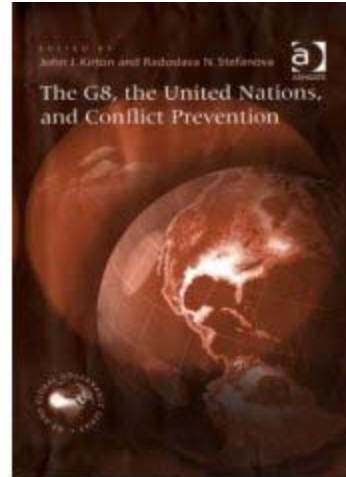


**JOHN J. KIRTON AND  
RADOSLAVA N. STEFANOVA,  
EDS. THE G8, THE UNITED  
NATIONS AND CONFLICT  
PREVENTION. ALDERSHOT,  
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***Pamela Stewart, Centre for Military  
and Strategic Studies, University of  
Calgary***

The 2005 World Summit was, this September, held in New York City. The summit, more formally known as the "High-Level Plenary Meeting of the 60<sup>th</sup> Session of The General Assembly of the United Nations," was, in the visionary words of Secretary General Kofi Annan, described as:

...a once-in-a-generation opportunity for the world to come together and take action on grave global threats that require bold global solutions... It is also a chance to revitalize the United Nations itself. It is, in short, an opportunity for all humankind.<sup>1</sup>

The implication here is that the United Nations is actually in need of revitalizing given its lackluster performance in stabilizing a globe facing rampant political, social and security threat challenges. A quick review of some of the Summit's key outcomes reveals that the United Nations continues to be ineffectual in stopping the growth of the global nuclear weapons industry and has made minimal inroads against the overall proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Further, the Summit leaders were unable to finalize the existence of the Human Rights Council nor agree on the much-touted Peace Building Commission. And

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<sup>1</sup> Secretary General Kofi Annan, The 2005 World Summit homepage. Available at [www.un.org/summit2005](http://www.un.org/summit2005). Accessed on September 15, 2005.

last, but not least, the world leaders were unable to discuss any changes to the Security Council, including the fundamental requirement to make its decisions more accountable and transparent. Overall, the Summit was a prime example of how the United Nations and, by association, the international community is currently functioning and organizing itself - not very well.

One of the more significant accomplishments, however, was the adoption of a Canadian initiative, the "Responsibility to Protect." This grand initiative is to form the basis by which states can collectively act against other states when such states are perpetrating acts of genocide, ethnic cleansing, and/or other acts against humanity within or outside their own borders. Given the above noted concerns, future analysis will be needed to see if and how the world community is able to implement such a fundamental but "principled" international ideal. A complimentary ideal is the idea that the world community should do all it can politically, socially, economically, and financially to prevent conflicts before they begin. Such an ideal is a G8 initiative arising out of the G8 Genoa Summit of 2001 and is, in part, the focus of this review.

As the United Nations' 2005 World Summit has concluded on a somewhat questionable note, it is now time to review *The G8, The United Nations, and Conflict Prevention* [hereafter *The G8*]. This review determines that *The G8* is an excellent source with which to understand the intricate nature of international decision-making at the United Nations and elsewhere, as well as the difficulties that arise in attempting to implement grand international ideals. *The G8* is the

eleventh book in Ashgate Publishing's *G8 and Global Governance Series*,<sup>2</sup> all of which are recommended. Begun in 1998, the *Global Governance Series* focuses on international institutions and how they deal with "issues at the center of global governance, ... such as finance, investment, and trade, as well as transnational threats to human security, etc."<sup>3</sup> By focusing on the central themes arising from individual summits, the thirteen current publications in the series address how such organizations as the G8, G7, the UN and the International Monetary Fund operate inside and outside the world's convoluted international systems.

