

The Camp David Summit offers a special opportunity

President Obama's decision to call a G8 summit is a reflection of the forum's especial ability to tackle major global economic and political issues

By Nicholas Bayne, International Relations Department, London School of Economics

Barack Obama is the sixth US president to chair the G7 or G8 summit. All his predecessors have left their mark on the summit's evolution. Gerald Ford, who invited Canada to the second summit in 1976, ensured it became a regular series and stabilised the membership. Jimmy Carter, although he never held the chair, established the summit as an institution, underpinned by the sherpa process.

Ronald Reagan promoted political issues up the agenda, on equal terms with economic subjects. George H W Bush steered the summit as the Cold War ended, leading eventually to Russia's membership. Bill Clinton first focused the summit's attention on Africa, which became an abiding theme in the 2000s. George W Bush launched an agreed initiative on the Middle East, ending the divisions caused by the invasion of Iraq.

So how is President Obama likely to be remembered for his occupancy of the G8 chair? Obama has already made his mark by deciding to call a summit at all. G8 summits happen because the leader holding the rotating chair decides to hold one. In practice, Japan, Canada and the European members would never forego this opportunity. But a US president might decide a G8 summit did not offer enough advantages beyond what other international engagements could provide.

Since Bush brought the G8 to Georgia in 2004 a rival institution has arisen. The G20 summit was called into being in November 2008, when the G8 was thought incapable of responding to the financial crisis. Obama chaired the third G20 summit at Pittsburgh; by the end of 2011 he had attended five G20 summits, as well as three G8 summits. There were indications that he found the G20 process more rewarding than that of the G8. Nevertheless, Obama has decided to invite

his G8 peers to Camp David in May, just before a summit of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in Chicago and a month ahead of a G20 summit chaired by Mexican president Felipe Calderón.

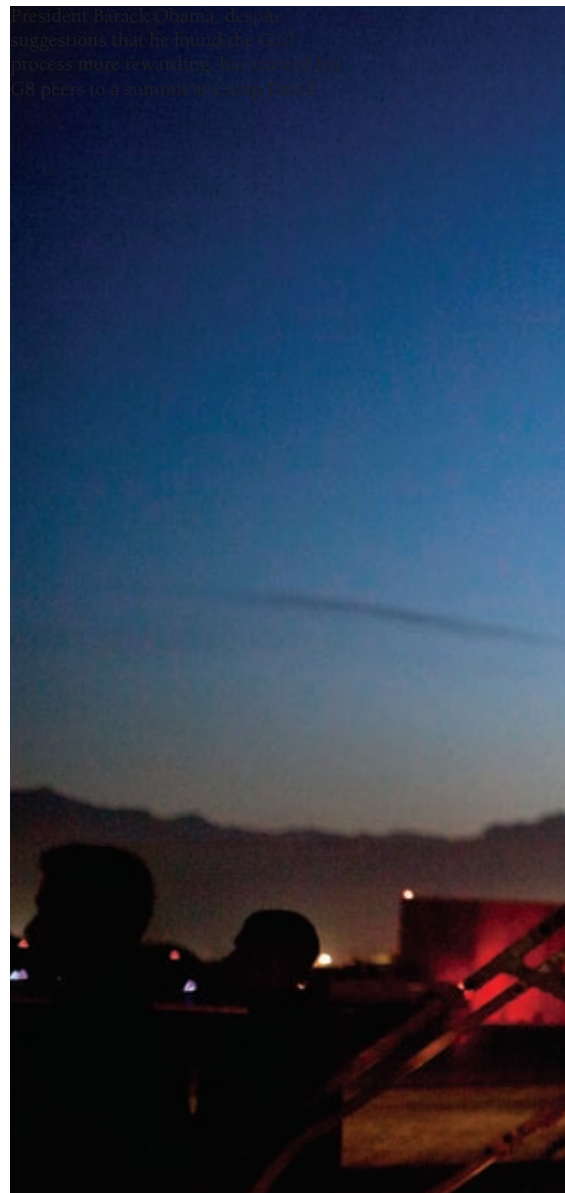
The political agenda for the NATO summit is well defined. Economic and financial issues are entrusted to the G20, thanks to the persistent crisis. With these two institutions already occupying their respective fields, what is left for the G8 summit to do?

