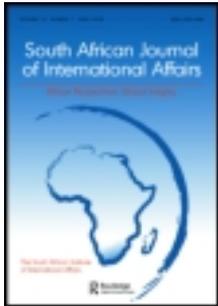


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Will they have table manners? The G20, emerging powers and global responsibility

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The creation of the G20 at leaders' level has signalled a major shift in North–South relations. Although the immediate cause for its launch was the global financial crisis of 2008, the underlying reasons relate to the existing global governance gap. Whereas globalisation — the flow of goods, services, capital, data and cultural products across national borders — has increased exponentially over the past two decades, rules and regulations governing it have lagged behind. This is also true of international institutions dealing with global governance, like the UN and the international financial institutions. A soft-law, informal group like the G20 at finance ministers' level, created in 1999, provided an ideal launching pad for a more ambitious and capacious entity that could take on the challenges of globalisation at the highest levels. Having held three meetings in 10 months and seemingly poised to replace the G7/8 (for economic governance purposes), the G20 seems well positioned to become institutionalised. Two key questions arise: what will it take to make it fully operational and what will be the role played by the key emerging powers in it?

Keywords: G20; emerging powers; global governance; globalisation; global South; North–South relations

Introduction

We are indeed of one mind We can't be put into a situation where we are asked to join in the dessert and miss the main meal.¹

Thabo Mbeki, 17 October 2007

When in 2004 Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin put on the table the idea of a G20 at leaders' level (or an L20, as it was then dubbed by some), most observers were sceptical, if not downright dismissive.² The notion of changing the comfortable, even cosy atmosphere of the G7/8, by then in existence for over a quarter of a century, for the free-wheeling give-and-take of such a larger, more diverse and heterogeneous assembly seemed far-fetched — about as utopian as reforming the UN Security Council, if not more so. A key obstacle, though by no means the only one, was Washington's reluctance regarding any such initiative. President George W. Bush, averse to exercises in summitry, was considered to be unenthusiastic about the proposal.

Yet, four years later, it was Bush himself who called and hosted the first meeting of the G20, held in Washington, DC, on 15 November 2008. In the course of the following 10 months, the G20 met on two additional occasions — in London on 2

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April and in Pittsburgh on 24–25 September 2009.³ In Pittsburgh, it was announced that the G7/8 would come to an end in the course of its meeting in Muskoka, Canada, in July 2010, to be replaced for good by the G20,⁴ at least when dealing with economic matters. Emblematic of the eagerness with which the ‘members of the club’ embraced this new undertaking was South Korea’s interest in hosting the second 2010 G20 meeting, to be held in November of that year. Seoul started to canvass its fellow members and the media for the privilege of doing so even before the Pittsburgh meeting.⁵

This remarkable success in bringing about a change in the architecture of global governance, replacing an old, proven (if, admittedly, somewhat shop-worn) instrument like the G7/8 with a new (albeit more representative) one like the G20 in the short span of four years is testimony to the many ways in which the need to confront the collective challenges facing the world’s political economy has ended up asserting itself. In some cases, this has occurred even against the ostensible will of some of its most powerful leaders. It is also proof positive of the power of ideas in what is, after all, the information age. What triggered the actual establishment of the G20 at the leaders’ level was the great recession of 2008. However, if the intellectual scaffolding and rationale for the new entity had not been in place for a number of years and it had not already achieved a considerable level of legitimacy in key policy circles, it would have been much more difficult for the G20 to come into being as quickly, and, arguably, as effectively as it did.⁶

In the context of the emergence of the G20 as the premier forum to deal with international economic issues, this article examines the role of emerging powers in this new international scenario.

A first question is that of how operational the G20, an entity where the emerging powers find themselves for the first time as fully accredited ‘members of the club’, is likely to be. In its first year of existence, the G20 has proven to be remarkably effective, to judge from such indicators as the effects of the global stimulus package agreed in London and the relative containment of protectionism. Yet it could well be argued that this has largely been due to the pressing nature of the global financial meltdown more than to anything else. Once the world economy has returned to normal conditions, what will happen?

For some observers, the G20 is a bit too large and unwieldy for it to work as a decision-making body, let alone as a steering committee for the world economy. It would thus be a very different entity from the G7 or the G8, one of whose distinct features was its relative intimacy and cosiness. And this is not just a question of numbers. It is also one of shared outlooks and sense of ‘we-ness’, which exists to a much higher degree among the most industrialised countries and their leaders than in larger entities that encompass developing countries as well.

