DECISION MAKING IN THE G7/G8 SYSTEM

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NOTE

This paper is in draft form – I hope to get ideas for improvements at the Grenoble workshops. The references are incomplete and there may be errors of fact.
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Introduction

The G7 – now G8 – summits were launched in 1975, with three objectives:

- Developing collective management of the world economy, to replace American hegemony;
- Reconciling the domestic and external pressures generated by interdependence;
- Mobilising political leadership to resolve problems beyond the reach of bureaucracies.

The summits have changed greatly over the last 25 years. But though ‘globalisation’ has now replaced ‘interdependence’ and a political agenda has been added to the economic one, these objectives remain the same.¹

When the G7 summits began, other multilateral meetings of heads of state and government were rare and this situation persisted through the 1970s and 1980s.² But during the 1990s meetings at summit level of other international organisations became a frequent feature of the international scene, whether global, plurilateral or regional.³ Over the same period, the shape of the G7/G8 summits also changed radically. The heads of government detached their flanking ministers and began meeting by themselves. The supporting apparatus, at both official and ministerial level, became much more complex and developed a life of its own. Many more outside contributors became involved both in the preparation of the summits and in their follow-up.

This paper examines the recent development of decision-making in the G7/G8 system.⁴ The analysis falls under three headings:

- The contribution of the heads themselves;
- The contribution of the supporting apparatus;
- The contribution of other actors, both state and non-state.
The aim is to illuminate two questions:

- What is the reason for involving heads of government in the work of international organisations?
- How do G7/G8 summits differ from other types of summit meetings?

The main focus will be on economic activities, with only occasional reference to political ones.

**Decision-Making in the G7/G8 Summits: A. The Contribution of the Heads**

The G7 summit was conceived as a personal encounter of the leaders of the world’s most powerful economies. The founders believed that bringing the heads of government together would enable them to understand better both the domestic problems of their peers and the international responsibilities that they all shared. This would enable them to solve problems that had baffled their bureaucrats. The bureaucrats themselves ought to be kept out of the process entirely.\(^v\)

Even before the first summit of all, at Rambouillet 1975, it was clear that this vision was out of reach. The subject-matter of international economics was too complex for the heads to reach decisions without some preparation. So they reconciled themselves to playing roles at the summit which had been written for them by their officials, especially their personal representatives or ‘sherpas’. This was the first stage in institutionalising the summits.\(^vi\) But the prospect of informal and spontaneous contacts, at which they could develop their own ideas, continues to exercise a powerful attraction on the heads. This section of the paper therefore looks at the ways in which the heads make their personal contribution to the summit, without relying on the supporting apparatus.

**The Heads and Summit Process**

During the 1990s, the heads always professed to want summit procedures made simpler. They complained that the agenda and the documents were too long, giving them no scope to make their own input. Some of their own practices, however, had contributed to this expansion.
Size. Once the size of the summit had been settled in the 1970s, at seven powers plus the European Community, the heads resisted any move to add new members. They believed small numbers were essential to informal exchanges. As British prime minister Callaghan had said in 1976:

“The numbers attending are small and compact. Discussions are businesslike and to the point. We do not make speeches at one another. We talk frankly but also as briefly as we can, and a lot of ground is covered.”

In 1991 the heads agreed that British prime minister Major could invite Soviet president Gorbachev as a guest to the London III 1991 summit. But once the Russians came, the G7 had to go on inviting them, as a refusal would be a severe setback to post-Cold War reconciliation. By skilful salami tactics, Russian president Yeltsin got invited to more and more of the summit. Eventually, US president Clinton called Denver 1997 ‘the Summit of the Eight’, while British prime minister Blair made Birmingham 1998 the first G8 summit.

Despite the political reasons for adding Russia, this enlargement has drawbacks. Yeltsin used to ‘make speeches’ at his colleagues, though his successor Putin picked up the informal mode at once at Okinawa 2000. Russia’s comparative economic weakness means that some issues still have to be kept in the G7. So the heads are wary of extending invitations to other powers, like China (as suggested by Japanese prime minister Obuchi before Okinawa), because, once invited, they cannot be ‘un-invited’ without giving offence. There is no agreement among the heads to admit other countries to summit membership.

Participation. Ever since 1975, the heads had been flanked at the summits by their foreign and finance ministers. This was originally on American insistence, though it also helped those with coalition governments, like Germany. By the 1990s, however, the heads and their ministers were meeting at the summit in separate groups, with only rare plenaries. In 1998 Blair proposed to separate the flanking ministers in time as well as space. Only the heads came to Birmingham 1998, with foreign and finance ministers meeting a few days earlier. ‘Heads-only summits’ have now become established and are clearly welcome to the heads themselves, as giving them greater freedom to choose their own agenda and develop their own ideas.
Agenda and Use of Time. The addition of politics to economics at the summit, from the early 1980s, together with new topics provoked by the end of the Cold War, produced severe overloading of the agenda. A campaign led by Major in 1992-3, to shorten both agenda and documentation and to cut down on ceremonial, had only short-lived effect. In 1998 Blair tried again, proposing an economic agenda of only three items – employment, crime and debt relief – for Birmingham 1998, though new financial architecture was added in response to the Asian crisis. A short agenda at a heads-only summit allowed the documents issued to be pruned severely.viii But since then both agenda and documents have been getting longer again, especially at Okinawa 2000, for reasons explained below.

