

Has the G8 Summit Met Its Objectives? Gleneagles' Answer

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Likely to be radically revised after the Gleneagles summit

The Gleneagles summit is the second G8 summit to be held in the United Kingdom and the second to be chaired by British Prime Minister Tony Blair. At the time of Blair's first summit, held at Birmingham in May 1998, the G7 process was under severe strain. The G7 leaders had found a wealth of new tasks for the summit, after the end of the Cold War. But the agenda became so overloaded and the procedures so bureaucratic that the system was close to collapse. In recognition of this, Blair brought in at Birmingham some radical reforms to the summit format, to enable it to meet its objectives better. These reforms were:

- Full membership for Russia, making G7 into G8;
- Heads of government to meet on their own, without supporting ministers;
- A simple agenda of a few topics only, with shorter documents.

This paper looks briefly at how far these procedural reforms have endured. It then considers more fully whether the G8 summits from Birmingham to Gleneagles have met their objectives better. The summary conclusions are that the changes in the summit format have proved durable. Russia will host its first summit in 2006, while the G8 has developed outreach to non-G8 countries, especially in Africa. By detaching its official apparatus, the G8 has also been able to develop links with non-governmental groups, especially in civil society. The agenda had begun to get out of control again by the Evian and Sea Island summits of 2003-4, but Blair has restored discipline for Gleneagles in 2005.

The original summit objectives remain valid: political leadership, to launch new ideas and break bureaucratic blockages; reconciling the international and domestic pressures of globalisation; and collective management of the international system by Europe, North America and Japan. The G8 summits, thanks to their simpler format, have done better at political leadership - launching initiatives and striking deals among themselves. They have preserved the spirit of collective management, despite their divisions over Iraq, and modified it in the light of greater outreach. They have identified a wholly new objective of integrating economic and political programmes. But the G8 summits have not been so successful in reconciling external and domestic pressures and this has led to failed initiatives and unfulfilled commitments. The Gleneagles agenda of Africa and climate change obliges the G8 to confront these failings and challenges it to do better. The practice of iteration - returning to issues in successive years - provides the best prospect of overcoming domestic obstacles. But while the current electoral weakness of half the G8 governments need not prevent agreement at the summit, it may prove a drawback to implementation of commitments. Gleneagles should anticipate this problem by building in a clear structure for following up any agreements reached.

The Procedural Reforms

The reforms to the summit format introduced at Birmingham have evolved over the last seven years. Despite Russia's full membership of the G8, the G7 heads still met separately at first to discuss certain economic issues. But this practice lapsed in 2003, once it was agreed that Russia

would host the summit in 2006. There has been no formal discussion of further enlargement. But the G8 has developed outreach to non-G8 countries, in a variety of ways. A group of African leaders has been associated with the summit ever since Genoa in 2001, when the G8 began its response to the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). Middle Eastern leaders came to Sea Island in 2004, when the G8 launched its Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative. Leading developing countries like China, India and Brazil came first to Evian in 2003 and will be at Gleneagles again, especially to discuss climate change.

Though heads of government now meet alone at the summit, the separate meetings of other G8 ministers continue to proliferate: not only foreign and finance ministers, but environment, employment, energy, education, development, interior and justice ministers also meet, sometimes in combination. G8 health ministers meet for the first time later in 2005. These meetings may go beyond the G8 membership and are increasingly detached from the summit process, pursuing their own agendas. Meanwhile the heads have developed links with non-government forces, including business and civil society. These received a setback in 2001, when the Genoa summit was beset by riots in which a demonstrator was killed. For the next two years civil society groups were held at a safe distance from the summit, while at Sea Island the American hosts kept them out altogether. In 2005 the British hosts have sought to engage more closely, especially with charities at work in Africa. For the first time there was a session between the sherpas and a group of NGOs, as part of the summit preparations.

The discipline of simple agendas, of a few topics and shorter documents was observed from Birmingham 1998 to Kananaskis 2002, with only some wavering by Japan in 2000. But the French hosts for Evian in 2003 and again the Americans in 2004 did not establish a tight agenda early on, but chose broad, all-embracing themes. In consequence, more and more topics were added and these summits issued a record volume of documents, of variable quality. For Gleneagles the British hosts have returned to the rigour introduced at Birmingham: two topics only – Africa and climate change – and a focus on economic rather than political issues.

