

Background

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The President's State Visit to Britain: Advancing the Anglo–U.S. Special Relationship

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On November 19–21, President George W. Bush will visit London as a guest of the British government. It will be the first ever State Visit by a U.S. president to the United Kingdom. The visit has huge symbolic significance, as well as being a critical meeting for both President Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair. The visit should solidify the Anglo–American nexus, which is of primary importance to both countries.

The U.S.–British alliance is a strikingly successful partnership of two great nations built on the solid foundations of a common heritage, culture, and vision. The two nations have fought alongside each other in seven major wars in the past 90 years, from World War I to the second Gulf War.

The U.S. and U.K. are also powerfully linked by trade and investment. The U.S. is by far the largest foreign direct investor in the U.K., and vice versa. Forty-three percent of all British direct investment overseas goes to the United States, compared to 35 percent invested in the entire European Union.¹ In addition, two-fifths of all American direct investment in the EU is in Britain, and more than 5,600 U.S. companies operate in the U.K.²

1. Margaret Thatcher, *Statecraft: Strategies for a Changing World* (London: HarperCollins, 2002), p. 402.
2. Figures cited in British Embassy, “Doing Business with the UK,” Washington, D.C., at www.uktradeinvestusa.com/DBUK/index.asp (November 12, 2003).

Talking Points

- The U.S.–British alliance is a strikingly successful partnership of two great nations built on the solid foundations of a common heritage, culture, and vision.
- The President should emphasize that Britain is America's most important ally and thank the British people for their sacrifice and support in Iraq. Critically, he should state that the Anglo–U.S. alliance will remain the cornerstone of U.S. strategic thinking.
- The U.S. and U.K. must remain united in their determination to achieve lasting peace in a free Iraq and deal with the twin global threats of state-sponsored terrorism and the production of weapons of mass destruction by rogue states.
- President Bush should raise the issue of the European Constitution and its possible implications for the United States' long-term relationship with Britain and the European Union. The President should seek assurances from Prime Minister Blair that the proposed constitution will not weaken the Anglo–U.S. special relationship.

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Key Goals of the State Visit

The goals of President Bush's state visit should be to:

- **Demonstrate** a united Anglo–U.S. front on Iraq,
- **Strengthen** U.S.–British cooperation in the war against terrorism,
- **Formulate** a joint position on dealing with rogue states, and
- **Provide** reassurances to Washington regarding NATO and the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP), as well as the European Constitution.

The President should emphasize that Britain is America's most important ally and thank the British people for their sacrifice and support over the Iraq issue. Critically, he should state that the Anglo–U.S. alliance will remain the cornerstone of U.S. strategic thinking.

In his meetings in London with Prime Minister Blair, the President should also discuss the future direction of Europe. President Bush should raise U.S. concerns over the European Constitution,³ stressing that further European integration will doubtlessly have consequences for the special relationship. He should also raise the issue of the desire by some member states of the European Union to develop the ESDP as a competitor to NATO and its possible impact on the future of the alliance.

Iraq. Britain played a major role in the war to remove Saddam Hussein from power, deploying 45,000 combat troops to the Gulf. It was the largest British military deployment since the Second World War, representing over a third of the nation's armed forces. Over 10,000 British troops remain in Iraq, and the British currently administer the southern region of the country, including the city of Basra. During the deployment, 53 British servicemen have been killed, including 22 in combat.⁴

Britain's continuing involvement in Iraq will be critical for the country's transition. The British Army brings with it years of highly successful experience

in peacekeeping in a wide range of theaters of operation, including Afghanistan, Bosnia, Kosovo, Sierra Leone, and Northern Ireland. The British possess an in-depth knowledge of Iraq and the region and have close diplomatic and historical ties with much of the Arab world. The President should urge the Prime Minister to continue his long-term political and military commitment to the future of Iraq.

Tony Blair should also be encouraged to play a more high-profile role on the international stage with regard to post-war Iraq. Blair was a pivotal figure before the war in developing the case internationally for taking military action to remove Saddam Hussein from power. He played a crucial role in building the broad-based international coalition of the willing that liberated Iraq. Washington was heavily dependent upon London in generating diplomatic support in Europe, which ultimately included Spain, Italy, Poland, and over 15 other European nations.

