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The Bush–Blair White House Summit: The U.S.–U.K. Relationship Is Still Special

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President Bush will meet with British Prime Minister Tony Blair at the White House on December 7. This is the latest episode in an extraordinary partnership between the two world leaders, which will end in 2007 with Blair's departure from Downing Street. The alliance is coming under increasing fire in the United Kingdom, where opinion polls indicate growing public skepticism over the value of the special relationship. The summit also takes place just days after highly controversial comments by State Department official Kendall Myers, who described the special relationship as "one-sided" and a "myth."¹

This week's White House meeting, the 10th major U.S. summit between the two leaders since 9/11, will focus heavily on the newly released findings of the Iraq Study Group, as well as the war in Afghanistan, the Middle East peace process, the Iranian nuclear crisis, and the genocide in Sudan. It will also be a forum for frank discussion over the future of Iraq, and President Bush should not be wary of opposing Blair's call for negotiations with Iran and Syria. It will also be an important opportunity to reiterate the strength and value of the Anglo–American special relationship, the driving force of the global war on terror, and the most powerful alliance in the world in the defense of freedom.

Key Recommendations for the Bush–Blair Summit

Fight to Win in Iraq

The U.S. and U.K. must remain united in their determination to win the war in Iraq, despite inevitable disagreements over strategy. An early withdrawal of British or American troops would have catastrophic implications for the future of Iraq and be seen by many Iraqis as a betrayal of trust. By liberating Iraq and removing one of the most brutal regimes of modern times, Britain and the United States made a powerful commitment to the future of the Iraqi people that must be honored. There should be no major pullout of Allied forces from the country until key military objectives have been met and Iraq is stable and secure.

The U.S. and the U.K. share a fundamental national interest in staying in Iraq and defeating the insurgency. The Middle East would view an early withdrawal as a humiliating defeat for the West and an emphatic victory for those who represent al-Qaeda in Iraq. A pullout would be an unparalleled propaganda success for a barbaric terror organization that has murdered thousands of Iraqi men, women, and children.

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Say No to Engagement with Iran

Tony Blair's call for U.S. and British engagement with Tehran to find a solution to the violence in Iraq is naive and risky, and the Bush Administration should reject it. The British government's decision to engage Iran and Syria, which the Iraq Study Group has echoed, is a serious strategic error that is likely to exacerbate the situation in Iraq rather than improve it. It risks dividing the Anglo-American alliance and strengthening the hands of rogue regimes that have a vested interest in weakening the partnership between Washington and London on the world stage.

Iran remains the world's biggest state sponsor of international terrorism and the greatest threat to world peace, along with North Korea. The Iranian regime is reportedly building close ties with al-Qaeda's leadership and training senior al-Qaeda operatives in Tehran in an effort to build a strategic terror alliance against the West.²

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is pressing forward with plans for a nuclear weapons program and continues to maintain that Israel should be "wiped off the map." Iran is also a huge part of the problem in Iraq, with Iranian-backed Shia militias actively engaged in a war against British forces in the south of the country. Blair's strategy of reaching out to Iran follows the European Union's fruitless policy of "constructive engagement" with Iran over its nuclear ambitions and is similarly likely to embolden rather than weaken Iran as a destructive force on the world stage.

Stand up to Iranian Threats

Washington and London should send a strong message to Tehran that the free world will not tolerate a nuclear-armed Iran or threats against Israel. The United States and United Kingdom should

propose the admission of Israel into NATO as a full and equal member.³ Israeli accession to NATO would explicitly extend the Western alliance's nuclear deterrent to cover Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. Israel meets NATO qualifications: It is a democracy, has a free-market economy, and is able to contribute to the common defense. Unlike some new NATO members, Israel would be a major net addition to the alliance, with lift and logistics ability, a superlative officer corps, and a first-rate military capable of all aspects of war-fighting. Israel spends nearly 10 percent of its GDP on defense and has active armed forces of 167,000 men and women, with 358,000 in reserve. It possesses up to 200 nuclear warheads and a well-equipped air force and navy.⁴ Israel's intelligence capabilities have been a vital asset in prosecuting the war on terrorism. Like the U.S. and Great Britain, Israel is a genuine warrior nation. Its accession to NATO could only enhance the alliance's capabilities.

As Iran moves closer toward its goal of producing a nuclear weapon and its threats against Israel and the West grow louder, the United States and the United Kingdom must build a powerful international alliance to confront and, if necessary, forcibly disarm the regime in Tehran.