Performance Against Objectives: Success and Failure

Political leadership The summit's first objective is political leadership, to launch new ideas and reach agreements not available at lower levels. Here the G8 summits since Birmingham have improved on the earlier record. The summits have been highly innovative, launching new initiatives, for example, in financial architecture, IT for development, infectious diseases, help for Africa, non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and a collective approach to the broader Middle East region. The summits have also been active in striking deals. Substantive agreements always built on the earlier preparatory work, but could only be reached by the intervention of the heads themselves; for example on debt relief, Kosovo, aid resources for Africa and Middle East reform. The heads also reached some procedural agreements without advance preparation, notably on the principle of helping Africa, at Genoa, and on Russia's hosting the summit a year later. At Kananaskis they even struck a linked cross-issue deal, when the US endorsed a \$1 billion replenishment of World Bank funds for debt relief in return for agreement by the others to subscribe \$10 billion over ten years to cleaning up nuclear and chemical materials in Russia – the 'Global Partnership'.

Collective management The G8 summit has also performed well in its third objective of collective management. The key test here is whether summit initiative is coming from all members, rather than a single source like the United States or the European Union. The first four G8 summits showed a wide dispersion, with different countries in the lead in different subjects. The US led on financial architecture, but the UK, France and Canada were the leaders on debt relief. On Kosovo, the US led on security aspects, the Europeans on economic support. The pattern of initiative changed, however, from Kananaskis 2002 onwards, following the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. From now on the Americans always led on terrorism and non-proliferation issues, but they wanted to associate their G8 colleagues with the measures taken. But on other subjects, notably Africa and other development issues, the Americans were rarely in the

lead, though they were active participants. The American unilateralism that proved so divisive over Iraq did not upset the practice of collective leadership at the summit. For Gleneagles, Blair has chosen two topics – Africa and climate change – where the United States is not in the lead.

Collective leadership has also been tempered by the G8's recognition that globalisation means many more active players in the international system. Outreach to non-G8 countries, especially in Africa, has enabled the summit to associate a much wider circle with its decision-making process. Business firms and civil society bodies have also been involved, for example in the task-forces on IT and renewable energy created at Okinawa in 2000. This practice has been applied less systematically in recent summits. But business and civil society are equal partners in last year's broader Middle East initiative and there has been wide consultation on Africa this year.

Integrating politics and economics A new objective – integrating political and economic programmes – has been identified by the G8 summits. While earlier G7 summits had dealt with political as well as economic issues, they had normally kept them apart. But the presence of Russia, which had more to contribute politically than economically, encouraged a joint approach and this gathered strength after 11 September 2001. The first topic where politics and economics were combined was Kosovo at Cologne in 1999, which demonstrated the value of having Russia at the table. The most ambitious integrated project was the sustained Africa programme, where peace-keeping and improved governance were linked with economic development. The Middle East initiative similarly combined political and economic reforms, while many of the issues on the terrorism and non-proliferation agenda, like transport security or the Global Partnership used economic measures to achieve political ends.

Reconciling international and domestic tensions The G8 has done much less well against its second original objective – reconciling the external and domestic tensions provoked by globalisation. The domestic issues raised at Birmingham and Cologne, like employment, crime and social protection, have slipped off the agenda. The implementation of G8 commitments has been uncertain. There are too many examples of the summit launching initiatives but then seeming to lose interest, for example in renewable energy and primary education; even on debt relief and infectious diseases the early impetus has been flagging. In some economic areas, such as the global environment, international trade and parts of the Africa programme, the G8 leaders have often failed to overcome domestic obstacles to progress – and sometimes have even been the obstacles themselves. The widespread perception that the G8 summit does not always keep its promises has undermined its public reputation.

Blair's choice of Africa and climate change as the principal themes for Gleneagles lays down a direct challenge to the G8 to confront this weakness and restore the summit's capacity to resolve sensitive domestic issues. The summit can only restore momentum to its Africa programme by overcoming the domestic obstacles in G8 countries to forgiving debt, greatly increasing aid levels and improving market access. Likewise, progress on climate change requires a major shift in the response to domestic pressures principally by the Americans, but also by the rest of the G8, so as produce a common position at the summit after so many years of disagreement.

Reconciling External and Domestic Tensions: Electoral Aspects and Iteration

What are the prospects of getting better results under this second summit objective, the most important and the most demanding of the three? Political leadership is about the balance of power within government, as between politicians and bureaucrats. Collective management is about the international aspect of summitry. But reconciling the tensions of globalisation is about the interaction of the international **and** domestic aspects of summitry. It goes beyond the limits of government to embrace the standing and the authority of each of the G8 heads in their country's political system. That, after all, is what determines whether the voluntary cooperation agreed at the summit will be converted into formal commitments by the G8 members and thus serve as the stimulus to wider international action.

