

3. The United Nations System and Its Contributions

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My name is David Malone. I am a Canadian Foreign Service officer currently on leave as President of the International Peace Academy in New York. The Academy is a small think-tank that works closely with the United Nations and regional organizations. There are about 32 of us here from 22 nationalities. So the Academy is genuinely international, even if we have not brought peace to much of the world.

A. The UN-G8 Interconnections

Initially, the UN had very little overlap with the G5, as the G7/G8 was in its earliest days. The G5 focused on trade, which was dealt with by the **General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade** (GATT) at the time, a body not formally part of the UN. The G5 focused even more on international economic and financial management in which the UN has a formal role, but no effective role in reality. So, in the very early years of the G5 — and then the G7 once Italy and Canada had joined — the UN had very little to do with it.

This rapidly changed, because the G7 started branching into areas such as the environment and development, where the UN actually had a lead role. The overlap grew between these two very different forums. The G7 was not very much liked at the UN. It was seen as a sort of self-selected “club” of big, rich countries, whereas the UN sees itself as the universal club of all countries, in particular a club in which the developing countries — often very small, very poor countries — can have a voice in the major issues of our time. So, in some ways, the G7 seemed to be the antithesis of the UN General Assembly.

However, this apparent gap was bridged by the person of the Secretary-General. Formerly, UN bodies such as the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social

Council did not interact with the G7 but the Secretary-General did. Javier Perez de Cuellar, Boutros Boutros-Ghali and today Kofi Annan frequently attend at least parts of G7 or G8 meetings. They are invited to attend partly in order to bring a flavour of the rest of the world — in particular, the developing world — and partly because they bring different perspectives on issues such as development, the environment, human rights, humanitarian action, peace building, conflict prevention and so on, all of them issues that the G7 and the G8 have dealt with.

The Secretary-General also is probably the world’s foremost diplomatic firefighter. When trouble is about to break out anywhere in the world, the UN is involved. Take the case of the Côte d’Ivoire in the year 2000. It had rigged elections causing no end of trouble and some violence, with the potential for a great deal more violence. Here the Secretary-General largely co-ordinated the international response involving the President of France, the heads of government of neighbouring countries and the Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). The leaders of the G8 and their foreign ministers are very much aware of this role of the Secretary-General. Nearly all of them play with the Secretary-General, so to speak, on a variety of issues. So, the Secretary-General of the UN is an individual they often want with them. Indeed, in recent years, he has always interfaced with the G7/G8 summit.

By and large, the G7 and now the G8 (with Russia) do not initiate programs. They are a forum in which governments exchange views, egg each other on to do better in certain areas and try to deal with emerging issues. For example, new developments in genetics a number of years ago, notably the Human Genome Project, often come up first in the G7

or the G8. It cannot do much about them, or at least does not want to do much about them. In fact, often they want to see the UN system, or a specialized agency of the UN system, or the **World Bank** or the **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** take action. That's why there is in fact much more *de facto* interface between the G7/G8 and these other institutions than appears to be the case in the news headlines.

The environment is a very good example (Kirton and Richardson 1995). There is no doubt that serious consideration of environmental issues in the mid 1970s and in the 1980s received a big boost from serious discussions every year by G7 leaders. But the key forum, which was very much supported by the G7 leaders, was ultimately the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (the Rio Conference). What the G7 leaders discussed at length among themselves was the issue of climate change — not because they were going to take any final decisions on climate change themselves, but because they were all participating in negotiations towards the UN Framework Convention for Climate Change. So, again, there was quite a bit of interface between informal discussions at the G7 and action — often treaty making — at the United Nations.

As well, many of the leaders' personal representatives or "**sherpas**" and senior officials of the G7/G8 system have past experience at the UN. A number of sherpas of the past are now ambassadors of their countries at the UN. This is the case, for example, with France's Jean-David Levitte. Several former G8 political directors are currently at the UN, notably the Canadian ambassador, Paul Heinbecker and the British ambassador, Sir Jeremy Greenstock. So there is much more mutual knowledge of these forums than one might imagine.

