic output and two-thirds of the global population, or if the mandate of the G-20 could and should broaden.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the leaders of the G7—which shaded into the Group of 8 (G8) after Russia joined in 1998 and back to G7 as a result of that country’s military incursions into neighboring Ukraine in 2014—obviously felt they could not neglect high-profile issues related to foreign and security policy.⁵ Early G7 summits therefore featured airplane hijacking and the stationing of US cruise and Pershing II missiles in Western Europe, prompting the group to hold parallel meetings on economic and foreign and security policy. The high point of the group’s entanglement with traditional foreign and security policy appears to have been 1983, when leaders sought to stem criticism of NATO’s plans to base new US missiles in Europe by adopting a Declaration on Security at the Williamsburg summit.⁶

In the late 1980s the G7 stepped back from traditional security matters, presumably due to the waning Cold War as much as the group’s expanding economic agenda. Via task forces, working groups, and expert networks, the G7 shifted toward initiatives in the realm of so-called nontraditional security.⁷ In 1995 the group integrated counterterrorism and the fight against organized crime into its agenda, and two years later the scope was extended to high-technology crimes. After Russia’s entry in 1999, the G8 briefly reverted to an active diplomatic role to resolve the Kosovo conflict, though NATO’s military intervention soon overshadowed the group’s role. In response to al-Qaeda’s attacks on Washington, DC, and New York on September 11, 2001, however, the G8 successfully harmonized the policies of major countries in the sphere of counterterrorist financing and adopted, in 2004, a common stance on nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction.⁸

Indeed, following the G-20 “upgrade” to a top-level summit, the nontraditional security agenda was virtually elevated to the *raison d’être* of the G8.⁹ But does the rise of the G-20 as a much broader collective obviate the need for the G7/8 in noneconomic areas as well? Could the nontraditional security agenda of the G8 be transferred to the still nascent broader constellation, especially given the functional overlap in the area of banking and financial services regulations? Is it possible to satisfy the aspirations and concerns of G8 and G-20 member states so as to make this happen? If so, what would be a reasonable scope of commitments for each of them and an appropriate time frame for changing the status quo?

One view is that diluting the financial and economic agenda of the G-20 jeopardizes its performance on achieving stable global growth.¹⁰ Others believe that, if short- and long-term concerns of great powers can be aligned, an expansion of the mandate of the G-20 may help offset the weaknesses of formal intergovernmental bodies.¹¹ Western European governments ultimately regard the weakening of G8 with apprehension, realizing that their relative weight in a larger group declines. Leaders of countries that aspire to gain a permanent seat at the UN Security Council—primarily India, Brazil, South Africa, Germany, and Japan—are wary that expanding the scope of G-20 initiatives could circumscribe the former body's role. China and Russia, from their privileged position as Council incumbents, have deliberately sought to enhance their leverage within the G-20 by promoting the Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) constellation. Russia's sudden annexation of Crimea in early 2014 and further military inroads into Ukrainian territory, however, will at least temporarily hurt that country's international standing.

I begin this article with an overview of the nontraditional security legacy of the G7/8, analyzing existing institutional arrangements and frameworks.¹² I go on to explore nontraditional security initiatives originating from the G-20 summitry that overlap with the former, identifying transfer/nontransfer of arrangements and frameworks to the larger body. I further examine the power dynamics at work among key G7/8 and G-20 stakeholders and outline three options for how the respective mandates in nontraditional security may be delineated. The first option implies a swift and structured transfer of commitments from the G7/8 to the G-20 whereas the second consolidates the division of labor roughly where it is drawn at present. A third option is to retain a tentative separation of G8 and G-20 responsibilities, in what can be described as “mission creep.”¹³

The G7/8 and Nontraditional Security

Over the past twenty-five years, the G7/8 established a series of intergovernmental programs, working groups, task forces, and expert networks assigned to different nontraditional security objectives. Several such initiatives gradually acquired the characteristics of “nested formality” within the informal setting of the G7/8, in that they were made quasi-permanent with regular scheduled meetings devoted to specific sets of issues and reporting mechanisms.¹⁴ Influential frameworks with quasi-permanent status are the Roma-Lyon Group (RLG), the Counter-Terrorism Action Group (CTAG), the Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding Experts Group (PPEG), the Africa Clearinghouse, and the Global Partnership Working Group, all created in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks on US soil. But a particularly important institutional arrangement is the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), which was already set up at the 1989 G7 Paris summit. The FATF opened the door for nontraditional security

cooperation and was later granted formal status through the creation of a plenary, a secretariat and a presidency.¹⁵