The Heads and Summit Content

Innovation in Agenda-Setting. Each G7 country hosts the summit in turn, in a predictable sequence.ix While many topics are carried over from previous summits, the host has the ability to propose as innovative an agenda as the others can accept. This is the point at which the host has most influence over the proceedings and most heads take the opportunity to intervene personally, by writing to, telephoning or visiting their peers.

Topics proposed as dominant themes for recent summits include:

- For Halifax 1995, Canadian prime minister Chretien proposed reform of the international monetary system.
- For Lyon 1996, French president Chirac proposed development, including inviting the heads of the IMF, World Bank, WTO and UN to the summit.
- For Denver 1997, Clinton proposed help for Africa.
- For Birmingham 1998, Blair proposed ‘employability’ – agreeing the topic bilaterally with Clinton even before Denver.
- For Cologne 1999, German chancellor Schroeder proposed debt relief for poor countries, signalling a change from the policy of his predecessor Kohl.
- For Okinawa 2000, Obuchi proposed information technology (IT) and the ‘digital divide’.
Some of the items on the list are recurrent summit items, but others, like development and IT, are wholly new. This shows how different leaders have added new ideas to the summit agenda – themselves increasing the overload about which they complain.

*Innovation at the Summit Itself.* Innovation by a G8 head at the summit is more often procedural than substantive. Ideas for brand new policies should have been filtered through the preparatory process.\(^x\) So Clinton was blocked by the Europeans at Naples 1994 when he proposed without warning a new round of trade negotiations. But new procedural proposals launched at the summit itself are more frequent and likely to succeed. Clinton made his mark at Tokyo III 1993, his first summit, by suggesting a special meeting of G7 employment ministers. (Chirac did the same at *his* first summit, Halifax 1995). Yeltsin produced a whole range of proposals for G8 meetings in Moscow, on nuclear safety and energy, to show that Russia was really part of the summit process. These procedural proposals, whatever their merits, also tend to expand the summit’s agenda and its apparatus.

Innovation also includes the personal crusades of certain summit heads, often going beyond the advice of their officials. The most conspicuous of these was Kohl’s insistence on getting environmental and nuclear safety issues onto the agenda, in addition to launching, as host, a meeting of G7 environment ministers before Munich 1992.\(^{x_{i}}\)

*Political Reflexes.* Another personal contribution from the heads comes when their political instincts lead them to pick out certain issues or go against what their officials have prepared. The heads are often moved to react to sudden crises happening just before a summit. For example, a terrorist attack on US servicemen in Saudi Arabia just before Lyon 1996 meant that Clinton persuaded his colleagues to convert material prepared on violent crime into a sharp condemnation of terrorism.

On other occasions the heads’ political sense tells them that the conclusions prepared for the summit are not adequate, so that they do not accept them. Halifax 1995 had made detailed preparations on reform of the IMF, rather less on the UN. But the heads themselves decided that the 50\(^{th}\) anniversary of the UN that year was an
opportunity not to be missed, so that they greatly expanded their conclusions. At Denver 1997 the heads were not satisfied with the progress being made on trans-border crime, which worried their electorates. They sought to accelerate G7 work in this area, making crime a major theme for Birmingham the next year. These interventions by the heads against the grain of the preparations, however, are different from deals struck on the basis of the preparatory work, discussed in the next section.

*Domestic Motivation.* As these examples show, often the leaders make personal use of the summit to respond to domestic pressures or to advance their domestic agenda. Kohl’s concern with the environment reflected strong public interest in this subject in Germany. Clinton hoped that having Africa on the agenda for Denver 1997 would help him in his plans to upgrade US policy towards that continent. Blair in 1998 and Schroeder in 1999 were newly elected left-of-centre leaders, who used the summit to advance their own domestic objectives in employment and social protection. These political objectives and pressures, of course, do not always have positive effects. French president Mitterrand felt obliged to hold up progress on concluding the Uruguay Round at Munich 1992, for fear that would upset the farming vote before the referendum in France on the Maastricht treaty.

