

# The 2008 Hokkaido-Toyako G8 Summit: neither summit nor plummet

Hugo Dobson

## The 2008 Hokkaido-Toyako G8 Summit: neither summit nor plummet

Hugo Dobson

### Introduction

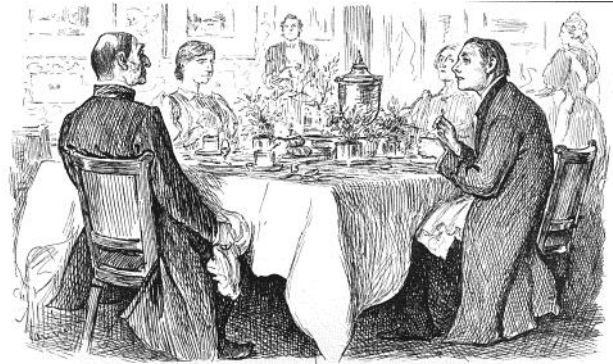
It's not often you hear or read this combination of words in the same sentence but surely this year's summit meeting of the Group of 8 (G8) leaders will be etched on people's memories for generations to come. Nobody could have predicted the cataclysmic events that unfolded on the northernmost island of Japan in the summer of 2008: the city of Sapporo attacked by the vengeful space monster Guilala; the leaders of the G8 countries united in their efforts to destroy the creature; former Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro ended recent speculation and returned to take over the reigns of power in a time of crises; and the G8 leaders taken hostage by Kim Jong-II. For an annual diplomatic event that is often portrayed as little more than a meaningless ceremony, this has to have been one of the most unforgettable summits in its thirty-three history. At least that's what happened if you only watched the highly amusing monster movie *Girara no GyakushÅ«: Toyako Samitto Kiki Ippatsu* (*Guilala Strikes Back: Crisis at the Lake Toya Summit*) premiered in Hokkaido the weekend before the G8 summit began.



**Guilala Strikes Back!**

In mundane reality, Japan hosted the thirty-fourth G8 summit from 7 to 9 July 2008 and it would have probably taken events of the magnitude described above for the world's press to have given the G8 summit serious attention. Most media depictions of the G8 are sadly predictable to the degree that the reports for next year's summits could probably be copied and pasted now. They tend to fall into one of two camps: it is either an evil behemoth of global capitalism irresistibly crushing all under foot, rather like Guilala did to Sapporo, or it is regarded as an impotent, anachronistic and

irrelevant talking shop at which what the leaders ate at dinner gets more press attention than their discussions and declarations. In fact, it is something different altogether, something that does not lend itself to quick fixes, easy soundbites and simplistic characterisations, but as the two depictions above have become the mainstream of media reporting on the G8, enquiring minds have to go out of their way to locate more nuanced and contextualised understandings of the G8. If they do, then it becomes clear that the G8 summit is a flexible and informal get-together of like-minded leaders (and Russia) for the creation of consensus on how to address common problems. It reaches this consensus incrementally over time and in an *ad hoc* fashion. Furthermore, not being a legal entity, it lacks the means and the legitimacy to force through any agreements reached. Instead, the G8 should be understood as part of a long-term process stretching back to the mid-1970s. It is a think tank where ideas can be floated and agreements struck. It can then prod, poke and encourage individual governments or the legitimate institutions of global governance like the United Nations to take action. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't, but what the G8 represents is a unique forum in world politics and expectant journalists attempting to file stories of major breakthroughs are going to be naturally disappointed. In this light, Japan hosted, once again, a moderately successful summit that was something of a curate's egg – good in parts. In a number of ways, this year's summit can be seen as an incremental step in various directions from policy outcomes to the way in which the G8 leaders meet.