Urge European NATO Partners To Help in Afghanistan

The U.S. and the U.K. must urge major European NATO partners to send combat troops to southern Afghanistan to help fight the Taliban. They should call for NATO to abolish "caveats" for member countries in theaters of war and call for all NATO member states to abide by the baseline rules in NATO operations or relinquish their memberships. It is unacceptable that British, American, and Canadian troops are laying down their lives in

1. See Toby Harnden, "Britain's Special Relationship Just a Myth," *The Daily Telegraph*, December 1, 2006, at <http://www.telegraph.co.U.K./news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2006/11/30/wusU.K.30.xml>.
2. "Iran 'Is Training the Next Al-Qaeda Leaders,'" *The Daily Telegraph*, November 14, 2006, at <http://www.telegraph.co.U.K./news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2006/11/14/wiran214.xml>; "Iran Plotting to Groom Bin Laden's Successor," *The Daily Telegraph*, November 14, 2006, at <http://www.telegraph.co.U.K./news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2006/11/14/wiran14.xml>.
3. This idea was originally proposed in John Hulsman, Ph.D., and Nile Gardiner, Ph.D., "Confounding the Mullahs of Iran: It's Time for Israel to Join NATO," Heritage Foundation *WebMemo* No. 966, January 24, 2006, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/MiddleEast/wm966.cfm>.
4. See International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance*, 2003–2004.

counterterrorism operations while many fellow NATO member states participating under the same operational command refuse to help. NATO must return to its original “all for one, one for all” spirit or it will perish as an institution.

Take Action to End the Genocide in Darfur

President Bush and Prime Minister Blair should call for an immediate meeting of key allies in Washington or London to discuss the crisis in the Darfur region of Sudan. Up to 400,000 people have been killed by Sudanese-backed Janjaweed militias in barbaric acts of ethnic cleansing. The United States and the United Kingdom should support the establishment of a NATO-enforced no-fly zone over Darfur, based on a coalition-of-the-willing strategy, in support of African Union peacekeepers. The West cannot rely upon an ineffective and morally ambivalent United Nations to take action over the biggest man-made humanitarian tragedy of the 21st century where tens of thousands of refugees face sustained attacks from Islamic militants. The U.N.’s track record in the face of genocide, from the killing fields of Rwanda to the “safe haven” of Srebrenica, has been one of appalling weakness and callous indifference in the face of human suffering.

The World Needs Anglo–American Leadership

The Anglo–American special relationship today faces some of the greatest challenges in its 60-year history, including rising public and political opposition in the U.K. Worryingly, anti-American views are now as widespread, or perhaps even more prevalent, in the U.K. than in some continental European countries with a far deeper tradition of public skepticism toward the U.S. In a recent *Financial Times*/Harris poll in five of the EU’s largest member states⁵, a staggering 36 percent of Britons surveyed described the United States as “the greatest threat to global security.” (Just 19 percent of British respondents cited Iran as the world’s greatest threat.)

If the British public continues to move further away from the United States and slide closer to the European Union on major international issues, the long-term future of the special relationship will be

placed in jeopardy. In many ways, Britain is at a turning point in its history: it is faced with a choice between further political, legal, military, and economic integration with the EU or a deepening of its alliance with the United States and other English-speaking allies such as Australia. As Tony Blair has discovered with the Iraq war, the two competing visions are largely incompatible.

From the U.S. point of view, it would be a geostrategic disaster if Britain leaned toward Brussels rather than Washington. Under a fully developed EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), America’s closest ally would be unable to operate an independent foreign policy and stand alongside the United States where and when it chose to do so. The consequences for the United States would be hugely damaging.

For Britain, there is much to lose from a weakening of the Anglo–American alliance: the further loss of national sovereignty, the diminution of British global power and influence, the loosening of defence and intelligence ties, and a weakening of the close-knit financial, trade, and investment relationship.

For both U.S. and U.K. policymakers and politicians, the defense of the Anglo–American special relationship should be a top priority. On the U.S. side, the Bush Administration should greatly step up public diplomacy in the U.K. Little has been done so far to project and communicate America’s foreign policy message to British and European audiences effectively. In London, the Blair government must do more to explain how the alliance with America enhances Britain’s national security and why the special relationship brings Britain significant benefits. At the same time, the British government should not undermine the alliance with America by supporting further political or defense integration in Europe.

This week’s Washington summit should serve as a potent reminder of the enduring strength and value of the special relationship. It is significant that it is the British Prime Minister and not the German Chancellor, the French President, or the U.N.

5. *Financial Times*/Harris Poll of Adults in Five European Countries, August 21, 2006, at <http://www.harrisinteractive.com/news/allnewsbydate.asp?NewsID=1081>.

Secretary General, whom the U.S. President looks to for partnership in addressing the big international security matters of the day. In times of international crisis, the U.S. and the U.K. stand together, and the world is a safer and better place for it.

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