

“Re-balancing the G20 from efficiency to legitimacy: The 3G coalition and the practice of global governance”

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Abstract:

This article contributes to the literature on global governance, legitimacy and small states through a detailed analysis of the Global Governance Group (3G). We examine in particular the operational impact and wider conceptual implications of the 3G’s collective diplomatic efforts on the Group of 20 (G20). By engaging in a reconfigured form of informal multilateralism we find that the 3G has been and is capable of shaping the global agenda with respect to the G20 in a way that is both more inclusive and connected with existing institutions, especially the United Nations (UN). Through this initiative, this group has effectively re-calibrated the existing narrative about small states, the G20, and global governance – shifting it from the paradigm of efficiency to one of legitimacy.

Keywords: 3G; G20; Global Governance; informal groups; small states

Informal Global Governance

As new centers of power mobilize and old institutions fall behind the curve of change, the trend in world politics has been for countries to substitute, bypass or

marginalize established institutions of global governance in favor of engagement with new forms of cooperative institutional arrangements – in short, towards informality in global governance. International Relations theory has traditionally been uneasy with forms of informal global governance.¹ Realists have dismissed them as irrelevant given that powerful members can ‘go it alone’, and neoliberal institutionalists are uncertain of what to make of these forums where formal institutional structures or binding agreements are not apparent.² Students of rational design see the advance of centralized rather than disaggregated models of International Organizations.³ Yet this trend toward informality is not only important for extending the debate about the manner by which cooperation can be secured in the global political economy “after hegemony,”⁴ but the manner by which small states attempt to influence bigger ones. Marked by less hierarchy and greater flexibility, informal global governance of small states is an admittedly fuzzy concept and explaining its theoretical relevance has therefore been a challenge for dominant IR paradigms. Moreover, the relationship between conceptualization and issue-specific international practice beyond the domain of the Security Council in select crisis situations has not been extensively explored. Notwithstanding Prantl’s call in his 2005 *International Organization* article for extended studies of the “dynamics between internal arrangements and formal IOSs”, there have been few studies that explore the use by smaller states of informal groups to increase their leverage in the global political economy and so increase our “understanding of power, legitimacy and change.”⁵

In functional terms there is thus some considerable space for specialized and more nuanced studies. Although greater attention is devoted to “multilateralism light,” the focus has been to some considerable extent on the mechanisms used by bigger and

stronger countries, not as tools by coalitions of the weak.⁶ A major strand of literature that traces forms of informal governance does so in a mode of analysis that privileges clubs of power where informality allows for easier back-room negotiations over contested issue areas as well as the implementation of tough regulations that are monitored in the privacy of informal groups, whether on a permanent or temporary ad hoc basis.⁷ Well-known groupings such as the G8, the World Trade Organization ‘green rooms’, and the Middle East ‘quartet’ on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are reflections of these informal groups, which indeed can be effective at achieving their narrow objective of furthering global cooperation.

Yet, although we have become accustomed to the idea that these contracting parties should have the requisite resources to back up their influence at the table, this approach should not limit our inclination or ability to perceive of alternative arrangements. Small countries also have engaged in informal groupings, either as counter-mobilizations via multilateral trade negotiations (the Cotton-4, or the Small Vulnerable Economies) or as part of mixed coalitions in either the trade (the Cairns group) or a variety of other issue areas through Friends (Kosovo 1999 for example, including individual countries such as Finland and members of regional forums notably the European Union, and the Organization of the Islamic Conference) and High-Level Groups (including Sustainable Energy for All) of the UN Secretary General, as well as a number of Contact groups (such as the Friends of Libya, including Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, Malta and Qatar), and Ad Hoc Advisory groups.

If asymmetrical in academic treatment and practical form, these counter-illustrations open up another important research strand that privileges cases where small

countries have responded to informal initiatives by big actors by informal organizational counter-responses of their own. A prime example of this phenomenon is provided by the synergetic emergence of the G20 and the Global Governance Group (3G). On the one hand, the concert-like power of the G20 in a modern global economy that is characterized as highly interdependent is well understood. On the other hand, the meaning of the 3G, where material resources do *not* explain who sits at the table, remains under-analyzed.