**Bishop: "I'm afraid you've got a bad egg, Mr Jones"**

**Curate: "Oh, no, my Lord, I assure you that parts of it are excellent!"**

**"True Humility" by George du Maurier, originally published in Punch, 1895.**

## The G8 in 2008

First of all, to place this year's summit in some kind of context. The G8 leaders first met as a G6 at the chateau of Rambouillet in November 1975. This year was the fifth time for Japan to host the summit with previous summits taking place in Tokyo (1979, 1986 and 1993) and Okinawa (2000). The Windsor Hotel served as the comfortable venue, selected by former Prime Minister Abe Shinzo largely for security reasons, although Hokkaido had been pencilled in as the summit venue as early as the previous 2000 Okinawa Summit. The management of the hotel is seen to be a recent success story, having been a product, and later victim of, Japan's bubble economy.

This year's summit was hosted by Prime Minister Fukuda Yasuo and attended by Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper, French President Nicolas Sarkozy, US President George W. Bush, UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and President of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso. Each leader was accompanied by a top bureaucrat, known as the sherpa, whose job was to guide their respective leaders to the summit of

international diplomacy. This year Kono Masaharu, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, served as Fukuda's sherpa.

In keeping with the G8 as a process, the summit of the leaders was preceded by a string of ministerial meetings throughout the year. These included Development Ministers (5-6 April, Tokyo), Labour Ministers (11-13 May, Niigata), Environment Ministers (24-26 May, Kobe), Energy Ministers (7-8 June, Aomori), Justice and Home Affairs Ministers (11-13 June, Tokyo), Finance Ministers (13-14 June, Osaka), G8 Science and Technology Ministers (15 June, Okinawa), and Foreign Ministers (26-27 June, Kyoto). Although not part of the G8 process, the Japanese government used its presidency of the G8 summit to draw a link to the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) that was held from 28-30 May in Yokohama. There was even an old boys' summit (known formally as the InterAction Council and founded by the Prime Minister Fukuda Takeo in 1983) that took place in Sweden at the end of June and at which former Prime Minister Mori Yoshiro represented Japan.

The summit schedule was spread over three days. On the first day, 7 July, the G8 leaders were joined by a number of African outreach partners a part of a process that was begun by the Japanese government at the previous summit it hosted in Okinawa in July 2000. The following day, 8 July, was the only time allocated solely for the G8 leaders to discuss a range of political, economic and security issues. The final day, 9 July, began with a working session of the G8 and the 'Outreach Five' (Brazil, China, India, Mexico and South Africa, who have cast themselves as the more positively titled G5), joined later in the day by the other major economies/emitters of South Korea, Indonesia and Australia to discuss climate change. During these three days and across the whole year of Japan's chairmanship of the G8, a number of trends of relevance to both Japan, the G8 and the world can be

discerned, which will be discussed below.

One final contextual but slightly tangential point: recent G8 summits have been distinct by the consistency in the attendance of their personnel. Tony Blair, Bush, Jacques Chirac, Koizumi and Gerhard Schroeder were regular summiteers who could use the informality of these annual gatherings at the G8 to reinforce their interpersonal relationships. This was, after all, one of the original intentions of the summit process. For example, it was the G8 where the leaders came together after the divisions of the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, and in response to the London bombings of July 2005, again the G8 leaders bonded. However, this year many of the leaders were either first-timers or had little experience of the summit: Brown, Medvedev and Fukuda were all attending the summit for the first time; Sarkozy for the second time; and Harper and Merkel for the third time. The most senior summiteer turned out to be Bush attending his eighth and final summit. Moreover, all this year's summiteers shared an unstable political position at home. The leaders were either hugely unpopular (Brown, Fukuda and Sarkozy), lame ducks (Bush), cat's paws (Medvedev), or domestically weakened by their position within minority governments or coalition governments (Harper and Merkel). Although lack of summit experience and the domestic weakness of the leaders hasn't stopped the summiteers reaching important agreements in the past, such as that struck at the eleventh hour at the 1979 Tokyo Summit on oil consumption targets, expectations were not high in advance of this year's summit.

