

## US wary of Downing Street calls for global regulation

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Standing underneath the dome of the US Capitol, receiving wave after wave of applause from the US political elite, Gordon Brown on Wednesday reached a pinnacle in his career.

The prime minister has long been an aficionado of US politics, spending holidays in Cape Cod poring over books such as Robert Caro's voluminous account of former president Lyndon Johnson's life.

But aside from the half hour in the Capitol, Mr Brown faced real problems making his mark in Washington.

In terms of US public perception, the prime minister is near invisible when compared with predecessors such as Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair.

Mr Brown also sought to convince his own domestic audience that the UK was still as strong a partner as ever with the US – a relationship often seen as a gauge of Britain's influence in the world.

Furthermore, he had a specific mission to carry out with the Obama administration – to persuade it to give more attention to the international aspects of the unfolding financial and economic crisis and to explore ideas for global regulation in particular. Here, analysts agree, he faced his greatest obstacles.

"This is probably the least significant visit by the least significant prime minister in modern British history," said Ted Bromund, Margaret Thatcher Senior Research Fellow at the conservative Heritage Foundation. "The reality is that Brown is desperately unpopular in the UK and has made no impact in popular opinion in the US."

Still, British officials insist speculation that President Barack Obama is uninterested in Europe in general and Britain in particular is misconceived. They emphasise the institutional ties between Britain and the US, including exceptionally close military co-operation, and regular US-European co-operation on high-profile issues such as Afghanistan and Iran.

Mr Obama will be addressing the whole range of international challenges confronting the US on his own first big journey as president next month – to Britain, France, Germany and the Czech Republic. Mr Brown's focus is on the first of those stops and on the G20 conference he is hosting on the financial and economic crisis.

"He's come with a very definite economic agenda . . . of getting Obama to focus more on the international aspect of the rescue of the world economy," says Eswar Prasad, a senior fellow at the liberal-leaning Brookings Institution.

But Mr Prasad and Mr Bromund highlight formidable challenges to Mr Brown's campaign – most notably on his call for a more global regulatory approach.

In perhaps the most contentious sentence of his speech the prime minister said: "Let us agree rules and standards for accountability, transparency, and reward that . . . will apply to every bank, everywhere, and all the time."

The US is traditionally deeply suspicious of such initiatives. "The US doesn't want to be in a position of giving control of regulation or regulatory issues to a supranational body," said Mr Prasad.

Mr Bromund added: "Any US administration would look at this with a great deal of scepticism and Congress is unwilling to give up sovereignty to bureaucrats . . . This is a recipe for global governance and global regulation on a titanic scale."

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