It is the purpose of this article to provide insights into broader puzzles about how cooperation is built into the global economic order, with particular insights about the role of states that are non-members of the G20. How do we explain the presence of an informal group such as the 3G that serves to bridge informal groups like the G20 with the formal pinnacle of global governance, the United Nations (UN)? Are informal groups just a part of the a new network of alliances that cloud our sight of the real forums of decision-making and power such as the UN Security Council, or even some smaller component of the G20? Or is their emergence and growing presence in the arena of international politics a sign of shifts, however subtle (though no less significant), in established arrangements of global governance? The article provides insight into these questions based on more than a dozen extensive and anonymous personal interviews with ambassadors and UN representatives from stakeholder states

The Rise of the 3G: Bridging the Efficiency and Legitimacy Gap

In the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis, the Group of 20 (G20) emerged on the world stage as the leading forum for international economic collaboration. Originally established in 1999 as a meeting of finance ministers from some of the world's most

powerful states (including the United States, China and Germany), the G20 was first convened in Washington D.C. by George W. Bush as a leader's summit during the onset of the financial crisis, and has continued to hold meetings around the globe.⁸ When it became clear that existing institutions – the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Group of 8 (G8) and, notably, the UN – could not coordinate an effective response to the crisis,⁹ the G20 was elevated to the principal forum for collective response management.¹⁰ This retreat from universalism was reinforced by the choice of setting. The Secretary General of the United Nations (UNSG) lobbied hard for the inaugural meeting of the G20 to be held in New York but was rebuffed by President Bush, who preferred Washington, D.C. for a number of reasons. In particular, a meeting in Washington would avoid linking the G20 to Wall Street and the culpability of the US, and demonstrated a clear preference for the IFIs over the UN system. It was hence in Washington that the G20, through the cooperative efforts of its member countries, was able to reduce the volatility in financial markets, implement regulatory reform, and establish a global economic stimulus to help cushion countries against the adverse effects caused by the financial crisis.¹¹

However, this combination of an exclusive form of executive multilateralism without participation or oversight from the wider international community elicited a strong counter-response from the states left out of the G20. Despite the inclusion of BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China) as members, the impression that the G20 was a group of powerful countries that formulated and imposed rules on all others persisted largely as a result of the overrepresentation of European countries as members, an

underrepresentation of African countries, and the absence of appropriate mechanisms for non-members to engage in a constructive dialogue with the G20 process.¹²

Substantive questions were also raised about where the powers of the G20 should be demarcated,¹³ particularly given signs in 2008-09 that the G20 was venturing into issues considered the domain of sovereign states – including exchange rates, debt levels, monetary policy¹⁴ and non-economic realms involving the environment and global security.¹⁵ Procedurally, critics expressed concern about the implications of the G20 in terms of its impact on the already weakened UN – the intergovernmental organization that had become the hub of modern global governance in the post WWII era¹⁶ – and on how future decisions on global issues are to be made.¹⁷ The ability of the G20 to act outside of the parameters of the UN instilled fear in non-members not only symbolically but also instrumentally by having their interests undermined by it. 3G countries noted that there was a “problem with the G20 because it was making decisions that impacted the broader UN membership...[and that]...was unfair to those outside as these countries had no impact [on G20 decisions].”¹⁸

In terms of resistance, the highest profile group coalesced around the ALBA plus countries (led by Venezuela and Nicaragua), which pushed for an alternative summit on the financial crisis at the UN General Assembly in June 2009. Yet, although the UNSG’s backing for the Stiglitz Commission provided intellectual and policy support for this event, the UN’s Conference on the World Finance and Economic Crisis ultimately reinforced the traditional small state image of voice as an expression of collective solidarity with little leverage. While containing some considerable ideational/normative

appeal, as indeed earlier initiatives directed toward a New International Economic Order had done, it was overshadowed as a policy-maker by the G20.

A second but over-lapping cluster of states that critiqued the G20 came from those countries that saw themselves as potential candidates for entry. Norway serves as a prime illustration of this response. Norwegian Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Store was a harsh critic of the G20's legitimacy, stating in the lead-up to the Toronto 2010 G20 summit that "the self-appointment of the G20 represents, from the point of view of international law and multilateral principles, a major step backwards in the way international cooperation has occurred since World War II."¹⁹ Yet, despite these misgivings about its mandate and functions as a forum for setting the global agenda, Norway's major policy recommendation was not the abandonment but an expansion of the G20 with an additional seat at the table for the Nordic Council.²⁰