It therefore makes sense to look at the domestic political standing of the leaders taking part at Gleneagles and, by comparison with the whole 30-year span of summit history, to consider how

this may affect the prospects for durable G8 agreements this year. What is the impact, for example, of the electoral timetable or the length of time the leaders have been in office? More generally, what techniques has the summit developed for reconciling domestic and international pressures?

Electoral Considerations

The impact of time spent in office makes a good starting point. The personal interaction between heads at the summit depends on mutual confidence. Other heads will not place much confidence in colleagues they do not expect to endure in their posts. In the past, this factor worked against Japan and Italy, which saw a rapid turnover in prime ministers, while it favoured the other G7 heads, who could be sure of at least four years in office and often longer. This has not applied to Koizumi or Berlusconi, but it does now apply to Paul Martin, leading a precarious minority government in Canada.

This could suggest that the chances of agreement are highest where there has been strong continuity among the heads. On that argument, the prospects for Gleneagles should be good, since almost all the heads will be meeting for at least their fifth summit – Martin of Canada and Barroso of the European Commission are the only newcomers since 2001. But the historical comparison is not encouraging. The last time there was such continuity was in the mid-1980s, under Reagan, Kohl, Mitterrand and Thatcher – when the summit went through its least productive period. What could account for this?

A more potent factor seems to be that heads are most active and innovative in summitry soon after they are first elected. Then they settle down to more cautious approaches, as the constraints of office close in on them, becoming least adventurous when they are facing new elections. But if they are successfully re-elected, they become innovative again. Blair and Schroeder were highly innovative summit hosts at Birmingham and Cologne, just after they took office; so was the re-elected Clinton at Denver in 1997. Even the Reagan Administration became innovative in the G7 after the president's re-election – but all the new ideas came from James Baker as Treasury Secretary rather than Reagan himself. On this analysis Blair is encouraged to be active and ambitious at Gleneagles by his successful re-election last month; by a reduced majority, admittedly, but the first time a British Labour government has ever won a third term.

This analysis also suggests some drawbacks of length in office. Heads may out-stay their welcome with their electorate and come to the summit shortly before they face elections they may well lose. This prospect clearly over-shadows Gleneagles. Schroeder has called for early federal elections in Germany, in September 2005, because of major losses in *Land* elections. Berlusconi faces elections early in 2006, also after suffering serious defeats in regional polls, even though he has survived longer than any other Italian prime minister since World War II. Chirac's presidential term lasts till 2007, but he has just had a bitter personal setback in the defeat in France of the referendum on the European Constitution. The resulting confusion in the European Union also weakens Barroso. Can anything come out of Gleneagles, with the leaders in continental Europe and Canada so weak and the EU so divided?

At first sight it looks unpromising. Chirac, Schroeder, Berlusconi and Martin will give top priority to political survival. But this need not prevent progress and the record of the early summits provides some comfort. Professor Robert Putnam developed his model of 'two-level games' by observing the G7 summit process in the 1970s, particularly the first Bonn summit of 1978 that produced a complex, cross-issue deal embracing macroeconomic, trade and energy policy. He concluded that relatively weak, internally divided governments are, on balance, more inclined to conclude international agreements than strong, confident ones. Carter in the US and Schmidt in Germany both used the deals struck at the first Bonn summit as a means of getting domestic acceptance of unpopular economic measures.

In contrast, a strong leader like Reagan saw little need to strike international deals at the summit, at least on economic issues. As the American scholar John Odell puts it, he had high BATNAs – better alternatives to negotiated agreements. Similar factors caused Clinton to

overplay his hand at Denver. He had just been re-elected and the US economy was booming. But his triumphalist attitude alienated the Europeans and the summit was unproductive.

This analysis can be applied to the line-up of leaders at Gleneagles. There is a contrast between the relative strength, in domestic electoral terms, of Blair, Bush, Koizumi and Putin and the weakness of Chirac, Schroeder, Berlusconi and Martin. But the weaker members may well have greater interest in a good result from Gleneagles than the stronger ones. Berlusconi, Schroeder and the others are all in electoral difficulty because of their domestic policies. They therefore want to show their electorates that their external policies are effective and that they can play an influential role among their international peers. A good result from Gleneagles would increase their standing, while to be blamed for the summit's failure would increase their troubles. For the same reasons, the bitter internal disputes in the European Union, setting Blair against Chirac and Schroeder over the budget, are not likely to spill over onto Gleneagles. The EU members of the G8 will want to show the US, Japan, Canada and Russia that the European Union is still an effective international force, despite some domestic disagreements.

