Tony Blair was active at Sea Island, especially on Middle East issues. But he was also thinking ahead to the next G8 summit, which he expects to host and chair at Gleneagles in July 2005. It is rare for a leader to host a summit more than once. Mitterrand, Kohl, Chirac and Chrétien of Canada have all done it, but Blair would be the first British prime minister to get this chance. The first summit he chaired, Birmingham 1998 (see LSE Magazine, winter 1998), introduced some fundamental reforms to the summit process: adding Russia to make G7 into G8; allowing the leaders to meet on their own, without supporting ministers; having a shorter agenda and less documentation. These reforms rejuvenated the G8 summit, so that Birmingham and the four summits that followed, up to Kananaskis in 2002, were more productive than those that went before. Evian in 2003 and Sea Island this year showed some loss of performance, with the agenda being too general and the G8 documents sacrificing quality for quantity. But these summits still had the merit of reconciling the G8 members after the deep divisions caused by Iraq. Blair wants the Gleneagles summit to return to the earlier simplicity, with a precise agenda of two or three items only. He has already said publicly that one
priority subject should be Africa and a second the
global environment, especially climate change.
Africa was on the summit agenda at G8 in 2001
and was the main subject at Kananaskis (LSE
Magazine, winter 2002). There the G8 agreed an
Africa Action Plan, which was closely linked to the
New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).
The main proponents of NEPAD – presidents Mbeki
of South Africa, Obasanjo of Nigeria, Wade of
Senegal and Bouteflika of Algeria – took part in the
Kananaskis summit. They were invited back to
Evian and Sea Island and Blair expects to invite
them again to Gleneagles.
The G8 Africa Plan, like NEPAD, covers peace-
keeping, standards of governance and economic
development. The main achievement at Sea Island
was agreement on G8 support for African peace-
keeping operations, in the form of training and
transport facilities. But economic progress has not
kept pace with this. The G8 have promised to
increase their aid to Africa, but have not offered
more market access for African exports nor
improved the terms of debt relief, though that is
what the African leaders want most.
Blair will aim to have Gleneagles make real
advances in helping Africa escape from poverty
and meet the Millennium Development Goals
for education and health. The G8 are already
associating non-G8 countries, international
institutions and African governments with this
process, through the African Partners Group. Blair
has created a new Commission for Africa, bringing
in the private sector alongside G8 and African
governments and aiming to generate more public
awareness of what needs to be done for Africa.
Trade will be one essential component, now that
the Doha Development Agenda is moving forward
again. Finance will be another, with the hope of
reaching agreement on the International Finance
Facility proposed by Gordon Brown.
While the G8 has moved Africa up its agenda,
the global environment has had less prominence.
It is necessary to go back to the Rio conference of
1992 to find major summit successes in the
environment. Before Rio, the summit could agree
in urging all countries to pay more attention to
protecting the environment, both through
domestic policies and international agreements.
But once the debate moved to specific issues like
climate change and biodiversity, a deep division
opened between European (and Japanese) enthusiasts and North American sceptics. While
in Europe policy was driven by consumers and
civil society activists, in the US it was dominated
by producers and business interests in energy,
agriculture and pharmaceuticals. Because of
this transatlantic divide, the G8 members have
steadily moved apart on environmental issues. At
Gleneagles, Blair hopes to reverse this trend and
to find ways of bridging the gap.
The reforms that Blair introduced at
Birmingham seven years ago cut the leaders
loose from their bureaucratic apparatus. This
gave them greater freedom to develop wider
links with other forces – with non-G8 governments,
with private sector movements in business,
and with civil society. This wider outreach is essential if
the G8 summit is to be effective and carry
conviction in today’s globalising world. But the
Sea Island summit made only limited advances in
this field and the Americans did not act to
associate civil society bodies with G8’s work. The
British, on the other hand, have a strong tradition
of involving business and civil society in summit
preparations and this is bound to prevail in the
run-up to Gleneagles. Blair is also on record as
favouring wider outreach to leading developing
countries, though he is more cautious on
enlarging the G8 by admitting more countries.
In recent years, especially since 11 September
2001, the G8 summit has moved away from its
original economic agenda and towards giving
priority to political issues, or at least those where
economics and politics are apparently inseparable,
like Africa and the Middle East. The summit has
been quite successful in areas where international
action is required, but less effective when
domestic policies need to be adapted, for example
in agriculture. In his approach to next year’s
Gleneagles summit, Blair is returning to the
mainstream economic agenda of trade, finance and
the environment. He has chosen issues where G8
members need to take difficult domestic decisions
in order to reach durable international agreement.
He is seeking to simplify the summit process and
make it more transparent and accessible. In this
way he is trying to revive the original virtues of the
summit process and adapt them to the conditions
of advancing globalisation.