Other states in this same potential candidate category included Egypt, Pakistan and Colombia. Akin to the ALBA plus group, this cluster tapped into feelings of resentment via the G77. Although unable to re-shape the G20, these states were strong enough to deny the summit some degree of legitimacy by blocking references to the G20 in the UN context, especially via the 2nd Committee dealing with Economic and Financial affairs.²¹ This exposes the danger in terms of the G20's informal but exclusive nature – in a similar fashion to the UNSC in crisis situations – by which "the processes of diplomatic problem solving and its collective legitimation... become increasingly decoupled."²²

Yet, despite the apprehensions that spurred much of the negative criticism of the G20 from the so-called "G172" (UN countries that are not G20 members), their approach

to reform have taken the form of calls for inclusion in the G20 process rather than resistance.²³ Notwithstanding its structural shortcomings, many non-members still view the G20 as capable of making positive contributions to the international community, as in its “effective”²⁴ and “commendable”²⁵ handling of the international financial crisis in which it “emerged out of the crisis...[as]...a mechanism to get people together”.²⁶ Minister Store’s push towards for a more inclusive G20 was echoed and, significantly, expanded upon by Ambassador Vanu Gopala Menon, permanent representative of Singapore to the United Nations. At the University of New York in late March 2010, Ambassador Menon, spoke of the international reactions to the G20.²⁷ He stated that Singapore had found a different way, one that – rather than simply accepting, rejecting or ignoring the G20 process²⁸ – sought to build a more equitable relationship between the G20 and non-G20 countries.²⁹

As early as April 2009, during the G20 London Summit, it was Menon who arranged meetings with non-G20 countries in order to develop the idea of the Global Governance Group.³⁰ However, it was not political maneuvering alone that allowed Singapore to secure its leadership position within the 3G. Qatar, for example, hosted an international summit in May 2010 to discuss ways that the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) initiative might be advanced. Yet, given that it was already involved in a number of large initiatives, it eventually relinquished its G20 responsibilities to Singapore and Switzerland (*see below*).³¹ Including these two countries, there are 28 members in the 3G: six from Southeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific (Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei, the Philippines, New Zealand and Vietnam); three from the Middle East (Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates); three from Africa (Rwanda, Senegal and Botswana); eight

from Europe (Sweden, Belgium, Ireland, Luxembourg, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Monaco and San Marino); two from South America (Uruguay and Chile) and six from Latin America and the Caribbean (Costa Rica, Guatemala, Panama, Jamaica, Barbados and Bahamas).

In approach, the 3G was not a complete break with the older tradition of solidarity among the marginalized from the bottom up. As with earlier expressions of this type,, there was an explicit oppositional component in this coalition – with an emphasis on voice opportunity – given that key members of the 3G had been targeted by the G20 directly and indirectly via the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as offshore financial centers (*see below*). This targeting was especially intense at the 2009 London Summit with the publication of the G20 communiqué in tandem with the OECD list.

If capable of blocking influence, nonetheless, 3G countries faced other constraints in dealing with the G20, due to the G20's expanded membership. In addition to the BRICS, the G20 contained a number of middle powers – notably, South Korea, Australia, Mexico and Turkey – that possessed both the skill and space for entrepreneurial activity. Such an extension of the “head table” made the condition of non-membership more acute, in the context of an explicit demonstration of global re-ordering. Whereas the voice of small states had been traditionally amplified by the declaratory signs of solidarity with big countries from the global South, the creation of the G20 recalibrated North-South relations. Moving the general insights offered by Jan Nederveen Pieterse³² in terms of the move toward a new axis of relations into diplomatic practices on the ground, a different polarization evolved between the ‘old’ establishment (the G7/8), the BRICS and ‘rising’

middle powers, and a larger cohort of smaller states on a global basis. Especially sensitive was the fact that big countries with membership in a wide range of organizations from the European Union (the UK, France, Germany and Italy, plus Spain as a permanent guest), the African Union/NEPAD (South Africa), ASEAN (Indonesia), and the Gulf Cooperation Council (Saudi Arabia) were brought into the G20, with smaller members of the same organizations and/or regions were left out.³³

