

# WebMemo



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## The Bush–Brown Camp David Summit: Will There Be a Shift in the Special Relationship?

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President Bush will host new British Prime Minister Gordon Brown at Camp David on July 29–30. The meeting will take place against the backdrop of simmering tensions between London and Washington over controversial remarks made by high-ranking officials in the Brown administration. Growing public animosity in the U.K. toward U.S. foreign policy has also contributed to speculation that the new prime minister will seek a closer relationship with Europe at the expense of the transatlantic alliance.

Although Brown may adjust some of its priorities as well as the dynamics that drive it, he is unlikely to change the essence of the Anglo–American alliance. While walking a delicate political path, Gordon Brown must act decisively to preserve an alliance that is crucial for defending freedom throughout the world.

**What to Expect from the Camp David Summit.** Recent remarks made by International Development Secretary Douglas Alexander<sup>1</sup> and new Foreign Office Minister Mark Malloch Brown were widely interpreted as an attempt to create distance between the new Brown government and the Bush Administration. Malloch Brown's outspoken comments, in particular, given in an interview with the London *Daily Telegraph*,<sup>2</sup> caused considerable unease in the United States, and would have led to a major diplomatic incident had they not been swiftly disavowed by the Brown administration.

In addition, Brown's recent meetings with German Chancellor Angela Merkel and with French

President Nicolas Sarkozy, in advance of his trip to Washington, have been interpreted in Europe as a sign that the new prime minister will adopt a closer relationship with Europe, at the expense of the transatlantic alliance. There is already talk in European capitals of a new axis developing between Berlin, Paris, and London, with Brown shifting away from Washington.

This weekend's meeting may well be the most awkward set of talks between Great Britain and the United States since the infamous February 2001 "toothpaste summit," when Tony Blair met with President Bush for the first time at Camp David in the pre-9/11 era. Brown, a rather dour and uncharismatic figure, has little in common with his more outgoing U.S. counterpart, and is unlikely to repeat the extraordinarily close partnership struck by his predecessor with the American president.

There is growing public animosity in the U.K. toward the Anglo–American alliance and widespread disillusionment with American global leadership, points reinforced in a new poll published by *The Sunday Times*,<sup>3</sup> which showed that 60 percent of Britons believe that Brown "should seek to put some distance between him and George Bush." The new prime minister will inevitably seek to reduce the

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number of high-profile public displays of unity that were a regular occurrence when Blair was leader and replace them with more frank, behind-the-scenes negotiations.

Style and personality aside, however, it is likely the Special Relationship will continue in the immediate term under Gordon Brown, a point he made clear in his first Downing Street press conference, where he described it as “our strongest bilateral relationship.”<sup>4</sup> Brown emphatically declared that “the relationship between a British prime minister and an American president will be as strong, should be strong, and will be strengthened in the months and years to come.” His Foreign Secretary David Miliband also acted quickly to quash any suggestion that the remarks by Malloch Brown reflected the view of the prime minister.<sup>5</sup>

There is no sign yet of an early withdrawal of British troops from Iraq, and in Afghanistan, London remains firmly committed to increasing Britain’s military commitment. On Iran, Brown has significantly not ruled out the use of force to halt Tehran’s nuclear program. There will certainly be continuing close Anglo–American cooperation in the war on terror as well as over a range of issues, from the genocide in Sudan to confronting Russia’s increasingly aggressive attitude toward Europe.

**A British Shift Toward Paris and Berlin?** As prime minister, Gordon Brown will probably disappoint those in Europe who wish to see Britain play a more central role in the European Union in close alliance with the continent’s two other major powers. Britain’s foreign policy focus will likely remain firmly anchored in the transatlantic alliance, and the relationship with Washington will remain paramount for the foreseeable future.

A Berlin–London–Paris axis might sound like an attractive proposition in the Chancellery or Élysée

Palace, but it is wishful thinking. Adopting this position would be little short of a revolution in British foreign policy and the most significant shift in strategic thinking since the World War II.

Washington’s commitment to maintaining the Special Relationship is just as great—if not greater—than London’s. The White House is under no illusion that in terms of significant military and intelligence support in Europe, the United States has only one major ally that is a global power in its own right, and that is Great Britain. Today, more than 12,000 British troops fight alongside their American counterparts in Iraq and Afghanistan, and London and Washington are cooperating on dozens of counterterrorism operations across the globe. The enduring strength of the alliance is the envy of the free world, and the French president and German chancellor can only dream of the kind of direct access to the U.S. president that is the preserve of the British prime minister.