B. The UN-G8 Relationship on Security Issues

Let us look at the substance of issues. The G7/G8 for its sins is nearly always dominated by fast-breaking political development. Sherpas and their deputies work very hard to have their leaders focus on the major economic issues of the hour. But leaders, in fact, usually find economics very boring. Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and Helmut Schmidt, the founders of the G5/G6 process, were an exception. They were former finance ministers who really loved the world of international finance. Most leaders today are not of that mould. They are much more political animals and they are much more comfortable dealing with political crises.

So, the meetings of the G8 today, always by default — not by intent — tend to focus on political crises: be they Kosovo or Chechnya in recent years. The Middle East can be counted on nearly always to provide communiqué fodder for the G7 or the G8. But these issues are dealt with actively, often by the **United Nations Security Council**.

There is one very interesting instance of actual connection between the G8 and the UN Security Council on an important decision. During the winter of 1999, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) acted on its threats against the former Yugoslavia and undertook a military air campaign to liberate Kosovo from the Serb military. NATO might have sought authorization from the Security Council to do so, but there was a threat of a Russian veto.

The Russians were extremely unhappy with the NATO action and that the Security Council had been bypassed. Fortunately, however, the Russians are now members of the G8, so quietly, the G8 political directors — away from the cameras — got together in Berlin and, amongst themselves, hashed out a solution to the crisis that would be acceptable to all of them. It was not a solution that all of them liked, but it was acceptable.

This formula worked out amongst the G8 political directors was put directly to the Security Council in the early days of June 1999 and adopted as Resolution 1244, which today governs the constitutional life of Kosovo. But this incident is quite unusual. Usually, the influence back and forth between the G8 and the UN system is much more informal.

C. The UN-G8 Relationship on Development Issues

A particular issue that is important to raise, because it matters tremendously to the UN constituency and to successive Secretaries-General, has to do with international development policy and aid. G7 leaders and Russia — although G7 leaders are the main ones who are relevant in this context — talk a very good game about aid. They nearly always promise to increase their aid efforts, but very rarely do so. Secretaries-General of the UN work hard to keep the leaders' feet to the fire and try to make them live up to their promises in this area.

It is not entirely coincidental that the Prime Minister of Canada announced a big increase in the Canadian aid budget during a year when he is hosting the G8 summit at Kananaskis. It would have been embarrassing to see the Canadian aid figures continuing to plummet in year when Canada was host. So, the Secretary-General will always take advantage of G8-type processes to try to make leaders true to their rhetoric on aid and development.

The Secretary-General has traditionally also been very open — as has the head of the World Bank, who also occasionally attends part of G7 meetings — to discussing aid policy, what we are actually doing wrong in our aid efforts and how we could be doing better. As well, in recent years, a number of figures from the developing world have met with G7 leaders just before the Summit starts. The Secretary-General is a very

welcome figure on the margins of those consultations. He is looked to by leaders of the developing world, notably African leaders, as their strongest go-between and ally, in dealing with often indifferent, often careless, leaders of the G7/G8 communities. And this explains why there is much more interaction between the UN and the G7/G8 than the headlines let on.

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Further Reading

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Discussion Questions

1. Are the UN and G8 best seen as rivals or as mutually reinforcing bodies in dealing with the key issues of global governance?
2. How and why has the relationship between the UN and the G8 differed in the issues areas of the environment, security, and development?
3. Should the UN Secretary General be given a more permanent, formal place as part of the G8 Summit? Why or why not?

Quiz

1. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 legitimized G8 action on:
 - a. climate change
 - b. trade policy
 - c. military action to liberate Kosovo
 - d. increased G8 aid for development
2. A former G8 sherpa, currently serving as his country's Permanent Representative at the United Nations, is:
 - a. France's Jean-David Levitte
 - b. Canada's Paul Heinbecker
 - c. Britain's Sir Jeremy Greenstock
 - d. Canada's Robert Fowler
3. The current Secretary-General of the United Nations is:
 - a. Javier Perez de Cuellar
 - b. Boutros Boutros-Ghali
 - c. Kofi Annan
 - d. Louise Frechette
4. The current Secretary-General of the G8 is:
 - a. Valéry Giscard d'Estaing
 - b. Helmut Schmidt
 - c. Jean Chrétien
 - d. None of the above — the G8 does not have a Secretary General
5. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development was held in Rio in:
 - a. 1972
 - b. 1975
 - c. 1992
 - d. 2002