

Evian: water on the flames

US president George Bush hosts the next G8 summit in Sea Island, Georgia, in June 2004, with the United Kingdom taking its turn in 2005. What was accomplished in Evian, France, this year? **Nicholas Bayne, Heidi Ullrich and Shinichiro Uda** have different assessments of what the summit did and didn't achieve and what the 2004 summit could tackle.

Welcome reconciliation but weak results

Nicholas Bayne

President Jacques Chirac had high ambitions for the G8 summit he would host at Evian, on the shores of Lake Geneva, in June 2003. But the war in Iraq divided the G8 right down the middle. The United States, the United Kingdom, Japan and Italy opposed France, Germany, Russia and Canada. Even the European G8 members were divided and found themselves on opposite sides to each other. The summit, however, provided the opportunity for reconciliation which everyone needed. Though the leaders had disagreed over the war, they could come together over the need to restore peace in Iraq. After initial contacts between Bush and Putin in St Petersburg, the Evian summit restored visible good relations between Bush and Chirac and Bush and Schröder. Evian showed the value of the close personal contacts provided by the G8 summit process.

But the leaders did not reinforce their reconciliation with innovative and durable agreements on the rest of their long agenda. Evian adopted a record volume of action plans, prepared by officials, but the input from heads of government seemed insubstantial. Chirac's ambitions on clean water, like Bush's initiatives on AIDS and famine, did not lead to any clear collective undertakings. Even on action against terrorism, where the others looked to a lead from the United States, the mass of documents contained few new commitments.

Evian showed that the leaders could still agree among themselves – which was a great relief. They still supported the concept of collective management that underlies the G8 summit. But their agreements, though copious, seemed weak in quality. Chrétien of Canada said the best thing about Evian was: 'It was a good meeting – it could have been a disaster!'

The challenges of Evian

Heidi Ullrich

Chirac outlined responsibility, democracy, solidarity and security as the four broad themes of the Evian summit. However, Bush arrived in Evian with challenges for the other G8 members including making progress in the war on terror. The G8 agreed to several US-driven initiatives including the establishment of a Counter Terrorism Action Group, and action plans to secure civil aviation and the control of portable air defence systems as well as to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Other challenges included matching the US five year \$15 billion Emergency Fund for AIDS, the \$1 billion annual contribution of the US to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria as well as the \$200 million emergency famine fund the US has established.

Despite their host of statements and action plans intended to show solidarity, the G8 leaders were weakest where they needed to be strongest: in the critically important area of strengthening the global economy. At Evian, the leaders of the G8 managed to produce only a general statement on trade that failed to offer the direction, political will, or personal commitment necessary to ensure progress in the Doha Development Agenda negotiations. The collapse of the WTO's Fifth Ministerial in Cancún, Mexico in September which derailed the Doha Development Agenda, can be in large part attributed to the inability of the leaders of eight of the largest developed countries to provide the necessary leadership prior to this critical meeting.

To further his vision of a multi-polar world, Chirac held the largest outreach meeting in the history of the G8 at which leaders of the G8 were joined by those of 11 developing countries and of Switzerland, as well as the heads of the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation. This expanded dialogue was a welcomed innovation. Whether Bush in 2004 heeds Chirac's call to make it a regular part of the G8 remains to be seen.

G8 summit in transition

Shinichiro Uda

Chirac stated that the summit successfully facilitated, for the first time in many years, in depth discussions by G8 nations of macroeconomic issues, the primary reason for launching the summit itself in 1975. For example, when Japanese prime minister Koizumi expressed the intention of implementing the painful task of economic structural reform at the 2001 Genoa summit, world leaders, although impressed, did no more than express their support. This time, leaders of most participating nations offered their full commitment to structural reform. Chirac also referred to corporate global governance for the first time in a summit declaration. This was relevant given the recent corporate accounting scandals in the US that have hindered the principled development of world markets.

The Evian summit was characterised by an expansive agenda and during one session included participation of non-G8 nations and international organisations. Another characteristic was the distinctive path the US is pursuing, which could be described as the manifestation of Pax Americana. In 2000 Clinton was late arriving at the Okinawa summit due to activities related to the Middle East peace process. This time Bush cut short his visit to Evian to host the international conference in Egypt with Israeli and Palestinian leaders.

The G8 summit should be deemed as a conference of the greatest significance for global governance. However, the future of the G8 relies on whether the leaders can find an effective way of expanding the summit, and whether they can achieve increased coordination between the US and other member states.

As long as G8 members can show a unified approach towards the challenges of world affairs, the forum will continue to have international influence. Such influence is visible through gaining the support of organisations such as the United Nations, which serves to increase the element of justice in the process of globalisation. If G8 members can recover their solid alliance by the time of the Sea Island summit in the US in 2004, the influence of the G8 will be strengthened. In this sense, their approach towards the UN resolution proposed by the US on governing Iraq in the autumn of 2003 will have been a vital turning point.

Conclusions and the way forward

It is clear that G8 members are back on course in pursuing their goal of collective management of the international system, in both economic and political issues. Although the immediate impact was muffled by the great mass of documentation, the main achievement of Evian was that it signalled the start of healing divisions caused by the differences of the leaders on the issue of Iraq. In the months

following the summit, G8 leaders continued to make concerted efforts to work closer on political issues, such as Iraq, Iran, and North Korea as well as the global economy. Bush has kept up his personal links with Chirac, Schröder and Putin, despite persistent differences over Iraq.

Bush will host the 2004 summit in an election year. His desire to shine as a world leader will be subject to severe political constraints. He has not only to win over his G8 partners: the advance of globalisation will make it impossible for the summit to maintain its closed circle. Future summits must engage constructively with other major players including key developing countries and civil society representatives. Without such expanded dialogue to reflect changing global realities, the G8 could likely be swept away in the current of world events. ■

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