Specifically, *The G8*, an edited compilation of 12 independent papers from leading G8 experts, is the first book of its kind to compare and contrast the roles of the G8 and the United Nations. The comparison is quietly interwoven throughout the book's three broad themes. First, it addresses how the G8 and the United Nations have dealt with the rapid globalization of the world since the G8's Lyon Summit in 1996, through to Kananaskis in 2002 and on to Evian in 2003. Second, it attempts to assess how well the G8 interacts or competes with other international entities, primarily the United Nations. Thirdly, the book's contributors, holding to the belief that the G8 is an extremely effective international body, attempt to understand why it is so effectual while the United Nations and other international organizations are seemingly not so effective. Recommendations on how the G8 can provide leadership for the international community and how each international entity can best work, alone or together, are subsequently included. Given the title of the book, these three themes are

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<sup>2</sup> For more information and a complete listing of the Series, see [www.ashgate.com](http://www.ashgate.com).

<sup>3</sup> Series Editor John J. Kirton, "The G8 and Global Governance Series," *The G8*.

confined by the concept of conflict prevention created from the Genoa Summit Agenda (2001).<sup>4</sup>

The book is organized into four main parts dealing specifically with the political-security concepts surrounding conflict prevention arising out of the Genoa Summit. The purely financial and macroeconomic issues are found in a twin summit series under the heading, *Global Finance*.<sup>5</sup> Part I addresses the G8's place and role in being able to prevent world conflict. Four expert papers respectively address issues surrounding G8 decision-making, consensus building, the ability to put the promise of conflict prevention into practice, and the intricacies of operating in an international system. Part II contains three contrasting looks at conflict prevention within the confines of a political-institutional framework. The first contributor's paper attempts to define the elusive *a priori* idea of conflict prevention by defining mostly what it is not, followed by a convoluted definition of what it actually is. No clarity is found here as the reader is left to muddle over the practical ability to "make it so" versus the idealistic desire to make what "ought to be" a reality. Of interest is the paper's analysis relating to the United Nations whereby as conflict prevention is firmly placed within Chapter VI of the UN Charter, it is as firmly rejected as a Chapter VII military enforcement option as much as the entire Chapter itself. This questionable definition-based process is highlighted in the next two papers. One

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<sup>4</sup>"We consider our commitment to conflict prevention to be an indispensable element in our international actions and initiatives. While the main responsibility for avoiding conflict lies with those directly involved, we will continue to work for effective action by the international community, primarily The United Nations, to prevent conflict." Appendix D, "Conclusions of the G8 Foreign Ministers' Meeting, July 18-19, 2002 in Rome, *The G8*, p. 225.

<sup>5</sup> The series has produced two volumes: *Governing Global Finance: New Challenges, G7 and IMF Governance*, and *Sustaining Global Growth and Development: G7 and IMF Governance*.

focuses on the unilateral US approach to international conflict prevention, the place of conflict prevention within the United Nations/Security Council framework and American perceptions of the role of allies post 9/11, while the second examines the European Union's ongoing attempts to agree on a unifying conflict prevention policy. The reader will find an interesting contrast of perspectives between these two papers, for the EU has much work to do to unify itself let alone unify the "civilized, economic world" to the one cause of conflict prevention. Whether US foreign policy can practically support such an initiative is left open for further debate.

Moving away from the political-institutional pressures affecting the promise of conflict prevention, Part III addresses the socio-economic dimension. Three significant papers identify the ramifications of world financial crises by addressing the role of the G7/G8 in promoting international financial stability. The impact of the G7 and the role of the International Monetary Fund are subsequently explained by drawing theoretical and statistical linkages between appropriate foreign aid contributions, world poverty, and rising and systemic conflicts. Some of the arguments presented in Part III are quite economically focused and may require supplement study. Regardless, the editors correctly assumed that any credible analysis of the G8 and its quest for overall conflict prevention must include the political, social, *and* economic aspects, as all play a part in triggering and fueling world conflicts. The Genoa Summit participants were adamant in their belief that for conflict prevention to work, for the G8 to function as a leading entity within the international theatre, all three aspects of civilization were to be

considered equally important. Correspondingly, it is a fact that most G8 members are also members of other multilateral, international organizations that are mandated to operate in the political, social and economic fields. It is this understanding of the multi-disciplinary make-up of the G8 that contributes to the strength and growth of the body as an effectual, successful international organization. This fact is strongly emphasized throughout this book's entire contents. The reader is left to ponder whether this fact is the key to understanding the UN's ongoing troubles.

