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# Getting the L20 Going: Reaching out from the G8

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## Introduction

There is now a growing consensus that the global community could benefit from a leaders' level meeting of the G20 — at least as a one time experimental encounter to give the new formula a chance to prove its worth. After five years of operation, the annual finance ministers' G20 meeting has demonstrated its value, in the face of both the initial 1997-9 Asian-turned-global financial crisis and the subsequent September 11th, 2001, terrorist attacks (Kirton 2004). Some leaders of the systemically important G20 countries have welcomed an elevation of the G20 to a leaders' level encounter. Some consequential members of the G8 have expressed a serious interest as well. And the leading architect and entrepreneur of an L20, Paul Martin, freshly elected as Canada's Prime Minister on June 28th, is continuing to try to bring an L20 to life.

The key question at present is thus how soon and how to give birth to this new meeting or new institution that many feel is a good idea. Here there is a wide spectrum of alternatives for how this can and should be done. At one end of the spectrum stands a San Francisco 1945-like "big bang" in which a new, now properly designed L20 is permanently created to replace a discredited G8 that is instantly and entirely abolished for good (Bradford and Linn 2004, Cooper and English 2005). At the other end stands a globally necessary and effective G8 that reaches out a little more to add a G20 in order to enhance the value that both mutually reinforcing bodies have for globally governing the twenty first century world.

It is certainly productive to analyze the respective roles, past and prospective performance, and proper design features of the L20 and G8, operating together or separately. It is less useful to have the case for creating an L20 stand or fall on the need to simultaneously obliterate the G8. For the present priority is to get the L20 going. It is much easier to do so if one does not have to first secure a consensus on the abolition of the G8, but instead leaves it to the Darwinian process of international institutional selection which will, in practice, determine which bodies survive, prevail or absorb others over time. There are many signs that the G8 leaders themselves, some from the G20 and many beyond, are strongly attached to the G8, and would refuse or be reluctant to let it die. There are many reasons why the G8 is still necessary to make the L20 work properly, rather than stand as an obstacle to an L20 that is otherwise sure to be a success. Above all, the demand for new global governance in the twenty first century is sufficiently strong and comprehensive to fully employ the energies and respective strengths of the G8, L20 and other such Summit-level plurilateral forums as well. The analytical and policy challenge is not to pick one body to do everything, but to determine how several can come together to meeting the global communities' critical needs. A synergistic co-existence is thus the winning formula for a successful future for both the G20 and the G8.

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## 1. The Need For a Fast and Easy Start

The first reason for synergistic co-existence is the need to give the still unborn L20 a fast and easy start — even as early as 2005 as Paul Martin hopes. The L20 may be a good idea, but it is not one whose time has already, or will, easily come. Indeed, in the long and ever lengthening time since Paul Martin first conceived and proposed it, the new L20 has not yet sprung to life by any groundswell of political spontaneous combustion in support. Its record here is beginning to compare poorly with the creation of the Bretton Woods-UN, NATO, and the G8 bodies, which took from two years to four to travel from conception to birth. It will be much more difficult to get the long awaited L20 started if the leaders — of the G8, the G20 and the world — are asked to make two big decisions rather than just one. It will be much easier if they are asked to decide not on creating one and abolishing another institution, but merely on adding one to the mix, or adding one on to another, or just expanding part of one that already exists. By far the easiest way to rapidly launch a L20 is simply to have one G8 leader hosting a G8 Summit to ask the G20 leaders: "Will you come once to give a L20 a try?," and in particular, ask his G8 colleagues: "Will you come an extra day to my G8 to give an L20 add-on outreach meeting a try?"

