

Global Governance Reform for the 21st Century

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I. The Central Challenge: The Mismatch of Global Institutions and Global Challenges

The central challenge of the 21st century is that the institutional framework for dealing with contemporary global challenges does not match the scope, scale and nature of the challenges themselves. If the 20th century represented the culmination of the a long history of the nation-state as the institutional framework capable of addressing the challenge of modernity, the global challenges of the 21st century seem to exceed the grasp of the current international institutional framework. This conundrum does not mean that the nation-state needs to be superseded by a better and stronger set of international institutions. To the contrary, the nation-state and national political leaders constitute the foundation of political legitimacy necessary for global governance and international institutional reform to move forward.

There are several specific manifestations of institutional inadequacy that are currently under scrutiny and which have generated proposals for reform. As comprehensive and important as these four manifestations of incongruence are, they do not represent the full nature of the mismatch but only illustrate several obvious gaps in adequacy. First, the United Nations Security Council as a creation of the post-World War II alliance in 1945 is confronting a crisis of obsolescence. Not only are Germany and Japan, the second and third largest economies in the world, not represented as permanent members of the Security Council, but, with the important exception of China, there are no developing countries represented either. Second, since the WTO meetings in Seattle in 1999, there is a growing demand for changes the voting shares in the Bretton Woods Institutions (the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) to better reflect current realities. Third, embedded in these reform issues but beyond them is the growing reality and tension concerning the unipolar nature of the military, economic, media, and political power of the United States in its conduct of foreign policy. Fourth, global challenges in the global age seem to be characterized more by interconnectedness rather than by isolation. This throws an international system based on “specialized agencies” into a state of inadequacy as the nature of contemporary interconnected problems exceeds their expertise based on specialization.

These four challenges are sufficient by themselves to justify a strong push toward international institutional reform, even if there were not more to the story. Yet, reform on all four fronts is severely circumscribed by practical political constraints. What seems to

be needed to break the deadlock and move forward are several conceptual innovations that together can reframe the discussion and possibly provide some daylight in an otherwise gloomy set of prospects for global governance reform. What follows is an effort to create a set of categories for thinking about reform which attempt to contain the tensions and trade-offs involved in achieving reform rather than try to avoid them.

It should be said at the outset that if the institutional framework today is inadequate, it does not mean that it is possible to invent a new formulation that is fully adequate and achieves unblemished enhancements on all fronts. The world is an imperfect and messy place. And any proposal of global reform will fall short of the ideals for democracy, equity, and justice for all.

II. Concepts and Categories for Framing Problems and Approaches

Specialization versus Integration

If global governance reforms are necessary in order to adequately address the challenges of the 21st century, the issue of the “adequacy” of the nation-state as a unit of representativeness, agency and legitimacy in the global age could easily be questioned. Many have argued that the increasing globalization of finance, trade, migration, and media have weakened nation-states and their capacities to manage domestic affairs. But the fundamentals of globalization do not seem to be juxtaposed to the nation-state so much as they are to the Western notion of modernity.

One way to look at this is to realize that the 20th century was based on the Western notion of progress rooted in the universality of human knowledge derived from specialization in disciplines and problem areas. Western modernism for much of the 20th century was understood in the West especially as a universal form of modernism which would be shared by all humanity as progress spread. The 21st century is already being seen as posing challenges distinct from the 20th century. The challenges of this century seem to be characterized by a fundamentally different construct.

Whereas 20th century challenges were seen as requiring specialization within domains to develop the knowledge and approaches necessary to address them, the challenges of the 21st century seem to be ones which require understanding the interlinkages between challenges and the interfaces between them rather than only burrowing deeper within the problem area itself as the primary means of developing approaches. While the 20th century relied on specialists, the 21st century may come to rely more on people who are integrationists, capable within their expertise but excelling in their grasp of the relationship between their area of expertise and those adjacent to it which increasingly drive results within it. As noted biologist Edward O. Wilson has written: “Most of the issues that vex humanity daily—ethnic conflict, arms escalation, over-population, abortion, environment, endemic poverty, to cite several most persistently before us—cannot be solved without integrating knowledge from the natural sciences with that of the social sciences and humanities.” [Wilson (1998) page 13.] The linkages among

challenges and between disciplines and approaches are fundamental drivers of institutional inadequacy and mismatch.