### **A Curate's Egg**

As regards substantive agenda items, attention was firmly focused on climate change and African development. Focusing on the former issue was partly continuing the momentum created at the previous year's summit at Heiligendamm and partly a result of Fukuda placing it on the agenda at a very early stage

when he spoke at the World Economic Forum in Davos in January. This was then promoted in the media as the 'Fukuda Vision' centred on pledging to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 60 per cent to 80 per cent by 2050 from current levels, although prospects of having this adopted by his fellow summitters were bleak – even more so as regards the adoption of any mid-term targets for 2020. Inviting a number of developing countries and major emitters to participate in the discussions was a necessary step but also made the chances of reaching any agreement even slimmer.

Eventually, commitment was made to achieving at least 50 per cent reduction in emissions by 2050:

We seek to share with all Parties to the UNFCCC the vision of, and together with them to consider and adopt in the UNFCCC negotiations, the goal of achieving at least 50 per cent reduction of global emissions by 2050, recognizing that this global challenge can only be met by a global response, in particular, by the contributions from all major economies, consistent with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities.

Comparing this with the statements made at the 2007 Heiligendamm Summit, incremental progress is clear from serious consideration to actual action and targets:

In setting a global goal for emissions reductions in the process we have agreed in Heiligendamm involving all major emitters, we will consider seriously the decisions made by the European Union, Canada and Japan which include at least a halving of global emissions by

2050. We have agreed that the UN climate process is the appropriate forum for negotiating future global action on climate change.

On the minus side of the ledger, the language used in summit statements is notoriously vague as it tends to be the result of compromise so what 'seek and share', 'consider and adopt' concretely amount to is unclear. What is more, there was some disparity between the English and Japanese translations of the above declaration with a stronger and clearer commitment implied in the Japanese version. Equally, there was no agreement on mid-term targets or consensus on baseline years and it is debatable how beholden G8 (or whatever forum may still be meeting) leaders will be to agreements made 42 years previously. On the plus side of the ledger, the US agreed for the first time at Toyako to concrete targets to cut emissions. In addition, the incremental and iterative fashion in which the G8 functions is clear: the leaders shifted from agreeing in 2007 to seriously consider a 50 per cent cut by 2050 to pledging a year later to promote the initiative within the UNFCCC negotiations. Another important aspect of these statements is the reference to the United Nations. The G8 leaders knowing the extent of their influence and abilities, instead recognized and reinforced the UNFCCC as the most appropriate and effective mechanism of addressing a global problem of this nature. So, very much a curate's egg.

This year Japan was also hosting the TICAD IV meeting in Yokohama and in fact brought the meeting forward to create a stronger link with the G8 so that the Japanese government could present Africa's concerns to the G8 leaders. Amongst a wide range of commitments and declarations related to African development and security, as regards the specific issue of the amount of aid promised by the G8 at Gleneagles in 2005, the Toyako Statement on Development

and Africa declared that:

We are firmly committed to working to fulfill our commitments on ODA made at Gleneagles, and reaffirmed at Heiligendamm, including increasing, compared to 2004, with other donors, ODA to Africa by US\$25 billion a year by 2010. We commend the successful replenishments of the resources of the International Development Association, the African Development Fund and the Asian Development Fund in which G8 countries provided nearly 75 per cent of donor's contributions and we acknowledge that ODA from G8 and other donors to Africa should be reassessed and may need to be increased for the period after 2010, beyond our current commitments.

In short, the key year is 2010 when the summit will be held in Canada. Looking ahead to that target and under considerable pressure from NGO groups, the G8 reworked its declaration at the last minute to reaffirm the original Gleneagles pledge, reinstate the concrete figures and encourage compliance so that they meet their targets, toward which some members are sadly lagging behind. The expectation is that next year's Italian summit will push forward the discussion of what will be agreed post-2010, highlighted in the above statement. Again, something of a mixed bag.