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## 2. Let the Leaders' Market Decide Who Wins

A second reason for synergistic co-existence is to let the leaders' market decide which institution will win. This may be little more than making a virtue of necessity. For in the real Darwinian world of international institutional selection, institutions, like old generals, do not die but merely fade away. The one major case where one was killed by design and replaced by another was the death of the League of Nations and birth of the UN in 1994-5. But even here the old ILO was left to continue. And America and its closest allies soon discovered they needed something smaller and better — NATO — to meet the new threat. Today America is far from being in a similar 1945-like state of high hegemony or after victory where it can dictate what must be done while others defer. Rather, today's America the vulnerable needs all the help it can get from its closest friends in the existing clubs it that have proven their worth and that America has founded and remained in since the start.

Unlike the League-to-United Nations transformation, informal "soft law" summit-level institutions like the G8 and L20 live by their performance. When leaders decide they are no longer worth the time and trouble and stop coming, there are no international civil servants or legal charters or mandatory annual budget allocations from national treasuries to keep them running long after they are of any real use. That is why some never really get started, such as the 2002 UN World Food "Summit," recent International Communications "Summit," or summer 2004 AIDS "Summit" in Thailand. Some start well and wither, such as the G15 Summit of Southern leaders created in 1989 when France invited them to Paris for a dialogue with the G8 host. Some find it hard to attract all the important leaders, such as the September 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development that President Bush skipped, or the APEC leaders meeting that President Clinton sent his Vice-President to in his stead, or the NATO Summit in Istanbul on June 28, 2004, from which Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin took a pass.

In this Darwinian world of natural leaders-level selection, the G8 has thus far won out. In every one of its thirty years every leader from every member has always come. Only death has kept anyone away. One can compare this record with the existing G20, and ask if all its finance ministers have come to every one of its annual meetings in its first five years.

Letting the leaders market decide may be a recognition of reality. But it does not stack the deck against the possibility that a L20 that might come to slowly kill its G8 creator. The G8 system itself provides proof that

this can and does happen. The G5 Finance Ministers club created in 1973 was soon replaced by the G7 Finance Ministers club created in 1986, as American treasury secretary James Baker and his G5 colleagues quickly came to the conclusion, through experience, that there was nothing the G5 could do in secret that could not be done better more transparently by the G5 countries with Canada and Italy on board.

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### **3. These G8 Leaders Love Their G8, With Good Reason**

The third reason for synergistic co-existence is that the current crop of G8 leaders really love and trust their G8, and have good reason for their choice. As emphasized by the dean of summit scholars, Sir Nicholas Bayne, the current club of G8 leaders have met together at every summit since 2001, with Canada's Paul Martin being the only newcomer to their exclusive summer camp. While not all might not like multilateralism or international institutions in theory, or like being lectured at by the leaders of lesser powers at the first G8 meeting they attended, all have at least learned how to make this international institutional devil they know work for them. Indeed, at their second gathering, at Kananaskis in 2002, they took the unprecedented step of saying they wanted to keep their G8 club alive, in its present form, not just for one more year as usual, but for a full nine. They took the further unprecedented step of defining who would host their gathering each year for the next nine.

An America flush from an unexpected G8 victory at the Sea Island Summit in June 2004 and led by a re-elected Bush will not want to declare the G8 and his Sea Island Summit a failure that should be abolished just after his year as host. Nor will he or John Kerry want to abolish the many important US priorities put in train through the G8 at Sea Island or before, most notably the Broader Middle East Initiative, Global Partnership on non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, anti-terrorism program, or peace support in Africa. Nor will Bush in particular find it easy to say no to Blair, Putin Koizumi or Berlusconi should they want to keep the G8 alive.

Britain's Tony Blair, about to host his second G8 Summit, will not want to give up, in his re-election year, his hosting of the July 6-8, 2005, Gleneagles Summit, and his African and climate change agenda for it, so that so someone else, somewhere else, sometime else can host an L20 substitute. If Blair can reap greater glory and performance by having more leaders with him, he can easily add an L20 to his existing G8. Even if Blair were tempted to take the great "L20 only" gamble, and put the G8 Gleneagles at risk, his Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown would probably prevent him from abandoning the G8 and Scotland in this way.

