

## 2. Generating Co-operation at the G8

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Hello, I'm Professor John Kirton, Director of the G8 Research Group at the University of Toronto in Canada, and your lead instructor for G8 Online 2004.

In this session, "Generating Co-operation at the G8," we explore how much and why the major democratic power members of the G8 Summit come together to make collective commitments, succeeding splendidly at times but failing miserably at others.

Every day national leaders, their ministers and their officials meet, inside and outside international institutions, to seek ways to co-operate on the issues raised by the interconnectedness of our rapidly globalizing world. Sometimes their face-to-face discussions foster the personal relationships that create trust and a more open flow of information, that avoid misunderstanding that can lead to unnecessary conflict, and that allow a "sharing and comparing" of experiences that participants can learn from and put to good use back home. Occasionally, such meetings generate a consensus on new principles and norms that diffuse outward and shape global order as a whole. And such meetings can even yield concrete, measurable, future-oriented collective commitments, and ones that are timely, well tailored and ambitious in addressing the critical challenges of the day.

Under what conditions do international institutions in general, and the G8 Summit in particular, help national representatives go beyond deliberation and set new normative directions to take the hard decisions that produce real, far-reaching change? Views on this fundamental question of international relations vary widely. Traditional **realists** answer that all countries, especially major powers, jealously promote their own interests, prevent other countries from getting ahead at all costs

and thus seldom reach meaningful collective agreements, no matter what international institutions they use. Other realists also see a world where relative power and national rivalry dominate, but claim that only when one **hegemonic** country is much more powerful than the others can it provide the leadership around which others will rally or coalesce. In contrast, **liberal-institutionalist** scholars assert that strong international institutions constrain national rivalries and promote co-operation, especially if these institutions have formal charters with precise obligations and large bureaucracies to foster agreements and put them into effect. But **constructivist** analysts argue that in a world of rapid globalization, societal forces are overwhelming the old game of government-controlled competition, forcing the leaders of even the most powerful countries to redefine their interests and even their identities. Even the most powerful country is now "bound to co-operate."

This debate also arises among those seeking to explain when and why the G8 generates co-operation among its members. Adherents of a **concert equality** model argue that by taking all major powers, with relatively equal capabilities and a common attachment to democratic values, and combining them in a select club controlled by popularly elected leaders, the G8 is likely to produce important co-operative achievements through mutual adjustment among its members (Kirton 1989; Kirton 1993; Bailin 2001). Others counter that the United States remains so much more powerful than the other G8 members that co-operation only comes when there is **American leadership** and another consequential G8 member in support (Putnam and Bayne 1987; Bayne 2000). Still others offer a model of **democratic institutionalism**, in which G8 co-operation arises when members

governments have strong G8 offices within their national governments, G8 institutions to deal with particular subjects and control over the multilateral organizations most relevant to the issue at hand (Kokotsis 1999). And devotees of the **false new consensus** model claim that recent G8 failures flow from the fact that the leaders of even the most powerful countries have all redefined their interests and identities to conclude that they are better off deferring to free market forces they can no longer control in a rapidly globalizing age (Bergsten and Henning 1996).

Which models best explains when and why the G8 succeeds? I argue that the **concert equality** model does. Co-operation comes in those areas, such as energy and trade, where the weaker members — rather than the United States alone — have equally relevant capabilities. But co-operation remains scarce on subjects, such as the regional security in the Middle East, where the United States predominates. G8 co-operation improved during the 1990s, when an increasingly democratic major power Russia steadily became a member of the club. The twenty-first century world of rapid globalization has now made even the most powerful G8 member more equally vulnerable to outside intrusions, and thus genuinely dependent upon the co-operation of its fellow G8 partners to meet its needs in a complex and uncertain world. The September 11th terrorist attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center dramatically illustrate how vulnerable even a once hegemonic America has become, and why it now badly needs the G8.

### **Charting G7/G8 Co-operation**

There are several ways to measure the co-operative success of a G7/G8 summit. The most basic, pioneered by the great summit scholars Professor Robert Putnam of Harvard and Sir Nicholas Bayne of the London School of Economics and Political Science, is to assign an overall grade to each summit, based on an assessment of the major agreements each produced (Putnam and Bayne 1987; Bayne 2000).

Another, first developed by professors George von Furstenberg of Indiana University and Joseph Daniels of Marquette University, and then refined by Dr. Ella Kokotsis, is to count the number of specific, measurable, future-oriented *commitments* encoded in the communiqués issued by the leaders at their annual event (von Furstenberg and Daniels 1992; Kokotsis 1999). Other methods include recording the judgements made by the editorialists of the world's elite media at the end of each summit, or those of the participating personal representatives of the leaders — the so-called *sherpas* — once they have retired from public life (Kirton 1989).

Whatever the method, these careful chartings all tell a similar tale. Co-operation among members at the annual summits was often high at the early summits of the 1970s, even if some spectacular failures occasionally took place. Co-operation then declined during the 1980s. However, since the late 1980s there has been substantial and often very high levels of co-operation. Indeed, recent summits have generated about four times as many commitments as those of the 1970s. The 2003 Evian Summit produced an all-time high of 206.