The G20, nonetheless, could not marginalize the 3G. Indeed, to a certain and significant extent, the G20 needed the 3G insofar as those states that comprise the G172 proved unlikely to buy into G20 decisions, initiatives or projects that do not represent their interests.³⁴ The 3G emerged “in response to very broad changes in the global strategic levels, [including] changes in China, India, [and the] emergence of the BRICS...[3G countries] are part of a shift where the regular channels are not able to respond to the changes taking place.”³⁵ To this end, the 3G acts as a forum that allows the G20 to respond to the concerns of non-members without, notably, requiring significant changes to current institutional arrangements.³⁶ For example, the inclusion of small states at the G20 high table via the 3G provision of variable geometry – a pragmatic approach whereby countries participate in initiatives based on their capacity to address them³⁷ – can foster informal alliances between large and small states on a variety of issues,³⁸ and can inspire creative strategies for addressing pressing global concerns:

We started the 3G with the idea of variable geometry. If the G20 discusses volatility we [Chile] want to be there. If you are discussing agriculture, you need Uruguay. They [3G members] are trying to see who is relevant and willing in terms of how to deal with many problems.³⁹

As Prantl points out, such “redelegation of tasks to informal groups of states may well be seen as a stabilizing element for international institutions in transition...[that]...reshapes the [global] balance between power and legitimacy, [and] which may temper the pressure toward formal change.”⁴⁰

Indeed, in that space that is being created by transformation of global order,⁴¹ the actors moving in to fill it may not be big states such as the BRICS , but may in fact be small states,⁴² given their capacity (and need) to craft fluid, innovative and pragmatic responses to global issues when they perceive that they are being shut-out from the decision-making processes of global governance.⁴³ As one official explained, “[w]e want to make it clear that we have the UN and you cannot do whatever you want. We need to be tough sometimes...if you are a small country, you can speak loud. But it is not easy. We can do good work, and influence things a little bit.”⁴⁴ As new centers of power mobilize and established organizations fall behind the curve of change, the 3G, in short, is very capable of shaping the global agenda in a way that is both more inclusive and streamlined through existing institutions.

The 3G Position and Substance

Arguing that “[p]ower itself confers legitimacy”⁴⁵ and that the UN is unique in that it is the only global organization with undisputed legitimacy and universal participation,⁴⁶ the 3G has proposed several measures to enhance engagement between the G20 and UN members. As developed most fully in a document entitled, *The United Nations in 2025 – How can the UN Remain relevant in Addressing Tomorrow’s Global Challenges* (2011), it outlined various actions that are necessary for the UN to assume the

dominant role in resolving world challenges and governance issues.⁴⁷ In specific terms the 3G proposed that before future summits, the G20 should hold consultations with non-G20 members through regular and predictable channels. The G20 should also provide updates about preparations and outcomes to the UN both before and after G20 meetings. Moreover, although the UN Secretary-General and his staff have been regular participants at the G20 Summits and preparatory meetings, their participation should be formalized. In addition, given that there is sufficient flexibility in the G20 process to engage all relevant parties on issues of global concern, the G20 process should arrange for the participation of non-G20 members in discussions on these specialized issues. Finally, the participation of established regional organizations (e.g. APEC, ASEAN, AU Commission, EU and NEPAD) should be regularized.⁴⁸

If the proposed approach is undertaken, the 3G is convinced that the G20 process can become more transparent and inclusive, which would in turn garnish greater support for and strengthen the actions of the G20.⁴⁹ By maintaining that the United Nations “is the only global body with universal participation and unquestioned legitimacy,”⁵⁰ the 3G’s strategy is not only to bring the G20 within the framework of the UN, but also to act as a UN pressure group for G20 reform.⁵¹ The goal here is to forge a G20/UN relationship that is complementary rather than competing or contradictory.⁵² As the Singaporean Foreign Minister George Yeo put it in March 2010:

We participate in this ‘3G’ process in order to help the G20 assume greater legitimacy in the global community of nations. It is to improve the G20’s interaction with the general membership in the UN, which in turn would

build wider support for G20 actions. It is important that the decisions of the G20 take into account the interest of other countries and are supported by them. The G20 process should strengthen the UN and other international organizations, not weaken them.⁵³

Yeo's remarks reflect those of the ambassadors and UN representatives interviewed for this paper who stated, for example, that "[w]e need to reform the UN to make it work for us. But we need to be careful not to overstep boundaries in doing so,"⁵⁴ and that the 3G strategy towards the G20 and the UN "reinforces the point that norm setting really needs to take place at the UN. While the G20 decision[s] need to be reached on a consensus...there is a need to bring this agreement back to the UN body".⁵⁵