Russia's Vladimir Putin, the G8 host in 2006 is unlikely to be tempted to take the plunge as well. Russia has waited a long time to host a regular G8 Summit, and to be thus restored to its former glory as an equal great power. It would want to demote itself to a club where it is equal to financially delicate emerging economic middle powers like Indonesia or Argentina. Putin's response to 911 shows he knows how to make the G8 work in the fight against terrorism — an issue of some salience to Russians at the present time. Deciding how to do so instead in an equal, consensus-oriented L20 dialogue with Saudi Arabia and China holding a de facto veto on any consensus is unlikely to appeal — despite the good work that the G20 has done on the narrow issue of terrorist finance in the past.

Germany's Gerhard Schroeder, as the G8's 2007 host, might at first glance seem tempted to take the great L20-for-G8 gamble. For his Germany was a G20 founder, first host and is hosting again in 2004. But Schroeder and his Finance Ministry have been notably cautious about launching an L20 in any form. And Schroeder has good grounds for believing, from his 1999 Cologne Summit, that if the twenty first century imperative it to make globalization work for all, a German-hosted G8, inspired by a red-green coalition at home, has already proven it can effectively deliver that.

Japan's Junichiro Koizumi, the G8's host in 2008, is adamantly opposed to any G8-for-G20 trade. This is not just because Japan is the only G8 member consistently to host successful G8 Summits, and did much to launch the G8 at Okinawa 2000 on the path to global governance in the twenty first century world. For why would Japan instantly declare itself to be the downgraded equal of China and South Korea and Indonesia in the apex forum for global governance when China remains the only Asian power with a veto on the UNSC P5 and will ensure that Japan never gets added to that club. A quick phone call from Tokyo to Washington or Seoul could easily kill any chance that a stand alone L20 might take place at all. In sharp contrast, Japan will accept an L20 as part of the G8's host's prerogative for organizing the outreach for the Gleneagles and subsequent G8 Summits. An L20 attached to the G8 is the only sure way to overcome a Japan that will and can say "no."

The current G8 leaders do love, and their possible replacements will quickly come to love, their G8 for a good reason — it has worked very well for them and the world over the past several years. The master grader of G8 Summit performance, Sir Nicholas Bayne, has awarded the Summits of the past seven years some relatively good grades — an overall average of B, led by a B+ grade for Blair's Birmingham in 1998, Schroeder's Cologne in 1999, and Kananaskis 2002 (Bayne 2005). These grades show that the G8 has a respectable record of working, for the benefit of many if not all.

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#### **4. Non-G8 Countries Long for the G8**

A fourth reason for favouring synergistic co-existence is that it is not only the G8 members who have come to love and trust the G8 Summit. The leaders of many outside countries would also feel the loss and long for the G8 if it were to disappear. Over the past half decade the G8 has mounted a sustained and expanding program of outreach that has allowed, and easily attracted, the leaders of dozens of outside countries and international organizations to participate in its dialogue. Indeed, the large G20-like dialogue group that the French assembled for Evian has become institutionalized, with the new "Evian Group" holding a second, if only partially attended, summit in New York in September 2003. Thus, to a large degree the G8 has already created the L20, making a separate creation and accompanying act of G8 obliteration an unnecessary step.

Among the non-G8 members of the G20 — the G12 for short — South Africa has been to every G8 Summit over the past four years. Other G12 members, notably India, China, Brazil and Mexico, were at Evian in 2003. Outside the G12, many emerging economies and regional powerhouses that have never been invited to a G20, notably Nigeria and Egypt, have long been welcomed at the G8. They would see a G20-for-G8 replacement as kicking them, and most of Africa, out of the apex global government forum. This they would not welcome, especially next year when Blair has made Africa his key agenda item for the G8 Summit and all but promised the African leaders that they would return to be with the G8 leaders there.

