



**WMRC Article**

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US President's Visit to UK  
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## United States: US President's Visit to UK Intends to Build Bridges, But May Build Walls Instead

*US President George W Bush has just finished a four-day trip to the UK, hoping that by reaffirming the US-UK relationship he can counteract the global criticism of the occupation of Iraq, but touting the special relationship between the two countries may further isolate them both from European allies.*

<b>WMRC Perspective</b>	
<b>Significance</b>	George W Bush is the first US president to travel to the UK on an official state visit since 1918 and does so at a time when the US and the UK are increasingly isolated in the international community over the war in Iraq.
<b>Implications</b>	President Bush is hoping the visit will shore up the UK's support for the worsening situation in Iraq and serve as a bridge over the widening gap between the US and Europe.
<b>Outlook</b>	The visit will indeed build upon the already strong relations between President Bush and UK Prime Minister Tony Blair, but the drawing together of the two leaders will be at the risk of isolating themselves from the rest of Europe, creating a wall instead of a bridge.

### Bridge Over Troubled Waters

When the invitation to visit the UK was originally extended from Queen Elizabeth II to the US President in June 2002, the intent was to demonstrate a new era of unity between the two countries following the attacks of 11 September 2001 and to celebrate their successful joint effort to remove the Taliban and al-Qaida from Afghanistan. Since that time, the relationship between the two countries has been tested as a number of challenges facing the world, and the US and UK in particular, have come to the fore: the ongoing war in Iraq that is claiming the lives of US and British soldiers, among others, with increasing lethality and frequency; an increasingly controversial trade battle between the US and Europe; a war on terror that seems to have lost its focus; and a global economy still on very shaky ground. The timing of the visit was not ideal for either leader as there seems to be little to celebrate. For Bush, a difficult re-election challenge is emerging at home, and for Blair, many Britons are wondering why he has gambled so much on a president for whom they have such little respect. It also comes at a time when the US has, again, antagonised Europe over a series of trade disputes, putting Blair in a difficult position politically as he empathises with his European peers while entertaining his guest and friend who is also the protagonist of European ire.

### Ich Bin Ein Londoner?

During similarly challenging times, US presidents have pledged their allegiance to beleaguered allies, such as when President John F Kennedy made a defiant speech against the Soviet Union's effort to choke off West Berlin (Germany) in 1963. Kennedy said 'Ich bin ein Berliner', translated as 'I too am a Berliner.' At that time, the US knew it was in their own best interest not to allow Communism to spread throughout Europe, but Kennedy gave a speech that not only addressed US interests and the fears of Americans, but also sought to reassure and assuage the fears of Berliners and all Europeans - a speech that said in no uncertain terms that American stood with them - not above them or below them, but beside them. He used the opportunity to reassure the world that the US would use its power to inspire its allies and give pause to its enemies.

Bush's main speech during his visit to the UK centred primarily on defending the war in Iraq, but it did touch upon the historical and 'special relationship' between the US and the UK, with their 'shared values' as the cornerstone. He pledged to continue the strong friendship with Prime Minister Blair as they would, together, stand against the scourge of terrorism, oppression and tyranny around the world. This unity became more pertinent following another terrorist bombing in Istanbul (Turkey) that seemed to specifically target UK citizens. However, with the pledges of unity between the two men and the hope that their countrymen would follow suit, the result may be a deepening unification but at the exclusion of other important allies. For example, Bush did not pass up the opportunity to chide French President Jacques Chirac in his speech, but to what end? The US is the most dominant power in the world and with the UK government at its side, it should be constructing a bridge between the US and Europe, but instead it is

building a wall. If former president Ronald Reagan were well enough, perhaps he'd demand Bush to tear that one down, too.

## Alone Together

The domestic poll numbers for both Bush and Blair are at all-time lows. With respect to Iraq, not since Bush's father have the victors been so unable to enjoy the spoils. Thankfully for Blair, his election is a long way off, but back in the US, Bush's Democratic opponents are sharpening their knives for what will undoubtedly be a tough and bloody campaign for re-election that takes place in less than a year. The timing of the visit did not benefit either leader. Americans, were they even paying attention to the fact their president was out of the country, will only hang their heads in dismay at the sight of 100,000 of the US's supposed best friends in the world protesting against their president. And the British must wonder why the red carpet is being rolled out for a president that they believe has led the UK government down a path that seemingly leads to more problems than solutions.

Approval Ratings		
	April 2003	Oct 2003
<b>US President George W Bush</b>	70%	50%
<b>UK Prime Minister Tony Blair</b>	49%	39%

## Outlook and Implications

The friendship between Bush and Blair and the 'special relationship' between their two countries is extremely important to the interests of both, but it may be at the detriment of the US and UK's relations with Europe. The two leaders have essentially created an exclusive club that is provoking the rest of their traditional allies to become even more sceptical of their agenda. The bridge Bush was building to Europe through Blair has not come to pass, and as Blair moves the UK, albeit kicking and screaming, closer to the US, he is pulling further and further away from Europe. What was intended to be a historical bridge-building visit may end up as the lowest point for trans-Atlantic relations, because the more the two stand together alone, the more others will co-operate to stand against them, creating a relationship based on common interests rather than one based on interdependence.

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