Often the economic and political aspects of a problem need to be handled together, and the G8 summit is well equipped for this

Simply posing this question supplies the answer. NATO, prepared by foreign and defence ministers, cannot handle economic issues. The G20 summit, prepared by finance ministers, has no political competence. But international issues do not divide neatly into political and economic. Often the economic and political aspects of a problem need to be handled together, to ensure consistency and mutual effectiveness of the measures chosen. The G8 summit, unlike the other two, is well equipped for this. President Obama can make it the central feature of his tenure of the chair. British prime minister David Cameron, when he moves into the summit chair in 2013, can develop variations on this approach and help to establish it as the G8's distinctive contribution to global governance.

The G7 and G8 leaders have always had the capacity to integrate political and

President Barack Obama, despite suggestions that he found the G20 process more rewarding than that of the G8 peers in a summit at Camp David.



economic themes. This is a reflection of the supreme authority exercised by heads of state and government. At first, the G7 chose not to exercise this capacity and preferred to treat economic and political issues separately. But when the Cold War in Europe was ending, the summit coordinated measures to promote both working democracies and market economies in the countries escaping from



communism, first in Central Europe and then in Russia. Once the G8 leaders began meeting on their own, with Russia as a full member, they often chose themes that integrated economic and political issues.

This became a regular feature of the summit's work during the 2000s and the source of its major achievements. Two themes deserve particular attention. The first was

the renaissance of Africa. The G8 members were powerfully impressed by the initiative of a group of African leaders to launch the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). This combined traditional aspects of economic development with moves to improve political governance and strengthen peace and security throughout the continent. Because of the clear commitment by the

Africans themselves, the G8 pledged to underpin all parts of the programme. The backing from the G8, combined with the Africans' own efforts, has led to major advances in both political standards and economic performance. In consequence, sub-Saharan Africa has survived the current crisis much better than expected.

The second theme was counter-terrorism in all its aspects, in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. Politics motivated the choice of themes, but economics often determined the measures adopted. The G8 developed techniques to improve transport security, by air and sea, and to inhibit the financing of terrorist activities. The summits worked to clean up nuclear installations and chemical weapons in the former Soviet Union. They agreed measures to intercept weapons of mass destruction being transported by sea, which led Libya to renounce such weapons.

The aftermath of the Arab Spring

Both these themes, especially Africa, remain current for the G8. But new subjects have emerged that deserve treatment at Camp David. The G8 programme of economic help and political encouragement for the Middle East and North Africa, launched in 2004, struggled to make progress while the old regimes persisted. But the arrival of the so-called Arab Spring early in 2011 made this a natural topic for the G8's Deauville summit last May, which was attended by leaders from Egypt and Tunisia. Further developments in those two countries, the overthrow of Mu'ammarr Gaddafi in Libya and the tense struggle in Syria mean that this should remain high on the G8's agenda. The political upheavals are leading to economic problems that will need to be addressed if democracy is to take firm root in the Arab world.

Meanwhile, the NATO summit will certainly have military issues in Afghanistan as a major subject. The G8 should look at the scale and pattern of civil support that would be most valuable for the country as the security situation changes shape.

Africa, Afghanistan and the Arab Spring are all issues that require integrated political and economic measures. Neither NATO nor the G20 can embrace the totality of these subjects. For the treatment of themes such as these, the G8 summit will continue to be the most appropriate forum. ■

African accountability on food and development

The G8 members could help to ensure that more development assistance in Africa actually reaches the grassroots level where it is needed most

By Archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane, president and founder of African Monitor

The growth experienced in Africa's economic and social development, peace and security, democratisation and governance during the past decade has been encouraging, and there is much cause for optimism. Africa is a continent filled with people who want to be in control of their own destiny and who continually push the boundaries in sports and the arts, economics, human rights and world peace.