In the first decade of its existence, the FATF pioneered a novel approach to transnational counter-money laundering. The forty recommendations adopted in April 1990 have remained the core of FATF activities. After its original emphasis on preventing the unimpeded circulation of money generated through drug trafficking and other forms of organized crime, the FATF turned to vulnerable business sectors and their entanglement with financial services in free-trade zones, the real estate sector, casino and betting services, migrant remittances, and international arms trade. The number of member states rose to twenty-eight by 1992 and the regime—through the creation of so-called FATF Style Regional Bodies—grew to comprise almost the entire world. Today, FATF-inspired monitoring activities cover financial operations from fund-raising to money transfers, capital management, and money disbursement.¹⁶

The 9/11 attacks prompted the crucial adoption of Security Council Resolution 1373 as well as the adding of nine FATF recommendations, all aimed at the prevention of terrorist financing. Especially as the Council strengthened its enforcement capacity, the implementation of Resolution 1373 and the FATF regime became mutually reinforcing.¹⁷ The FATF regime was also bolstered through support from powerful observer member organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, Interpol, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, and the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision. Self-reporting, mutual evaluation, and “the identification of non-cooperative countries and territories” have become the three chief tools used by the FATF to combat most forms of illicit financial operations.¹⁸

If the FATF arose from within the G7 remit of financial regulation, working groups and networks formed after 9/11 clearly expanded the nontraditional security agenda in other directions. The Roma-Lyon Group came about through fusing two preexisting components devoted to counterterrorism (the Roma group) and transnational border crime (the Lyon group). The work of the RLG was geared toward vulnerabilities in transportation security, high-tech crime, criminal legal affairs, and law enforcement, and bridged the traditional divide between migration and counterterrorism policy.¹⁹ The group operates by developing initiatives for consideration by G8 working subgroups, and later formulates detailed proposals for approval by interior and justice ministers. For the most part, the collaboration is informal and gathers experts within a wide array of topics.²⁰ The work of the subgroups is less publicized, though one important subgroup specializes in high-tech crime via the Internet.

The Counter-Terrorism Action Group attended to post-9/11 capacity building in the area of terrorist response and prevention. Formally affirmed at the 2003 Evian summit, the CTAG devoted much of its activities to improv-

ing procedures associated with document inspection, luggage screening, and security personnel vetting. The CTAG also helped enhance the capacity of the Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Committee and strengthen implementation of international agreements on terrorism. The CTAG, whose activities waned after 2007, was presided over by the G8 chair country and had rigid information-sharing rules that unfortunately limited its effectiveness beyond Western countries. Its suspended collaboration with the FATF, the 2006 adoption of a Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, and the upgrade of the G-20 combined to make its role less central.²¹

The Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction (GPSWMD) was launched at the 2002 Kananaskis summit. The GPSWMD was inspired by the US Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Program of 1992 and evolved into a program addressing proliferation and terrorist use of weapons and materials of mass destruction, for which G8 countries footed the \$20 billion bill. One target, a 50 percent reduction of chemical weapons stockpiles mainly in the former Soviet Union, was accomplished in 2010.²² Programs aimed at enhancing control over nuclear materials were also launched, leading to the decommissioning of 190 Soviet-type submarines. Through close collaboration with the International Atomic Energy Agency and the Nuclear Summit Series, held in conjunction with G8 summits, the GPSWMD found itself at the core of global nuclear nonproliferation.²³

The G8 Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding Experts Group was brought into being following the 2004 Sea Island Summit. The group's action plan outlined priorities such as the training of military peacekeepers, police, and civilian personnel participating in peacekeeping activities as well as logistical assistance.²⁴ The PPEG has been especially active in Africa—where the vast majority of UN military operations are conducted—and managed to train and equip some 75,000 troops by 2010. A separate mechanism for coordinating peacekeeping support missions among donor countries and the G8, the UN, and the African Union was set up as the Africa Clearinghouse at the 2009 L'Aquila summit, also welcoming India, China, and Scandinavian states. Together, the programs helped establish a worldwide network of peacekeeping training centers furnished with substantial financial support and expertise.²⁵