Hence the three "founding philosophies" of the 3G: 1) to confer greater legitimacy to the G20 process; 2) to act as a bridge linking G20 and UN membership; and 3) to ensure that the G20 hears the voices of non-members.⁵⁶ As one official put it, "we are small countries, but we need to improve global governance and the only thing that we must make clear to them is that we are very pro UN. We don't want the UN destroyed."⁵⁷

In regard to implementing these reforms, it is important to note that the 3G has experienced some small successes. In 2010, for example, the Korean government extended an invitation to Singapore – as Chair of the 3G – to participate in the G20 Seoul Summit.⁵⁸ The following year, during the G20 Cannes Summit in 2011, French officials made it a priority to arrange consultations between G20 and non-G20 members and, following the recommendations of the 3G, invited the UN Secretary-General to participate in the Summit.⁵⁹

These successes are contextualized by 3G strategy relative to offensive action by the G20 towards 3G member activities. Upon its inception, it appeared as though many members in the new 3G grouping also happened (and not by much coincidence) to be key financial centres that opposed G20 efforts to clamp down on grey zones in financial transactions. This common interest, however, did not mean outright resistance by the 3G along the lines of a single issue. Rather, in terms of substance, the issues promoted by 3G countries represented the divergence of categories and interests prioritized among the targeted offshore financial countries. Several other members of the G20 were put into the same “grey” category as Singapore and Switzerland, including Lichtenstein and Chile, while other 3G members, such as Costa Rica and Uruguay, were placed on the “black” list of non-cooperative tax havens.

These divergent priorities were further complicated by the image or branding effects of G20/OECD targeting of offshore financial centers which played up the image problems of affected countries and downplayed their respective image enhancers. The core countries of the 3G, for example, had played constructive roles in various aspects of international relations. Some of this leadership was provided in discrete areas such as Singapore’s niche diplomacy on Law of the Sea, or Chile on the International Labour Organization or the International Criminal Court. In other cases, it was far more diffuse, as in Costa Rica’s reputation for being a Samaritan state or Switzerland’s hosting of UN organizations. In other words, although the commonality remained “that most members didn’t think that they were treated fairly by the lists created by OECD countries...” “[i]n general terms, there are only smaller groups of countries represented in the 3G group.

These countries feel a stronger need to have some democratic legitimacy on policies that relate to everyone. This was the political underpinning of the [3G] movement.”⁶⁰

Consequently, under these circumstances of 1) divergent interests among the targeted offshore financial countries; and 2) issues of image, there was a prime logic within the 3G to engage diplomatically and settle the offshore financial issue via efficiency at the multilateral level. As a result, although proposals were made that meetings be held between senior officials or even finance ministers, this approach was rejected. Through the coordinated efforts of the 3G, the focus instead shifted to a bilateral response to the G20/OECD targeting with concentrated, if uneven, emphasis on implementing agreed exchange of tax information (EOI) standards in a more behind the scenes and low-key fashion.

What gave the 3G its originality was not therefore its common defensive stance against stigmatization in instrumental terms, but rather its ability to shift the objectives towards a re-balancing of the relationship between non-members and members of the G20. The 3G does not, therefore, “try to respond to all the issues of the G20. [Instead] what we have chosen to do is to focus on issues that are the most important to the group. In terms of global governance, it’s a process of reforming the global governance framework.”⁶¹

Akin to the other strands of solidarity by non-members of the G20, this offensive approach combined intensity of voice opportunities with scope of mobilization. The difference was its adaptive quality, with some degree of accommodation to the existence of the G20 so long as the summit process shape-shifted in accordance to the tenets of

inclusionary global governance. The key to this strategy with respect to goals was to limit the capacity of the G20 to dictate the rules of the game in global governance not by outright resistance or denying the existence (or legitimacy) of the G20, but by integrating the activities of the 3G with the G20 both directly (by an insertion of the 3G into the G20 process) and indirectly (by a rapprochement between the UN and the G20). In doing so, the narrative about the G20 was transformed from the efficiency dimension to the legitimacy dimension. As one official noted during our interview,

There is a trade-off between efficiency and legitimacy. We take a sort of pragmatic approach to this...Mostly, we are favourable to the G20 because at the height of the international financial crisis, they were effective. Now...we do support not only coordination, but we would [also] like to see more accountability to the UN and the bodies to which the Bretton Woods institutions are based on. We would like to see more of this and seeing an opportunity to get more engaged.⁶²