This is one reason why the G7 was reluctant to expand, and why the so-called ‘Outreach Five’, a term that generated quite a bit of resistance among those very five (Brazil, China, India, Mexico and South Africa), were ‘only asked to join in the dessert and miss the main meal’, as Thabo Mbeki put it once, and why we had to await the biggest financial crisis since the Great Depression to get a G20.

There is an inverse correlation between the number of participants in any given meeting and the efficiency, effectiveness and productivity of its deliberations. That said, it must also be underlined that small groups may be nice and cosy, but not necessarily that fruitful in today’s world, where reaching out to a broader network is imperative to get anything done. As Colin Bradford has put it, the world is not only

becoming more multipolar; it is also becoming more multicultural.⁷ As I have argued elsewhere, in the first decade of the 21st century we are witnessing the transition from 'club' to 'network' diplomacy, something that also applies to the practice of summits such as the G7 and G20.⁸

There are two separate issues here: one is that of size; the other is that of group dynamics. For these meetings to work, the last thing one needs is a set of long, boring speeches written by bureaucrats and read by the principals. The whole idea of these meetings (and the reason why the G7 succeeded and lasted for 30-something years) is to generate a more informal give-and-take among the principals. This is, admittedly, not something all leaders of the developing world are necessarily very good at, but it is what the challenge is all about. The very purpose of these meetings is to break the barriers of communication among leaders at the highest level and create the levels of trust, mutual confidence and reciprocity that are needed in the handling of international affairs for the system to work smoothly and effectively. This already exists to a significant extent among many countries in the industrialised North; it also exists in some specific regions of the global South. It is less apparent that it prevails *between* the main leaders of the North and those of the South.

The G20 embodies a window of opportunity to create such a situation — a welcome development, and one that breaks the barrier between what used to be referred to as the core of the world economy (the G7 members) and the periphery (the Outreach Five and others), a distinction that becomes increasingly questionable as countries such as China and India take up more and more the role of growth engines for the world economy. With the ascendancy of the G20 to the leaders' level, the emerging countries are no longer relegated to a second tier of discussion and engagement. As equal members of the grouping, they are not 'outreach' participants; instead, they are full members of the club and are entitled to all its privileges. Through the G20, the global governance deficit has been partly addressed. The global South now has representation and power in the upper tiers of the geopolitical hierarchy.

The nature of the problem

Why is it that this new entity, whose creation signals a veritable sea change in the relationship between the developed world and the developing one, has come into being so swiftly? Moreover, why is it that it has done so with a 'Big Bang', as opposed to through a more gradualist approach, which is what many observers expected?⁹

The immediate cause for elevation of the G20 to the leaders' level was the 2008 global financial crisis. Yet the crisis itself, although originating in the US, reverberated throughout the world economy so quickly precisely because of a crucial factor: the global governance deficit affecting the international system. Ever since the onset of the current phase of globalisation, the gap between the increased level of cross-border flows of goods, services, capital and cultural products, on the one hand, and the rules and institutions in place to monitor them, on the other, has grown exponentially. Not surprisingly, the room for mishaps has grown accordingly.

In addition to regular financial crises, globalisation has also contributed to the expansion of international inequalities. The income differences between the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) member countries and those of the global South have continued to expand — the per capita income in some of the former can be as much as 80 times higher than that of those of a number of African countries. The demographics are also changing. The rate of population

growth in the developing world is much higher than in the developed one. We thus had an ever smaller part of the world population controlling a steadily larger share of the world's resources and allocating to itself the power to make the key decisions on the course of the world economy through entities like the G7/8, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and other such bodies. This was not sustainable.

In the 1990s a number of financial crises took place in some of the largest developing nations, including Mexico, Brazil, Russia and Indonesia, whose most dramatic expression was perhaps the so-called Asian crisis, which started in Thailand in 1997 and quickly spread, not just to much of East and South-east Asia, but also to Latin America and elsewhere.¹⁰ It was precisely as a result of the Asian crisis that the G20 at finance ministers' level came into being.