While the Iraq war was a huge military success, the strains of post-war administration and reconstruction have placed both the U.S. and British leadership under immense pressure. Since the end of hostilities in Iraq, the White House and Downing Street have faced mounting criticism over their handling of intelligence information in the lead-up to the Iraq war, as well as growing impatience over the pace of political reform and economic progress in Baghdad. There is also growing unease domestically, both in Britain and in America, over guerrilla attacks on coalition troops serving in the country and the growing cost of rebuilding the country.

President Bush and Prime Minister Blair must remain focused on the continuing hunt for Saddam Hussein and terrorist insurgents, as well as the establishment of a stable and free Iraq. The U.S. and U.K. should present a common front in the face of growing international criticism of the coalition administration of Iraq. The two nations must remain united in their determination to establish a secure, representative, and self-sustaining Iraq. The state visit to London will provide a valuable opportunity

3. For a detailed overview of the potential impact of the EU Constitution on Britain, see David Heathcoat-Amory, MP, "The European Constitution and What It Means for Britain," Centre for Policy Studies, June 2003, at www.cps.org.uk/dhaconv.pdf.

4. Britain has a long history of military involvement in Iraq. In the First and Second World Wars, 54,000 British and Commonwealth troops died fighting in Iraq.

for London and Washington to renew their call for greater international support for the reconstruction of Iraq.

The White House and Downing Street should also formulate a joint position on the Iraqi debt question, advocating debt forgiveness as opposed to debt restructuring. The U.S. and U.K. should formally call upon European countries (primarily Russia, Germany, and France) and Arab countries (including the Gulf states and Egypt) to forgive the huge debts owed by the Iraqi government. It would be an opportunity for Europe and the Arab world to make a historic contribution to the economic development of post-Saddam Iraq and a major gesture of support for the Iraqi people. If the Iraqi debts are not forgiven, the Iraqi people will be financially crippled for a generation—perhaps even generations.⁵

The War on Terrorism. Since the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington in September 2001, Britain has stood steadfastly with the United States in the war against terrorism. The U.K. was the first country to join with America in launching military strikes against the Taliban in Afghanistan, and the British Prime Minister played an outstanding role in helping to build the international coalition in the fight against al-Qaeda. More than 1,500 British troops served with the International Security and Assistance Force in Kabul, which was led for the first six months by the U.K. A further 1,700 Royal Marines served alongside their U.S. counterparts in the hunt for remnants of the Taliban and al-Qaeda.

As Vice President Richard Cheney has described it, Iraq has now become the “central front” in the war against terrorism.⁶ U.S. and British special forces continue to launch search and destroy missions against Baathist guerillas as well as foreign insurgents operating inside Iraq. To stem the flow of international terrorists flowing into the country from neighboring Arab states, the U.S. and U.K.

must coordinate efforts to pressure Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Iran to cease their support for terrorist groups and hand over Baathist leaders who may have sought safe haven in their countries.

Intelligence gathering will be critical to winning the war against terrorism in Iraq and internationally. While increasing their coordination of anti-terrorist measures, London and Washington should enhance intelligence cooperation between the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency and Britain’s MI6. Britain and America should continue to share intelligence through the Echelon electronic surveillance system while excluding other European nations, in particular France and Russia, both of whom provided Iraq with sensitive intelligence ahead of the coalition invasion.⁷ Echelon should continue to be shared only by the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada.

While the war on terrorism has brought even closer cooperation between the United States and Britain, there are potential pitfalls for the special relationship. The thorny issue of Europeans held by the United States on suspicion of involvement in al-Qaeda terrorist activities is likely to be a key issue of contention between the U.S. and British leaders when they meet. Tony Blair will be under intense pressure from his own Labour Party to secure the suspects’ return to Britain. Over 200 British Members of Parliament have called for the United States to repatriate British Guantanamo Bay detainees to the United Kingdom. (Foreign Secretary Jack Straw has also been critical of the United States’ handling of terrorist suspects at Guantanamo.)

While addressing British concerns over the continuing detention of European suspected terrorists at Guantanamo, President Bush should be wary of making immediate concessions. The fact that it will be extremely difficult for British or European courts to secure convictions against any of the suspected terrorists carries with it serious implications for the global war against terrorism. This would not serve

5. For further background, see Nile Gardiner, Ph.D., and Marc Miles, Ph.D., “Forgive the Iraqi Debt,” Heritage Foundation *Executive Memorandum* No. 871, April 30, 2003, at new.heritage.org/Research/TradeandForeignAid/em871.cfm.