Over the past decade, six of the world's 10 fastest-growing economies were in sub-Saharan Africa – a figure expected to increase to seven in the next five years. During the height of the recent financial crisis, while many countries were collapsing, Africa was able to record a growth rate of 2.8 per cent in 2009 and pick up momentum in 2010 with growth of 4.9 per cent.

Nevertheless, commitments on food and development by the G8 members are imperative. It is critical that these commitments – such as those of the L'Aquila Food Security Initiative (AFSI) – are met.

The importance of accountability

In spite of indications that Africa is on the cusp of realising its potential, reports by the United Nations, Oxfam and other agencies make it clear that food insecurity and chronic poverty are increasing. There remains a great need for G8 members to meet their commitments to the continent.

However, commitments to food and development in general should be targeted less at handouts and more at providing economic services that trigger additional entrepreneurship at the grassroots level. African Monitor's interaction with grassroots communities through poverty hearings, citizen consultation and capacity-building projects has shown that what the people

want is not food and development handouts, but the means to make a living.

Hunger in Africa must end in the next 15 years. In the next 20 years, global hunger should become a thing of the past. G8 leaders therefore need a holistic understanding of the agricultural and livelihoods situation in developing countries. It is not just the need for food that is pressing, but also the need to support agriculture and its role in supporting livelihoods, nutrition and health.

Commitments to food and development in general should be targeted less at handouts and more at providing economic services

Thus it is vitally important that accountability structures are improved, as it is clear that money spent on rural and small-scale farmers can be better utilised. As such, the provision of food aid and measures that are aimed at raising productivity should not be viewed just as an end in themselves, but as a means to an end.

In 2009, African Monitor hosted a high-level policy forum on agriculture and food security. This policy forum made a case for an increase in targeted investment in smallholder agriculture in Africa that could reduce poverty and ensure food security within a short time.

The organisation has also been working with grassroots communities in selected African countries to build their capacity to effectively and efficiently monitor the commitments made by their governments to improve food security and also to

accelerate the development process. African governments, through the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), have set ambitious commitments, particularly in agricultural development, in the form of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP).

In support of this programme, African leaders committed 10 per cent of public spending to agriculture. The development partners, through the G8, supported the CAADP initiatives and launched the AFSI in 2009. Apart from the 10 per cent committed to agriculture, African governments committed 0.5 per cent of their national budgets to infrastructure, 15 per cent to health and 20 per cent to education.

African Monitor's grassroots work

African Monitor tracks these commitments through the Development Support Monitor (DSM), which is used by civil society organisations and other initiatives to hold their national governments accountable.

African Monitor's work enables it to listen more to the people on the ground in terms of their voice, realities and aspirations. This allows it not only to assess impact, but also to understand people's aspirations. Through African Monitor's Grassroots Focus Index project, the people on the ground have indicated that what is essential to them is the alignment of policy and practice to their realities and aspirations, including infrastructure, information provision, agriculture and food security.

The main challenge has been a lack of transparency from both African governments and G8 members. African Monitor's own experience has been that data availability diminishes and eventually disappears the closer one gets to the ultimate destination of the resources, by which time one depends on proxies and anecdotal evidence.

It is important for the G8 leaders to increase transparency in terms of their commitments to development and also to report regularly on the level of attainment of those commitments. In addition, there is a need for G8 leaders to invite civil society organisations and other development stakeholders to attend their meetings as observers. They need to have access to more information that will enable them to hold the G8 leaders accountable.



Although G8 countries committed to allocating 10 per cent of their public spending on agriculture, only 10 countries are currently doing so.

The importance of civil society having such access to information is underlined by the tardiness of African countries in meeting the target of allocating 10 per cent of their national budgets to agriculture. Recent data indicate that only 10 – Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Malawi, Niger, Senegal, Uganda and Nigeria – are spending more than the 10 per cent. Another nine countries are spending between five and 10 per cent.