Two further G8 frameworks in the realm of nontraditional security deserve mention, although neither has yet coalesced into a large-scale institutional arrangement. One is climate change mitigation, which featured on the group's agenda in 2005–2008. At the 2005 Gleneagles summit, G8 member states agreed to sixty-three nonbinding commitments and to a Clean Energy Investment Framework under World Bank auspices.²⁶ Three years later, in Osaka, the group endorsed the establishment of Climate Investment Funds, prompting independent analysts to praise, for once, the group's accomplishment on energy efficiency.²⁷

The second major G8 framework that deserves mention is the food security initiative, launched in anticipation of broader involvement by emerging great powers. Under Italy's G8 chairmanship in 2009, the L'Aquila summit advanced a broad initiative that combined concerns about food scarcity caused by climate change, food price volatility, and dwindling biodiversity. The L'Aquila Food Security Initiative converged around a twelve-point statement declaring that the G8 countries commit "to act with the scale and urgency needed to achieve sustainable global food security."²⁸ Due to the quick response from world leaders and officials at the Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Food Program, the program succeeded in mobilizing pledges worth \$22 billion for sustainable agriculture development over three years.²⁹

The G-20 and Nontraditional Security

Both the G7/8 and the G-20 bolster international security by creating interpersonal trust among world leaders and by sustaining and developing economic relations.³⁰ But so far the latter has stayed within a narrower scope of activity, mainly forging agreements on monetary policy, supervision and regulation of the financial sector, and specific banking and accounting practices. The G-20 is uniquely placed to reorchestrate financial regulation via the Financial Stability Board (replacing the G7's Financial Stability Forum) as a "network of networks" influencing the IMF, the Bank for International Settlements, the World Bank, European financial institutions, the International Standard Classification of Occupations, and the International Accounting Standards Board. In fact, the G-20 reshaped regulatory systems more comprehensively than the G7/8 ever did following the latest financial crisis.³¹ More of a "steering committee" that provides strategic guidance than "a decider" on global economic matters, the G-20 nevertheless remains poised to assume crisis response functions.³²

The G-20 certainly delivered a critical contribution in 2008–2009 by alleviating the consequences of the Lehmann Brothers bankruptcy and the ensuing unavailability of money for short-term loans. The official agenda adopted at the G-20 Washington, London, and Pittsburgh summits in the course of eighteen months was almost single-mindedly devoted to the acute financial and economic crisis and the role of international financial institutions, resulting in an unprecedented \$1.1 trillion stimulus package. Only a small set of issues viewed as unrelated to the core agenda were mentioned in the last paragraph of the summit declaration, indicating that other questions had been raised. Paragraph 15 of the Washington declaration adopted 15 November 2008 read, pithily: "We remain committed to addressing other critical challenges such as energy security and climate change, food security, the rule of law, and the fight against terrorism, poverty and disease." Paragraph 15 remains relevant as a list of issues featured largely at

the margins of G-20 summits. But whereas non-economic items fail to be prioritized, the broader range of G-20 deliberations generates ideas that occasionally rise to prominence. Because concerns about food security in many developing countries had already been raised at L'Aquila in the G8 context, the issue resurfaced in concluding statements at subsequent G-20 summits. At Pittsburgh the issue of energy security also entered the concluding statements, in a separate section labeled "Energy Security and Climate Change." The measures proposed in the latter covered reinforced regulatory oversight, energy efficiency, and enhanced market transparency.

This expansion into the realm of nontraditional security, while modest, gave rise to a handful of concrete programs and government measures. The 2010 Toronto summit welcomed the launch of the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program as an outgrowth of the Pittsburgh agreements. The goal of mitigating food security was addressed through a recapitalization of multilateral development banks set to increase annual lending to developing countries from \$37 billion to \$71 billion. At the June 2011 Paris meeting of agricultural ministers, the G-20 further adopted an Action Plan on Food Price Volatility and Agriculture. The November 2011 Cannes summit even made food security a formal agenda item, yielding annexes devoted to food price volatility. While no major new initiative came out of the 2012 Los Cabos summit, previous commitments were fleshed out.