Zimbabwe was an issue that elbowed its way onto the G8's agenda as a result of a run-off presidential election less than a fortnight before the summit began that was characterised by intimidation and the withdrawal of opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai. Zimbabwe had been discussed at the G8 Foreign Ministers Meeting in

Kyoto before the Toyako Summit and was then addressed in a dedicated statement by the G8 leaders. They condemned the government of Robert Mugabe, called for the original election results to be upheld and threatened the imposition of financial sanctions, a step the G7 took previously at the 1989 Paris Summit against China in response to the Tiananmen Square massacre. However, thereafter, the implementation of sanctions was vetoed by Russia and China in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). On the one hand, this issue demonstrates the flexibility of the G8 as a forum of global governance. In the past, the G8 has always been flexible enough to respond to events as they immediately unfold including various terrorist attacks across the decades, the Chernobyl nuclear accident of 1986, the death of North Korean leader Kim Il-Sung in 1994, the Indian and Pakistani nuclear tests of 1998, and conflict in Kosovo in 1999. However, on the other hand, it also highlights the limits of the G8's consensus-building and calls Russia's membership into question. Signing up in the G8 to an agreed statement on Zimbabwe that threatens sanctions and then undermining it in the UN raises serious questions about Russia's consistency and like-mindedness with the G8 family.

It should not be forgotten that the G8 leaders and especially their sherpas had a (possibly too) full agenda to discuss. Food security, global health, counter-terrorism, nuclear non-proliferation, reform of international institutions and the state of the world economy were all addressed in summit documentation to varying degrees. It may well be the case that the G8 is attempting to address too much, especially as it only had one day for the core leaders to address these issues. It is ironic, to say the least, that the state of the world economy was the issue that led to the original meeting of the G6 in 1975, but at a time of similar (if not worse) economic dislocation, the G8 failed to address this issue to any significant extent in its discussions. The decade-old forum of the G20

was later charged with coordinating a response to the global economic slump at its Washington meeting in November 2008 suggesting that it may become the mechanism of choice in the future instead of the G8. However, attention at Hokkaido was firmly placed on climate change and Africa – issues that were never intended to be dealt with by the original summit process.

### Beyond the 8?

Nobody was in any doubt that this would be a well-run and well-organised meeting and that the Japanese government would do its utmost to avoid the humiliation of being responsible for hosting a failed summit. However, this summit also proved to be a considerable step forward in addressing the major weakness of the G8 summit process – its lack of legitimacy – through the best means available: reaching out to other participants.

A number of leaders from other countries were also invited to join this year’s G8 summit for specific sessions. For some it was their first time to attend the G8, whilst others had considerable experience of the G8 summit. African participants invited to the first day included Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika (8th summit), Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi (2nd summit), Ghanaian President John Agyekum Kufuor (4th summit), Nigerian President Umaru Yar’Adua (2nd summit), Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade (7th summit), South African President Thabo Mvuyelwa Mbeki (9th summit), Tanzanian President Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete (1st summit), and Chair of the Commission of the African Union Jean Ping, alongside UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and World Bank President Robert Zoellick to discuss African development including food security, water, health and education. As regards the ‘Outreach Five’ leading developing countries who were invited to the third day of the summit, Chinese President Hu Jintao (5th summit), Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (4th summit),

Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (5th summit), Mexican President Felipe de Jesús Calderón Hinojosa (2nd summit) and South African President Mbeki were in attendance. Other invitees to the final day included Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and South Korean President Lee Myung-bak, all attending for the first time.



### Should More Egos be Invited?

It should not be forgotten that one of the few ways in which the G8 can accrue some much-needed legitimacy is through this process of ‘outreach’. In short, this year’s summit was the most representative G8 summit in history and a substantial step as part of the ‘outreach’ initiative of which Japan has been an innovator in the past. Going back to the previous occasion upon which Japan hosted the G8 summit in Okinawa in 2000, Prime Minister Mori invited a number of NGO representatives and African leaders, specifically South African Prime Minister Thabo Mbeki (as chair of the Non-Aligned Movement), Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo (as chair of the Group of 77 developing countries), and Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika (as representative of the Organization of African Unity (OAU)).