Distinction between Institutions and Governance

There is a fundamental distinction between the configuration of international institutions and the process for global governance. In the debate on global reform, there seems to be a confusion between reform in the institutional arrangements and governance reform, as if they were the same when in fact they are related but separate issues. The adequacy of the current configuration of international institutions to confront global problems is a separate issue from that of global governance. One is an issue of structure and framework; the other is one of process and dynamics.

Distinction between Representativeness Legitimacy and Performance Legitimacy

It is useful to distinguish between performance legitimacy and representativeness legitimacy. What is not always clear is that there is a trade-off, or at a minimum a tension, between these two desiderata. For example, the UN General Assembly must represent the high water mark for representativeness legitimacy among all international institutions because of it is based on the one country-one vote principle. And yet it is not clear that it is the best vehicle for “getting things done”. The G-7/8 summit mechanism, by contrast, could be an efficient forum for decision-making because there are a small number of leaders present enhancing performance legitimacy. However, representativeness legitimacy is increasingly questioned since the G-7/8 countries constitute a group of Western, industrial countries with less than 15 percent of the world’s population in a world that is increasingly non-Western and non-industrial.

Authority, Agency and Political Legitimacy in Global Governance

For global governance reform to sufficiently enhance legitimacy, it is not enough to generate greater performance legitimacy alone through greater efficacy nor is it enough that reforms embody only greater representativeness legitimacy. *Political legitimacy is the perception that authorities with capacities to execute decisions (agency) derive their authority from a foundational idea rooted in widely shared values.* Authorities can gain political legitimacy by political processes, by being elected, for example, or by reflecting the values, interests and goals of their people even if they do not formally represent them. This last source of political legitimacy can be seen as being honored in the breach with recent examples of leaders who cease to reflect their peoples’ values, interests and goals being run off as leaders: Marcos; Pinochet; etc..

There are also broader processes involved in how leaders can achieve legitimacy by reflecting the broad aspirations of people that embody common values but go beyond narrow interests by articulating broader but specific goals which can be addressed and even achieved by agency, process and institutions. Specific goals have the advantage of laying out expectations of specific results for which quantitative indicators can be

created. By monitoring the evolution of critical indicators and evaluating specific results, the political interaction of leadership, decision processes (agency articulation) and institutions can become transparent and accountable which enhances the legitimacy of the entire undertaking, even if progress is not as high as anticipated. The openness, inclusiveness and integrity of the process reinforce legitimacy beyond that derived from the values-aspirations-consensus-goal formation sequence. This entire process enhances democratic accountability.

For all these reasons, national leaders tend to embody political legitimacy. Whether through formal political processes or through informal consensus articulation modalities, national leaders seem to be perceived as highly legitimate vehicles for agency. While perhaps not always the ideal embodiment of democracy, it is nonetheless difficult to find alternatives which can supersede them. Nonetheless, it is necessary to create safeguards, incentives and assurances around national political leaders to ensure accountability, integrity and legitimacy. It is not an easy exercise to construct alternative general rationales to justify that leaders other than national leaders be able to trump national political leaders in constituting legitimate agents for the will of national societies. Therefore, summits consisting of national political leaders have greater authority, agency and legitimacy for taking decisions than alternative leaders might. As Robert Keohane has written recently: “the relevant question is whether, *in light of feasible alternatives*, existing or attainable forms of multilateralism are legitimate *relative to these alternatives*....They can only be defended on the basis of *comparative legitimacy*: the normative superiority of partial reliance on them for authorization of action, over other feasible processes.” [Keohane (2005), pp 18 and 22, emphasis, his.]

The issue of who decides on the future of the institutional configuration is an issue of global governance by accountable national political leaders, as well. The role of the United Nations is not to govern but to provide a forum for decisions. Even though the Bretton Woods agencies, for example, or the WTO and the WHO are all UN agencies, it is not for the UN Secretary General or the UN Secretariat or the heads of the UN agencies among themselves (through the Chief Executive Board) to sort out the foundational issue of institutional configuration. It is a global governance issue requiring strategic guidance by political leaders.

