Chapter 8

Reform, Assessment, and Impact

This chapter highlights cosmopolitan aspects of the F8/F7/F20 process, and focuses on reform, assessment and impact. The first section considers the variety of pressures for internal reform of the Initiative. The entire cycle of F8 summits is discussed through the lens of scholarship on reflexive governance. In the second section, the F8/F7/F20 process is assessed for how it has been shaped by changes in information technology, by changes in international relations, and by changing norms of religious public engagement.

Reform

Proposals to reform, improve, replace or abolish the F8 process arose from the beginning. As early as 2006, religious leaders were questioning the authenticity of a ‘top-down’ summit process that was not significantly influenced by civil society NGOs. Reform proposals have ranged widely in scope and kind. Some have addressed the composition of the Initiative through increasing (Canada 2010), reducing (US 2012) or changing (UK 2013) participation. Canada was the first to adopt a delegation model that reflected the religious landscape of national hosts; this was adjusted when the shadowing process shifted from the G8 to the G20. Other reform proposals have suggested institutional changes including whether and how to establish an International Continuance Committee (ICC).1 Once established, reform proposals explored the degree of organizational authority and type of leadership structure it might offer the ongoing process. When shadow summity shifted from the G8 to the G20, the committee shifted from a ‘crisis committee’ to being more of an ‘advisory committee.’ Expanding or contracting the agenda has been much discussed, as has been the degree of practical application2 and pragmatic relevance of the summit model.3 NGO-based summits (UK, US) were more supportive of developing specific public policy recommendations than gathering top-tier religious

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1 Christie and Hamilton, Email exchange, August 2009.
leaders (Russia) or galvanizing widespread civic engagement with high-level moral statements (Canada). The Initiative’s evolving relationship with civil society organizations (e.g., Christian Aid, Tear Fund), academic think tanks (e.g., the G8/G7 and G20 Research Groups), academia (e.g., the Centre for Interfaith & Cultural Dialogue at Griffith University in Australia and the ICLRS in Italy), business (e.g., The Religious Freedom and Business Foundation), development (e.g., Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs) and youth (e.g., Faiths Act Fellows with the Tony Blair Faith Foundation) have also influenced reform efforts.

Although shadow summitry would not shift from the G8 to the G20 until 2014, religious leaders were asking “Does the G8 Matter?” as early as 2008. Charles Reed from the UK delegation noted that the G8 summits had become part of a larger civil society process applying pressure to the G8 to lead the world in a different direction, but he challenged religious leaders to consider whether or not this approach might be “exaggerating the power of the G8, almost to the point of caricature” as if the G8 “could make poverty history, if it so chose, more or less as a matter of political will.” He critiqued this overly agentic focus of attention on the G8 as misplaced, but then went on to identify ways in which attention to the G8 is “entirely merited, and this relates to the issue of governance.”

We have come to realise that the new global political economy is not operating totally anarchically; it is actually being governed, however unsatisfactory that process may be from various normative points of view. To many people, the G8 now represents prospectively the effective centre of global governance. The G8 has now expanded from its traditional fire side chats to embrace meetings of foreign, finance, trade, justice, environment, home, employment, energy and education ministers as well as ad hoc meetings, task forces and working groups to address pressing issues. These meetings are backed-up by associated meetings of officials, thereby adding to a growing sense that a system of rule may be emerging in and around the annual summits of leaders. Seen from this perspective, the G8 is more than a mere symbol of power, but less than an actually powerful institution that routinely takes and carries into practice

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4 Steiner, “Reflexive Governance Dynamics Operative within Round One of the World Religious Leaders’ Dialogue with the G8 (2005–2013).”
5 Reed, “The G8: Our Spiritual and Moral Responsibilities: Does the G8 Matter?”
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.