*The Heads and Summit Follow-up*

Once the summit is over, the leaders rarely intervene to ensure its conclusions are carried out. Late in 1991 and 1992 there was much telephoning between G7 leaders in a vain attempt to conclude the Uruguay Round by the end of the year, as they had promised at the London III and Munich summits. In October 1998, Blair sounded his colleagues on whether the worsening monetary crisis called for an extraordinary summit – but they were content just to issue a statement encouraging their finance ministers. But these examples of personal intervention by the leaders are exceptional.xii

The position is quite different as regards communicating the summit outcome to the media. All the heads take pains to convey their own views to their national press corps. The leaders want to make a good impression back home, which leads them to stress their personal victories, rather than the agreed results achieved at the summit.
Comparing national accounts reveals inconsistencies, which can focus public attention on points of difference rather than agreement.

**Summary of the Contribution of the Heads**

The main personal contribution of the heads of government to decision-making at the G7/G8 summit, independent of their officials, can be summarised thus:

- A strong attachment to simplicity of process, recently advanced by the launch of ‘heads-only’ summit, though some of their other practices conflict with this;
- Innovation by the summit host in agenda setting and by all leaders at the summit, though more often in procedure than content;
- Political reflexes, triggered by sudden crises or a sense that the preparations are inadequate, which may reflect domestic pressures or objectives;
- Rare involvement in implementation, but close attention to media treatment of the summit, which can stress differences more than agreement.

**B. The Contribution of the Supporting Apparatus**

The preparation of the summit is largely in the hands of the supporting G7 or G8 apparatus. Even what happens at the summit itself usually owes more to the preparatory process than to the personal intervention of the heads. This section therefore looks at what supporting G7/G8 bureaucrats and ministers do, both on their own and in combination with the heads of government.

**The Supporting Players**

*The Sherpas.* Traditionally, summit preparations have been in the hands of a small team of bureaucrats, led by the sherpas, who are chosen either for their personal closeness to the head or their seniority in their parent department. The sherpas are supported by two ‘sous-sherpas’, one each from the foreign and finance ministries, to work on the main summit agenda, and by the ‘political directors’ from foreign ministries, to prepare foreign policy subjects. While originally the entire group would
meet together, during the 1990s the sherpas, each set of sous-sherpas, and the political directors took to meeting separately, to cover the growing agenda. Plenary meetings of the full team have become rare. In addition, groups of specialist officials have grown up to deal with recurrent summit themes like terrorism or disarmament.

Summit preparations are concentrated in several meeting each spring, to select the agenda and start drafting the necessary documents. In many ways the dynamics of summit meetings are reproduced at sherpa level. At these small gatherings, discussion is frank, with plenty of personal interaction. The sherpas get to know each other well, they understand each others’ domestic background and they develop a sense of solidarity and shared responsibility. The sherpas become adept both at seeing what arguments would prove convincing, against their colleagues’ domestic backgrounds, and at picking up ideas from the others which they can use to good effect back home.

The Other Ministers. At the outset foreign and finance ministers attended the summit, flanking the heads. But each group has gradually asserted its independence. During the 1980s the secretive G5 emerged as the public G7 finance ministers, while G7 foreign ministers began meeting on their own on the margin of the UN General Assembly. Since Birmingham 1998, both groups meet just before the summit, but no longer attend it.

Meanwhile, other ministers became associated with the summit in the 1990s, largely thanks to personal initiatives by the heads themselves. Regular or periodic meetings of environment ministers (promoted by Kohl), employment ministers (backed by Clinton, Chirac and Blair), energy ministers (started by Yeltsin), interior and justice ministers and education ministers (first in 2000, thanks to Schroeder) are held both to prepare for summits and carry out instructions from the heads. Most of these groups include the Russians, though finance ministers remain as G7 only, and each has its own apparatus of supporting officials.

Once the summit began meeting as heads only, these separate ministerial groups no longer felt bound to preserve the strict G7 or G8 format. G8 Foreign ministers have invited selected other countries to join them for meetings focused on specific
problems – for example, on Balkan stability in June 1999, in response to the Kosovo crisis. The G7 finance ministers have created a new permanent grouping, the G20, linked to monetary reform in the IMF, which includes major developing countries active in the system.\textsuperscript{xvi}

\textit{Summit Preparations}

\textit{Agenda-Setting.} This is the task for the first sherpa meeting of the year. The host head of government, as shown earlier, focuses on new ideas to make that year’s summit distinctive. The sherpas have to wrestle with the on-going summit agenda, of items started but not completed in earlier years, and this is always under pressure.\textsuperscript{xvii} The difficult issues that come up to the heads often need recurrent summit treatment, like international trade or debt relief for poor countries. While most items can be handed on to other established organisations for follow-up (see below), sometimes the institutions are inadequate, so that the G7/G8 remains responsible for them.

The innovative ideas of earlier years, such as employment or information technology, become recurrent items later. Since Blair’s reforms of 1998, which were meant to check this inflation of the agenda, the summits have kept on adding new items – education, conflict prevention, aging, information technology, infectious diseases – without taking old ones off. Italy in 2001 may try to return to a limited, three-part agenda of poverty reduction, environment and conflict prevention. But, in general, the hardest part of agenda-setting for the sherpas is deciding what to leave out.