There is at the moment no locus of authority, agency or legitimacy to provide overall strategic guidance for defining the inter-institutional arrangements that are needed for the future. Inter-institutional relations decisions are by nature not for institutional heads to determine; the international institutions are accountable to national governments so that it is necessary that national leaders in a political setting provide guidance, oversight and accountability regarding inter-institutional relations. The current *void at the apex* is a major reason for the mismatch between the international institutional framework and 21st century global challenges.

III. The Global Age and Global Challenges

Frameworks and Goals for the Global Age

What is really quite stunning is that despite the fact that the configuration of international institutions and global governance processes are seen to be inadequate to address global challenges, this inadequacy has not prevented there being generated two universally endorsed frameworks for prioritizing global issues and setting goals for dealing with them: the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Both derive from a sequence of UN conferences in the early to mid 1990s which generated a plethora of recommendations for action on children (Jomtien 1990), environment (Rio 1992), human rights (Vienna 1993), population (Cairo 1994), social development (Copenhagen 1995), and women (Beijing 1995). These world conferences led to a prioritization of seven International Development Goals (IDGs) by national authorities, development cooperation ministers of industrial countries, in May 1996 focusing on poverty, gender equality, education, health, and environment goals to be achieved by 2015. (DAC 1996)

The Millennium Summit at the UN General Assembly in New York in September of 2000 heads of state and governments promulgated a “Millennium Declaration” which has five fields of action: security, human rights, democracy and governance, poverty and development, and environment. The Millennium Declaration is a framework for action on global issues for all actors—the private sector, civil society, national governments and international institutions—in both industrial and developing countries, authorized by national leaders. The MDGs are a set of specific goals and quantitative targets and indicators which provide benchmarks for efforts and results to be achieved by 2015 in addressing the multidimensional aspects of global poverty. They refine and reaffirm the IDGs profiled earlier by industrial country ministers, adding an eighth specific goal for development cooperation and partnership on trade, finance, debt and aid.

Global Goals from Global Society

The crucial political meaning of these two sets of goals – the Millennium Declaration and the MDGs—is that, while authorized by national leaders, they came from society not from governments alone. Thousands of civil society organizations, hundreds of private sector leaders and 191 governments participated in these conferences culminating in the Millennium Summit in the fall of 2000. These goals are what Andrew Cooper in his book on the UN conferences, Tests of Global Governance (2004), calls “bottom up multilateralism”. These two sets of goals are neither “UN Goals” nor official governmental goals only. While endorsed by governments at head of state/government level, they are indeed global goals from as well as for global society. In a very real sense, they came from society rather than being foisted on society. Therefore, they have *process legitimacy* derived from an inclusive consultative process across a range of inter-related issues.

Furthermore, they represent broad human aspirations that almost everyone can identify with. No one, rich or poor, wants to live in a world in which half the world is poor; no one wants to live in a world in which 2.4 billion people have no sanitation, or in a world in which children and mothers die needlessly because of lack of access to health care, or in a world in which forests-soils-water-fish-air and climate are threatened by human activity which can be managed more effectively. In terms of legitimacy derived from the values-aspirations-consensus-goal sequence, the Millennium Declaration and Millennium Development Goals represent the embodiment of broad *aspirational legitimacy*, not only because of the bottom up universal processes by which they were generated because of the content of the goal frameworks themselves.

While these frameworks can be seen as global goals for global society, the societal input from both NGOs and private sector groups largely was channeled through national delegations to these conferences and presented in the formal settings by national government officials. As Cooper indicates, “states still remain the principal agents within the UN-centered process of communication and negotiation.” (p.4) Global civil society organizations and international institutions do not supersede nation-state based representation at the global level. Global society in the global age is still predominantly governed by private and public sector leaders from national societies not from transnational entities. In the case of the series of UN conferences leading up to the Millennium frameworks, the channeling of values, aspirations and goals through national leaders into these global forums helped endow them with *political legitimacy* because of the primacy of the nation-state as the foundation of democracy. (See Brooks 2005)

In summary, the Millennium agenda appears to have three sources of legitimacy: bottom-up process legitimacy enhancing inclusiveness, aspirational legitimacy reflecting shared values, and political legitimacy derived from nation-state channeling of agency.