Also excluded would be the many very poor countries from Africa and the Middle East that have been welcomed at the G8, most recently and expansively at Sea Island in 2004. A G20-for-G8 substitution would kick the world's "lower class" countries — including the poorest of the poor — out of the apex global governance forum. It would also say to the leaders of Afghanistan and Iraq — both newly popularly elected as 2005 unfolds — that the world's most powerful countries and body are no longer interested in their fate. No American President or British Prime Minister or Russian President would want to do this. It would similarly kick out the heads of the many multilateral UN organizations — representing the full global community — that have come to some G8 summits, starting as long ago as Lyon in 1996.

To be sure, it is theoretically possible that an L20 could add a few more members and even invite more of them on a flexible basis, and even in as inclusive and expansive fashion as the G8 has. But getting consensus among the existing 20 on who to add and how to add them would be difficult. And adding them onto a base of twenty or more would make a meaningful dialogue difficult, especially the free and frank informal

exchange that Paul Martin sees as the L20's very *raison d'être*. If the established fact is the precedent, it is noteworthy that never once in its five year history has the finance ministers G20 invited any outsiders to come.

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## 5. The G20 Needs the G8

The fifth reason for synergistic convergence is that the G8 is necessary for the G20 to work as it should. It was the G8 that created the G20 finance ministers forum in 1999, defined its mandate, guided its work and provided a consequential forum to which the G20 could report and thus have its consensus be put into effect. A G8-for-G20 replacement would thus constitute an act of international institutional matricide. More recently, at Evian 2003 and in the subsequent meeting of the "Evian Group" the G8 has proven that it knows how to create, continue, nurture and work well with a leaders-level L20-like forum.

Above all, if the L20 is to start life as an informal dialogue group with an agenda limited to one or two pressing issues, as Paul Martin proposes, it is essential to have a continuing G8 deal with the vast array of global governance issues that the L20 will not be able or willing to take up. The 15 or so separate documents issued at each of the last two G8 Summits shows how broad the G8's agenda has already become. A continuing G8 will help the L20 avoid the agenda overload that will cripple it in its early years.

Equally important, the G8 has now evolved into an elaborate global governance mountain that includes a dozen ministerial institutions and dozens of official level working groups below the Summit peak. It would be too much to expect, or want the L20 to instantly replicate these, or for the G8 to extend their membership to the full 20 countries. One reason is that some of their work is so sensitive that a very small cohesive group is necessary to maintain the trust from which their effectiveness flows. The long time it has taken to absorb Russia into most once G7 bodies and Russia's continuing absence from the G8's trade ministers' Quadrilateral or Global Health Security Initiative shows how difficult the process of expansion is, even a full decade and a half after Russia, then as the Soviet Union, first signaled it wanted into the G8 club. A big bang G8-for-L20 replacement would thus destroy much of the effective capacity for global governance that the world community already enjoys.

Furthermore, the G8 and L20 have distinctive roles. The G8 is a full strength global governance institution, with deliberative, directional, decisional, delivery, development of global governance and domestic political management tasks. The L20 is currently conceived as being only a deliberative body for free and frank informal exchange, and a directional body, breeding consensus on priorities, policies, principles and norms. While its G20 precursor has put in a respectable performance as a decisional body, the number of commitments it has generated has fallen off of late, while that of the G8 has soared. It is unknown if the G20 delivers, by its members complying with the collective commitments they have made. And the G20's work has had little domestic political resonance in its major member countries at home.

To be sure, the L20 might come to command the same domestic and global visibility as the more exclusive G8 has had almost from the start. But even so, the US and each of its G8 colleagues, likely hosting an L20 in a G8-like rotation, would have its leader, government and public forced to focus on the big global issues, be reminded of its global responsibilities, and induced to co-operate, once every 20 years rather than eight, should the G8 die. Without the opportunity to host, shape the agenda and make the institution work for the U.S., or other host countries, within the politically definable future, it is easier for a G8 leader to lose interest and stop coming to Summit's hosted by others when his or her crowded schedule presses at home. Every U.S. President and other G8 leader can easily imagine that they will serve for at least eight years and thus have a chance to host the G8 at least once. Even those with the greatest self confidence and liveliest political imaginations have no empirical grounds for believing, particularly if they come from democratic polities, that they will be there for a full 20 years.