The bungling of the IMF in that crisis,¹¹ the patent absurdity of having a group of mostly North Atlantic countries dealing with a crisis taking place in East Asia and the favourable predisposition of the Clinton administration in the US towards some forms of multilateralism opened the doors for the creation of the G20 at finance ministers' level. Canada and Germany also played a key role in pushing for this alternative, and the then-finance minister of Canada, Paul Martin, became the first chair. The first meeting took place in Cologne, with follow-up ones in Toronto and Montreal, with a later one in New Delhi setting a pattern of alternation between Northern and Southern locations. A yearly ministerial meeting of the principals (in the autumn of the northern hemisphere) was supplemented by twice-yearly ones at deputy ministers' level, thus quickly institutionalising the group.

Martin's leadership would turn out to be crucial to giving the fledgling group a wide-ranging and ambitious agenda. Whereas the IMF suggested that the G20 take up some of the unresolved technical issues of global economic policy-making the IMF itself was unable to sort out, Martin had bigger fish to fry. From early on, he focused on the broader challenges entailed by globalisation, thus providing the group with a forward-looking mandate, one that quickly caught on.¹²

The global governance deficit stems not only from the failure of the existing institutional framework to keep pace with the increased transborder flow of transactions of all kinds, most evident in the financial sector, but is also apparent in other areas. It also manifests itself in the growing incompatibility between the considerable share of economic activity that is taking place outside the control of the nation state (and thus of any democratic accountability) and the role of government in democratic systems. While globalisation fosters greater inequality both internationally and domestically, thus leading to strong demands on governments to do something about these inequities, governments, unable to tax many of these increased global flows and thus pushed into severe fiscal crises, bear the brunt of popular discontent with the effects of globalisation. In that context something had to give, and the G20 at finance ministers' level attempted to come to terms with this challenge, although perhaps not as successfully as one might have wished.¹³

Once he became prime minister of Canada in 2004, Martin started to champion the cause of a G20 at leaders' level. He had become convinced that the problems facing the world were so intractable and the tools available so limited that a new instrument was needed.

In this context, it is of interest to examine the reasoning behind the effort undertaken to set up such a group, as there are lessons to be learned there for the field of international institutional reform. Given the global governance deficit, a

number of options were available. One possibility was to attempt to reform and change existing, 'hard-law' international institutions like the UN and the international financial institutions (IFIs) and thus make them both more effective and representative. One such effort was the one undertaken by the G4 (Brazil, Germany, India and Japan) to reform the UN Security Council in 2006, an attempt that (some would say, predictably) did not make much headway. Organisational inertia being what it is, and given the unsurprising resistance of entrenched interests to attempts to reduce their oftentimes anachronistic privileges and shares of whatever power exists in such international organisations, such direct, 'head-on' reform initiatives inevitably turn into uphill undertakings.

An alternative to the reform of existing international organisations is to create new ones, and recent history is littered with the remains of attempts to create such entities, which have to contend with the understandable reluctance of most governments to put in place additional international bureaucracies, inevitably to be paid for by national taxpayers — who already consider themselves over-taxed and under-serviced. In fact, in most parliaments, where knowledge of international affairs tends to be on the thin side, the yearly quotas to be paid by national governments to international organisations of various kinds provide an easy target for the opposition benches (and even, sometimes, for members of the treasury).

In that sense, the 'upgrading' of the G20 seemed a much more promising venture. It did not imply the creation of a radically new entity, but, rather, the building up of an existing one. Given its informal character, no treaties needed to be signed or ratified. It thus was in many ways the path of least resistance to reform — a diagnosis that in hindsight proved to be remarkably accurate. It also offered another advantage. In all such ventures, one of the most contentious items is that of membership, which tends to have implications for international hierarchy and status. And in the numerous conferences and debates on the project of a G20 at leaders' level, various possibilities were mooted, including a rotating membership comparable to that of the non-permanent members of the UN Security Council. Yet in the end, such proposals, which essentially implied re-opening the Pandora's box of membership, fell by the wayside, leaving in place the less controversial solution of simply keeping the current members of the G20 who were anointed as such in 1999, which already provides a fair (though by no means perfect) regional and geographical balance.

The global South at the high table of world politics

With the creation of the G20, emerging powers in the global South thus have a remarkable opportunity to sit at the 'high table' of the world political economy. They should try to make the most of it, by engaging in genuine give-and-take and not in public posturing designed to score points with the media or with the public back home. 'Ganging up' on some of the leading powers will not do for these purposes.