What Sea Island achieved
The G8 Sea Island summit in June 2004 marked the
30th gathering of the annual meeting of leaders of
the major industrialised countries. However, in many
ways Sea Island showed the signs of an "institution"
still in the early stages of maturity: confident in its
aims and abilities, but somewhat unsure of its
methods. Initially established to discuss economic
issues of common concern to its members, the Sea
Island G8 continued a summit trend of expanding
its agenda to include political, security, and social
issues.

President Chirac and President Bush at G8’s
Sea Island summit, 2004. The 2005 summit
will be at the Gleneagles Hotel in Perthshire
(pictured below)
and G8 countries can strengthen their dialogue on bringing about reform. Additional initiatives include increasing literacy by 20 million people in the region by 2015 through the training of 100,000 teachers, and strengthening entrepreneurship through microfinance, vocational training, and private enterprise activities. The G8 also adopted a bold Action Plan on Non-Proliferation in which leaders reaffirmed commitments on nuclear non-proliferation made at Kananaskis in 2002 and Evan as well as supporting measures to increase the effectiveness of the International Atomic Energy Agency. The leaders also broadened a previous initiative in both substance and scope through the Action Plan on Expanding Global Capability for Peace Support Operations, which includes commitments to train and equip 75,000 troops globally by 2010 for both regional and international peace support operations. The G8 was quick to assist that all such activities would be carried out in line with the United Nations Charter. The G8 statement on trade was stronger than in 2003 but failed to make longer term commitments. Several documents showed the G8’s faith in market forces and developments in science and technology for increasing prosperity, improving health, and protecting the environment. G8 agreed to “take all necessary steps’ to eliminate polio by 2003 as well as to support the development of an HIV vaccine through a global consortium of scientists, funded with an initial donation of $15 million from the United Nations. The 3R Action Plan and Progress for Implementation Initiative committed G8 members to reduce, reuse and recycle their products and materials. The content and scope of the commitments and action plans agreed at Sea Island showed that the institution of this summit has benefited from its 30 years of experience. However, the G8’s inconsistency in incorporating the views of other actors in the development of its plans as well as its plethora of complex documentation reveal that the summit still lacks the wisdom that comes with maturity. The 2005 G8 at Gleneagles provides Tony Blair with another opportunity to urge the summit to act its age.

Shivering in Savannah

While the leaders enjoyed warm ocean breezes and sandy beaches on Sea Island, the 3,500 members of the press shivered in near freezing temperatures, thanks to over-zealous air conditioning, at the International Media Centre 80 miles inland in the city of Savannah. The Media Centre was on the banks of the Savannah River across from the historic heart of old Savannah. Representatives of the press were rapidly transported across the river in restored ferries, but then endured long waits as police checked their bags. Security was tight not only in the Centre but throughout the city. Due to fears of a terrorist attack or the massive protests scene at the 2001 Genoa summit, the US spared no expense with security bill estimates as high as $35 million. The 350 demonstrators, many of whom were peaceful members of Falun Gong, were therefore estimated to cost around $100,000 each. Unlike previous host organising committees, the US organisers required journalists and broadcasters to purchase workstations and supplies. Perhaps this and the time-consuming two-stage accreditation process explained why nearly half the workstations in the Media Centre remained unoccupied. And, for all that Sea Island was highly stage managed, fewer leaders than at previous summits visited the Media Centre for a traditional final press conference.

The University of Glasgow will host a conference on 29–30 June 2005 on Development, Sustainability and Finance – the Role of the G8 and the Gleneagles Summit. More details about this conference will be available on www.gla.ac.uk from early 2005.