However, the median expenditure in the agricultural sector is only 5.5 per cent. Seventeen countries spend less than five per cent of their total expenditure on agriculture.

The AFSI adopted the Rome Principles, which aim to channel resources into well-designed, results-based programmes. African Monitor's work with grassroots communities, as well as citizen consultations, has shown that the ways resources are accessed are malfunctioning at the grassroots level.

The accountability channels should examine the extent to which these commitments are effective in allowing lower-level and grassroots access to resources, as opposed to concentrating access at the top.

To date, African Monitor has worked with partners to empower the grassroots to highlight such blockages, as well as mobilise their levels to address the blockages.

Constantly auditing G8 policies

It is also important that a mechanism for constantly auditing the G8's policies and the initiatives of grassroots voices, realities and aspirations be developed. This will ensure that they are focused on the grassroots in their policies and practice.

G8 accountability should go beyond balancing the books in terms of delivering what is committed, but should deliver development. Accountability should extend

to the ability of the resources committed to deliver development. Delivering development requires more inputs and efforts beyond announcing policies and money. It also requires listening and acting in good faith to the realities and aspirations of people.

In addition, the scope of accountability should be broadened to include direct mechanisms where the members of the G8 family can report on the progress of their resolutions. Analyses of commitments and progress should not just be reserved for the G8 meetings or encountered through protests but need to be formalised within countries' own governance structures.

Finally, G8 countries need to do more on delivery on commitments. According to the G8's Deauville Accountability Report, the delivery on AFSI is only 21 per cent. The significance of the commitments made will therefore depend upon delivery. ■

Do G8 summits make a real difference?

At last year's summit, members pledged more transparency over meeting the targets agreed on; compliance scores show what has been achieved

By Marina Larionova, National Research University Higher School of Economics, and Ella Kokotsis, G8 Research Group

For the past 37 years, the annual G8 summits have generated a wide breadth of declarations and communiqués binding the leaders to hard commitments across a diverse range of global policy issues. The extent to which the G8 members comply with their annual commitments has, in recent years, become a hotly contested topic, pitting academics, politicians, policy wonks and newsmakers against each other in an effort to understand whether commitments by the G8 do, in fact, matter. Given this era of ongoing domestic political constraints and conflicting global demands, does the G8 have the ability and, indeed, the capacity not only to make, but also to keep the commitments its members collectively generate at their annual summits?

The G8's ability to do so does matter, for it demonstrates the summit's legitimacy and credibility as an effective centre of global governance. The release of the G8's first systematic, comprehensive accountability report in Muskoka 2010 recognised that effective leadership begins with promises being kept, and that regular, clear and transparent reporting is an important first step in this process.

More modest accountability reports were released by the G8 on anti-corruption in 2008 and food security, water, health and education in 2009. But it was not until 2010 that the G8 undertook, for the first time, to assess its own accountability comprehensively. By systematically reporting on a wide range of development commitments, the G8 members collectively expressed their ongoing commitment to strengthen the effectiveness of their actions.

This trend continued in Deauville, France, in 2011, with the release of the Deauville Accountability Report on health and food security. Noting that the G8 members "remain

strongly committed to meeting our commitments and to tracking their implementation in a fully transparent and consistent manner", the Deauville Accountability Report tracked progress on a number of commitments related to health, including those from the 2010 Muskoka Initiative for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health as well as the 2009 LAquila Food Security Initiative.

With a year gone by since the release of the Deauville Accountability Report, the eve of the 2012 Camp David Summit offers an opportune time to reflect on the outcome of the Deauville commitments in an effort to understand whether the G8's new accountability reporting mechanism does, in fact, make a difference.

Deauville results: a work in progress

Although the leaders recommitted to improve the rigour of G8 accounting in meeting commitments and to redouble efforts to promote transparency and accountability, by April 2012 there was still no formal information on the accountability process or data on the G8 members' progress in meeting their Deauville pledges.