\textit{Summit Endorsement – Work in Progress.} Endorsement takes up the largest and the easiest part of the summit agenda and documentation. It consists of the heads putting their authority behind work that is going on elsewhere. Often this will be activity that has been generated by earlier summits, so that the heads give their blessing to work in progress. In other cases G8 governments find it useful to have the endorsement of their peers for policies they have decided to adopt already, since this can be useful in overcoming domestic opposition.

This part of the summit agenda, however, is most subject to inflation. There is a strong incentive for G8 governments to expand the area of their policies carrying
summit endorsement. But the wider this endorsement is given, the more its value becomes diluted. In principle the move to heads-only summits should allow more issues to be pushed down to other ministers. But, in practice, once the heads have lent their authority to a particular subject, they are reluctant to abandon it, for fear others should conclude that they have ceased to care about it.

Stimulating Agreement at Lower Levels. A more demanding technique is where summit discussion, or even the prospect of it, is used to bring about agreement at lower levels. This may be to resolve differences between G7 or G8 members, or to stimulate agreement in wider international contexts. A good example is seen in the international financial architecture agreed after the Asian crisis. The essential work on this was done by the G7 finance ministers and their deputies. On some issues there were deep divisions between them, but the approach of the summits at Birmingham in 1998 and Cologne in 1999 gave them an incentive to resolve these differences. The heads endorsed what their finance ministers had agreed, without adding anything of their own.

A more controversial example is seen in the summits’ involvement in the GATT Uruguay Round negotiations. At three summits - Houston 1990, London III 1991 and Munich 1992 - the heads undertook to complete the round by the end of the year, but because of differences on agriculture they always failed to meet their own deadline. For Tokyo III 1993, however, the preparations called for the G7 trade ministers to meet as the ‘Quad’ just before the summit itself. The imminence of the summit encouraged the trade ministers to reach agreements that opened the way for the Uruguay Round’s final completion in December 1993.

Stimulating Agreement at the Summit Itself. The two techniques described so far cover most of the summit content and often they will produce the most important evidence of G7/G8 cooperation. But the heads also play a more direct role. In some cases they have to engage their own authority to give impetus to a wide-ranging or innovative programme. The work on the digital divide at Okinawa 2000 is an example of this. In other cases agreement can only be reached through the intervention of the heads themselves. This applied to the peace arrangement for Kosovo in 1999. Detailed preparations had been made, but everything hinged on the
position of Yeltsin, which did not become clear until he reached the Cologne summit in person.

In yet other cases the heads are able to reach agreements which are not attainable at lower levels. Debt relief for low-income countries provides successive examples of this technique throughout the 1990s. At London III 1991, Naples 1994, Lyon 1996 and Cologne 1999, the heads succeeded in advancing agreement on this subject further than their finance ministers had taken it. They tried hard to do so at Birmingham 1998 and Okinawa 2000 as well, but did not succeed. Debt relief is thus one area where the summit has become identified as the place where things happen, so that it attracted huge demonstrations to Birmingham and Cologne.

Such agreements exploit the heads’ wish for some achievements of their own. They are not happy when everything at the summit has been ‘pre-cooked’. The sherpas try to provide scope for the heads to go beyond what has been prepared for them. Otherwise, they will be tempted to take their own unprepared initiatives – as described earlier. But this strategy does not always work. This is shown by the summits’ treatment of environmental issues both before and after the UN Conference on Environment and Development at Rio in 1992. The early summits, from Paris 1989 to London III 1991, were able to stimulate much new thinking on the environmental and to feed ideas into the preparations for Rio. However, as discussion moved from broad ideas to specific commitments, it became harder to overcome differences between the United States and Europe. When the summits took up the environment again, at Denver 1997 and Okinawa 2000, in advance of climate change meetings at Kyoto and The Hague, raising the issue to head of government level did not resolve the disagreements.

*Domestic Motivation.* When the heads are ready to go a bit further at the summit than their officials or ministers, that usually reflects their judgement of the balance of domestic and international advantage in reaching agreement. Yeltsin knew that the Kosovo settlement was unpopular in Russia, but he did not want to alienate the support of the G7. Schroeder, Blair and their predecessors were aware of strong public interest in debt relief, mobilised by the Jubilee 2000 Campaign. But these domestic political considerations can work in the wrong direction. On climate change
and biodiversity the strongest domestic pressures in Europe come mainly from consumer groups and public opinion, while in North America they come from producers and business interests. So agreement on environmental issues may actually be harder to reach at the summit than lower down.