Who are these emerging powers? One definition is the one encompassing the already mentioned Outreach Five; another is BRICSAM (see below); a third is simply all the global South members of the G20, minus Australia. In this article, we will rely on BRICSAM as our operational definition for 'emerging powers'.¹⁴

BRICSAM includes Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa and Mexico. These countries — China, India and Brazil in particular — represent the driving force behind global economic growth in the early 21st century and are well positioned to continue this trend. Added to this economic heft is the diplomatic skill and

soft-power standing of the listed countries. This combination of countries brings together the hard- and soft-power elements necessary for effective interaction on the global stage. The BRICSAM countries also provide regional, cultural and historic representation for the global South. Russia is not really part of the global South, but its position as an emerging economy — with vast natural resource wealth — makes it an important player in the realignment of multilateral institutions.¹⁵

And when we refer to the ‘global responsibility of emerging powers’, the question is, responsibility towards whom? Presumably, towards the international system. Yet this system is formed by certain structures in which, by definition, emerging powers previously played a minor role or none at all. They are emerging precisely because until now they had been relatively submerged, as it were. Things have changed, and these powers, most notably China and India, but also others, like Brazil, South Africa, Turkey and Indonesia (whose rise expresses what has been called ‘the cult of bigness’) aspire to join the top tiers of global governance.

Before being formally asked to join the club, therefore, these countries were vetted to find out whether or not they would ‘fit in’ and not attempt ‘to rock the boat’ once they were inside, when presumably it would be awkward to discipline or expel them. To expand on Thabo Mbeki’s expression, if the Outreach Five were to be invited to the main meal (as they have been by now), would they have good table manners?

The behaviour, responsible or otherwise, of these emerging powers, in turn, is essentially determined by two factors: structure and agency. By the first of these I mean territorial and demographic size, per capita income, size of armed forces and defence budget; by the second, the pattern of their diplomatic activity and engagement. There is always history, and it carries a certain weight. In addition to their sheer territorial and population size, China and India bring to the table 5 000 years of trajectory as civilisations, which provides them with a cultural density and ‘thickness’ that is difficult to ignore.

There is also a certain ranking, often unspoken, but quite evident among a group like the Outreach Five, with China in the first place not just because of sheer size, but also because it is widely considered to be the one power that could, in the course of this century, become another superpower and put itself in a position to challenge the US. Nonetheless, China, at least for the next 20 years, should be considered a status quo power, with a vested interest in keeping things as they are, as it catches up on the many fronts where it has been lagging, from rural poverty to public infrastructure and higher education. As the largest holder of US-denominated securities (largely US Treasury bills), it has a special interest in maintaining the stability of the international financial system and, at least in the short-term, the strength of the US dollar.

India ranks second, and should be seen in many ways as a revisionist power, one not at ease with its current place in the international system. It resents not being among the Permanent Five in the UN Security Council; it did not sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and for much of the last three decades its nuclear policy has been that of a maverick; and in the endgame of the Doha Round of the World Trade Organization it was the main spoiler of the negotiations to further liberalise global trade. Yet precisely because of that, and given its newly improved relations with the US, its historical ties with Russia and the dynamism of its trade with China (in 2008 India’s main trading partner), India is also in a swing position in the international balance of power. For this, its cutting edge information technology sector, as well as its status as a space power, are not insignificant assets.

Brazil is another continent-sized country whose vast territory, significant population (although much smaller than China's or India's) and abundant natural resources, now augmented by the discovery of vast off-shore oil fields on its southern coast, put it into a pivotal position among the BRICSAM nations. In terms of agency, it enjoys a number of advantages — a first-rate foreign service manning a foreign ministry, Itamaraty, that has traditionally been considered among the most effective in the world; an undisputed leadership position in South America (the historical rivalry with Argentina is long gone; it is no contest now); and having been blessed with executive leadership of the highest quality over the past decade-and-a-half.

Until 1994, a major problem for Brazilian foreign policy was that of weak presidents, who found it difficult to make their mark abroad. Ever since, though, it has been able to count on two outstanding (albeit very different) leaders at its helm, President Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1994–2002), a real scholar-statesman, and Luiz Inacio 'Lula' da Silva (from 2003), the first trade union leader to be elected president in Latin America, whose popularity ratings, as he approaches the end of his second term in 2011, have reached 80%. Their energetic and forward-looking foreign policies have put Brazil in the front row of international players and it is almost impossible to scan the international media today without coming across pictures of President Lula — be it next to Queen Elizabeth, shaking hands with Barack Obama or meeting Hu Jintao.