The G8 Research Group's preliminary interim analysis of compliance by the G8 and the European Union with 18 priority commitments made at Deauville provides some insight into the G8's compliance performance trends. These assessments are made on the basis of publicly available information, with individual scores assigned on a scale where +1 indicates full compliance with the stated commitment, 0 is awarded for partial compliance or a work in progress, and -1 indicates a failure to comply.

The average score of +0.46 is similar to the 2010 Muskoka final result but lower than the 2009 LAquila final score of +0.63.



Compliance performance on macroeconomic commitments remains strong, with +0.67 for LAquila, +0.89 for Muskoka and +0.78 thus far for Deauville. Trade received a score of +0.33, which continues the upward trend from 2010's +0.22 and 2009's -0.78. The average performance on development has been improving from +0.31 in 2009 to +0.62 in 2010 and 2011 respectively. Compliance was strongest with those commitments focused on good governance, with support to the transition process in Afghanistan receiving a compliance score of +1.00 by all G8 members.

There was a slight increase on the Muskoka Initiative on, increasing from -0.56 in 2010 to -0.22 in 2011, although it remains below zero. All members scored between 0 and

Leaders of the G8 members with other statesmen at the Deauville Summit last year. At the meeting, members expressed the intention to boost transparency



+1.00 on commitments to improve the transparency of aid information, with an average score of +0.44.

Compliance was strong on commitments on nuclear non-proliferation, where the G8 members received a combined average score of +0.78 for their actions in reinforcing the non-proliferation and comprehensive test ban treaties and increasing national system effectiveness respectively. However, performance on other security commitments was significantly lower, with a score of +0.11 for engagement on regional security and +0.33 for support for building capacities to help fight terrorism.

Members' compliance with climate change commitments was higher than average for the last three years, reaching a score of +0.67 in

2011 for emissions reductions. The G8's commitment to foster green growth as a promising source of jobs scored only +0.33.

A new commitment to ensure effective actions against violations of intellectual property rights in the digital arena was fully implemented by most G8 members, while in others actions are under way for improving global frameworks for addressing online intellectual property right infringements.

A downward trend in compliance results is observed on food security and agriculture, with the highest level of +0.89 for L'Aquila, +0.22 for Muskoka and 0 for Deauville. G8 members had failed by the start of 2012 to meet their targeted contributions to the L'Aquila Food Security Initiative since the 2011 Deauville Summit. They also failed to

comply with commitments to secure the return of stolen assets.

Overall, G8 compliance performance varies significantly by commitment and issue. Delivery on macroeconomic, development, climate change and security pledges have proven to be consistent with the G8's previous track record. On the Muskoka and L'Aquila signature initiatives, there continues to be a need to consolidate efforts. Work on the fight against terrorism and the recovery of stolen assets needs to be stepped up as well. Further progress will be assessed when the G8 Research Group releases its final compliance assessment for Deauville, taking into account stakeholders' feedback, just before the Camp David Summit begins.

The promise of Camp David

As the G8 leadership prepares for its annual summit gathering at Camp David, the momentum on accountability cannot be lost. With the G8 so heavily focused on transparency and the delivery of results, the 2012 Camp David Summit offers an excellent opportunity to move the accountability agenda forward. To do so, however, the Accountability Working Group (AWG) will

By systematically reporting on a wide range of development commitments, the G8 members expressed their commitment to strengthen the effectiveness of their actions

have to ensure that the work done to date stays on track. This means that a number of issues in the G8's reporting mechanism will need to be further refined.

First, measurable objectives included in summit commitments will ensure that future tracking and reporting on results are less difficult and complex.

Second, data limitations will need to be addressed in a more comprehensive manner, as baseline data and consistent methodologies allow for more rigorous assessments. Third, monitoring systems on the ground will need to be improved, allowing for timely and reliable information to enhance results-oriented reporting.