Summit Follow-Up

In contrast to agenda-setting and summit preparation, the sherpas play little part in summit follow-up. The G7 and G8 ministerial groups, in contrast, have a growing role in the implementation of summit conclusions. They have much greater flexibility than the summit itself, in the choice of when they meet and whether they involve other countries. The G7 finance ministers, for example, regularly meet on the margins of the spring and autumn meetings of the IMF and World Bank, as well as other times in the year as the need arises. By far the largest responsibility for summit follow-up, however, still rests with wider international institutions. The contribution of these outside bodies is considered in the next section of this paper.

Summary of the Contribution of the Supporting Apparatus

The contribution of the supporting apparatus to the summit, whether working on its own or together with the heads, can be summarised as follows:

- The traditional sherpa network has been supplemented in the 1990s by the growth of semi-independent G7 or G8 ministerial groups;
- In agenda-setting, the hardest task for the sherpas is to decide how to leave things out, so as to keep the agenda under control;
- Summit endorsement of existing policies is valuable in giving the authority of the heads, but this becomes devalued if used too much;
- The prospect of summit discussion can stimulate agreement at lower levels, without a direct contribution from the heads being necessary;
- The sherpas try to take advantage of the heads’ desire to achieve something of their own, so as to advance agreement at the summits beyond the preparations – but this does not always work;
Sherpas take little part in follow-up; supporting ministers do rather more, but most is done in wider institutions.

C. The Contribution of Other Actors

Contribution to Summit Preparation.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the G7 governments kept summit preparation firmly in their own hands. Other governments had little chance to influence the process directly, except for other member states of the European Community, who were consulted to some degree by the Commission and Presidency. The OECD, however, normally held its annual ministerial meeting a few weeks before the summit, so that the non-G7 members could make their views known. As for non-government influences, these hardly went beyond visits to the host head of government by business and trade union delegations under OECD auspices. But during the 1990s the hermetic character of the summit preparations began to loosen up and this process accelerated rapidly from 2000.

International Institutions and Other Governments. The growing involvement of supporting ministers in the preparatory process enabled other international institutions to be involved. G7 and G8 ministers often involved senior staff members from these institutions to join them.

The supporting ministerial groups also allowed other governments to become involved, as they were not limited to a strict G7/G8 format. A more radical move was made before Okinawa 2000, when most of the G8 leaders met a group of heads of government from developing countries in Tokyo on their way to the summit. A similar meeting seems likely before Genoa 2001.

Private Business and Non-Governmental Organisations. In 2000, the Japanese prepared the treatment of IT and the digital divide at the summit by involving a range of major multinational companies. They organised a special conference shortly before Okinawa and incorporated most of its findings in the summit’s own report. The involvement of NGOs took off at Birmingham 1998, where the Jubilee 2000 Campaign organised a march of 50,000 people calling for debt cancellation. Since
then, the host head of government has always met a delegation of NGOs present at the summit. In 2000 the Japanese also provided an NGO centre at Okinawa and involved NGO groups in consultations with their sherpa team; this is being repeated for Genoa 2001.xxi

**Contribution to Summit Follow-Up**

*International Institutions.* In contrast to the preparations, summit follow-up has relied on other actors from the outset. The summits of the 1970s and 1980s largely delegated the responsibility for implementing their decisions to bodies like the OECD, the IMF and World Bank and the GATT. During this time the summits took a detached attitude to these institutions, handing down their decisions as *fait accompli* and expecting them to be adopted without further debate. But this approach would no longer work in the 1990s, as more countries became active in the international system and the G7 became less dominant.

When the G7 conducted their review of international institutions, begun at Naples 1994 and continued till Denver 1997, they realised that they would have to use more tact and persuasion to get their ideas for reform accepted by the wider membership. Meanwhile, the expanding agenda has taken the summits deeper into policy areas where the institutions are inadequate, such as crime and money-laundering. This has been a factor behind the creation of G7 and G8 ministerial groups, for example of interior and justice ministers.xxii

*Business and NGOs.* Both private business and NGOs have become involved in summit follow-up during the 1990s. An initial involvement of private business came with the ‘Global Information Society’ conferences launched from Naples 1994, to promote the wider diffusion of information technology, but these ran out of steam.xxiii The renewed interest in IT at Okinawa 2000 has led to the creation of the ‘dot force’ to recommend ways to overcome the digital divide, with strong participation from business and also from NGOs. Business and NGOs are involved in two other programmes agreed at Okinawa: the campaign against infectious diseases in poor countries; and the task force on renewable energy. Their participation has the merit of tapping additional sources of expertise and financial support. But these new follow-
up structures may be harder to integrate into the existing framework of international institutions.

Summary of the Contribution of Other Actors

The contribution of other actors to summit decision-making can be summarised as follows:

- The formally hermetic system of summit preparation now gives rather more access to other governments and international institutions, as well as to business and NGOs.
- International institutions have always been entrusted with summit follow-up, but the G8 now treats them more persuasively and systematically;
- There are problems however, when the institutions are inadequate; involving business and NGOs can compensate for this, but at the risk of overloading the summit again.

