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Gordon Brown and the Future of the U.S.–U.K. Alliance

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As Gordon Brown settles in at 10 Downing Street, there is growing concern in Washington over the future of the Anglo–American Special Relationship. There is also a fear that he will seek a clean break from the Blair era by putting distance between Britain and the United States on the world stage.

In practice, Brown is unlikely to immediately transform the essence of the Anglo–American alliance, but he will adjust its style, tempo, and priorities as well as the dynamics that drive it. He will have to face major threats to the Special Relationship, including rising anti-Americanism and the increasing centralization of political power in the European Union.

With a large base of support on the left of the Labour Party and ties to Democrats in Washington, Gordon Brown will not seek to emulate the close friendship that Tony Blair developed with President Bush. The new Prime Minister will avoid the high-profile public displays of unity that were a regular occurrence when Blair was leader and replace them with frank, behind-the-scenes negotiations.

Iraq. The British press has reported that Gordon Brown may reverse Blair's policy in Iraq and announce the early withdrawal of British forces from the country. The election of Harriet Harman, a critic of the Iraq war, as Labour's deputy leader, has reinforced these fears. Despite the feverish media speculation over Brown's intentions, it is unlikely that he will make an immediate decision to draw down the remaining 5,500 British forces in the country. Such a move would cause a severe early

strain in relations between London and Washington and would undercut the White House as it tries to shore up political support for the war on Capitol Hill. The new Prime Minister will also wish to avoid the impression that he is weak-kneed, after backing Blair's Iraq policy for several years.

Brown will, however, face intense pressure from left-wing Members of Parliament to extricate Britain from Iraq, and a further deterioration in the security situation or any significant loss of British troops could make a pro-war position increasingly untenable. In addition, growing calls from the opposition Conservative Party and Liberal Democrats for an inquiry into the Iraq War will add to the pressure to shift course on Iraq, as will the prospect of a possible general election as early as 2008 before an overwhelmingly anti-war electorate.

A frequent visitor to the United States, Brown's instincts are pro-American, but those of many of his supporters certainly are not. He will face a more openly anti-American stance from Labour MPs, who will be sharpening their knives not only over Iraq but also over features of the U.S.-led war on terrorism, such as the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, the CIA's practice of "extraordinary rendition," and American support of Israel.

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Brown on the World Stage. Brown's approach toward America will be less sentimental than Blair's, based on his narrower conception of the British national interest. He will be more willing to split with Washington and confront the United States over "soft" issues, such as international development assistance, poverty reduction, trade, and global warming, that he views as top priorities. Brown has called for "a modern Marshall Plan" for the developing world, with a doubling of development aid from Western nations, combined with a complete write-off of multilateral and bilateral debt owed by the world's poorest countries.

His views on some of the biggest foreign policy issues of the day, however, such as how the West must ultimately deal with Iran's nuclear program, remain an enigma, and it is uncertain whether Brown will back a more hawkish line toward the regime in Tehran. If the United States were to use military force against Iran's nuclear facilities, there would be no guarantee that a Brown-led British government would provide military, strategic, or political support.

What is certain is that Gordon Brown will not withdraw British forces from Afghanistan. Britain is currently redeploying 1,500 troops from Iraq to operations against the Taliban, and the number of

British forces in southern Afghanistan as part of the NATO-led operation is expected to rise to 8,000 by the end of the year.

The Future of the Special Relationship. The Special Relationship will continue in the immediate term under Gordon Brown in a more low-key fashion, with close Anglo-American cooperation in Afghanistan and global counter-terrorist operations as well as over a range of issues, from the genocide in Sudan to Russia's increasingly aggressive attitude toward Europe.

Brown will, however, need to demonstrate strong leadership in defense of the alliance if it is to survive. The Special Relationship is under threat and stands in a precarious long-term position. Major challenges loom on the horizon, including the stunning rise of anti-Americanism in Britain, growing attempts by the al-Qaeda network to break the alliance, and the continuing loss of British sovereignty in the European Union. The relationship cannot be taken for granted; protecting it must be a top-level priority for both the British and U.S. governments.

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