Finally, the G8 will need to rely more on the support of its partner organisations – foundations, civil society, private-sector associations and non-governmental organisations – to ensure the successful delivery of its commitments.

The Camp David Summit thus offers a significant opportunity for the leaders to demonstrate the credibility of the G8 as an effective centre of global governance through an ongoing commitment to improved transparency and candid self-reporting. ■

The open spiral: the ongoing moral commitments of faith leaders



The meetings of religious leaders in the lead-up to the G8 summits will continue, as much remains to be done on key global justice and compassion issues

By the Reverend Doctor Karen Hamilton, general secretary, Canadian Council of Churches, and the Reverend Bud Heckman, executive director, Religions for Peace – USA

Eight G8 countries. Eight years of InterFaith Leaders' Summits. With the G8 meeting in the United States in May 2012, the 'open spiral' that is the parallel InterFaith Leaders' Summits is, in a sense, complete, because the full cycle of eight country hosts is finished. At the same

time, the InterFaith Leaders' Summits are continuing, because there is much work yet to be done and the G8 will continue to meet.

Since 2005, when the G8 met in the United Kingdom, there have been parallel summits of religious leaders meeting each year. In the days leading up to each of the G8 meetings, international and host-country national

religious leaders gather to discuss the G8 agenda, recommit themselves to such key global justice and compassion issues as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Care for Creation, and issue a statement to the G8, to each other and to the world.

The record of these parallel summits and the ongoing life of their statements can be found online at www.faithchallengeg8.com. It is an eight-year record of consistency and persistency, of speaking together in commitment and challenge about the issues of today's world – the neglect of which causes great suffering to so many; the fulfilment of which would bring healing and an enhanced life to so many.

While each G8 summit can have a unique focus, based on the host country's interests and the urgent needs of the world, there are overlapping themes. Faith leaders



Commemorating Martin Luther King Day at a Baptist church in Washington, DC. Leaders from many religious traditions will bring together the international and the local

at each summit aim to have recognisable continuity in their engagement.

The 2012 gathering of faith leaders in the US is not just a closing of the eight-year cycle. Rather, it is part of the open spiral, continuing to build on the parallel faith leaders' summits that have gone before. It moves forward the commitment and challenge of the faith leaders to each other and to governments. There is, therefore, a consistent and unwavering character in the moral voice of religious leaders to the G8.

Human security concerns

This ongoing moral voice speaks to issues of shared security. The 2012 InterFaith Leaders' Summit will give particular focus to human security concerns, such as the Muskoka Initiative on Maternal, Newborn and Child Health and the LAquila Food Security

Initiative. In order to achieve this, the leaders will work with the international economic affairs staff of the US National Security Council, the White House Office of Public Engagement and the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships.

The faith leaders who participate in these summits come from many traditions – Baha'i, Buddhist, Chinese Traditional, Christian, Hindu, Indigenous, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Shinto, Sikh, Zoroastrian and other traditions. They bring together the religious and the political, the international and the local, and the heart and the head with their common witness.

Regional, representational delegations – some of whom have been acting jointly for a period longer than the cycle of G8 meetings – are hosted by partnerships or collaborative efforts of faith leaders and communities in the G8 host country. Interfaith relationships and social cohesion are built in several ways through this process, which then gives strength to the passion and commitment necessary to make global policy changes that will affect millions of individuals' lives.

The 2012 InterFaith Leaders' Summit meets in Washington, DC, on 17 May, just in advance of the G8 Camp David Summit. It is very much continuous with the open spiral pattern, but will add its own twist. At the request of religious leaders from Latin America, and owing to the proximity of the G8 and G20 summits, it will also pick up a shared focus on the G20 summit, which takes place in Los Cabos, Mexico, one month later. Religious leaders from the US and other G8 countries will exchange actions with leaders from the wider G20 country set, including Argentina, Brazil and Mexico. A representative joint delegation will present the combined actions and commitments to the US administration in Washington on 17 May and at Mexico's Foreign Ministry in Mexico City in the week before the G20 summit.

