

SUBSTANTIATING THE NEW VISION OF THE G20

by

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Plenary Session: Dialogue among Political Leaders, Scientists and Industrialists ⁽³⁾

Many serious problems we are facing today are global problems, e.g., global warming trend, spread of infectious diseases and financial crises. Could these problems really be solved satisfactorily if we do not learn to overcome the dilemma between striving for “national competitiveness” and the need for “global collaboration in one community”?

The STS forum, from its inception in 2004, has been trying to offer a unique platform for discussion among many influential individuals from different arenas of activity which normally lack communication: the policy-making community, the business community, and the scientific community. This plenary session will give them the chance to discuss various key challenges presented by science and technology in the future, and how to find a way out through this tripartite discussion.

1. The views are those of Dr. Nicholson and should not be ascribed to the Council of Canadian Academies

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2. The 6th annual Science, Technology and Society (STS) Forum was held in Kyoto, October 4-6, 2009 and was attended by more than 800 leaders in science and technology, business and government from all regions of the world.
3. Description of the goals of the Plenary Session as provided by the STS Secretariat. The panel included seven speakers and was chaired by YT Lee of Chinese Taipei, Nobel Laureate in Chemistry in 1986.

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The world is in the midst of a great transition. The post-war order that has defined global economics and politics for the past six decades is giving way. As one significant example, Prime Minister Hatoyama's election here in Japan a month ago (30 August) marks a watershed in this country's politics.

Barely a week ago (25 September) in Pittsburgh, the leaders of the G20 nations issued what is destined to be an historic communiqué, the most significant element of which was the declaration that the G20 is to be "the premier forum for our international economic co-operation".

This is an event of epochal significance – finally, a formal recognition that the world economy has evolved from the post-war hegemony assumed by the G-7, to the new reality that the nations represented in the G20 account for almost 90% of global output and for about two-thirds of the world's population*. Indeed, perhaps the one good thing to have emerged from the financial meltdown has been the belated admission by the "old club" that the world has changed – this time for real and forever.

So we find ourselves, rather suddenly, blessed with an historic opportunity, but also *challenged* to create the practical mechanisms, and the support infrastructure, to equip the G20 to become a truly effective forum for collective action on the

* The members of the G20 are: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, European Union, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, United Kingdom, and United States.

global stage. My purpose in these brief remarks is to suggest, as a basis for debate, what may be needed to make the G20 equal to the task it has set for itself.

We are all aware of the need for co-operative action to confront issues that are inherently cross-national as the triple pressures of growth, technology and globalization threaten to overwhelm the coping capacities of the world's interlinked environment, economy and society. The recurrent financial crises that have preoccupied the G20 to date are only one manifestation.

So while the G20 was born 10 years ago as a meeting of finance ministers – chaired initially by Canada's minister, Paul Martin, with whom I have had the honour to work at several points in my career – the authority of the group has evolved, now to the level of national leaders.

Of equal or even greater significance – and as the Pittsburgh communiqué clearly demonstrates – the G20 has now come to see its mission as extending well beyond simply global financial issues to also include at least energy security, climate change, trade openness, and support for the most vulnerable. In short, the G20 is destined to become the pre-eminent forum to discuss, and hopefully to *decide*, how to address co-operatively the most important environmental, economic and social issues of our time.

This is a tall order, but it must be faced. In so doing, the G20 leaders are going to need focused and co-ordinated intellectual resources dedicated to issue analysis and advice development from a thoroughly *cross-national* perspective. In practical terms, I am convinced that the G20 will need a permanent, professional secretariat. For now, the intellectual support infrastructure can be cobbled together from member governments and from existing international bodies like the IMF, the World Bank and the OECD. But, whether because of limited mandate or too narrow representation, none of these organizations, individually or collectively, can fill the bill on a permanent basis.

Above all, the professional support arm of the new G20 will need new and *sustained* injections of political energy and commitment.

I would argue that in addition to a substantively expert secretariat, the G20 also needs to find new and more effective ways to engage with the broader society, including, in particular, transnational business, the academic sector and, not least, the science and technology community. These actors provide increasingly necessary cross-national perspectives to complement the understandably nation-centered perspectives of government officials. Organizational innovation will clearly be needed to create more influential roles for non-government players than is the case today in multinational bodies, while at the same time keeping the numbers around the table manageable.

Some will say that the last thing the world needs is another talk-shop, supported by another international bureaucracy. What we need is more *action*, not more words.

While I am sympathetic to this plea, we have to be realistic. The great global issues involving our shared and interconnected environment, economy and societies include the toughest challenges mankind has ever faced. They are characterized – particularly in their interconnected behavioral aspects – more by our ignorance than by our understanding. Action must therefore be conditioned by a lot of thinking, a lot of researching, and a lot of talking – all from a diversity of perspectives. We can't just shoot from the hip. We can't even agree yet where to aim!

So study and talk we must – but from the perspective of a new order in global affairs. Because this must also be a thoroughly *informed* perspective, there is now a new urgency to reform the mandates of the existing international research and advisory machinery – where necessary combining some; perhaps eliminating others; and creating what else may be needed to fill the gaps.

Something profound happened in Pittsburgh last weekend, and the time has come to seize the moment.