The Challenge of Implementation

In September 2005 the UN General Assembly will bring together heads of state for the first time since the Millennium General Assembly in 2000 to review progress under the Millennium Declaration and the MDGs. Already, first reports are that the challenge of implementation is not surprisingly both difficult and urgent. Most observers think that the pace of action is not adequate to change the trendlines of the challenges. This implementation gap potentially adds still another dimension to the inadequacy mismatch of the international system to improve the global human condition.

At the request of UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, Jeff Sachs assembled 250 experts in ten task forces which generated reports on actions needed to achieve the MDGs by 2015. These reports are extremely helpful in scoping out the principal dimensions of key sectors and elements necessary for achieving the MDGs, identifying high yield actions and actors, and developing strategies for advancing toward the MDGs at a pace adequate to reach them in ten years time.

As good as they are, these are reports by experts not strategic guidance forged by political leaders. They are technical reports lacking political valence. They are better at seeing the needs by goal and by sector than they are at highlighting the intersectoral synergies and multisectoral dimensions. They make an excellent basis for shorter, more focused global action plans generated and endorsed by national political leaders to provide strategic guidance to key institutions and actors and to energize political momentum for mobilizing the policies, resources and actions necessary for achieving the MDGs by 2015.

The challenge of implementation of the Millennium Declaration and the MDGs are simply one more illustration of the need for global governance reform for the 21st century. Taking into account the foregoing categories, tensions and trade-offs, summit reform seems to be the most promising avenue for making a political breakthrough that can have multiplier effects throughout the international system and across a variety of domains. This is not to minimize the crucial importance of UN Security Council reform, or changing the voting shares in the BWIs or any number of other worthwhile efforts to strengthen the international system. Rather the opposite; it seems as if summit reform could complement these other reform efforts and in fact facilitate them rather than substitute for them.

IV. Summit Reform

The G-7 summits were founded in 1978 primarily as a forum for coordination of economic policies among North America, Europe and Japan, the principal economies at the time. G-7 (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK and the US) finance ministers still meet twice a year to monitor global economic conditions and to prepare the economic aspects of the G-7 heads of state summit agendas. Russia was added in the early 1990s to the summits but not to the ministers of finance. Otherwise, no institutional broadening of the G-7/8 mechanism has occurred in 27 years. Although heads of state from non-G-7/8 countries have increasingly been invited on an ad hoc basis for parts of the summits (lunches or dinners, for example) or for side events, they are not members of the summit mechanism. There is a thick and intensive network of finance, foreign affairs and even development cooperation officials of G-7 countries who work continuously to prepare and follow-up summit actions.

It is not hard to conclude that the summit mechanism is one aspect of the international system that is in need of reform. What is less well appreciated is how summit reform might become a major vehicle for addressing the broader issue of the mismatch between global problems and global institutions and processes as well as a device for generating reform momentum which could spill over into the UN, the BWIs and other spaces in the international community in need of reform. Summit reform, properly undertaken, could be the catalyst for systemic reform and for mobilizing resources for goal fulfillment.

Addressing Reluctance for Reform

On reflection, it is clear that one of the constraints on moving summit reform forward is an understandable reluctance on the part of current powers to dilute their control of the agenda and decision-making capacity (agency). It is equally clear that those new powers who might become institutional members of the summit group would be reluctant to go into what is now the G-7/8 group as minority members who could be swept along by the current powers on both the agenda and the conclusions. Some safeguards would be needed to provide assurances to both sets of countries to facilitate agreement.

Secondly, there is also an understandable reluctance to move forward on expansion of the membership of the summit mechanism based on size alone, as in the proposal by Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin to move the G-20 finance ministers group to head of state level summits which the Canadians now call the L-20. This proposal is not without appeal due to the fact that the G-20 finance ministers already have a satisfactory track record in their annual meetings since 1999. The non-G-8 countries in the G-20 are all large emerging market economies which are compelling because of the size of both their economies and their societies. (They are Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, China, India, Indonesia, Korea, Saudi Arabia, South Africa and Turkey.) Together with the G-8 plus Australia, the G-20 comprises 64 per cent of the world's population as compared to 14 percent for the G-8. Expedient realism suggests a once-and-for-all leap from G-8 to L-20 to save the problem of opening the Pandora's box of the ideal membership. But there is sufficient reluctance to shutting out smaller, poorer developing countries and to under-representing Africa and the Middle East to forestall the L-20 proposal at the moment. Therefore, some modification of the L-20 idea may be necessary.