The attention that price volatility received by the G-20 may have improved the functioning of agricultural commodities derivatives markets and overall regulation standards. But disappointment with the limited approach taken by the G-20 on food security has prompted some analysts to conclude that the group is actually causing more harm than good.³³ One problem is straightforward disagreement on policy. Whereas the United States and Brazil argue that price volatility only diminishes when markets produce adequate amounts of foodstuffs, India, China, and Argentina insist on harnessing national food reserves and domestic quota requirements to supply domestic markets.³⁴ Amidst such disputes, France was in 2011 content to win support for a global database to better measure the level of food staples, along with a prohibition on export restrictions and taxes on World Food Program purchases for humanitarian purposes.³⁵

In 2011 China put its considerable weight behind the French-led food security initiative and similarly endorsed the idea of the G-20 engaging on the issue of energy security.³⁶ So far, however, the G-20 approach to energy issues has been even less aggressive than that of the G7/8.³⁷ The Pittsburgh summit merely produced an appeal to increase investments in clean technology and measures to enhance transparency in energy markets; since January 2010, G-20 countries do report monthly data on oil production and consumption, along with refining and stock levels. To the environmental nongovernmental organization (NGO) sector, these results are meager. Again, due to conflicting energy policies among member states (e.g., Aus-

tralia has introduced a national carbon tax while Canada has rejected any carbon pricing model), the G-20 has dashed widespread expectations that it would forge a joint approach to the threat of climate change.

On other nontraditional security challenges, the G-20 has so far at best a record of individual member states conforming to the laws and regulations generated by institutional arrangements and frameworks associated with the G7/8. In some such areas, cascading norms within the G-20 have been quite significant (see Table 1).³⁸ Notably, G-20 member states that recently served on the Security Council tend to stay involved in international networks on counterterrorism and nuclear nonproliferation, successively resulting in limited (across issues) or partial (restricted to one issue) conformity with G7/8 objectives. The work of the GPSWMD and the PPEG, meanwhile, has been geographically restricted to the former Soviet Union and Africa, respectively, and therefore has not engaged most “G-11” countries (those that belong to the G-20 though not to the G7/8).³⁹

The most important exception to the nontransfer or partial transfer of institutional arrangements and frameworks is the work of the FATF, which effectively is already shifting to the G-20.⁴⁰ The most important explanation for this unusually high level of conformity with G7/8 objectives is probably the involvement of the G-20 finance ministers meeting in the FATF regime immediately after the 9/11 attacks.⁴¹ That is, several years before the group’s upgrade to a summit, G-20 member states had become acquainted with the challenge of counterterrorist financing and were therefore prepared to consolidate cooperation in this field after 2009.

Already in Pittsburgh, the G-20 welcomed the progress made by the FATF and urged it, in paragraph 15 of the Leaders’ Statement, to “issue a public list of high risk jurisdictions by February 2010.” Three years later, the task of preparing an official report prepared to the 2012 Los Cabos summit provided the FATF with an opportunity to expand on the G7/8 legacy. At this point, the stance taken against so-called noncooperative governments hardened significantly. Only North Korea and Iran were subjected to enhanced scrutiny, but another thirteen governments were viewed as non-compliant, meaning that their financial institutions must operate at a higher cost in the international marketplace.⁴² G-20 members Nigeria, Indonesia, and Turkey were classified as reluctant whereas Saudi Arabia was recognized as having some laws at odds with the FATF regime.

Recalibrating the Global Political Order: Power Dynamics at Play

In the late 1990s and the 2000s, Canada, Germany, Italy, France, and the United Kingdom entertained ideas about incorporating the emerging great powers of the developing world into economic policy coordination. Anticipating that their relative weight compared to China, India, Brazil, and Rus-

Table 1 Transfer/Nontransfer of Quasi-permanent G7/8 Institutional Arrangements and Frameworks in Nontraditional Security to the G-20, by Way of G-11 Conformity

G7/8	G-11 Conformity	G-20
Financial Action Task Force (1989)	40 plus 9 FATF Recommendations implemented by G-20 members except Nigeria and Indonesia	2012 Report to G-20 leaders by the FATF
Roma-Lyon Group (2001)	Partial conformity by way of overlapping activities by the Security Council (CTC)	
Global Partnership Working Group (2002)	Limited cooperation on nuclear nonproliferation issues	
Counter-Terrorism Action Group (2003)	Partial conformity via programs and projects run by the ICAO, IMO, ADB, UNDOC, OSCE, and the World Bank	
Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding Experts Meeting/Africa Clearinghouse (2004)	Limited cooperation on peacekeeping within the Security Council and other relevant UN bodies	
Clean Energy Investment Framework (2009)	Partial conformity by way of increased investment in clean energy by most G-20 member states	G-20 Framework for Strong, Sustainable and Balanced Growth (2012)
L'Aquila Food Security Initiative (2009)	Partial conformity through measures to enhance confidence and functioning of agricultural markets by most G-20 member states	Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (2010); Action Plan on Food Price Volatility and Agriculture (2011)