It is clear that expansion of the G8 – for so long discussed – is now firmly on the agenda. Noises

were being made in Hokkaido that the Italian Prime Minister, the host of next year's summit, had been impressed by the arrangements for this year's summit and would continue with a similar format in the summer of 2009. However, the overriding question is whether many of these countries are actually interested in joining an expanded G9, G13, G20 (or whatever the suffix may be), let alone be willing to travel long distances at considerable expense to attend a short breakfast meeting? Ultimately, will expansion damage the informal nature of the summit process and simply result in another UN and further institutional overlap?

Outreach has been manifest not only in terms of inviting other countries but also as regards engagement with civil society (sometimes described by the patronising term 'downreach'). Unlike the 2000 Okinawa Summit, there was no construction of an NGO centre this time, possibly as a result of controversy over MOFA's efforts last time that smacked of surveillance rather than facilitating civil society participation in the summit. This time, one hundred press passes were given to fifty NGOs selected by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and they were given their own dedicated space in the media centre in Rusutsu. Fukuda also met with a number of NGO representatives on 19 June 2008 for a 90-minute meeting ahead of the summit, which was praised by a number of NGO representatives. This year Japanese NGOs were organised under the umbrella of the 2008 Japan G8 Summit NGO Forum formed in January 2007 under the chair of Hoshino Masako. The local government also provided a number of facilities for NGOs and included them from an early stage in the preparations for the summit.

However, the reaction of civil society to the summit agreements was largely negative. As regards the planning of the summit, there were criticisms of the withdrawal of visa and refusal to grant activists entry to Japan. As regards the centrepiece issue of climate change, environmental NGO *Kiko Nettowaku* echoed a

number of other groups by criticising the lack of concrete mid-term goals and cooperation of developing countries, and as regards the long-term goal of 50 per cent reductions by 2050, highlighting that it was only the US that had shifted its position since Heiligendamm the previous year; the positions of the other summiteers had not changed. Finally, as regards aid and development, there was criticism of the poor treatment of the subject by the summiteers. However, despite clear dissatisfaction with the summit declarations, as regards the participation of civil society in this year's summit, there was a sense expressed by representatives of the 2008 Japan G8 Summit NGO Forum that this year's activities were part of a learning process and could provide a solid foundation for future action. Again, in short, something of a curate's egg.

### **The G8 in Japan's Foreign Policy**

The G8 functions within Japan's foreign policy as a forum for the promotion of its national interests simultaneously on a regional, bilateral and unilateral basis, in addition to the multilateral level discussed above.

On the regional level, the Japanese government has cherished its role as a self-appointed and sole representative of Asia (*Ajia no Daihyo*). This goes back to the first summit at Rambouillet and has been a continuous theme since then, manifested both in the agenda items the Japanese government brings to the attention of the Western summiteers after regularly conducting tours of the region to sound out its neighbours and its attempts to foster the participation of fellow Asian countries in the summit. Preparations for this year started early when Finance Minister Nukaga Fukushiro visited India and Vietnam in January 2008.

However, at this year's summit, this role was played out more in terms of membership than agenda items and very few issues related solely to Asia found their way into the G8's discussions. Instead, the Japanese government

as host was successful in inviting three leaders from the East Asian region (broadly defined) to participate in discussions on the third day of the summit focused on the environment: South Korean President Lee Myung Bak, Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd. For each of these leaders, it was the first time to participate in the summit process. In addition, the leaders of China and India participated in the summit as part of the enlarged dialogue with the 'Outreach Five', again on the final day of the summit. Both these leaders have participated in a number of enlarged dialogue meetings with the G8 leaders at previous G8 summits.