Core Expansion Plus Variable Geometry: Rotational Representativeness

As a consequence, a number of observers, including this one, have come to the conclusion that one way to create more representativeness than would be possible under the L-20 idea would be to enlarge the summit mechanism by adding a few new core members supplemented by an additional half dozen or so empty seats which would be occupied differentially by different countries from different regions depending on the issue being worked on or decided upon. This is called variable geometry. For example, the four countries which seem to command nearly unanimous agreement as new members of the summit group are China, India, Brazil and South Africa. Their presence would enlarge the summits to an L-12. Six additional open seats for countries depending on the issue would make a total of 18 which would make a small enough grouping for discussion and decision-making, enhancing performance legitimacy.

Safeguards Against Pre-emption

Immediate safeguards from being taken hostage would be to establish decision-making procedures which protected each of the twelve core member countries. The general working method would be to resolve differences by compromise and try to achieve unanimous consensus among the L-12 on the agenda, on priorities and on policy decisions or recommendations. For example, where consensus cannot be reached because some core member's vital interests are at stake, a procedure for tabling an issue,

which could then be brought back later if and when the core members' objections are dealt with. And a procedure for removing entirely an issue or decision from consideration might be put in place. A suggestion would be that any two core countries could table an issue, removing it for the time being from the discussion, with the understanding that it is not off the agenda entirely and could be brought back at a later time, providing the two core members concerns have been either met or taken care of by events. Another suggestion is that any four core members could in effect defeat an item or proposed decision by objection. This would remove the matter entirely from summit consideration for the foreseeable future, so as not to continuously clog up the agenda or provoke acrimony and conflict. The idea of these proposed procedures is to provide safeguards for both current and prospective members but not allow single country vetoes, as in the UN Security Council. Every singular objection requires at least one like-minded partner.

Evolutionary Representativeness

The ability of regimes to take in diverse opinions and to adjust to changed circumstances is an important feature to continuously upgrade capacity to deal with evolving contexts. (Epistemic reliability, in Robert Keohane's terminology. Keohane 2005, page 22.) There are two additional ways that might enhance representativeness legitimacy. There is increasing talk among Europeans that it would be acceptable in some specific institutional settings to reduce European representation to a single seat for the European Union. One such setting might be the IMF Board of Executive Directors; another could be the head of state summits. If the EU took one seat in the summits, it would reduce the core member group of the L-12 to nine countries, five industrial country seats and four developing country seats. This smaller sized group would enhance performance legitimacy by removing three extra seats while not stripping any single country or region of representation.

Also, an EU single chair might be an opportune moment to further enhance representativeness legitimacy by inviting an Islamic nation such as Egypt to take a core member seat at the table. It seems absolutely vital to include an Islamic nation and a Middle East country in the summit mechanism. Perhaps it can be done immediately. But if not, it might be better to go with what is feasible first---i.e. add China, India, Brazil and South Africa which are less controversial---and then move later to include an Islamic Middle Eastern country. If, for example, Egypt was added at the same moment that the EU took a single chair, the core group would be an L-10, with five industrial countries and five developing countries. The voting rules outlined above would still provide safeguards for all. The G-20 is an illustration of an effective group in which ten developing countries actually outnumber the nine industrial country members (when a G-7 member is president of the EU, which is the twentieth chair when the EU president is not a G-7 member country).

Another version of evolutionary representativeness was suggested orally by Kemal Dervis. It is to revisit the representativeness issue at some predetermined date in the

future. For example, it could be agreed now, when a new summit grouping is formed, that in, say 2020, the membership/representativeness issue would be revisited and reviewed to see what current thinking and political perceptions are at the time. The most obvious seats that might come under review would be the developing country regional seats in Africa, the Middle East and Latin America. Since there is only one seat per region, it might be the case, according to the Dervis formulation, that any one of these regions might wish to claim a regional chair and elect a representative of the region for a period of, say, five years, to be reviewed and re-elected every five years. This could open up the issue of regional representation, which might be complex and contentious right now, even holding back the whole project of summit reform, but enhance the current reform proposal by not making once-and-forever decisions about representation and specifying a date-certain in the future when the issue would be revisited.