Note: G7 applies to 1975–1997 summits of heads of state and government, G8 to corresponding summits 1998–2013, and G7/8 refers to both; G-20, Group of 20; G-11, countries that belong to the G-20 but not the G8; FATF, Financial Action Task Force; CTC, Counter-Terrorism Committee; ICAO, International Civil Aviation Organization; IMO, International Maritime Organization; ADB, Asian Development Bank; UNODC, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime; OSCE, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

sia would decrease in the coming years and decades, the larger European Union (EU) countries and Canada sought to attenuate their influence in the top rung of resourceful countries. Still hesitant as to when and how to invite emerging great powers into top-level arenas, they helped nudge the United States to acknowledge the likely inevitability of changing global power relations by the mid-twenty-first century. What began as an outreach exercise at the Gleneagles (2005), Heiligendamm (2007), and L'Aquila (2000) summits matured into a concerted effort to provide emerging great powers access to global policy making venues.

As in the case of the emergence of the G7 in the 1970s, the exact composition of G-20 membership was partly the outcome of an arbitrary selection process. A more exclusive club had been envisaged by the group of people who hatched the original idea of engaging more stakeholders, and

this “experimental group” included China, India, Brazil, Mexico, and South Africa. The latter two, along with countries subsequently included (Argentina, Australia, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, and Turkey) seemingly lacked a sense of great-power entitlement, not having been previously seated at a top table of international diplomacy (at least not in recent history). Most G-11 countries were nonetheless soon prepared to support a broader G-20 mandate.

When the world faced the most serious financial crisis in recent history, the dire need to mobilize economic and political capital catapulted particularly China, India, and Brazil into prominent roles. For the duration of intense crisis management and reform of international financial and banking regulations, all emerging powers including the two Asian giants appeared content with their newfound significance on the world stage. More recently, the surfacing of new international conflicts inserted a different dynamic into summit proceedings. In particular, the first half of 2011 saw attempts to forge a coordinated response to events in the wider Middle East stuck between the preferences of a closely knit Atlantic community on the one hand—securing a Security Council resolution and then intervening in Libya during a seven-month-long military campaign—and non-Western great powers sceptical of outside intervention on the other. In April 2011, BRICS members met in Sanya, China, and expressed strong reservations about how NATO was enforcing the UN-authorized no-fly zone over Libya.

The BRICS, at the same time, urged the UN General Assembly to conclude negotiations on a Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism. In line with previous Indian and Chinese attempts to bolster transnational counterterrorism mechanisms within the UN, this appeal could be interpreted as part of a long-term effort to substitute arrangements and frameworks already established by the G7/8 in this field. It is clear that the basic rules of monitoring and information sharing in transnational counterterrorism were created by G7/8 countries and led by the US government. It is similarly evident that collaboration in this field—as illustrated by worldwide electronic eavesdropping programs run by US intelligence agencies in recent years—has privileged the United States and other Western countries in that they reaffirm the asymmetries of structural power in the realm of high-grade intelligence.⁴³

Still, in a period when Washington has been at pains to vigorously perform “system maintenance” in the global political order, countries such as Japan are visibly burdened by the prospect of a “post-American world.”⁴⁴ As the relative significance of Japan in the world economy decreases and disputes arise with China and South Korea over territorial boundaries in the South China Sea and controversial historical monuments, Tokyo has been unable to play the bridge-building role it championed under US presidents Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush.⁴⁵ Russia, conversely, has insisted that

the US-led international order is skewed to the detriment of emerging great powers. In this context, the BRICS group instigated by Russia emerged as a “hedging approach” for regional great powers that seek to enhance their role in the world.⁴⁶

It is especially difficult to see how the G-20 would be able to assume the role marginally played by the G7 in the 1970s and 1980s, and by the G8 more recently, in adopting policy positions behind which the entire group is united on high-profile foreign and security policy matters. The complex power dynamics at play within and between the various constellations described above would rarely allow for a joint statement or course of action to be adopted, as the 2011–2014 crises over Syria and Ukraine clearly demonstrate.

Handover, Division of Labor, or Mission Creep?