Brazil is also the only Latin American country with a truly global foreign policy (Cuba had one for a while, but no longer), having spearheaded the India–Brazil–South Africa initiative and the G20+ grouping within the Doha Round negotiations, and having been part of the 2006 G4 (with Germany, India and Japan) efforts to reform the UN Security Council. Between 2003 and 2008, Brazil opened 32 new embassies abroad, a feat unmatched by any other nation, at a time when most countries were closing down missions and foreign ministry budgets.

Where does that leave South Africa?

Apart from being Africa's economic powerhouse, South Africa's biggest asset is the emblematic nature and exemplary character of its democratic transition, as well as its capacity for reconciliation and to bring people from all ethnicities together. It has also proven to be diplomatically nimble, positioning itself as a prime interlocutor in the North–South dialogue. Like Brazil, South Africa has also been blessed with some outstanding leaders, most notably Nelson Mandela, and its politics, at least for a while, had a resonance in the domestic politics of Western Europe and North America that none of the other emerging powers did: those who appear on the wrong side of Nelson Mandela, as the pharmaceutical industry found out to its chagrin not too long ago, do so at their peril. Nonetheless, in terms of structure (meaning landmass, population and size of gross domestic product, among other things), South Africa does not stand in the same category as either China, India or Brazil. This can be a problem in projecting its power and influence abroad, both now and in the future.

This would seem to indicate that if South Africa wants to keep the rather privileged niche it has carved for itself in international affairs since 1994, it must put its 'soft power' front and centre, and nurture and cultivate those elements that have made it so distinctive until now. The moment the 'Rainbow Nation' starts to lose its

shine and begins to be seen as ‘just another African country’, only a bit better off, its international leverage would be drastically diminished, especially since South Africa does not enjoy the undisputed regional leadership in Africa that, say, Brazil enjoys in Latin America. All of this puts a special burden on South African diplomacy.

This challenge is an especially daunting one. On the one hand, South Africa finds itself under pressure to act ‘more like an African country’ and disregard international concerns about the situation in, say, Sudan or Zimbabwe, and ‘play ball’ with its fellow African Union members. On the other hand, the very credibility and standing of the new South Africa in international affairs is predicated on the notion that it is a functioning democracy, that it has a well-working economy and that it is willing to stand up and be counted for certain values and principles, no matter how much sympathy South African leaders might have for the predicament of their African counterparts. This is very much a balancing act that is not easy to bring about, but not one beyond the capabilities of Pretoria, which over the past 15 years has chalked up a not unimpressive record of international accomplishments.

Mexico is in many ways ‘the odd man out’ in this grouping. China, India, Brazil and South Africa have made their being part of the former Third World, now the global South, a matter of pride and even self-identity. Part of the reason their interaction with the G7 was somewhat tentative, if not downright diffident, is precisely because they did not want to appear as joining the ‘rich countries club’ and leaving their brethren from the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) at the door. India was a founding member of the NAM and chaired it on several occasions; South Africa chaired it from 1998 to 2001; China has always been close to it; and Brazil, though not a NAM member, has developed a strong global South profile in its foreign policy initiatives, especially since 2003.

Mexico, however, has never been a NAM member, and it quit the G77 when it joined the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA) and the OECD in 1994. The secretary general of the OECD, the ultimate ‘rich nations club’, is former Mexican Foreign Minister Angel Gurría and, for all intents and purposes, Mexico seems to have joined the North. Yet, for all the talk from Mexican government officials that the country is torn between North and Latin America (as if Mexico were not part of the latter), one only has to watch some of the leading news programmes on US television to realise the profound, even vitriolic, anti-immigrant (essentially anti-Mexican) sentiment expressed in many quarters in the US, making this marriage of convenience a difficult and problematic affair.

Mexico City is still in many ways Latin America’s cultural capital, and the depth and resilience of Mexican popular culture is extraordinary. Mexico has a long and distinguished tradition of an independent foreign policy, something that does not go away easily. It thus feels called to play a significant role on the international stage on its own, rather than simply as NAFTA’s third partner, and a second-tier one at that.

