



The G20 at the Leader's Level

L20 and Fragile States Conference

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The topic of fragile states is a complex issue requiring long-term commitments and changes to entrenched practices at the international level. Each and every global problem (security problems in particular) can only be managed if states have the necessary capabilities as well as the political will. In this regard, the issue of fragile states is crucial and cuts across various dimensions¹. To address any security issue is to talk about strengthening states' capacities. The L20 grouping brings together nations that have considerable experience and resources to assist in fragile states as well as countries that have a geographic proximity and are the regional leaders of these troubled areas. In the present context, an L20 could contribute the most by addressing the prevention side of fragile states while leaving intervention to the purview of established organizations such as the UN Security Council/peacekeeping and other regional bodies.

There was consensus about the importance of the problem. There was consensus that more needs to be done of a preventive nature and that a more comprehensive approach to intervention would be useful. There was not consensus on what should be done about it. Currently the underlying problems seem to be complicated by the following:

- Commitments are not made for the long-term;
- Competition between industrialized countries on how to address development aid and assistance;
- Poor coordination amongst donors on aid and assistance;
- Minimal lessons learnt from past intervention and reconstruction of fragile states compounded by minimal rates of success (e.g. multiple attempts to assist Haiti)
- Notwithstanding the surge of good will during the tsunami crisis, aid is decreasing; money often does not get to the ground; the public is often confused as to why there is a need for more money;
- Aid "orphans", countries that are not considered a priority by any of the donors;

Furthermore, the complexity of this issue stems from the recognition that a fragile state is not just a problem of poverty but that the legitimacy and capacity of the state is in crisis. Thus addressing development aid alone will not bring success. However, consensus on what is most valuable to ensure a "healthy state" is unclear. The rich discussion illustrated some reasons that prevent reaching consensus²:

¹See the 2004 Report of the UN Secretary –General's High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change

²See Ravi Kanbur "Economic Policy, Distribution and Poverty: The Nature of Disagreements"
Cornell University 2001; <http://www.people.cornell.edu/pages/sk145/>

1) Time frame. Assisting fragile states involves decisions whether to promote short term stability by propping up kleptomaniac dictators or promoting political change at the cost of short term instability in order to gain long term change. Different people have different time frames.

2) Degree of aggregation. Some worried that momentum for MDGs would be lost if success was attained by disproportionate progress in just five countries - neglecting dozens of countries. A third of the world's poor live in fragile states.

3) Differing views of the market and role of state regulation. To build effective states and institutions from scratch involves departing from conventional Bretton Woods' strictures. It may also involve changes to the international trading system, which is more appropriate for mature diversified economies with established institutions (e.g. need for import taxes to increase revenue generation).

Industrialized countries bear a measure of responsibility. They must follow through on commitments made to limit financial/business corruption and small arms.

There was emphasis on what we do NOT want:

- Do not create new institutions for fragile states. We need to work with what exists in terms of architecture. Any agreement to create new institutions should be referred to the UN for further deliberation and adoption. Framing, crafting appropriate vocabulary, is critical.
- Do not "securitize" the social agenda- do not bring health and education (and their budgets) into the sphere of security decision makers.
- Any new framework for action should not be devised with L20 interests taking precedence.
- The L20 should not compute a "fragility" index, with failure metrics and country rankings.
- Do not attempt to maintain an L20 "watch list" to determine where intervention is desirable as political agendas will ultimately distort and will not add any additional value to other fora which do so currently.
- Do not aggravate the cultural divide by applying a universal template- there are many kinds of fragile states. Do not disrespect local traditions and or ignore local resources.
- The term "fragile" states should not be used. Instead, use "area of instability and transnational threat". Talk about "healthy state competence and resources", about strengthening state institutions, about state needs and means to deal with insecurity, aids, and environmental degradation.

Commitments must be long term; we must invest for perhaps decades. There was consensus that there is no 'meta-solution', but there are many constructive initiatives. Some participants thought donor agencies were in need of a mega shock. Others thought that we had to keep it simple. Perhaps donors could agree to coordinate by each "adopting" a number of very difficult countries, ensuring there were no "orphans"

Areas of agreement:

1. Ministers could be commissioned by Leaders to periodically report on lessons from past efforts to avoid repeating mistakes.³

³ The James Dobbins article in the online edition of RAND Review should be required reading. <http://www.rand.org/publications/randreview/issues/spring2005/nation.html>

2. New norms should be established for “competent” states, development strategy and country programs. Increase the capacity for governance. New norms should be agreed for humanitarian intervention. The L20 might provide an effective challenge function on effective implementation of the OECD’s DAC “Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States” (harmonization and alignment, for example, specifically for private companies involved in reconstruction).
3. Establish an L20 wide experts roster as (such as CANADEM) a resource to international and regional organizations dealing with problems of fragile states.
4. Establish a neutral early warning system, perhaps with a world media organization to support independent journalism. As well as strengthen the Human Rights Commission at the UN (to a Council).
5. Encourage regional resources for intervention. We must not be misled by overestimating resources for ‘developmental peace keeping’. For example, South Africa's weak army cannot deploy more than 3000 soldiers abroad. The brigades constituting the proposed African Standby Force are in various stages of construction, some of them at present little more than paper planning exercises.
6. Cease purveying weapons; establish “Name and Shame” reports on illegal exploitation of resources; regulate markets for precious gems; initiate a convention on sale of small arms.
7. Develop a global “stability” network, a matchmaking service incorporating national civilian volunteer rosters. Supplement the International Crisis Group with a “Crisis Response” group – to analyze, lobby, and develop incentives and mediation capability to fill gaps.
8. Most importantly, strengthen the UN; endorse the High-level Panel definition of terrorism, endorse the Peace building Commission, institutionalize a challenge function to review and monitor commitments made to the UN.

In general terms, given that the G8 can not legitimately speak for the rest of the world, there are probably actions that need to be taken that could be catalyzed only by an L20. This group with clout may deliver. The risk is that the desirable informality possible at inaugural summit meetings would deteriorate, leading to many concentric circles of advisers and unproductive formality. Time will tell. In specific terms, the conclusion is that “fragile states” is too complex a topic for an inaugural or early L20 Leaders meeting – there are too many potential pitfalls. The topic would be of interest once the L20 was well established.