Whatever the specific ambitions of emerging great powers and interests of their more established counterparts, it is the G7’s and especially the G8’s record that sets the criteria for measuring G-20 success; thus, the latter has aptly been labeled “both rival and a successor of the G8.”⁴⁷ Considered to have “earned its spurs from its vital work on financial regulation and economic co-ordination” in 2008–2009, only a year later the G-20 was debunked for its lackluster performance.⁴⁸ Even Brazil and India, countries that stand much to gain from G-20 membership and the global diplomatic exposure it generates, were visibly disappointed by the decline in tangible outcomes.⁴⁹

In late 2012 and 2013, internal G-20 debates shifted toward how to calibrate fiscal consolidation without undermining a brittle global recovery or trigger competitive devaluations.⁵⁰ Lingered in the background was also a dispute over whether the G-20 ought to set up a (small) secretariat to furnish the presidency with administrative support. China, Brazil, Russia, Australia, and the United Kingdom endorsed that idea, even though most governments realized it would be difficult to agree on a secretariat’s exact role.⁵¹ The latter type of nested formality in the informal setting of (serial) summit diplomacy, moreover, could be perceived as undermining the UN and therefore be resented by non-G-20 countries that question the wisdom of carrying over important functions from formal to informal international institutions.

There appear to be three basic options when it comes to transferring the G7/8’s nontraditional security agenda to its broader successor. Proponents of a swift and structured handover of nontraditional security matters to the G-20 are typically eager to highlight the gains made in terms of a higher degree of representativeness compared to the G7/8. Latching onto Western appeals to emerging great powers that they act as “responsible stakeholders,” advocates of expanding the G-20 mandate justifiably question that a body representing some 60 percent to 65 percent of the world population

ought to confine its deliberations to high finance, and leave security matters to the G8 and the Security Council.⁵² All other things being equal, representativeness would unequivocally be enhanced if the G-20 assumed responsibilities in the realm of nontraditional security, in the same way as would enlargement of the Council.

But in an argument that closely mirrors concerns regarding Security Council enlargement, skeptics point to the pitfalls of emphasizing representativeness at the expense of efficiency and effectiveness.⁵³ One dimension of this argument focuses on the limited prospects for likemindedness forming within the G-20, as a precondition for lasting outcomes. Another dimension hones in on differences between Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and non-OECD economies, which in turn influence the capacity to handle relevant problems. For example, in aggregate terms, the G-20 is significantly less developed in cybersecurity than members of the narrower group.⁵⁴ Such asymmetries are of course related to levels of economic performance, infrastructure investments, governance capacity, and overall computer literacy. From this vantage point, the notion that the G-20 might assume the reins of all of the G8's endeavors would seem overly optimistic.

Admittedly, many proponents for a speedy handover of G7/8 issues to the G-20 are decisionmakers, public intellectuals, and academic writers in the developing world, speaking from within the rising great powers that stand to gain from an institutional power shift. But there are also notable exceptions, such as former Canadian prime minister Paul Martin, who clearly supports widening the G-20 mandate at the expense of the G7/8. When it comes to security as well as climate change, overseas development, or bank regulation, Martin asserts, the world will increasingly need China, India, and Brazil to sit at the table or solutions will simply lack legitimacy as well as efficacy.⁵⁵ John Kirton, with perhaps unmatched experience of research into G7/8 and G-20 affairs, argues that "the G8's legacy and limitations suggest that the G-20 will succeed if it becomes a club with a comprehensive agenda."⁵⁶ Andrew F. Cooper and Ramesh Thakur similarly say that the G-20 "should replace the G8 as the grouping that counts."⁵⁷ The suspension of Russia from the narrower group would hardly undermine that case, as it makes it even less representative of the world's largest and resourceful countries.

Conservative pragmatism is the hallmark of a second option, advocating a clear and durable division of labor between the two institutions. A general argument is that either body must avoid spreading itself thin and trim its respective policy agenda. Hikaru Yamashita wrote in 2012 that he envisaged the future G8 as quintessentially devoted to nontraditional security matters, after its original mandate was effectively subsumed by the G-20 in 2008–2009.⁵⁸ Another voice of conservative pragmatism is Canadian prime minister Stephen Harper, who bluntly states that "if the world's rich-

est and most powerful nations do not deal with the world's hardest and most intractable problems, they simply will not be dealt with."⁵⁹ Emphasizing the complexity of the challenges that the G7/8 faces, Harper implies that the G-20 lacks the format, experience, and political desire to forge mechanisms through which nontraditional security matters are properly managed.⁶⁰