Part IV is the book's conclusion and contains only one paper, a comprehensive assessment of the G8's strengths and weaknesses in the past, present, and future. In conducting this assessment, the authors, Gina Stephens and Kristiana Powell, present an excellent paper and firmly support their premise that the G8 is fundamental to a stable international order in the post-Cold War era. They address the previously mentioned multi-disciplinary existence of the G8 with an holistic approach that argues:

By applying a conflict prevention lens to development policies, the G8 - and the entire international community - will be better placed to prevent the very causes of conflict long before violent, armed clashes occur. Only by addressing the deeper roots of conflict can the G8, and other institutions, truly move beyond good intentions in this area.<sup>6</sup>

After this proclamation, they proceed to identify and explain the historical foundations established during the successive summits. The historical overview is followed by a logical, detailed analysis of the G8's role in making conflict

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<sup>6</sup> *The G8*, p. 196.

prevention a reality. The analysis encompasses the successes, challenges, and future recommendations: a great way to tie up the other eleven contributions of the book. Their paper led this reviewer to the conclusion that “the ability of the G8 members to make conflict prevention a “reality” is lauded; let them be challenged to keep on trying, given the ineffectuality of the United Nations to operate outside of its own bureaucratic making.”

*The G8* is one of those books that comes along ever so occasionally which covers a topic in such depth that a reader first becomes knowledgeable on the topic almost without conscience thought, second is empowered to further their study and assess their own personal views on the issues, and third, anticipates the arrival of the next volume in the series. Such reflection begins almost at once, as the editors, in both the preface and the acknowledgements, interestingly explain the book's origins and development. Along with the 12 expert papers that make up the bulk of the book, *The G8* also includes several tables, figures and a list of abbreviations the reader can utilize to understand the statistical facts outlined in the book. The most welcomed segments here are the G8 Research Group Analytical Appendices covering the years from 1996-2002 and the Documentary Appendices, a complete listing of the G8 Meeting Statements, Notes, and communiqués on the issue of conflict prevention from 1996-2002. Complementing these components is a comprehensive bibliography, a very useful research tool for further study. All these aspects of *The G8* combine to make it a valuable educational tool for many interested readers: undergraduate and graduate students studying the fields of international relations

and economics, government officials needing further clarification, and those desiring a more thorough understanding of the world's international dynamics.

My only negative comment on the book revolves around the contributors themselves and the worldviews that suffuse some of their writings. As the editors noted in the preface, the contributors are all leading experts in their field, with many having several years experience operating and working within the G8 organization and their respective governments. What is missing from the compilation are any strong views contrary to the book's key premise that the G8 is a successful entity and that conflict prevention is possible. Although several writers mention the difficulties existing in attempting to prevent conflict, the tone of the writings is optimistic as the authors hold to the belief that such a lofty goal is reasonably attainable. The reader is cautioned to look elsewhere to gain differing perspectives. The reader is also cautioned that, as in all academic endeavors, factual evidence supporting one argument or another is almost always available if one looks hard enough.<sup>7</sup> The reader must not use *The G8* as an end point of study. Further research of alternate views is recommended and encouraged. However, its place in the literature as the premier study of the G8, the United Nations, and conflict prevention is most assuredly guaranteed.

*Pamela Stewart is a Master's candidate in Strategic Studies at the Centre for Military and Strategic Studies, University of Calgary. Although her main*

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<sup>7</sup> For example, David Malone notes that "Contrary to conventional wisdom, most research indicates that civil wars decreased in both number and magnitude from 1992-1998," while Frank Loy states that, as of 1998, predictable conflict and chaos was "not only more numerous, but also became bloodier and involved more combatant countries...and they lasted longer." Malone, "The G8 and Conflict Prevention: From Promise to Practice?," *The G8*, 44 and Loy, "US Approaches to International Conflict Prevention and the Role of Allies and International Institutions," *The G8*, pp. 104-105.



*academic interests focus on professional development in the Canadian Forces, she also recognizes the need to fully understand the political, strategic and economic global environment within which the CF operates.*