The shared objectives and processes of the 2012 InterFaith Leaders' Summit include issuing a moral statement, creating religiously

sensitive background documents on key initiatives for the G8 and G20, requesting an intervention with the administrations and their leaders' sherpas, holding focused discussions on relevant issues, engaging the media through a press briefing and newspaper articles, providing an interfaith worship or observance opportunity, and providing individual and integrated organisational time.

'Hard' and 'soft' advocacy

The American partnership of faith groups planning the parallel summit to the 2012 G8 and G20 summits has come together under the name 'Joint Religious Leadership Coordination for the G8 and G20 Summits'. The focus is building collaboration and unity for common witness on shared moral concerns ('soft' advocacy), as well as, for some of the partners, working in specific ways to influence the policy agenda ('hard' advocacy).

The Council of Religious Leaders of Metro Chicago, the Chicago Theological Seminary and its students, and the Tony Blair Faith Foundation and its Faiths Act Fellows were originally part of the formula for a Chicago G8

Religious communities can advocate for the vulnerable and help to ensure that policies are grounded in shared moral values

location. But with a late-in-the-game shift by the US administration to a smaller, more private meeting at Camp David on an earlier date, several of the participating faith organisations adjusted their strategy and a DC venue was settled upon. Additionally, new partners had to be found, including the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs at Georgetown University, which will play host to the meeting.

The G8 (and G20) summits present a unique way for the faith community to contribute to global development, peace and human enrichment. Through direct engagement with political administrations, religious communities can advocate for the vulnerable and help to ensure that policies are grounded in shared moral values. The 2012 meeting of the InterFaith Leaders' Summits is both an end and a new beginning in this open process. It is a continued unveiling of the open spiral. ■

The G8-BRICS relationship: moving from competitive avoidance to cooperative engagement

The G8 and BRICS groups have so far not recognised each other's existence, but it would make sense for them to start interacting on an issue-specific basis

By Andrew F Cooper, University of Waterloo/Balsillie School of International Affairs; Distinguished Fellow, the Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI), Canada

The relationship between the G8 and the BRICS grouping of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa can be depicted as one of competitive avoidance. That is to say, the transition of the BRICS group from a construct invented by Goldman Sachs in 2001 to a formalised summit of leaders in 2009 from a variety of perspectives fits the image of 'rival parallelism' to the G8. Akin to the G8, the BRICS summit process pivots on a leader-centred meeting on a self-selected basis. Akin to the G8, with the addition of Russia in 1997, the BRICS group has extended its membership – South Africa being formally added at the April 2011 Sanya Summit in Hainan, China. Akin to the G8, the group can make a claim concerning its importance by reference to impressive structural capabilities – its size of population (one-third of the world's population), nominal gross domestic product (more than \$13 trillion) and foreign reserves (above \$4 trillion). Akin to the G8, the BRICS leaders' declarations have been progressively longer with references to a wide spectrum of global issues. And finally, akin to the G8, meetings of the BRICS countries have been stretched to include forums of agriculture ministers, finance ministers, foreign ministers, health ministers and trade ministers.

This image of 'competitive avoidance', or rival parallelism, is reinforced by the complete lack of dialogue or any sense of engagement between the two processes. Neither the G8 nor the BRICS countries have referenced or acknowledged one other in any explicit fashion in their respective summit documents.

One way to interpret this exclusion is to privilege the G20, with the G8 and

BRICS countries becoming constitutive groups or even caucuses within the larger global summit 'steering group' established in November 2008. To be sure, this image of caucusing conforms to the pattern in which both G8 countries and BRICS countries meet before G20 summits.

Yet such a pattern of rival parallelism is not without controversy and complications. Does the image of caucusing reproduce the old polarisation of politics between an old establishment and a cluster of 'rising' countries along a mainly North-West/global South divide? Moreover, where does this pattern leave the 'missing middle' – countries such as Korea, Mexico, Australia, Turkey and Indonesia that have a huge stake in belonging to the G20, and have increased their capabilities as hosts and agenda-setters in the G20?