Harper's current British counterpart, David Cameron, also insists that "division of labor" should receive serious consideration. In mid-2010 Cameron told reporters that the G8, after some tinkering, can remain useful: "You could make it more focused and strategic, majoring on foreign policy and security issues, while also keeping the particular link to accountability on development aid which is really important." Cameron further proposed that G8 members consider "getting rid of the pre-cooked communiqué, to turn it into a proper small strategic discussion" that would "leave the G-20 to be the big economic global governance forum, which it now is."⁶¹ By refocusing the narrower group toward fireside chats that bolster mutual trust and give rise to innovative thinking, Cameron apparently believed it a good idea to cultivate its competitive advantage. In June 2013, before the Ukrainian war, Russian president Vladimir Putin made remarks to the same effect.⁶²

But conceptually speaking there is a third option that, due to its political realism, cannot be easily discarded. A Canadian former top diplomat and commentator, Paul Heinbecker, has been adamant that "the G20 ultimately will absorb the G8."⁶³ The main reason he cites is that, once world leaders meet regularly they will inevitably end up addressing what are perceived as the most pressing issues of the day, either in bilateral conversations or in joint sessions proper. In part because of outside expectations projected onto such an august forum, and in part due to the reluctance of heads of state and government to be bothered with technicalities of economic policy, Heinbecker predicts that G-20 summits will follow the path of the G7/8 and ultimately fail to suppress consideration of a wider range of topics.⁶⁴

Barring comprehensive UN reform, the constraint that will continue limit G-20 expansion into the security realm is international conflict management conducted at the Security Council. Some of the most powerful governments, already seated at that table, will no doubt go on harnessing the integrity and established legitimacy of the Council.⁶⁵ Other governments, hoping to gain entry as permanent member states in the foreseeable future, do not want to undermine that body's mandate and status. But an informal body that is in a position to take effective action could also—so goes the argument in favor of allowing emerging great powers to assume a greater role in nontraditional security matters of global significance—help unblock stalled intergovernmental negotiations on international trade, climate change, and Council expansion proper.

Heinbecker envisages that the transfer of nontraditional security “portfolios” from the G7/8 to its more inclusive successor could occur over a long period of time, giving both sides time to prepare for the handover of issues.⁶⁶ This approach seems to have resonance with some G-20 member states. In late 2010, the Turkish ambassador to South Korea poignantly expressed his country’s desire to see the G-20 expand gradually in the realm of nontraditional security, bringing in new issue areas but moving slowly so as to absorb the lessons of decisionmakers and officials with previous commitments. According to Ambassador Erdogan Iscan: “Its agenda should be expanded in a phased manner to cover other related topics, such as the development issues, food security, poverty eradication, climate change, energy security, etc.”⁶⁷

This last option, outlining a mission creep scenario in which the G-20 gradually wrests control over the nontraditional security agenda out of the hands of the G7/8, simultaneously fits with existing uncertainties about the prospects of either group. To G-20 skeptics, this uncertainty represents a measure of sensible caution about moving ahead too quickly. But it could also be attractive from the standpoint that an area-by-area transfer of authority might persuade new stakeholders to create initiatives that constitute improvements on earlier ones, and thereby establish a process by which institutional arrangements and frameworks enhance the quality of global governance.⁶⁸ That is, what some view as politically expedient procrastination would generate benefits with regard to stakeholders behaving more responsibly than if the handover is swift or entails a clear division of labor between the two.

Russia’s unexpected military operation in the Crimean peninsula in early 2014, immediately after having hosted the Sochi Winter Olympic Games, may in fact have added to the attractiveness of mission creep. Suddenly, the ostensible achievement of expanding the G7 to the G8 by including Russia in the late 1990s was thrown into doubt, rendering the G-20 a more viable alternative for nontraditional security cooperation than either to reverting back to G7 collaboration or patching up relations with the Kremlin. Given the disruptiveness of Putin’s actions during the Ukraine crisis, it would appear that only a change of political leadership in Russia could restore the G8 as an arena at which the major Western powers would want to exchange sensitive information or invest significant amounts of political capital.

Conclusion

Far-reaching conclusions cannot be made on the basis of existing experience and the limited analysis for which there is room here. But the direct involvement of heads of state and government in G7/8 and G-20 summits appears to have contributed to countries accepting a more comprehensive

implementation of agreements made in response to the 2008–2009 financial crisis while strengthening their overall commitment to regulatory regimes. In this vein, the reinvigorated summit-based G-20 helped avert backsliding and kept crucial issues like that of reforming quotas in the World Bank and the IMF at the top of the agenda of global policy making.