V.Conclusions: Toward More Concerted Action on the Global Agenda

To summarize, there are several key drivers that compel action on summit reform. First, there is a vacuum at the apex of the international system for the implementation of the new global agenda, including the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals, among other issues. UN ECOSOC is moribund; the World Bank-IMF ministerial committees (the IMFC and the Development Committee) are strictly speaking confined to the BWI agendas; the G-7/8 is too narrow in its country composition; *there is now no mechanism for providing strategic guidance to the international system as a whole from the apex.*

Second, there is an immense shift from the 20th century focus on specialization to the 21st century focus on interlinkages among global challenges and on intersectoral synergies to be realized by dealing with them in an integrated rather than isolated fashion. This shift in the substantive foundations of the challenges humanity faces is mirrored by a configuration of international institutions, many of which are actually known as “specialized agencies”, which are organized on 20th century principles. *A major way to adjust the mismatch of the configuration of international institutions to the constellation of global challenges is for national political leaders to generate strategic guidance on the new inter-institutional relations* which are required to adequately address the challenges and realize the intersectoral synergies embedded in the multisectoral MD and MDG agendas. Furthermore, only heads of state have the authority to address multisectoral programs involving multiministerial agendas within their countries as the necessary counterpart to intersectoral agendas for international institutions.

Third, the new global agenda potentially provides a new politics for democratic accountability through the relationship of global goals with quantifiable targets and indicators to monitoring and evaluation systems providing transparency and accountability. There is a new emphasis on results rather than efforts, outcomes rather than inputs which can create a new space for democratic politics and common endeavors. This new results orientation opens opportunities for political leadership to create new and more effective relations among different international institutions to generate greater

synergies and higher yield outcomes in dealing with global issues. The injection of political leadership into these relationships can energize the linkages between different components of the international community, accelerating systemic reform. *Linking leadership, vision, institutions and results can enhance accountability legitimacy of the international system.*

Fourth, *summit reform* provides a potentially more flexible, feasible and facile avenue for transformational changes in global governance than other possible areas of reform. Creating new mandates and agendas for global governance and expanding the membership of the summit mechanism to include a combination of new core members and variable geometry for additional members depending on the issues and challenge up for discussion and decision is a way to *combine enhanced representativeness and performance legitimacy in one move*. Focusing on summit reform also capitalizes on the high *political legitimacy* associated with national government leaders in the international system. Summit reform seems to have the most solid foundation for apex leadership in the international system, the highest return in terms of effectiveness due to its small size, informal modality and unbureaucratic nature, and the most diverse sources of representative legitimacy deriving from rotation, evolution, and expansion of the membership. By taking on humanity's goals for the 21st century, the summits will be seeking to reflect the *aspirational legitimacy* embodied in the goals themselves.

Politics provides the electricity that charges the international system with energy, resources and resolve to undertake major challenges. Translating national political leadership into global political leadership seems to be the best means of introducing new dynamics into the international system so that global governance processes can generate guidance, oversight and new relations of the international institutions necessary for the global challenges of the 21st century to be adequately addressed.

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Acknowledgements: This paper was inspired by attendance at an excellent conference on UN reform held in Waterloo on April 3-5, 2005, organized by Paul Heinbecker at the Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI). I am grateful to him and his colleagues, John English and Andrew Cooper, at CIGI for their collaboration and collegueship during the last year. This paper is part of a project on the G-20 and Global Governance at the Brookings Institution being carried out by myself and my close colleague, Johannes Linn, with financial support from CIGI. I am very appreciative to Martin Albrow for many thoughtful conversations on this subject and particularly for a most helpful extensive discussion while working on this paper. Two timely conversations with Kemal Dervis have also facilitated my thinking, as noted in the text. I am grateful to Johannes Linn, Nancy Birdsall, Jo Marie Griesgraber, Andrew Cooper, Paul Heinbecker and Mark Zacher for astute comments on an earlier draft for which I am extremely grateful. Mark Zacher also brought the recent paper by Robert Keohane to my attention. I alone am responsible for the views, perspectives, ideas, and errors in this paper.

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CIB: 17 May 2005