Comparison with Other Summits of International Organisations

The preceding analysis provides the basis for comparing the G7/G8 with other types of multilateral summit meeting, which have expanded so much during the 1990s. This part of the paper looks briefly at a selection of other summits, concentrating on those with at least some economic impact. All these other summits are aspects of existing international organisations. The G8 summit, even with its growing apparatus, remains the only example of a free-standing meeting of heads of government, coming together on a regular cycle.

Global Summits. During the 1990s a number of summits have been held under UN auspices. These began with the UN Conference on Environment and Development at Rio in 1992, followed by summits on social issues (Copenhagen 1995), on women (Beijing 1996) and population (Cairo 1998). The UN Millennium summit, with a wider agenda covering development, peace-keeping and environmental issues, was held in September 2000.
The Rio summit attracted a large attendance of heads of government; the next three meetings were less well supported, though the Millennium summit reversed this downward trend.\textsuperscript{xxiv} All except the last were dedicated to a single topic; all of them were single events, not part of a recognised series; and all, though held under UN auspices, were distinct from the established organisations concerned with international economic matters.\textsuperscript{xxv}

\textit{Regional Summits.} In the European Union, the European Council continues to hold regular meetings, three times a year.\textsuperscript{xxvi} But in addition it often holds special meetings, for example with countries applying for membership or with its neighbours in the Mediterranean. The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), founded in 1989, has held annual summit meetings from 1993 onwards. The countries of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) also meet regularly at summit level, with usually an economic agenda, and also hold ‘ASEAN + 3’ summits with China, Japan and South Korea.\textsuperscript{xxvii} In the Western hemisphere, a ‘Summit of the Americas’ was held at Miami in 1994, to launch plans for a free trade area of the entire region, and further meetings have been held in 1998 and 2001.\textsuperscript{xxviii} Regional summits are also frequent in Africa (both the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and smaller groupings) and among Arab and Islamic countries, though the economic content varies considerably. Many regional economic summits are part of a regular cycle. They vary considerably in size, as do their parent organisations.

\textit{Plurilateral Summits.} The main summits in this group are the heads of government meetings of the Commonwealth and of the Francophonie, held every two years. The economic content of Commonwealth summits has been rising, especially since the Edinburgh meeting of 1997.\textsuperscript{xxix} The ‘outreach’ summits of the European Union also fall into this category, especially the regular ASEM summits where all the member states of the EU meet a group of East Asian countries. Since 1991 the EU has also developed regular summits with several individual countries, such as the United States, Canada and Japan (its G7 partners), though these are more like bilateral summits, as only the Commission and the Presidency take part.

\textit{Objectives of Summit Meetings of International Organisations.}
The G7 summits were created with the three aims given at the beginning of this paper: collective management of the world economy; reconciling domestic and international tensions; and political leadership. It is worth applying these three objectives to the other summits noted above, to see whether they also explain the involvement of heads of government in other international organisations. The first of these aims – collective management of the world economy – does not apply generally, but a broader objective of ‘system management’ can be substituted.

*System Management.* In all the international organisations considered, system management is a major reason for having a meeting a summit level. The summits are used to give strategic direction to the organisation or to set out a programme for the future. In regular summits, the heads of government conduct a stock-taking of the organisation’s progress, and provide new impetus to work at lower levels. But even one-off events, like the UN summits, are used to bring coherence to a range of disparate activities or to give the organisation a fresh start on an auspicious date.

*Political Leadership.* Why are heads of government called upon to engage in this high-level system management? This is because the heads have a political authority which their officials and even their subordinate ministers do not have. Ministers are meant to be able to engage their national governments, but often they can only commit their own specialist department, while other parts of government take no notice. There is no doubt about the ability the heads to engage their governments *in toto.* Heads of government have another important source of authority: they have democratic legitimacy, often obtained directly from their electorates. Thus heads of government engage not only their governments, but their entire peoples. Summit meetings of international organisations, therefore, are always used to give enhanced political authority and democratic legitimacy to whatever is agreed there.

*Reconciling International and Domestic Pressures.* Once again, a question arises; why are heads of government increasingly required, in the 1990s and 2000s, to exert their political authority in international economic contexts? The answer lies in the increasing interaction of external and domestic pressures in economic policy. All the features of globalisation – increased exposure to international competition, the growth
of private direct investment and other capital flows, the diffusion of new technologies – cause international factors to penetrate deeper into domestic policy-making. More areas of government are involved in the activities of international organisations, while the decisions of these organisations have a deeper impact on national politics. Only heads of government are can reconcile all these different pressures and respond to these new political demands.