Variations by issue area

That said, it is also apparent that, irrespective of their coincidences on a number of questions on the international agenda, there are differences among the newly emerging powers. China and India are large energy consumers, oil importers and greenhouse gas emitters. Brazil and Mexico are oil producers and exporters, with Brazil playing a key role in the alternative fuels field, mainly in biofuels. China and India are evolving into significant military powers, something that cannot be said of

Brazil, Mexico and South Africa, although Brazil is ratcheting up its defence expenditures quite considerably, having announced some major purchases of French-made platforms.

On trade liberalisation, they have also ended up on very different sides of the fence: although Brazil and India (and initially South Africa) worked closely in the establishment of the G20+, the agricultural negotiating group within the Doha Round, in the end they fell out, and India essentially killed the Doha Round (with China's support), when Brazil tried to salvage what was left of it in mid-2008. This only brought to the fore what many had said from the beginning: for all their joint endeavours on the agricultural trade front, Brazil and India really have very different interests in this matter: whereas Brazil, as a net exporter of agricultural products, is ultimately interested in bringing extant barriers to trade down, India, given that close to two-thirds of its population still depends on relatively inefficient and often subsistence agriculture, is in a more defensive position.

What about regional responsibilities?

Although there is no question that Brazil, India and South Africa are the undisputed leaders of, respectively, South America, South Asia and Southern Africa, the condition of each of those neighbourhoods is very different. A conflict-ridden region tends to 'pull down' emerging powers, who must devote precious resources to act as the neighbourhood's 'cop on the beat' to prevent family disputes and front-of-store fights from boiling over. South Asia's rocky state, and especially Pakistan's near civil war, but also civil strife elsewhere, has the effect of dampening India's rise. South America, on the other hand, although undergoing momentous political and social changes, has traditionally had low levels of inter- and intra-state armed conflict, thus making it easier for Brazil to project its interests around the globe. Southern Africa, on the other hand, with Zimbabwe and the Democratic Republic of Congo still in a deep crisis, can be placed somewhere central on the high-low conflict continuum.

That said, it is also true that one of the features of the contemporary international agenda, shaped by global forces, is that it is so intertwined and interconnected that there is no automatic North-versus-South alignment of issues, although there is in some cases (such as reforming the IMF and World Bank by adding greater voting rights to emerging economies, although even here, positions are not that clear-cut).

A strategy going forward

With the G20 off to a good start, a key issue is how to strengthen it and make it more operational. The danger is that with the global financial crisis subsiding, it may lose momentum and come to be seen as less central, both to the old G7/8 members and to the new ones from the emerging economies. Crucial to this endeavour is to keep their collective eye on the ball of globalisation's key challenges and how to move forward on them.

For the emerging powers, and the BRICSAM nations in particular, it is crucial that the enormous potential of the G20 be realised and that the appropriate decisions to prioritise it, staff it and allocate to it the necessary resources be taken. Anecdotal evidence and indicators such as national media coverage of the three initial summits

of the group suggest, for example, that neither Mexico nor South Africa seem to have fully realised what the G20 entails and have taken it rather nonchalantly.

One of the initial accomplishments of the G20 at finance ministers' level was the acknowledgment that globalisation was a positive process from which much could be gained. At the same time, it recognised the need to make it into something truly inclusive and to look for mechanisms to compensate for the many ways in which it created new inequalities and inequities. Starting from that premise, a number of proposals have been put on the table.

Roughly speaking, three alternative scenarios lay themselves out for the role of the emerging powers within the G20. A first one is to act as if the G20 were nothing but an extension of the G7/8 — a 'connector' or transmission belt for the values and agenda of the leading developed nations.¹⁶ With their membership in the group giving an enhanced legitimacy to the exercise and their international standing correspondingly elevated, these emerging powers should now 'play ball', and 'go along to get along', thus avoiding acrimonious confrontations and accepting the reality that the world economy continues to be controlled in the North and that it is best to accept, in whatever modified form, the policy proposals emanating from the leading OECD members.

A second alternative is to switch the agenda 'from private wrongs to public goods', that is, from righting the wrongs caused by runaway, unregulated financial speculation that led to the great recession of 2008 in the first place to key global problems like climate change, global food security and global health.¹⁷ This entails a more proactive attitude and a willingness to take on thorny questions, the answers to which will often generate divisive debates, but in the end this is the only way to move forward in actual problem solving.