Such commitments at each summit come from many different issue areas. But some clear patterns stand out. By far the biggest and most consistent contributor has been North-South development, which has been particularly strong in the seven-year summit cycle that began in 1996. Trade and the world economy have been consistent contributors, although the latter has faded somewhat in recent years. Energy was by far the biggest contributor in the first seven-year cycle of summitry from 1975 to 1981, to be replaced by terrorism, crime and drugs in the 1990s. Since the third cycle started in 1989, the biggest contributors have been the environment, nuclear safety and arms control. The fourth cycle, starting in 1996, consistently featured development and debt relief for the poorest, information and communications technology, and health.

## Explaining G7/G8 Co-operation

These patterns show that the summit is increasingly successful in generating co-operation across several important issue areas in the world. But what explains why an individual summit succeeds? The evidence suggests that the best account comes from the concert equality model, which emphasizes the new vulnerability for all bred by today's globalization.

First, most members, and not just the United States, have hosted highly successful summits, with France proving particularly strong. Second, the summit's co-operative performance plummeted in the first half of the 1980s, when the rapidly growing U.S. economy and soaring U.S. "superdollar" were steadily restoring the United States to the hegemonic position it had lost in the crisis-ridden early 1970s, when the G8 Summit was born. Third, a puzzle arises during the 1990s, when the vibrant U.S. economy outgrew many of its fellow members, yet G8 Summit co-operation again increased — by some measures to levels never seen before. But 1989 marked the start of the process that brought a newly democratic Russia into the summit, diminishing the U.S. share of the club's overall capabilities and strengthening the democratic bond at its core. And with the onset of the contemporary wave of globalization, first focused on by the G8 in 1996, each member has become more vulnerable to the terrorism of global reach, the global financial crises, and the transnational pollution, crime and disease that globalization has brought.

These causal connections are seen again when we look at the summits' co-operative successes and failures across its different issue areas. Many of the most successful summits

reflected leadership by the weaker members — such as Germany and Canada's initiative on terrorism at the Summit in Bonn in 1978. The most successful area — North-South development — came in an areas where Japan and France, and not the United States, came to lead the world in the relevant capability of **official development assistance** (ODA). The same has been broadly true in international trade, where summit members are quite equal in the share of world trade they accounted for, and where their economies, under the impact of globalization, have become increasingly open — and thus vulnerable to — flows and forces from abroad.

This combination of equal capability and equal vulnerability working to create successful summits was evident from the outset in the case of energy. There the surplus oil, uranium and other energy supplies of Canada and Britain, now joined by Russia, were precisely the capabilities needed by a vulnerable, oil-dependent United States, especially when the oil shocks of 1973 and 1979 and the mini shocks of 1990 and 2000 came. As globalization has brought this same combination of equal capability and vulnerability to all democratic members of the summit, its co-operative successes have steadily spread to other issue areas and increased overall.

High levels of collective commitment have thus come from G8 Summits in recent years. But the question arises — do the G8 leaders keep their commitments when they leave the Summit and return home? We take up this question next week, when Dr. Ella Kokotsis bring us our lecture on "Compliance with Commitments in the G8."•

## References

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## Further Reading

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## Discussion Questions

1. What are the best ways to conceive of and measure the co-operative success of a Summit? What other ways can you suggest, beyond those already used?
2. Which summit do you regard as the most successful summit ever and why? Which do you regard as the greatest failure and why?
3. If the concert equality model provides the best explanation of a summit's co-operative success, how successful is the June 2004 U.S.-hosted Sea Island Summit likely to be?
4. Is the existence of equal vulnerability enough to induce G8 co-operation, or do G8 leaders have to made aware of this vulnerability by a crisis in order to catalyze co-operation?
5. How fast and well do G7/G8 leaders learn from past mistakes, to produce improved levels of co-operative performance?
6. Is co-operation likely if all or most leaders share a common political or ideological affiliation or orientation, of either a right-wing or left-wing sort?

## Quiz

1. In explaining the co-operative success of the summit, the importance of having G7/G8 ministerial and official level institutions for the particular issue area is highlighted by the model of:
  - a. concert equality
  - b. American leadership
  - c. democratic institutionalism
  - d. false new consensus
2. Over the full 30-year life of the G7/G8 Summit, the issue area that has consistently generated the most commitments encoded in the concluding communiqué has been:
  - a. energy
  - b. trade
  - c. North-South relations
  - d. terrorism
3. The most successful summit, measured by the number of commitments encoded in the leader's level documents, came with the 169 commitments produced by the Summit at:
  - a. Bonn 1978
  - b. Toronto 1988
  - c. Okinawa 2000
  - d. Genoa 2001
4. The G8 member with the largest amount of official development assistance is:
  - a. Japan
  - b. United States
  - c. Germany
  - d. Canada
5. The G7 first focused on the concept of globalization at its summit in:
  - a. Paris 1989
  - b. Halifax 1995
  - c. Lyon 1996
  - d. Cologne 1999