With respect to means, the 3G built up its own standing through the power of numbers and a diversity of membership that was difficult to ignore. Structurally there were some limits imposed on these coalition-building efforts. Some member-states of the EU, notably Luxembourg, have very similar profiles as the core 3G membership, but did not join. The 3G also did not include a wide number of African countries, and even those that joined kept a low profile. Notwithstanding these constraints, however, the 3G was able to build up an impressive degree of geographic diversity with 29/30 members from Europe, the Middle East, the Americas, Asia and Africa. At the same time, although a number of the 3G members can be placed in the category of developmental states the 3G

“is made up of both rich and developing countries”⁶³ and none could be depicted as fragile or failed states. On the contrary, in terms of the list of countries by GDP (nominal) per capita, a number of the 3G members were at the top of the hierarchy: Luxembourg (#1), Qatar (#2), Switzerland (#4), and Singapore (#10).⁶⁴ All of these countries had sophisticated economies and professional foreign services, thus cutting into the advantages of big powers in terms of information and access.

One route in projecting capacity was through an overlapping initiative with the World Economic Forum, which networked Singapore and Switzerland with Qatar – a formidable small state diplomatic actor, and one, notably, without an offshore financial issue association. George Yeo, Singapore’s foreign minister, travelled to Davos to link up with state officials of small European states as well as a larger group of opinion-leaders. It was during this stage of the initiative that the name “3G” was formalized – an idea that came from Lichtenstein. Another source of strength was the willingness of the core states in the 3G - in particular Singapore, Switzerland and Lichtenstein - to use the diplomatic capacity of their UN offices in New York to build leverage for the group. Such buy-in demonstrated that the 3G directed its voice opportunity not only from the outside, but from inside the global system.

In implementing this strategy the 3G made its own mechanisms valuable, even indispensable, to both the G20 and the UN. “It’s not just that the UN pushes for more transparency,” as one ambassador noted, “it’s [also] often the case the G20 wants to see their work reflected in the UN texts, so it makes sense that two sides with common interests meet.”⁶⁵ The problem for the G20 as it moved beyond its catalytic stage was that of entrenching its legitimacy. Although most important for the BRICS, that did not want

to be seen as explicitly breaking away from the tenets of universalism and solidarity, legitimacy was also a concern for the Obama administration, which wanted to mend some fences with the UN and the wider international community in the post-Bush era. A measure of this US concern with legitimacy can be gauged by the fact that President Obama's Sherpa for the G20 had begun to include the UN in his shuttle diplomacy, a huge contrast with the culture of neglect for the G20 under the Bush administration.

The 3G's ability to deliver on the legitimacy dimension of global governance is perhaps best exemplified by the UN's unwillingness to acknowledge the G20's existence formally in its proceedings and documentation. In facilitating this breakthrough – through the text of the resolution 65/94 - the 3G had to overcome resentment to the G20 not so much of resister countries directly but the core countries within the overall structure of the G77. Here sheer numbers played a crucial part in allowing resolution 65/94 to be adopted by consensus in December 2010, as open conflict with the 3G meant that resisters would have to break with a large group of the UN membership. The success of resolution 65/94 led to a more sophisticated (albeit continuing) debate about the comparative advantages between the G20 and the UN. Joseph Deiss, the Swiss president of the UNGA in 2010 conceded, for example, that the G20 had “effectively delivered” rapid and coordinated response at least in the context of the “immediate aftermath” of the 2008 financial crisis. He also conceded that in this process the UN had been to a considerable extent marginalized – it was talking through the UNGA without the G20 listening. That being said, however, the G20, as with other ad hoc groups, had “questionable legitimacy” and the need then was for “the best possible articulation of expertise, leadership and legitimacy, and to do so in a setting of coherence.”⁶⁶

A second means by which the 3G was able to bridge its leverage and the extension of legitimacy was through the rapprochement of the UNSG's role in the G20. As noted, the Bush administration had chosen the IFIs over the UN in an explicitly exclusionary fashion. What the G20 was instrumental in doing was to re-insert the UNSG into the G20 process, if not as a primary actor then at least in a connected/supportive manner. This re-insertion was done above all through persistent lobbying in the run-up to the Toronto 2010 summit, due to concerns that Secretary General Ban-Ki Moon would be excluded from the summit. A third achievement in instrumental results, due to 3G pressure and in combination with other forces (including the push by South Korea as host), was the acceptance by the G20 of a formula for non-member participation, enabling the summit host to invite up to five guests. Although mainly directed at the settlement of the question of regional representation, the 3G was the main beneficiary of the decision of this G20 just before the November 2010 Summit to introduce a 'G20 plus five' approach, with the Korean preparatory committee explicitly stating that this decision had been made because "we finally agreed that we needed to have a better geographical balance."⁶⁷