This is consistent with the strong support emerging in Europe for Blair's strategy for helping Africa: a commitment to double aid levels, leading to the attainment of the 0.7% target in a set timetable; readiness to overcome reservations to 100% debt relief; and support for the International Finance Facility, subject to conditions. As for climate change, none of the European leaders is trying to complicate Blair's strategy of engaging the Americans.

Much greater resistance to Blair's proposals on Africa and climate change has been coming from the United States, where Bush's domestic position has become much stronger since his re-election. But while US presidents in their first term worry about getting re-elected for a second, presidents in their second term are concerned about their historical legacy. This has already had a clear impact on Bush in his more conciliatory attitude to America's allies and partners, especially in Europe. At Gleneagles, Bush will much prefer to have the United States appear as the leader in doing good in the world, rather than as the country that frustrated agreement. There has already been American movement on debt relief. Bush may well have more up his sleeve on aid and climate change – only Gleneagles will tell.

It is now possible to summarise the argument so far on how G8 leaders' electoral positions affects their performance at the summit and what that tells us about the prospects for good results from Gleneagles. The fact that all the heads have at least five years summit experience, except Martin and Barroso, looks like a positive point, but in fact may not be. The heads may know each other well, but this may lead them not to expect very much or to take each other for granted. A stronger positive factor is that Blair and Bush have just been re-elected, in conditions that makes them inclined to promote and entertain new ideas. The domestic political weakness of the continental European and Canadian heads is not the drawback that it might appear. They are less well placed to advance new ideas, but they want to be associated with positive results from Gleneagles, so that their international achievements can offset their domestic problems, as elections approach.

Reconciling Tensions through Iteration

The prognosis for Gleneagles offered so far is quite hopeful, in terms of agreement at the summit. But the disappointing results from recent summits in terms of the second objective – reconciling domestic and international pressures – derive more from what happens after the summits, rather than at the summits themselves. International agreements may be reached by the G8; but these are later frustrated or diluted by domestic resistance in one or more of the G8 members. Furthermore, the summit has become reluctant, over the last seven years, to take up issues with a high domestic content in the G8 members. It has come to prefer wholly international subjects, or those where the greatest domestic policy change is made by others, in Africa or the greater Middle East. Blair has reversed this trend for Gleneagles, by selecting an agenda where G8 domestic decisions are inescapable. Will this return to the summit's original economic vocation prove effective? Will the international agreements reached at Gleneagles be followed up by thorough implementation?

Looking back at the summit record over the last 30 years, one technique emerges very clearly as serving to ensure that summit commitments are met, so that international and domestic pressures are reconciled. That is the technique of iteration – coming back to the same subject at the summit in successive years. With rare exceptions, this has been the foundation of most successful interventions by the summit right from the start.

The blunt fact is that the summit rarely solves a problem at the first attempt. A shining exception is the monetary agreement concluded at the very first summit at Rambouillet in 1975, which gave a misleading impression of what summits could achieve. The other achievements from the heroic age of summitry, in the 1970s and early 1980s, relied on the process of iteration to bring domestic policy in the G7 countries into line with their international undertakings. In macro-economic policy coordination, the commitments made at the first three summits reinforced existing strategy, at best. Real policy change only took place with the Bonn summit of 1978. In trade negotiations likewise the deadlines set in 1975 and 1976 had little effect – real forward movement began after the London summit of 1977 and concluded with Bonn a year later. Energy required attention from Bonn in 1978 through Tokyo in 1979 to Venice in 1980 to get G7 policies changed.

The decline in the summit's performance under Reagan's presidency from 1981 to 1988 is matched by a sharp reduction in iteration. Subjects like the debt crisis came briefly to the summit but then dropped off the agenda again, though they cried out for iterative treatment. Even the political themes in which these summits made most progress were treated episodically, with no sustained attention to East-West relations or the Middle East. In economic subjects iteration was provided at finance minister level, with the Plaza and Louvre meetings of 1985 and 1987, not at the summits.

Iteration returns with the revival of the summits as the Cold War ended. Policy on helping Central Europe, exceptionally, was resolved at the first attempt, at the 1989 Paris summit. But helping Russia required iterative treatment over the next four years. Throughout the 1990s, the summit's main achievements came through iteration. The most notorious example was in international trade, where the G7 three times broke their summit promise to conclude the Uruguay Round, because of differences over agriculture. They succeeded only at their fourth attempt in 1993. The summits dealt with debt relief for low-income countries on six separate occasions between agreeing Toronto Terms in 1988 and concluding the Enhanced Heavily-Indebted Poor Countries programme at Cologne in 1999. Iterative treatment of the global environment between 1989 and 1991 revealed increasing difficulties, but at least brought the US to sign up to the Climate Change Treaty at Rio in 1992, if not the Biodiversity Treaty.

