



Meeting: “The G20 at Leaders’ Level?”  
February 29<sup>th</sup>, 2004  
IDRC, Ottawa



**The G20 as a Summit Process:  
Including New Agenda Issues such as “Human Security”**

*Paul James*

**Professor of Globalization, RMIT University, Australia**

**Summary**

The present paper specifically addresses the question of “human security”<sup>1</sup> while more broadly attempting to pull together the concerns of the other papers to suggest the creation of a different kind of forum that could confront a range of issues from financial management to security and health. When Paul Martin mentioned the G20 idea in Davos, the first example he referred to was a possible role in political/security issues. However, the G20, like its progenitors the G7 and the G8, has focused primarily on global financial architecture. These notes argue (1) for a broadening of the agenda of the G20 to encompass “human security” issues (including health, development, debt, military intervention, etc.) and (2) for a rethinking of the institutional form of the G20 that in broadening its agenda takes into account the constituencies that such a broadening entails and makes it a more flexible forum.

Both dimensions – agenda-broadening and institutional reform – are arguably crucial in order to respond adequately to the mounting problems of global governance. In the

context, firstly, of the War on Terror with reconstruction problems in Iraq and Afghanistan and, secondly, the “ungovernability” of the global market with exacerbating inequalities, these problems of governance might be said to be part of a generalizing crisis. In terms of agenda-broadening, the complex intersection of issues of overall economic stability, human security and economic reconstruction after regional conflict, makes bringing the questions of “human security” onto the agenda a fundamental necessity. However, this also entails rethinking the institutional form of the G20. Instead of a meeting of finance ministers (or even always heads of state), it is worth considering the G20 as a *summit process*. That is, as an interconnected series of agenda-based meetings in which heads-of-state members either come themselves or delegate to the most relevant government ministers and advisors, as well as invite relevant stakeholders.

## **Background**

Over the past decade a number of destabilising developments have occurred which pose serious practical and conceptual challenges to conventional policy frameworks and responses. These challenges have all been of a complex and unconventional nature – they do not accord with conventional models of state-based military, financial or social threats. Rather they involve non-state or multiple actors, or complex processes such as social, environmental and economic feedbacks. They have required the involvement of both old and new actors such as international agencies, police forces, citizens, NGOs, media and civil society groups. At the same time, they challenge the relevance and efficacy of conventional state-based financial or security responses conducted as stand-alone actions. Developments in the recent past that challenge social sustainability range from the local to the global:

- the terrorist attacks in New York, Washington, Kuta and Riyadh, and international policy responses including wars in Afghanistan and Iraq;
- the erosion of civil liberties, democratic governance and international human rights law in the course of coalition-building and counter-terrorist responses following the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001;
- a global health crisis, ranging from global diseases such as AIDS, SARS and tuberculosis to the medical consequences of regional zones of global conflict;
- threats to eco-systems, human communities and economic patterns posed by environmental degradation;
- the Asian political and financial crisis of 1997-98 with its accompanying effect on regional communities;
- the global refugee crisis, growth in people smuggling, increasing number of internally displaced people;
- the fraying of liberal security norms based on international law, co-operative institution-building and dialogue, through developments such as the Korean crisis, the fraying of international arms control and non-proliferation agreements, and the destabilizing impact of pre-emptive security doctrine;
- the untenable stresses being placed on the United Nations system through opposing developments and demands – on the one hand discord in the Security Council, the disregard of international law and the creation of security or peace-building crises by member states, and on the other hand increasing demands for UN involvement in peacekeeping, humanitarian relief, crisis governance and nation-building.

### **The importance and role of the G20 as a *summit process***

In the face of increasingly complex interdependence across the globe, multilateral institutions are crucial to the world's future, and yet institutions such as the United Nations have become too unwieldy and have been side-lined on basic issues of security and economic regulation. To take the G20 to another stage, arguably involves doing more than just expanding the membership of a G7/G8-style organization. Moreover, the background of change suggests the importance of bringing in non-state actors, transnational bodies, and international institutions in a regularized way. Both moves would considerably add to the importance and unique place of the G20. The transformation of the G20 into a *summit process* (that is, a heads-of-state forum which allows for delegation and invitation processes) would allow an unparalleled flexibility to the forum.

More specifically, in relation to the security issue this would have two inter-related dimensions:

1. conflict prevention/generation of the political will to forestall conflict.
2. post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation.