As regards South Korea, the Japanese prime minister had in the past visited or talked to his South Korean counterpart ahead of and/or before the summit, but this was the extent of his access to the summit table prior to this year's summit. In the case of Indonesia, this was the realisation of a previously failed attempt to invited President Suharto to the 1993 Tokyo Summit. On that occasion, despite its best efforts, the Japanese government was unsuccessful in securing the agreement of the fellow summiteers to Indonesia's participation. In the end, Prime Minister Miyazawa Kiichi did arrange a bilateral meeting between Suharto and President Bill Clinton on the periphery of the summit. Finally, in the case of Australia, this was once again the realisation of a long-held ambition: the Japanese government had attempted to include the Australians within the original meeting of the G6 in November 1975 at Rambouillet. It appears to be its position as the only Asian summit nation and its self-perception as a representative of the region that motivates the Japanese government in extending invitations.

However, the Japanese government's position as the sole representative of the East Asian region in the G8 also shapes its attitude towards the most-touted future member of an expanded

G8: China. As discussed above, the expansion of the G8 has been receiving increased attention over the years and appears now to be squarely on the table after Japan hosted the most representative summit in history. Despite these efforts, the Japanese government is still wary of allowing China in as a regular member and its opposition to China's inclusion is based on similar reasons that fuelled its opposition to Russian membership in the 1990s: unresolved bilateral issues and a strong belief that the G8's sense of cohesion built on democratic and capitalist principles would be eroded. No doubt, the Japanese government would also wish to avoid allowing a rival for the position of Asia's representative into the G8, especially whilst it is still excluded from the UNSC.

As regards the bilateral level, the G8 affords the opportunity for a number of bilateral meetings to take place on the edges of the summit. In the past, the Japanese prime minister has taken the opportunity to meet with a number of his counterparts and maintain Japan's key bilateral relationships. This has been of particular importance in handling the relationship with the US whether it be the resolution of trade disputes (the 1988 Toronto Summit for example) or discussion of the position of US bases within Japan (the 2000 Okinawa Summit). As host, Prime Minister Fukuda had a busy schedule of bilateral meetings including Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper and US President George W. Bush on 6 July. He then met with Nigerian President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, South African President Thabo Mbeki, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown all on 7 July 2008. Fukuda met with Russian President Medvedev for the first time on the evening of the following day, and finally he met with Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono on the evening of 9 July 2008.

Obviously the most important of these meetings was with Bush and it allowed the two leaders to



reassert the strength of the two countries' alliance and discuss North Korea: both the abduction issue and the US removal of North Korea from the list of terrorist-supporting states. The two issues were linked in Bush's attempts to reassure Fukuda that the US would support Japan over the abduction issue despite concerns in Japan that its ally was going soft on North Korea by removing the label of a terrorist-supporting state. In addition, the meeting provided Fukuda with an opportunity to increase the pressure on Bush to accept the 50 per cent cut in emissions by 2050 ahead of the opening of the summit. Also of importance was the meeting with Medvedev. Although this was their first meeting, it was conducted on a first-name basis and as well as addressing a range of bilateral issues led to another in a long line of joint declarations over the years that the two governments would seek to resolve the Northern Territories territorial issue in an attempt to improve bilateral relations. The fact that the summit was being held in Hokkaido was not ignored.

On the unilateral level, the Japanese government has used the G8 summit in the past to promote its national interests by placing issues of concern on the agenda and lobbying to have statements of support included in the final declarations. For example, as the Cold War came to an end, the Japanese government managed to ensure that the communiqués released at three consecutive summits (Houston in 1990, London in 1991 and Munich in 1992) expressed support for Japan in the resolution of the territorial dispute with the Soviet Union/Russia over the Northern Territories. However, this strategy of instrumentalising a multilateral forum like the G8 to promote Japan's national interest on a bilateral issue proved to be completely unsuccessful in moving the issue toward resolution. Nevertheless, the Japanese government continued to use a similar strategy at this year's summit. The G8 took the opportunity to reaffirm its position towards North Korea and expressed support for the

resolution of the abduction issue (*rachi mondai*) in its Statement on Political Issues:

We are committed to resolving regional proliferation challenges by diplomatic means. We express our continuous support for the Six-Party process towards the verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and the eventual normalization of relations between the relevant Six-Party members through the full implementation of the Joint Statement of 19 September 2005, including the resolution of the outstanding issues of concern such as the abduction issue.