Yet, given even its capacity to provide innovative solutions to the decision-making processes of global governance, it would be a mistake to exaggerate the 3G's impact on the G20's effectiveness vis-à-vis its agenda. The 3G did promote a form of variable geometry that sought to establish and justify a dialogue between the G20 and the 3G on issues of instrumental importance to the 3G, as illustrated in its concerns on the labeling of its members in the offshore financial-related issues. But as the 3G moved into bilateral means of dispute-resolution and the pressure from the G20 on these issues

relaxed, this concept of bilateralism spilled over into other issue-areas, in particular food security in which countries such as Chile and Uruguay had important interests as agricultural exporters. At the same time, this downplaying of its overall instrumental effectiveness should not overlook the 3Gs influence on the legitimacy side. Unlike the resisters or the aspirants to the G20 process, the 3G reconciled self-selective executive multilateralism with the principles of global governance. While grounded in national interests, this reconciliation could have only been achieved via the “3G[’s] innovative method of modern diplomacy”⁶⁸ - its subordination of issue-specific instrumental concerns to a wider 3G narrative that was grounded on the need for transparency, greater scope for participation, and some join-up between formal and informal mechanisms of multilateralism.

As with other components of small state diplomacy there was a strong element of symbolism attached to the 3G’s achievements. Certainly there was little in the way of immediate material benefits that came out of the coalitional exercise, and the instrumental benefits from the 3G were gained largely at the national level. Leveraging the voice opportunity amplified by numbers, Singapore was able to move towards an inside status in the G20, and the general consensus among the ambassadors and UN representatives interviewed for this paper, in the words of one official, is

that Singapore was the [3G] developer. They are a strong economy. They are completely globalized, they depend on the dynamics of the global economy as much or more than any other country. They decided that they cannot just look at what is going on with the G20. They established coalitions of likeminded

countries, with similar interests and developed that...[T]hey have been the engine to this.⁶⁹

Invited by South Korea to attend the Seoul summit, Singapore was invited back by France at the Cannes G20 in November 2011. These benefits reflected a demand for an in-between approach from a non-member that was not tilted towards blocking but rather towards entrepreneurial and technical leadership on an issue-specific basis. The status of Singapore in this regard can be judged by its repeat attendance, in a context where the ‘natural’ representative of the 3G would be country such as Switzerland. To the credit of Singapore, it was able to supply this form of leadership over a mixed coalition with representatives of both rich countries from the North and well-to-do and poor countries from the global South. The recipe of keeping the coalition was a mix of industriousness and an interesting mix of public relations and risk-adverseness. Using resources not available to most small states Singapore has “over time...paid the bill”⁷⁰, and kept the momentum up by holding monthly meetings and preparing documents. Its ambassador to the UN used an effective form of public diplomacy to complement the inside game of lobbying with an outside game that showcased the narrative of fairness and equity in terms of global governance.

The extension of Singapore’s diplomatic attributes into the 3G – and through these into a more privileged position in the G20 – also reinforced its own skills and capabilities. Although stimulated into action on the G20 due to its non-member role, Singapore (along with Switzerland) enjoys insider status in other parts of the G20 extended network. This role is most evident in the membership of these key 3G countries in the FSB. In terms of the shaping and monitoring of an array of regulatory issues,

therefore, Singapore (along with Switzerland) was a rule maker, not a rule taker. The finance minister of Singapore was also appointed head of the IMFC. Singapore also was willing to pass on leadership when the context of the G20 evolved, thus defusing emerging rivalry issues. “Singapore is a good convener,” remarked one official, “but this does not mean that Singapore will be the only one to go to the G20 in the future.”⁷¹ To be sure, as witnessed by the dynamics of the Los Cabos meeting in June 2012, Singapore’s visibility in the 3G could be reduced on a summit by summit basis, with Chile taking on the task of supplying much of the group’s entrepreneurial and technical capabilities.⁷² Such a transition reinforced the impression of success with respect to the impact of informal-based multilateralism, in that this handing off of leadership enhanced the 3G’s credibility in terms of the practice of global governance while consolidating institutional access to the G20 in the context of an easing of intensity over the question of financial centres.