### **What form for the G20?**

#### *Dimensions of a possible institutional form*

- Changing state-based membership, with provision for gradual systematic movement of state members into and out of the G20. For instance, membership of the G20 could be on a staggered ten-year basis with movement out of the group occurring through a revolving door that brings in another country from a similar

constituency, for example, membership of the OEDC, ASEAN, OPEC, OAU, etc.

This would counter one of the criticisms levelled at the G7/G8 is that it is a closed club of privileged members that have a similar ideological direction.

- Changing internal delegation according to the agenda item while continuing the foundational membership as heads-of-state. In other words, the delegates of the heads-of-state would be chosen according to the agenda focus. For example, if the focus were finance it would be finance ministers; military security it would be defence ministers, etc. This would counter the criticism that the G7/G8 is too narrowly constituted.
- Changing external invitees according to the agenda focus. For example, if the agenda was health, then as Tim Evans writes, it would be important to invite “the leaders of the multi-lateral health agencies – WHO, UNICEF, WB, UNFPA – and other major players in global health from the private sector (for-profit, not-for-profit and civil society), professional groups and academia. If the agenda was truth and reconciliation processes then it would be important to invite jurists and NGO leaders in this area.

#### *Dimensions of a possible meeting form*

- the summit would possibly be agenda-based with each meeting having a very specific focus.
- the summit would have provision to *invite* presentations and proposals on the agenda item from non-G20 countries.
- the summit would also *invite* presentations and proposals on the agenda item from non-state actors ranging from representatives of NGOs and transnational

institutions to independent scholars and representatives of think tanks.

- The summit would have provision for both open and closed presentations, for closed deliberations of material, and for open disclosure of policy documents, materials and recommendations that come out of each summit.

### **What agenda for the G20?**

“Would there be a discussion of the current and potential roles and mandates of international organizations? Would the agenda seek agreement on whether specific kinds of greater capacity are needed at the international level? Would there be a discussion of proposals to strengthen relevant regional institutions and coordinate their work with global institutions?” Yes, given the agenda-based nature of the *summit process*, choices could be made to address these as well as other themes as a series of priority issues with an assumed brief to come up with ways forward and policy recommendations.

### **Building the process**

As Diana Tussie writes, “in order to move the agenda suggested above, the G20 needs some changes. It has not been free from criticism. Gerry Helleiner has denounced its lack of legitimacy, its restricted agenda and the fact that it was a U.S.-originated initiative. Despite these flaws, the G20 leaves room for its non-G7 members to lead initiatives and promote a wider agenda and for it to become a transmission belt of agenda-moving ideas”.

How to make it happen? The reform of the G20 could be affected as a gradual process of expanding the range of agenda foci and reforming the structure:

- Bring in non-government institutions, from WHO and the World Bank to Green

Peace as invited participants in meetings that are relevant to them.

- Bring in members of academic institutes and think tanks, where relevant to their area of expertise, as ongoing consultants to develop material and provide iterative briefing-policy papers on specific issues.
- Make the agendas for G20 meetings public, with policy and briefing documents posted on the web when suitable.
- Set up a small permanent secretariat to handle the process.

<sup>1</sup> The concept of *human security* emerged in mainstream political debate through the United Nations Development Programme's 1994 *Human Development Report*. Here, *human security* was defined as having two main aspects: safety from chronic threats such as hunger, disease and repression; and protection from sudden and harmful disruptions in the pattern of daily life. The rationale for the elaboration of the concept of *human security* in the UNDP's report, and a concern which continues to underpin a range of critical approaches to the way security is understood and practiced, was the need to contest traditional approaches to security that seemed to be marginal to the daily threats facing people around the world. As the UNDP (1994: 22) notes, 'Human security is a child who did not die, a disease that did not spread, a job that was not cut, an ethnic tension that did not explode in violence, a dissident who was not silenced. Human security is not a concern with weapons—it is a concern with human life and dignity'. It is in this light that the concept of *human security* should be viewed: as an attempt to focus more directly on the myriad factors and processes that render individuals insecure, and to contest the necessary equation of security with the territorial inviolability of states. Such an approach reflects a concern with extending boundaries of ethical responsibility beyond the state; with moving away from viewing those outside state boundaries as 'others'; with de-legitimizing military force as the central tool for achieving security; and with focusing more fundamentally on the structural causes of insecurity: accepted political, social and economic arrangements and forms of organization that undermine individual welfare (whether it be the structure of the international economy that creates or furthers poverty or the denial of full citizenship rights to minority groups in particular states) or retard the potential to which individual insecurity can be fundamentally redressed.