Some journalists reported this as the first time for the issue to appear in the documentation emanating from a G8 summit. However, in reality, this was the sixth summit in a row for the G8 to call for the early and/or peaceful resolution of the abduction issue either in the Chair's Summary or as part of the Foreign Ministers' Meeting since its first appearance in G8 documentation at the 2003 Evian Summit. Looking back to the Northern Territories dispute, historical precedent appears to suggest that this strategy will have extremely limited results.

### **Domestic Reception**

For the most part, approval ratings for the Fukuda administration were in steady decline throughout most of 2008 and only began to show signs of bottoming out during the summer once the G8 summit was over, but too late to prevent his resignation at the beginning of September. Thus, it was only to be expected that the G8 summit would become embroiled in the wranglings over his future: there were expectations that he would try to score a success at the G8 summit to boost his domestic

standing, predictions that a Lower House election might be called after the summit, and even doubts as to whether he would be around to host the summit.

Although the strategy of basking in the reflected glory of a successful summit has been seen to work for numerous past G8 leaders and Japanese prime ministers - Nakasone at Williamsburg in 1983 and Venice in 1987 and Kaifu at Houston in 1990 providing some examples of positive shifts in opinion polls - it is difficult to pinpoint the G8 summit as a specific factor in the changes in approval ratings. Generally, unpopular prime ministers continue to be unpopular and popular prime ministers continue to be popular. However, prime ministers are rarely deterred from attempting to instrumentalise the summit for scoring points at home.

Regardless of whether this was Fukuda's strategy or not, the summit predictably appeared to have little effect on an already deeply unpopular leader. According to an opinion poll conducted by the *Asahi Shinbun* immediately after the summit and published on 15 July, Fukuda's cabinet commanded an approval rating of 24 per cent, an increase of 1 per cent from the previous month's poll, and a disapproval rating of 58 per cent, a decrease also of 1 per cent. Specifically as regards his performance at the summit, 24 per cent believed that he had demonstrated leadership, as opposed to 60 per cent who disagreed. 32 per cent of pollees rated the G8's treatment of climate change, whereas 60 per cent did not. Thus, a distinct lack of leadership was perceived and any results that may have emerged from the summit were unlikely to be credited to Fukuda. Subsequently there was a slight rise in Fukuda's approval ratings according to some polls but it occurred after the G8 summit had passed from people's memories and was likely to be a result of different factors. In any case, this did not forestall his resignation.



### Hanging on Fukuda's Every Word

The reaction of civil society was touched upon above and is explored in more detail in the other articles that make up this special edition. As regards the reaction of the Japanese business world to the summit, Nippon Keidanren did organise a summit meeting prior to the leaders' meeting on 17 April 2008 in Tokyo that discussed the connection between climate change and innovative technology, promoted the lowering of trade barriers to environmental goods and services and called on the G8 to adopt a sectoral approach to carbon emissions. Thus, it came as no great surprise that a number of Japanese newspapers reported after the summit that Nippon Keidanren's Chairman Mitarai Fujio's reaction to the 2050 target of 50 per cent cuts, the G8's recognition of the sectoral approach and the role of innovative technology was largely positive and Fukuda's leadership was singled out for praise. However, Keizai Doyukai's Chairman Sakurai Masamitsu was more critical, expressing regret over the lack of progressive results and arguing that the summit should contribute to progress in international discussions and address the introduction of incentives and the establishment of mid-term targets. Although the business world has tended to speak with one voice in reaction to previous summits and not have such divergent reactions, there have been other occasions when Keizai Doyūkai has been more

critical of the Japanese government and G8 summit process than Keidanren.

