

Lecture 8: UK Objectives for the Sea Island Summit

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My name is Nicholas Bayne and I teach at the London School of Economics and Political Science. This lecture for G8 Online examines the objectives being pursued by the United Kingdom — and by the British prime minister, Tony Blair — for the 2004 G8 Summit at Sea Island, Georgia.

The British have always approached the annual G8 summit in a thoughtful and systematic way, and 2004 is no exception. The objectives being formulated this year must be seen in terms of the past, the present and the future: the past, because Tony Blair himself inaugurated, back in 1998, the current summit format where only the heads of government meet. The present, because the British always want the annual summit to focus on issues that need to be resolved at head of government level. And the future, because Blair expects to preside over the next G8 summit, which will be held in Britain in 2005.

The Past — Summit Format

So far this year the American preparatory process has remained faithful to the model introduced by Tony Blair at the Birmingham Summit of 1998. The U.S. sherpa team has made clear that George Bush wants an informal, hard-working summit, with the maximum of direct contact between the leaders and the minimum of distractions. This wins British approval and is seen as a welcome change from last year's Evian Summit, which was over-ambitious and burdened with too much documentation.

But there are some aspects of this year's preparations where the United Kingdom would have preferred a different approach. The Americans have not chosen a precise and limited agenda, but instead taken three very broad themes — security, freedom and prosperity. But

these themes could cover almost anything, so that the agenda could spread unpredictably as the summit approaches. The British have supported gradual outreach from the summit, whereby the G8 have developed links with important non-G8 countries and invited their leaders to joint sessions at the summit. The United States seemed at first to have decided not to invite non-G8 leaders to the Sea Island event, though they now considering meetings before the summit with African or Middle Eastern leaders. Despite these differences of method, however, the British feel that the American preparations leave them free to develop their own approach for next year — more of that later.

The Present — Agenda for 2004

The British see two central issues of substance for this year's summit and welcome the attention the United States has given to them. These are, first, the Middle East, broadly defined, and, second, nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Last year's summit at Evian took place after deep divisions had emerged among the G8 members over the war in Iraq. Personal contact had almost broken down between George Bush on one side and Jacques Chirac and Gerhard Schroeder on the other. The Evian Summit was successful in bringing all the leaders back on to speaking terms, but the wounds over Iraq were too fresh to permit any substantive joint action. This year's summit provides the opportunity to show solid G8 co-operation on Middle Eastern issues. That is Blair's highest objective, which he has been pursuing with both Bush and his colleagues in the European Union.

The United States has been developing ideas and proposals to improve standards of gov-

ernance and economic performance throughout the Middle East region, from Morocco to Pakistan, called the "Greater Middle East Initiative" (GMEI). When these ideas began to leak out, countries of the region, such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia, protested that the U.S. was trying to dictate to them. But as well as protesting, the members of the Arab League have been trying to develop their own ideas for reform, though they have found it hard to agree among themselves.

The UK has been backing many of the American ideas and pointing out the parallels with the "Barcelona process" launched by the European Union back in 1995. This too aimed at promoting economic and political advance in the region, though progress has been very slow. The 2004 Summit provides an opportunity to re-launch all these ideas as a collective G8 initiative, not imposing measures on the countries of the region but giving them encouragement to develop their own reform processes. It is still unclear how far this year's summit can go. Whatever emerges from the Sea Island Summit will only be the start of a long evolution toward greater democracy and better economic growth in an unstable region. The British expect that this initiative will still need attention at the 2005 Summit and are happy to prepare for that.

Broad ideas for political and economic reform would be much more acceptable in the region if the G8 could show progress in resolving the tension between the Israelis and the Palestinians. The U.S., the EU and Russia have worked together with the United Nations over the original "road map." But the meeting between Bush and Ariel Sharon of Israel in mid-April has provoked anxiety among the Europeans, who fear the alienation of the Palestinians. The G8 Summit provides the chance of agreeing on new joint moves to promote a settlement — and this is a major British objective.

The same is true of Iraq. Early preparations for the Summit did not envisage that Iraq itself would be a major topic. But recent events

have changed that, since the Summit will be held only shortly before the planned transfer of power in Iraq, for which the U.S., the UK and other coalition members are seeking greater involvement by the UN. If the G8 can agree on a joint approach to Iraq post-30 June, with greater involvement from France and Germany, that would meet another British objective.

In the field of nonproliferation, there are several issues that could be advanced at the G8 Summit, building on the decisions taken last year at Evian. The most hopeful event in the last year has been the decision of Libya to renounce nuclear arms and to surrender its weaponry. This has produced valuable intelligence on what other countries have been doing, especially Iran, North Korea and Pakistan. Libya therefore needs to be encouraged back into the international community. The policies of Iran have improved since the joint visit there last November by the foreign ministers of France, Germany and Britain, but they still have worrying elements. A firm understanding reached at the Summit among the G8 would strengthen the hand of the [International Atomic Energy Agency](#) (IAEA) in ensuring Iran observes its disciplines. The news from North Korea is less encouraging, but diplomatic contacts are continuing. The Summit enables the rest of the G8 to back up the multilateral process being pursued by the U.S., Japan and Russia together with China and South Korea.

The Future — The Agenda for 2005

One subject is likely to be less prominent this year than it has been in earlier years and that is Africa. Even so, the Sea Island Summit will discuss some issues of development that are of great concern to Africa, such as food security, the fight against HIV/AIDS, encouraging the private sector and greater transparency of mining, oil exploitation and government finance.

Tony Blair, however, has already identified Africa as a major topic for the Summit in 2005, which he expects to chair. Blair prefers to select

a precise agenda of a few specific topics well in advance. Africa is already at the head of the list, with climate change in second place. Blair has been personally involved from the outset with the movement for an African renaissance, launched back in 2000 by presidents Thabo Mbeki of South Africa and Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria. This has evolved into the [New Partnership for Africa's Development](#) (NEPAD), which is still making progress despite all the troubles affecting the continent. Blair, together with Jean Chrétien of Canada and Jacques Chirac of France, has consistently backed the G8's involvement in Africa, as embodied in the Africa Action Plan agreed upon in 2002.

In preparation for next year's summit, Blair has already created a Commission for Africa, with leading members from both G8 and African countries. This is intended to maintain public interest in ending the international

marginalisation of sub-Saharan Africa. Gordon Brown, the British finance minister, is promoting a new international financial facility that will double the amount of aid flowing to poor countries, especially in Africa, and hopes that this will win G8 backing by the time of the 2005 summit. African leaders are very likely to be invited to join the G8's discussions again next year.

Africa and climate change will not be the only topics for the G8 in 2005. Other issues, such as the multilateral trade negotiations in the [World Trade Organization](#) (WTO), may be ripe for joint action by next year's summit. Part of the British objectives in 2004 will be to ensure that the decisions taken the Sea Island Summit provide the foundations for effective G8 actions in a year's time, both on current priority issues, like the Middle East, and on new and revived topics like the future of Africa.●

Discussion Questions

To come

Quiz

1. What is the name of the joint proposal by President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa and President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria?
 - a. New Plan for Africa's Development (NEPAD)
 - b. Third World Economic Development (TWED)
 - c. African Initiative for Millennium Economic Development (AIMED)
 - d. Africa Action Plan (AAP)
2. The UK's primary objectives for the Sea Island Summit are to discuss:
 - a. the Middle East and Afghanistan
 - b. water, famine relief and mining
 - c. nonproliferation and the Middle East
 - d. North Korea and the Barcelona process
3. What country holds the chair of the 2005 Summit?
 - a. Canada
 - b. Russia
 - c. France
 - d. Britain