Most importantly, the G8 and L20 have fundamentally different seminal, "constitutional" missions. The G8 was created in 1975, as its *de facto* "Charter of Rambouillet" affirmed, to globally protect and promote the value of "open democracy, individual liberty and social advance." The G20 was created to ensure financial stability, at least for the systemically important countries that were its members but presumably for the global community as a whole. If the L20, like the G20, is to foster consensus among its G8 and non G8 members, or more broadly between those from the north and the south, it will need a continuing G8 as a *de facto* L20 caucus group to ensure that the commitment to open democracy, individual liberty and social advance is at least protected and ideally expanded in the new more diverse group. This is especially so as the non-G8 members will continue to have their own caucus groups, from the G77 and Non-Aligned Movement, through the G15 born in 1989 by the G8, to the new trade-oriented G20 plus. No one has suggested obliterating these "G's" along with the G8. At a minimum, G8 leaders will not want to abolish their democratic G8 caucus at a time when democracy is under attack in Russia, and not yet secured in China or Saudi Arabia.

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## 6. The World Wants and Needs the G8

The sixth reason for preferring synergistic co-existence is that the world as a whole wants and needs the G8 to continue, for several reasons small and large. First, at a minimum, the G8 provides a prudential insurance policy should the untried L20 fail. G8 leaders recognized the need for prudence when they took more than a decade to abolish their G7 after its eighth member, Russia, started to come on board. The need for prudence is even greater now, given that L20-like, north-south, Summit-level bodies have been tried and failed before. The leading example is the 1981 Cancun Summit designed to pave the way for global negotiations and a new North-South bargain at the UN. It failed, and in the immediate afterward Mexico declared bankruptcy and Latin America's lost decade came. A second example — the IMF's Interim Committee created out of the financial crisis of the early 1970s — also proved unable to deal with the debt crisis of the 1980s or with the globalized financial crises that the 1990s brought. In both cases, it was the G8 that had and did ride to the rescue with debt relief and second lines of defence.

Second countries, international organizations and civil society actors have long recognized the value of international institutional forum shopping — for if one is blocked for whatever reason in one place, one can look elsewhere for a better deal. Major initiatives often require their proponents to mount sustained campaigns that mobilize several international institutions in support, rather than look to any single centre for the one-stop shopping that is sure to work. More broadly, while many regularly decry the waste of duplication and overlap, all recognize that healthy institutional rivalry can have its rewards, in spurring innovation in the global governance of old problems, and in the race to govern the many new yet ungoverned domains.

Third, the global community often needs timely and responsive action in today's fast paced, crisis-ridden world. Relying only on the L20, as one stop shopping centre open only once a year at an annual Summit, may mean having to wait too long to get the needed timely response. Since even the G8 has never been able to mount an *ad hoc* emergency face-to-face meeting, even in response to crises such as 911, it is difficult to see how the more unwieldy and diverse L20 could. Even in calmer times, a L20 will find it more difficult to come to timely, well tailored, consensus, commitment and compliance on a broad range of issues than the G8. At a minimum there are the transaction costs of securing such co-operation among 20 rather than eight actors, in a club with much greater diversity on all dimensions, and members with a shorter experience of working together.

Fourth, there is good reason to believe, from the revealed preference of the global community over the past 15 years, that the world wants democratic governance. The G8 can supply it, drawing on its all democratic members and its shared social purpose of "open democracy, individual liberty and social advance." The G20, with non-democratic China and Saudi Arabia as consequential members, and financial stability as its seminal

vocation, cannot. The experience of recent G8 Summits suggests that the global demand for democracy is growing, and penetrating such long hard core cases as Africa and the broader Middle East.