A third approach would entail doing much of the above, but also continuing to push for significant changes in the rules of the international system — from the way votes are assigned in the IFIs to the lax standards of financial flow supervision, which make it possible for financial speculators to wreak havoc with the economy and welfare of many emerging powers at the press of a button. This would also entail a certain commitment of those emerging powers in the G20 to make an effort to bring to the table the concerns and priorities of their regional neighbours and friends who are not. Given the informal character of the G20, these consultations (if they are to be called this) would have to be carried out informally as well. The main point is that for there to be 'buy-in' among other developing countries as to the legitimacy and representivity of the G20, this is crucial. The last thing any such entity that defines itself as a 'steering committee for the world economy' needs is to be accused of incurring the same failings as its predecessor, the G7/8.

That said, there is little doubt that the creation of the G20 represents an extraordinary opportunity for the emerging powers to do something about reducing the global governance gap, to do so from the perspective of their own interests, and to do it in the immediate (as opposed to the more distant) future. They should strike while the iron is still hot.

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Notes

1. Quoted in 'Background material: Environment/climate change/energy/global governance', Centre for Global Studies, 12–13 February 2008, p. 4, <http://www.i20.org/publications/35_51_Background-Material.pdf>.
2. See Martin P, 'A global answer to global problems', *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2005.
3. On the Pittsburgh summit, see Cooper AF & D Schwanen (eds), *Flashpoints for the Pittsburgh Summit*. Waterloo: CIGI, 2009; Kirton J & M Koch (eds.), *The G20: The Pittsburgh Summit*. London: Newsdesk Communications, 2009; and Heine J, 'Recession tests mettle of G20', *Toronto Star*, 22 September 2009.
4. In addition to the Outreach Five, i.e. Brazil, China, India, Mexico and South Africa, the other members of the G20 are Argentina, Australia, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, South Korea and Turkey. The 20th member of the group is the president of the EU.
5. On the enthusiasm with which this was greeted in Korea, see *Korea Herald*, 'G20 leadership', 28 September 2009.
6. For a key volume on this, see English J, R Thakur & AF Cooper (eds), *Reforming from the Top: A Leaders' 20 Summit*. New York & Tokyo: UN University Press, 2005.
7. See Bradford CI, 'Anticipating the future: A political agenda for global economic governance', in English J, R Thakur & AF Cooper (eds), *Reforming from the Top: A Leaders' 20 Summit*. New York & Tokyo: UN University Press, 2005.
8. Heine J, 'On the manner of practising the new diplomacy', CIGI Working Paper, 11, October 2006.
9. On scenarios of how the G20 would come about, see Carin B & G Smith, 'Making change happen at the global level', in English J, R Thakur & AF Cooper (eds), *Reforming from the Top: A Leaders' 20 Summit*. New York & Tokyo: UN University Press, 2005 and Heine J, 'Opening the rich countries' club to others', *China Daily*, 14 November 2008.
10. Wade R & F Veneroso, 'The Asian crisis: The high debt model versus the Wall Street–Treasury–IMF complex', *New Left Review*, 1, 228, March–April 1998.
11. On this, see Stiglitz J, *Globalization and Its Discontents*. New York: Norton, 2002.
12. For a comprehensive review of the early years of the G20 at finance ministers' level, see Kirton J, 'Toward multilateral reform: The G20's contribution', in English J, R Thakur & AF Cooper (eds), *Reforming from the Top: A Leaders' 20 Summit*. New York & Tokyo: UN University Press, 2005.
13. For an interesting dossier of short pieces drawing a balance of the G20 at finance ministers' level, see Kirton J (ed.), *G20: Growth, Innovation, Inclusion: The G20 at Ten*. London: Newsdesk Communications, 2008.
14. See Cooper AF & A Antkiewicz (eds), *Emerging Powers in Global Governance: Lessons from the Heiligendamm Process*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2008.
15. See Shaw TM, A Cooper & A Antkiewicz, 'The logic of the B(R)ICSAM model for global governance', in Cooper AF & A Antkiewicz (eds), *Emerging Powers in Global Governance: Lessons from the Heiligendamm Process*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2008, p. 23.
16. For a view of the G20 at finance ministers' level as performing such a role, see Kirton J, 2005, *op. cit.*
17. For this proposal, see Cooper AF & A Schrumm, 'Moving the G20 forward: From private wrongs to public goods', 27 November 2009, web commentary, <<http://www.cigionline.org/publications/2009/11/moving-g20-forward-private-wrongs-public-goods>>.