Why is iteration so important? There are three main reasons. First, summits deal with complex and far-reaching issues. These often require a first consensus on broad principles, followed by agreement on specific measures. This, for example, was how the summits handled the global environment in the early 1990s. Second, summits deal with difficult and intractable subjects – easy ones are settled at lower levels. When initial solutions prove inadequate, as constantly happened with debt relief, the summit has to come back and try to do better. Third, it often takes time for the heads to overcome domestic resistance to the international agreement – several years, in the case of agricultural trade in the Uruguay Round. Indeed, sometimes a change of government is a condition of progress. Full agreement on debt relief was only possible after Clinton had taken over in the US and Schroeder in Germany.

Iteration has its own drawbacks. Sometimes the difficulties get worse with time, as might be said of Russia's economic problems in the early 1990s. More fundamentally, there is a trade-off between iteration and innovation. If the summit has to keep coming back to old topics, it will have no time to launch new ideas, which are essential to its first objective of political leadership. So the G8's aim must be to work through any necessary iteration promptly, so that the issue can be taken forward at lower levels and does not clog up the summit agenda indefinitely.

Conclusions: Prospects for Gleneagles

What are the results of applying the principle of iteration to the G8 summits since Birmingham, up to and beyond Gleneagles? There was highly effective iteration between Birmingham and Cologne in 1999, on new financial architecture and debt relief for the poorest. In more recent summits, iteration has been used to good effect with counter-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The same is true of transport security, though it is arguable whether this deserved the attention of heads of government. But on economic issues, the record of 21st century summits has been very mixed and this has implications for Gleneagles.

The G8 made an excellent start with its Africa initiative, moving from general principles at Genoa to the detailed Africa Action Plan at Kananaskis. But while there were political advances after that, the economic provisions ran into domestic problems in the G8 countries. The Africans became increasingly disappointed at the slow progress in debt relief and trade access. That is why it is right to make Africa the major subject for Gleneagles this year, so as to restore and accelerate the momentum of the African programme. But the treatment it gets this year should also ensure that progress on African issues can continue at sub-summit levels, without requiring an annual fix at head of government level.

Many of the individual components of the Africa dossier also need stronger iteration this year. The G8 has replenished the financing for debt relief twice since Cologne, but has not improved the terms, so that this year's agreement on 100% relief of multilateral debt is overdue. After launching the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria at Genoa, the G8's attention to infectious diseases has wavered. Action on primary education has failed to fulfil its early promise. Trade has been on the agenda every year, but without much impact since the Doha Development Agenda began in 2001. Trade, health and education need more attention this year, as well as debt relief, with specific results on the lines of the recommendations of the Commission for Africa. As for aid - previous summits have rarely made commitments on aid volumes and prospects for agreement on an International Finance Facility look unpromising. But Gleneagles could at least start an iterative process, building on what the European G8 members have already promised and encouraging Canada, Japan and the United States to match these commitments.

Climate change is different from Africa, in that there is no track record of earlier agreements, at least since the Rio Conference of 1992. Given the known differences over the Kyoto Protocol, a comprehensive G8 agreement looks out of reach. But Gleneagles will have been worthwhile if it launches a process that embraces the US and provides for explicit iteration at the summits of ensuing years.

In short, substantive commitments are needed from Gleneagles on Africa generally and on specific elements, including debt relief and trade access. There may be no more than initial steps on aid volume and climate change, leading to further treatment at future summits. But the real test of Gleneagles' achievement will be not whether the commitments are taken at the summit but whether they are carried out.

Here there is a link back to the earlier discussion of electoral strength and weakness. Iteration is a valuable technique for overcoming domestic obstacles to implementation. Successful iteration is easier when governments remain in office and can ensure that the international commitments they have taken are implemented. In this context, continuity among G8 leaders is positive. Conversely, electoral weakness undermines this process. Governments fighting for survival will yield before domestic obstacles and will not try to overcome them. Within the EU, it will be harder to push through the reforms in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) needed for a good result in the Doha trade negotiations.

So while conditions may be propitious for reaching agreement at Gleneagles itself, political weakness in many G8 governments will make it harder to overcome obstacles to implementation - the main weakness of the summit process in the 21st century. The only reliable protection against this danger is to build into the G8 agreements a clear structure for following up the commitments made, which will trigger iteration at the summit if the impetus flags at lower levels.

The key to success at Gleneagles on both Africa and climate change is not only what is agreed at the summit, but the shadow it casts into the future.

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