6. The Honorable Richard B. Cheney, “Meeting the Challenge of the War on Terrorism,” Heritage Foundation *Lecture* No. 802, October 17, 2003, at www.heritage.org/Research/MiddleEast/HL802.cfm.

7. “Revealed: Russia Spied on Blair for Saddam,” *The Daily Telegraph*, April 13, 2003, and “Dossier Reveals France Briefed Iraq on US Plans,” *The Sunday Times* (London), April 27, 2003.

the interests of the United States, Great Britain, or other European allies. Indeed, while Prime Minister Blair will need to demonstrate concern over the plight of British detainees, it is by no means clear that he would relish their return to Britain.

Rogue States. The forthcoming meeting between President Bush and Prime Minister Blair offers an excellent opportunity for Washington and London to coordinate an effective policy on dealing with rogue regimes. A joint stance by Britain and America will place added pressure on the U.N. Security Council, the European Union, and other international bodies to take action against regimes that pose a threat to international peace and security.

Britain and America must jointly increase pressure internationally to isolate North Korea and Iran to prevent them from developing and proliferating weapons of mass destruction. The U.S. and U.K. should pressure other international powers such as Russia and China to end nuclear and military cooperation with rogue states.

The White House and Downing Street should call upon the United Nations to play a more constructive role in helping to disarm dangerous rogue regimes. Instead of acting as a glorified debating society, the U.N. should be an effective multilateral body for addressing threats to international security, including the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.⁸ Over Iraq, the U.S. and British leaders displayed outstanding world leadership at a time when the United Nations demonstrated a lack of fortitude and a blatant unwillingness to enforce no fewer than 17 resolutions calling for the disarmament of Saddam Hussein's regime.

Europe. In his meetings with the British Prime Minister, the President should speak frankly about U.S. concerns over the European Security and Defense Policy and the European Constitution. Both issues may have major implications in future years for both Anglo-U.S. and U.S.-European relations.

European Gaullist efforts to establish a European defense identity separate from and in competition with NATO continue to gain ground. Berlin-Plus, the March 17, 2003, agreement reached between the U.S. and the EU that was designed to definitively resolve questions of compatibility between the two institutions,⁹ has been called into question by Franco-German efforts to set up a wholly separate EU planning structure.

During the height of European opposition to the U.S. stance on Iraq, the viability of Berlin-Plus was called into question by France, Germany, Luxembourg, and Belgium. These four countries advocated the establishment of an independent EU military headquarters at Tervuren, Belgium, with an independent planning capacity. Beyond the obvious operational drawback of such an institutional arrangement leading to unnecessary duplication with NATO, the political ramifications of such an outcome are clear. The independent EU command would be wholly autonomous from NATO and would function effectively as the institutional expression of Franco-German efforts to lessen the American role in Europe. Ambassador Nicholas Burns, the U.S. representative to NATO, rightly sounded the alarm, calling such an outcome "the greatest threat to the future of the alliance."¹⁰

President Bush should strongly support the Berlin-Plus agreement and put an end to the seemingly inexhaustible efforts of European Gaullists to scupper American efforts to establish a complementary military arrangement between the U.S. and the EU in which NATO continues to remain the preeminent transatlantic security institution. For the sake of the continued vitality of the alliance, he must echo Ambassador Burns's comments, making it clear that the duplication of planning by the new EU command is not remotely acceptable to the United States. Only by taking such a firm stand can the President finally bury this recurring threat to NATO.

8. This point is explored in more detail in Nile Gardiner, Ph.D., and Baker Spring, "Reform the United Nations," Heritage Foundation *Background* No. 1700, October 27, 2003, at www.heritage.org/Research/InternationalOrganizations/BG-1700.cfm.

9. Berlin-Plus seeks to avoid the unnecessary duplication of transatlantic resources and has four elements. First, it assures the EU access to NATO operational planning. Second, it makes NATO capabilities and common assets available to the EU. Third, it makes the Deputy Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (always a European) also commander of any EU-led operations. Fourth, it adapts the NATO defense planning system to allow for EU-run operations.

10. "EU Military Plans Under Scrutiny," *BBC News Online*, October 21, 2003.

At the same time, the President should convey the message to Prime Minister Blair that the White House is also concerned by the potential impact on U.S.–European relations of the European Constitution. He should express the view that the establishment of a politically centralized Europe run by supranational institutions could fundamentally alter the relationship between Europe and the United States.

President Bush should also seek assurances that the Anglo–U.S. special relationship will not be harmed by British commitments to a future constitution. A common European foreign and security policy that prevents Britain from standing alongside the United States when it wishes to do so would be a nightmare scenario for planners in Washington.