At the same time, there is growing recognition that the G-20 lacks the likemindedness that has characterized G7 and, to a lesser extent, G8 deliberations. Indeed, as soon as the acute phase of the financial crisis was over, ambitious joint decisions became harder to forge among the G-20 members. Meanwhile, the G7/8 is with the (partial) exception of Russia made up of democratic governments whose economies conform to OECD principles and whose collaboration over decades created a distinctive legacy of policy coordination on monetary and fiscal issues. As we have seen, after 9/11 this elite-level incremental approach to transnational problem solving was extended to nontraditional security problems.

When united, the G-20 can argue that it speaks for the majority of the world's population and that it controls over four-fifths of all economic resources. In this respect, the G-20 constitutes a major improvement on the G7/8, which beyond North America and Western Europe includes only Japan and partly non-European Russia. An elaborate consultation mechanism, as that pioneered by G7/8 member Japan in 2000 and by G-20 member South Korea in 2010, might compensate for the noninclusion of small- and medium-sized states. What it cannot fully compensate for is the loss of democratic legitimacy when some member states are not governed by elected politicians. The inclusion of China and Saudi Arabia, along with countries with weak human rights records, inevitably dilutes democratic credibility.

Yet since democratic credibility does not disqualify a country for a permanent seat in the Security Council, it should not automatically render the G-20 unfit to handle nontraditional security challenges. Given that the legitimacy deficit is manageable, the G-20 would not have to look hard for problems that could benefit from increased attention by resourceful countries. Were the G-20 to go down this route, the obvious precedent is the G7/8 agenda. Over the years, the G7/8 addressed high-profile foreign policy matters and established solutions to several global problems, even coming up with a rudimentary climate change regime in 1979. As highlighted above, its most impressive record pertains to counterterrorism, peacekeeping capacity building, and nonproliferation.

The continued existence of the G7/8 and its rationale as a vehicle to manage nontraditional security problems nevertheless presents a delicate diplomatic challenge by suggesting, to some G-20 members, that they remain excluded from vital and prestigious issue areas. In fact, one reason why the eleven non-G8 members may want to appropriate the G7/8 legacy is that the

latter will finally be put to rest. To the extent that leading Western governments use G7/8 meetings ahead of G-20 summits as an opportunity to coordinate their positions in advance, it cannot be excluded that the BRICS may seek to broaden to a G-11 as an arena with a precooked agenda separate from that of the G7/8. Since Russia was forced to exit the latter over the Ukraine-Crimea conflict in 2014, this scenario has become even more plausible.

Yet G-20 summits provide an occasion at which political leaders and senior advisers can deal with pressing and salient matters, which implies that all attempts to control the agenda may in the long run be self-defeating. The temptation of G-20 leaders to expand the scope of activities could stem from one of two contrary experiences. One is that the G-20 is largely successful in resolving the narrow set of issues with which it has been concerned since its inception and that its achievements reinforce the appetite of G-11 governments to expand the group's mandate. The second experience is that failure (or intangible success) regarding core economic tasks might paradoxically also prompt the G-20 to turn to a wider range of issues. If member states remain committed to sustaining the group as a top-level arena where they address mutual differences, they might simply identify alternative high-profile topics to serve as pretexts for arranging extravagant summits.

Regardless of whether the G-20 is able and willing to emulate the G7/8, a comprehensive appropriation of the G7/8 agenda remains unlikely. There are at least three constraining factors at work: one thematic, one symbolic, and one institutional. Thematically, the problems of the 1980s and 1990s were so different from the challenges facing the world today that it makes little sense to reinvigorate working groups and networks that devised their original missions under the G7/8 system. Symbolically, the adoption of a highly ambitious agenda would make the G-20 resemble the G7/8 to the extent where it would precipitate criticism of great-power domination akin to that until recently deployed by many emerging great powers themselves. Finally, there is an intricate interplay between the informal groups of great powers and the legitimacy of existing formal institutions that tends to induce influential actors to hedge their bets and keep most options open.

In other words, as long as major players such as the United States and China continue to resist the dilution of the mandate of the Security Council with reference to the need to sustain the effectiveness of the latter institution, the swift handover option is highly unlikely. But so is the division of labor option, which would risk reinforcing the frustration of emerging great powers at the obvious stalling of incumbents to either enlarge the Council or allow the G-20 expand into nontraditional security. The mission creep alternative, by contrast, remains a practical and politically convenient way for old stakeholders to hold the feet of new stakeholders to the fire. 🌐

Notes

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