Frustrations over inequality

Another way of interpreting this gap is to regard the G8-BRICS competitive avoidance emerging out of the difficulties with the older and asymmetrical 'outreach' culture of the G8 – epitomised by the ultimate failure of the Heiligendamm Process. In many ways, that process can be seen as the catalyst for the coming together of the BRICS countries, as opposed to the grouping being invented by

Goldman Sachs. After all, this was a process that brought the core BRICS countries (China, India and Brazil) together in a summit setting for several years up to the G8's L'Aquila Summit in 2009. However, notwithstanding the constructive components, the Heiligendamm Process also exacerbated the frustrations of the rising states about the lack of equality in terms of standing with the G8.

Both of these interpretations, though, point in other ways to the need for some renewed thinking about the ongoing relationship between the G8 and the BRICS group. Despite the G20's ascendancy, the G8 has not disappeared. Rather, it has consolidated its position in both some 'hard' security and 'soft' social areas of the international agenda. The adjacent summits of the G8 at Camp David and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization at Chicago in 2012 highlight the hard component, with a likely focus on Iran and nuclear proliferation, Syria and Afghanistan. The soft component extends from assistance to the Middle East and North Africa to expressed concerns with food security.

Return to core agenda

In such an environment, there is a new, compelling logic for the G8 and the BRICS countries to start a new process of engagement on an issue-specific basis. In part, this logic is one of default, with the G20 returning under the stresses of the eurozone debt crisis and other ongoing reverberations from the 2008 financial shocks to its original core finance and regulatory agenda. In part, however, it should also be by design. In the post-Heiligendamm Process era, the G8 and BRICS countries can meet on the basis of equality on issues that both groups have as urgent priorities – especially in those domains where there are big gaps in terms of the overloaded G20 agenda – including key functional and architectural questions on global governance.

This image of 'competitive avoidance', or rival parallelism, is reinforced by the complete lack of dialogue or any sense of engagement between the G8 and BRICS group processes



The leaders of the five BRICS countries at the New Delhi summit in March

There are, of course, considerable obstacles and risks attached to any movement along these lines – especially if this movement was to take any bold form, such as an invitation for the BRICS group to take part in some or all of the G8 Camp David process.

At one level, it accentuates the impression – already visible in the G20 – that global governance is returning to a concert model as in previous times of crisis and rupture, such as 1814-15, 1919 and at the end of the Second World War. Because of this impression, there must be a visible willingness on the part of the G8 to operate on the basis of equality in any such engagement.

At another level, there is the question of identity. In the run-up to the BRICS New Delhi Summit in March, the five countries acknowledged that the time has come for

them to “assume a more important role in global governance and engage more deeply on key areas”. Nonetheless, the approach has been in practice to seek solutions to global governance issues and challenges, not through following the West, but through communication and coordination among the BRICS countries. Still, each member put domestic priorities and problems ahead of institutional solidarity. The April 2010 BRICS Brasilia Summit was shortened to a one-day event when Chinese president Hu Jintao went home early to deal with a major earthquake in western China. And in June 2010, another summit on the margins of the Toronto G20 was cancelled completely when President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva stayed home because of massive floods in northeast Brazil. Nor have the members been able to put together a

collective strategy on key issues such as the selection of a new managing director of the International Monetary Fund or a rescue package for the eurozone. Building a dialogue – not estrangement – with the G8 may, paradoxically, help extend the collective identity of the BRICS group.

The rationale for moving forward with this new form of engagement will be inevitably increased – if not immediately, then at least when Russia hosts the G8 in 2014. As a straddling country, with membership in both the G8 and BRICS groups, Russia will have an added incentive to move towards a constructive and mature dialogue between these parallel institutions. Such anticipation, nevertheless, should not stop the creation of building blocks to facilitate the process being put in place now. ■