Fifth, there is also good reason to believe that then world wants greater civil society and legislative participation in global governance. Here the G8's democratic commitment has been expressed not only in its principles but also in its practice, particularly in its growing success since 1995 in including civil society in influential ways in its governance processes and forums. Since 2002, the leaders of the legislatures of the G8 countries have held an annual meeting of their own. To be sure, there is much more that could and should be done by the G8 in this regard (Kirton 2001-2). But the G20 has done virtually nothing at all, despite Paul Martin's desire and efforts to do so at its Montreal meeting in 2000. And the L20, as the G20, will find it difficult to move forward, given the presence and importance of non-democratic China and Saudi Arabia in the club.

Sixth, there is the important issue of legitimacy, where the G8 has a strong and growing claim. Legitimacy in global governance does indeed derive in part from the architectural inputs — the size and representativeness on several dimensions of the actors at the table in the inner management core. By this criterion it is the Bretton Woods-UN system, with the original P5 and American veto still at the centre after sixty years, that should be abolished, and not the G8, which has expanded from six to nine equal members in its thirty years. A second source of legitimacy is the quality and effectiveness of the outputs any international institution provides. Here a comparison of the G7/G8 over thirty years with the G20 over its first five would not support a conclusion that the second has succeeded where the first has failed.

There is a third source of legitimacy — the autonomous "soft power" attractiveness of an institution's core ideas — the global appeal of the central values, principles and norms it was created to protect and promote. Here the G8's "open democracy, individual liberty and social advance" has been shown, by the democratic revolution of the past 15 years, to have a wide global appeal, in virtually all geographic regions and social classes of the world. In contrast, the G20 offers essentially the financial stability necessary to protect the status quo powers of the current system — the already rich upper class G8 countries, and the rising upper middle class powers as well. A body dedicated to protecting the already rich and rising is unlikely to win the legitimacy race. Even if the G20 offers the full "Montreal consensus" and the mantra of "making globalization work for all," it must still contend with the G8's proven three decade record on social democracy, and its twenty first century additions, starting with the G8 Africa Action Plan.

Seventh, there is the large and growing demand for global governance in the future. The world does not offer a fixed demand that alternative international institutional suppliers must fight to the death over in a zero sum game if they are to win their preferred market share. There is more than enough work for both the G8 and the G20 and for many other similar institutions as well. This demand can be seen arising through five layers of increasing ambition that the global community needs to address.

The first is the demand for international institutions to perform longstanding, classic functions, such those enumerated by Charles Kindleberger in the financial domain. Here it is the Bretton Woods institutions and not the G8 that needs reform and perhaps even replacement as well. A second layer is to give expression to new, increasingly accepted demands, such those relating to gender, women and children, or physically new issues, such as the governance of the internet. Here the G8 has had a mixed record, running well behind the UN on gender but moving rapidly on the internet. A third layer consists of demands that globalization has moved from the domestic governance to global governance realm. Here in such fields as education and microeconomic reform, the G8 has done rather well.

A fourth layer is to counter institutional imbalance and fragmentation, embedded in the system by the incomplete, unbalanced and particularly fragmented creation of 1994-5. This architecture was born without a Summit level or any integrative command body. It left many spheres ungoverned, such as energy, the environment, and competition policy for a start. The imbalance has increased over the past decade, with the

new WTO and a stronger IMF arising to promote economic liberalization, but with no similar World Environment Organization or stronger ILO to keep pace in the environmental and social protection domain. The record of the G8 and G20 suggests that is the former body, and not the latter, that can be counted on to restore the balance and integration that most of the world wants (Kirton 2002).

The fifth and final layer is to pioneer new principles appropriate to the tightly interconnected twenty first century world, to replace the Westphalian ideological fundamentals entrenched at the core of the order of 1944-45. Here the G8 has done much to produce and act on such new principles, from ecological custodianship to humanitarian intervention in Kosovo. In sharp contrast, the G20 has done little. There is reason to doubt that an L20, with China and Saudi Arabia there to veto any consensus, will do much more.

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