The Rise of British Power

Since September 11, Britain has unquestionably emerged as the world's second most powerful nation. Prime Minister Blair's standing shoulder to shoulder with President Bush in the war against terrorism has reaped enormous dividends in terms of British prestige and influence on the international stage.

In every key area, whether it be diplomatic influence, military power, or economic clout, Britain's star is in the ascendancy relative to the other European powers. Significantly, two-thirds of Americans view Britain as the European nation with the most influence in the world. In contrast, just 5 percent of Americans believe that France is Europe's most influential power.¹¹

It is in Britain's vital national interest to remain as America's key ally in the 21st century. America will retain its preeminent position as the world's sole superpower, and it is critical that Britain retain its place as Washington's leading partner. The European Union, for all its delusions of grandeur and talk of a common foreign and security policy, is likely to remain politically divided, economically stagnant, and militarily weak in terms of global power for decades to come. It therefore remains in both countries' interest to look to each other and not to Brussels in order to maximize their influence.

Key Recommendations for President Bush

- **British Presence in Iraq.** The President should encourage Prime Minister Blair to continue his long-term military commitment to the future of Iraq. A British military presence in the country is vitally important to Iraq's stability.
- **Iraqi Debt.** The White House and Downing Street should formulate a joint position on the Iraqi debt question, calling for the forgiveness, not restructuring, of Iraq's international debt.
- **Rogue States.** The United States and Britain should coordinate pressure on Iran, Syria, and North Korea to cease production of weapons of mass destruction and support for international terrorism. Washington and London should jointly call for the application of tougher sanctions against Pyongyang, Tehran, and Damascus.
- **The War Against Terrorism.** The U.S. and U.K. should increase coordination of anti-terrorist measures and enhance cooperation between the CIA and MI6. London and Washington should make a concerted effort to halt the flow of international terrorists into Iraq by placing pressure on neighboring Arab states such as Syria, Iran, and Saudi Arabia.
- **Detention of al-Qaeda Suspects.** President Bush should resist calls from British lawmakers to repatriate British citizens held by the United States at Guantanamo Bay on suspicion of involvement with al-Qaeda terrorist activities. This would set a dangerous precedent and would be in neither the U.S. nor the British national interest.
- **The EU Constitution.** President Bush should raise the issue of the European Constitution and its possible implications for the United States' long-term relationship with Britain and the European Union. The President should seek assurances from his British counterpart that the European Constitution will not weaken the Anglo–U.S. special relationship and Britain's ability to work together with the U.S. on key foreign policy matters.

11. See "Blair and Britain Enjoy Strong Support in U.S. Poll," *The Wall Street Journal*, September 29, 2003.

- **European Defense.** Washington must seek reassurances from London regarding European Union plans to develop a separate defense identity. The U.S. and U.K. must ensure that NATO continues to remain the preeminent transatlantic security institution.
- **The Future of Europe.** The U.S. and U.K. should work toward the advancement of a flexible, dynamic Europe that maintains the principle of national sovereignty at its core.

Conclusion

In his historic address to a joint session of Congress just days after the tragic events of September 11, President Bush remarked that “America has no truer friend than Great Britain. Once again we are joined in a great cause.”¹² Washington unquestionably views Great Britain as its most important ally, politically, strategically, and militarily.

The success of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars demonstrated the tremendous strength of the U.S.–U.K. special relationship. Once again, Great Britain stood shoulder to shoulder with the United States at a crucial moment in history. They should take great pride in the removal from power of two of the most brutal dictatorships in modern times.

The Anglo–U.S. alliance must remain the cornerstone of strategic thinking in both Washington and London, as it has been since the Second World War. The world’s two most powerful nations must remain united in their determination both to achieve lasting peace in a free Iraq and to deal with the twin global threats of state-sponsored terrorism and the production of weapons of mass destruction by rogue states.

As former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher famously observed:

[W]hatever people say, the special relationship does exist, it does count and it must continue, because the United States needs friends in the lonely task of leadership. More than any other country, Britain shares America’s passionate commitment to democracy and willingness to stand and fight for it.¹³

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12. President George W. Bush, “Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People,” September 20, 2001, at www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html.

13. Lady Margaret Thatcher, “Speech to the Foreign Relations Council of Chicago,” June 17, 1991, at www.margaretthatcher.org/Speeches/displaydocument.asp?docid=108275.