The French and German governments have fortunately dropped their outright hostility toward the United States, and it is easier for both Downing Street and the White House to work with their new leaders than it was with Chirac and Schröder. However, while France and Germany will cooperate with Washington on some issues, they are unlikely to fight alongside America in a major war (Afghanistan is a perfect example). Paris and Berlin will act, in some cases, as strategic partners of Washington, but more often as strategic competitors. The brutal truth remains that Germany and France cannot be relied upon by the United States to act as close allies when the chips are down, and America needs a friend to stand alongside her.

There is also little prospect that Britain under Brown will move to the heart of Europe. Like Tony Blair before him, Brown will find that he will fre-

1. See Patrick Wintour and Julian Borger, “Brown Message to U.S.: It’s Time to Build, Not Destroy,” *The Guardian*, July 13, 2007, at <http://politics.guardian.co.uk/foreignaffairs/story/0,,2125375,00.html>.
2. Rachel Sylvester and Alice Thomson, “Mark Malloch Brown: ‘Let’s Not Rely Just on US,’” Interview with *The Daily Telegraph*, July 15, 2007, at [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2007/07/14/nforeign214.xml](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2007/07/14/nforeign214.xml).
3. YouGov/Sunday Times Survey, July 19–20, 2007, at [www.yougov.com/archives/pdf/results%2007%2007%2020%20topline.pdf](http://www.yougov.com/archives/pdf/results%2007%2007%2020%20topline.pdf).
4. Gordon Brown, Press Conference, 10 Downing Street, July 23, 2007.
5. See Philip Webster, “US Is Most Vital Ally, Says Miliband,” *TimesOnline*, July 16, 2007, at [www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/politics/article2080573.ece](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/politics/article2080573.ece).

quently have to choose between siding with the United States and siding with the big powers of the European Union on crucial matters of war and peace. The German chancellor and the French president are primarily European rather than global in outlook, and view most issues through the prism of the EU and their own national interests within that framework. Britain's focus is far less Eurocentric, with a greater emphasis upon acting as a global player than a European one.

Paris and Berlin traditionally work in concert within the EU on most major issues, a fact that is unlikely to change significantly under Merkel and Sarkozy. Both leaders are committed to further political integration in the European Union and believe in centralizing more political power in Brussels in the area of foreign, economic, and defence policy. Brown shares little enthusiasm for the European single currency or expanding the role of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). He may even roll back Britain's commitment to the European Convention on Human Rights as part of a toughening of British anti-terror laws. Brown will also face intense public pressure to agree to a U.K. referendum on the new European Union Treaty,<sup>6</sup> a revived version of the European Constitution, which will place him directly at loggerheads with Paris and Berlin.

**What Brown Must Do to Preserve the Special Relationship.** As prime minister, Gordon Brown will be forced to navigate a delicate path between support for the United States and appeasing the anti-American and pro-European instincts of many in his own ruling Labour Party. He will 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 difficult. 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 fall 2007 or spring 2008, before an overwhelmingly anti-war electorate.

Brown will need to demonstrate strong leadership in defense of the Anglo-American alliance if it is to survive for future generations to inherit. The relationship cannot be taken for granted, and protecting it must be a top-level priority for both the British and U.S. governments. Brown will need to act swiftly to repair the harm caused by his minister for Asia, Africa, and the United Nations, whose recent remarks were among the most undiplomatic made in the modern history of the Foreign Office. Mark Malloch Brown's appointment was a slap in the face to the United States, and if he continues to operate as a loose cannon, the potential for serious damage to the working relationship between London and Washington cannot be underestimated.

**Conclusion.** Faced with the rising threat from al-Qaeda, the insurgency in Iraq, counteroffensives by the Taliban in Afghanistan, and the looming specter of a nuclear-armed Iran, the next few years will be a critical time for U.S.-U.K. relations. It is imperative that London and Washington work together in addressing the major international issues of the day. A world without strong joint Anglo-American leadership would be a far more dangerous place. It is a partnership that must continue to flourish if the West is to defeat the scourge of global terrorism and defend the cause of liberty and freedom around the world.

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6. According to the latest *Telegraph/YouGov* poll, 58 percent of British voters back calls for a referendum on the EU Treaty, with just 17 percent opposed. See George Jones, "Gordon Brown's Lead May Provoke Election," *The Daily Telegraph*, July 27, 2007, at [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2007/07/27/nbrown127.xml](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2007/07/27/nbrown127.xml).