Conclusion

In this nascent world order in which the operational rules do not follow predictable patterns, small countries have an accentuated ability to draw attention to global governance issues. In such a context they can influence important policy decisions of dominant institutions.⁷³

This space for influencing the international system is at odds with the assumptions about a movement towards ‘multipolarity’ in which power coalesces around a small number of dominant poles. To be sure, it is increasingly important for small states to remain attuned to the desires and interests of emerging economies and new world powers.⁷⁴ Indeed, the ascendancy of the G20 in global governance fits this template. If

not a classic concert of powers along the lines of the model associated with the 1814/15, 1919 and 1945 eras, the G20 represents a condominium of big states from both the G8 and the global South. Galvanized by the 2008 financial crisis, the G20 came into being as a self-selected group of countries designed to be systemically important.

Certainly, at the outset, the 3G countries were excluded from even a traditional form of “pyramidal” structure featured in traditional trade negotiations.⁷⁵ Many of the 3G key members were branded as problem countries due to the OFC/tax haven issue and as such as targets for stigmatization in key components for their national economic development. Although different from the meaning of “exiting” in other manifestations of informal governance – that is to say, in relation to the movement away from the UN framework – the first success of the 3G was to defuse this targeting by moving the issue from the political/diplomatic to the technical domain.

By then taking the high road – that is, by emphasizing the need for equality at the core of a reconfigured form of robust multilateralism - the 3G became an agent for solutions, especially with respect to legitimacy of the G20 process. In conceptual terms, this push for balance fits the conclusions of some important recent literature that signals the limits of big power influence through informal mechanism, As Randall Stone puts it: “[there is an upwards bound] that powerful states can display, and it requires that informal prerogatives of the powerful are compensated with a degree of formal control by the weak. In this sense, the legitimacy of the organization is a binding constraint that influences institutional design.”⁷⁶

The 3G in practice effectively bridged the efficiency of the G20 with the legitimacy of the United Nation members, or “the other G172”. Consequently, it was able

to carve out a key intermediary role for itself within the existing network of regional and extra-regional interests of global governance. This “quiet” Singaporean initiative thus gathered kudos for its innovative and pragmatic “middle way” approach, and for the careful manner in which officials exercised their diplomatic skills to advance its mandate.⁷⁷ Unlike the resisters, whose agenda was to use the crisis to push for more fundamental and wide-ranging change, the 3G allowed the G20 to receive some imprint of credibility from the United Nations. In terms of realizing the power of small states, “[t]he creation of the 3G was a step in the right direction...When you have issues that go directly to the heart of others, it is important...to have channels to have input on these issues.”⁷⁸

In tactical terms, such an approach bridged as well the divide between a risk orientation and risk aversion. Singapore was willing to distinguish itself – and the 3G coalition – both from the G20 membership and the resisters. Yet, at the same time, the institutionalized adjustment was pursued via a change in the G20 (with the inclusion of non-members), not the UN.

While not wanting to over-state the instrumental achievements of the 3G, in terms of agency, the role of this coalitional is extremely important in shifting the framework of the G20 specifically and global governance more generally from a tight club to a loose network of states. Instead of the centralization that appeared to be the mode of operation at the outset, one of the major impacts of the 3G was in recalibrating the image of the summit process to a far more decentralized model in a multi-functioning environment. Such leverage challenges the assumption of multipolarity in favor of an image of non-

polarity; “a world dominated not by one or two or even several states but rather by dozens of actors possessing and exercising various kinds of power.”⁷⁹

Notwithstanding the heterogeneity of the 3G, the looseness of its organizational structure allowed it to hang together. Areas of potential conflict between members of the group were minimized, with care by individual states not to overplay their hand or try to push the group towards positions that were problematic from either an international or domestic position. The preparation and research underpinning of the 3G’s efforts were crucial to its performance, without the leader-centrism of the G20. Instrumental here, as we have noted throughout the article, has been the role of Singapore as intellectual leader, provider of technical support, and convener of the group.

In overall terms, therefore, the 3G re-calibrated the narrative about small states, the G20, and global governance. Building on the notion of resilience the 3G was able to use a mix of diplomatic skill and concentrated focus to adapt under stressful conditions. Rather than acting as unorthodox agents, however, this informal grouping acted ultimately as a stabilizer of the international system, alleviating a wider sense of resentment about the G20, and as an enabler for the embeddedness of global governance in the practice of international politics via the economic agenda of the G20.

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