## Conclusions

The most commonly asked question immediately after the summit was whether it had been a success or a failure. However, this question is symptomatic of a popular attitude to the summit that demands quick fixes. The nature of the G8 demands that a few years pass before the question can be revisited in a meaningful way and in the meantime various international NGOs and the G8 Research Centre at the University of Toronto will continue to track compliance and seek to hold the G8 leaders accountable for the fulfilment of their promises. The best that can be said at this stage is that the results were mixed. Toyako was not as successful as some summits (Rambouillet in 1975 or Bonn in 1978 for example) and not as disastrous as others (San Juan in 1976 or Bonn in 1985). Japan will continue to act as chair of the G8 until Italy takes over at the beginning of 2009 and already there have been a series of incremental follow-ups that continue the G8 process but will probably get little media attention: the framework for action on global health, regular finance ministers' meetings, foreign and finance ministers' statements, and the G8 parliamentarians meeting in Hiroshima.

## The Party's Over for Another Year

However, trouble appears to be brewing, particularly as regards expansion of the G8. Since the G8 leaders left Hokkaido on 10 July, Russia's intervention in Georgia has continued to confirm fears that it does not share the same principles or subscribe to the same international norms that are supposed to bind the G8 together and constitute some form of informal criteria for membership. Both G7 finance and foreign ministers have come together to condemn Russia's actions, support Georgia's sovereignty and promise to rebuild the Georgian economy. At the same time, how US President-elect Barack Obama chooses to conduct foreign relations generally and reacts to Russia specifically will be of considerable importance: his Republican opponent John McCain had advocated stripping Russia of its G8 status well before its intervention in Georgia. It appears that the summit's most risky experiment with expansion that began in the 1990s and resulted in the metamorphosis from G7 to G8 to reflect Russia's participation may be floundering. Russia's alienation from its fellow summiteers is likely to give the core summit members food for thought and stall future expansion of the G8 for some time, despite the best efforts of the Japanese government to promote 'outreach' at this year's summit. The greatest threat to the continuance of the G8 in its present form appears to come from within, rather than from any space monster.



## Notes

*Many thanks are owed to the Japan Foundation Endowment Committee for part-funding my trip to Japan during the G8 summit, to Peter Hajnal for useful comments and suggestions, and also to Andy Staples for introducing me to the patois of rock climbers.*

*Hugo Dobson is a senior lecturer at the National Institute of Japanese Studies and*

*School of East Asian Studies, University of Sheffield. He is the author of Japan and the G7/8, 1975-2002 and The Group of 7/8, both published by Routledge. He may be contacted at H. Dobson@sheffield.ac.uk*

*Posted at Japan Focus on November 30, 2008*

*Recommended citation: Hugo Dobson, "The 2008 Hokkaido-Tokayo G8 Summit: Neither Summit nor Plummet" The Asia-Pacific Journal, Vol. 48-5-08, November 30, 2008.*

---

| Article Series Index   |                                   |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| <a href="#">Alternative Summits, Alternative Perspectives: Beyond the 2008 G8 Summit</a>   | Philip Seaton                     |
| <a href="#">The 2008 Hokkaido-Toyako G8 Summit: neither summit nor plummet</a>   | Hugo Dobson                       |
| <a href="#">Indigenous at last! Ainu Grassroots Organizing and the Indigenous People's Summit in Ainu Mosir</a>  | ann-elise lewallen                |
| <a href="#">The Hokkaido Toyako Summit as a Springboard for Grassroots Reconciliation Initiatives: The "Peace, Reconciliation and Civil Society" Symposium</a> | Lukasz Zablonki and Philip Seaton |
| <a href="#">The G8 Summit as "Local Event" in the Hokkaido Media</a>   | Philip Seaton                     |

---



---

| Other Resources  |  |
|--|--|
| <a href="#">G8 Information Center, University of Toronto</a>                               |  |
| <a href="#">Official Japanese Government Webpage</a>                                       |  |
| <a href="#">Hokkaido Toyako Summit Preparation Council 2008 Webpage</a>                    |  |
| <a href="#">Andrew DeWit, The G8 Mirage: The Summit and Japan's Environmental Policies</a> |  |

---