So reconciling the international and domestic pressures generated by globalisation emerges as the most important motive for international organisations to hold summit meetings. The influence of globalisation on the different summits appears very strong:

- Regional groupings created in the 1990s, like APEC and the FTAA, anticipate that trade and other types of cooperation will soon lead them into domestic policy. As ‘globalisation institutions’, they have built in a summit layer;
- The series of UN summits, starting at Rio in 1992, focus on issues with a strong domestic policy content; these can again be seen as ‘globalisation summits’.
- The G7 summit itself and the European Council started in the 1970s, at the beginning of the international penetration into domestic policy, which was identified as ‘interdependence’. But both G7 and EU summitry has greatly expanded in the 1990s, as a consequence of globalisation.

This analysis suggests that, in the summit meetings of international organisations created since the G7 was founded – and even in earlier ones – the underlying reason for involving the heads of government is to reconcile international and domestic pressures. The heads give their political authority to the organisations and provide strategic impulses in system management. In short, these summits have all been developed for the same reasons as the G7 summit was created 25 years ago.
Comparison of Decision-Making Practices

The objectives of the G7/G8 summits and of the summit meetings of international organisations may be the same. But their decision-making processes are very different. This section will review – in reverse order - the contribution to decision-making of the heads themselves, of the supporting apparatus and of other actors at these other summits, as compared with the G7/G8.

Contribution of Other Bodies. The G8 largely uses on its own apparatus for summit preparation; other organisations do the same. The G8 relies on outside institutions to implement its conclusions, though G7/G8 ministerial groups are taking on more responsibility. But the summits of international organisations are designed to use their own subordinate bodies for implementation. Providing impulses and instructions to these bodies may be the principal purpose of the summit.

International organisations may have close links with business or other private interests. For example, the EU receives input in various contexts from the Economic and Social Council, from UNICE or from the Trans-Atlantic Business Dialogue. But these outside bodies are usually linked to the organisation, rather than to its meeting at summit level. With few exceptions, both summit preparation and follow-up remains firmly in the hands of the official apparatus. APEC, however, has innovative links with business; senior executives meet in parallel to the annual APEC summit, with some direct contact with the heads. Environmental NGOs were very influential at the 1992 Rio UNCED, while other NGOs have been active at subsequent UN summits.

Contribution of the Summit Apparatus

This aspect of other summits is closer to G7/G8 decision-making and the methods used in preparing the meetings are broadly the same. Most other organisations do not have the open-ended responsibility of the G8 summit. So setting the agenda for these summits is less complicated, except in the European Council, where each Presidency has to ration its priorities. It is possible to identify in other organisations the three main techniques used by the G7/G8: endorsement of work in progress; stimulus to agreement at lower levels; and stimulus to agreement at the summit itself. But the
balance between them is different. Especially in summits of large membership, preparation focuses on getting careful agreement in advance on what is meant to happen at the summit. The heads lend their authority to the proceedings, but have little chance of using their deal-making abilities. The exceptions are those summits which are small enough to admit a real dialogue among the heads present, like the European Council and the APEC summit. But if the EU members are meeting groups of other countries at summit level, their preparations admit of little flexibility.

**Contribution of the Heads Themselves**

As the previous section indicates, other summits allow much less scope for personal intervention by the heads themselves. The participating heads have little opportunity to innovate, either in process or policy, or to profit from their political reflexes. There is little in the other summit meetings which corresponds to the ‘anti-bureaucratic’ sentiment at work in the G7 context. There are, however, certain exceptions to this. At Commonwealth heads of government meetings, the heads go off on their own into a ‘retreat’ and in APEC summits too the heads meet without officials present. At European Councils the heads themselves have to negotiate and their personal intervention matters. At the European Council in March 1999, for example, Chirac personally insisted on watering down reforms to the Common Agricultural Policy agreed at lower levels. But the European heads are constrained by their responsibilities for ‘system management’, as compared with the G7/G8.

**Conclusions**

This paper has analysed the decision-making methods of the G7/G8 system, especially of the summits, as they have developed over the last decade. The main findings have been summarised at intervals earlier in the paper. It has then addressed the questions formulated at the outset:

- What is the reason for involving heads of government in the work of international organisations?
- How do G7/G8 summits differ from other types of summit meetings?
The answer to the first question suggests that international organisations involve heads of government for essentially the same reasons as originally brought about the G7 summits. The heads are used to give strategic direction in system management; to give political authority to international decisions; and to reconcile international and domestic pressures in policy-making. The third reason is the most important and underpins the other two. As globalisation has increased the tension between domestic and international policies, so summit meetings have grown in the 1990s and 2000s.

The answer to the second question reveals wide differences between the G7/G8 and the other summits in decision-making. There is similar interaction between the heads and the supporting apparatus in all these summits, though most international organisations want to tie up summit decisions much more tightly in advance. But other summits can rely on the organisation in question for implementation of its results, while the G7/G8 has to use other bodies for this. The personal intervention of the heads prevalent in the G7/G8, in setting the format, in innovation and in political reflexes, finds less scope in other summits, except perhaps the European Council.

When the G7 summit began, similar meetings were rare; now they are much more common. The G7/G8 apparatus used to be very simple; now it is wide-ranging. The G8 heads have gained new freedom by meeting without their flanking ministers. But this is already being eroded by the growth of subordinate ministerial meetings competing for their attention. Even so, the G8 summit still remains largely unique, in offering the participating heads the opportunity to make their own personal contribution. That vision explains the abiding appeal of the G8 summit to the heads of government themselves.

Notes

i These objectives are analysed in Putnam and Bayne 1987, pp. 13-35 and Bayne 2000, pp. 3-15 and 191-217.

ii On the other summits of the 1970s and 1980s, see Putnam and Bayne 1987, pp. 145-148.

iii It is worth noting that the G7/G8 summit itself is not an international organisation, according to the criteria set out in Jacobson 1984, pp. 77-98.
Nearly all the examples of decision-making in the main body of this paper are taken from Bayne 2000, Chapters 5, 8 and 10.

This view was held strongly by French president Giscard d’Estaing and German chancellor Schmidt; see Putnam and Bayne 1987, pp. 32-34.

For an account of the development of the sherpa process, see Putnam and Bayne 1987, pp. 48-61.

Quoted in Putnam and Bayne 1987, p. 44.

The communiqué issued after Tokyo III 1993 was down to six pages. At Denver 1997 the heads issued a total of 29 pages of documents. This was cut back by half at Birmingham 1998.

The order is: France, US, UK, Germany, Japan, Italy and Canada. There is still debate on whether Russia can host its first summit in 2003, at the end of the current cycle.

The classic example of a new policy introduced without preparation at the summit is the agreement on hijacking from Bonn I 1978 – see Putnam and Bayne 1987, p. 87. But even at early summits such initiatives were very rare.

Kohl’s crusade goes well back into the 1980s. He tried to hold a G7 environment ministers meeting before Bonn II 1985, but the French declined to come. His political reflexes led him to propose a statement from Tokyo II 1986 on the Chernobyl nuclear accident, which had happened just before the summit. See Putnam and Bayne 1987, pp. 202-3 and 213-4.

Sometimes the follow-up includes a further summit meeting of the G8 and others, such as the Moscow nuclear safety summit of early 1996 and the Sarajevo summit of July 1999 on Balkan reconstruction.

There were some changes in national practice during the 1990s. Under presidents Reagan and Bush (senior), the US sherpa had been a senior State Department figure, but Clinton chose his sherpas from his White House staff and so, it appears, will his successor Bush (junior). Chancellors Schmidt and Kohl had always made the State Secretary at the finance ministry the German sherpa, but Schroeder moved the post to his Chancellery.

As with the summit itself, the arrival of the Russians has introduced rather more formality.

For an analysis of this development, see Hajnal 1999, pp.35-44.

See Kirton 2001 for an account of the G20 and its role.

The growth of ‘iteration’ at the summits is documented in Bayne 2000, pp. 200-208.

The Quadrilateral or ‘Quad’, composed of the trade ministers of the US, Japan and Canada and the responsible European Commissioner, had been founded at the Ottawa summit of 1991, though its links with the G7 process had become tenuous. See Putnam and Bayne 1987, p. 131.

Chirac’s initiative of inviting the heads of institutions to the summit itself was not repeated, however, after Lyon 1996.

This meeting was arranged without difficulty, in contrast to the resistance by the G7 heads to the proposal from Mitterrand for an encounter with other leaders before the Paris Arch summit of 1989. See Bayne 2000, p. 75, n. 5 and Attali 1995.

NGOs also influence national preparations. Some of the environmental measures agreed at Okinawa, such as the task-force for renewable energy and the provisions on illegal logging, were British initiatives worked out in cooperation with NGOs.

One early example of this trend is the Financial Action Task Force against money-laundering, founded at the Paris 1989 summit – see Bayne 2000, p. 66.

For details, see Hajnal 1999, pp. 38-39.

The 1992 UNCED at Rio was the largest of all summits, in terms of the numbers of heads of government present. Another such summit is planned for its tenth anniversary – Rio + 10 – in 2002. See Brack and others 2001.

There are no summits of the IMF or World Bank, nor of specialised agencies like the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) or the International Labour Organisation (ILO). Some heads of government attended the ministerial meeting of the WTO in Geneva in 1998, to mark the 50th anniversary of the GATT, but it never became a full summit. A late proposal to elevate the Seattle WTO meeting to summit level fell very flat.


For details on APEC and ASEAN summits, see Bergsten 2001, pp. 19-21.

The 1994 ‘Summit of the Americas’ was the first such meeting since 1967 – see Barston 1997, pp. 108-9.

On the Edinburgh meeting, see Bayne 1997.

Blair arranged a similar ‘retreat’ for the G8 heads at Birmingham 1998.

As reported in Financial Times, 27/28 March 1999.
References