

Brown has outsourced British foreign policy

Irwin Stelzer says that the PM wants a special relationship between Washington and Brussels (not London), and foreign policy to be set by a web of international institutions

Now we know. Until now, we Americans have been wondering whether we were witnessing from the new boy on the foreign policy stage a cock-up or a considered change in Britain's policy towards the United States.

When Gordon Brown exclaimed that he would never have appointed the man who wears his hatred of the American president and the neoconservatives as 'a badge of honour' had he known how offensive Malloch Brown would be to George Bush and the Americans, there was an inclination to believe him, even though it taxed credulity to think the Prime Minister had been so badly briefed. When the Prime Minister 'went out of his way to be unhelpful', in the words of one participant at the Bush-Brown meeting in Camp David, there was some willingness to attribute Brown's frosty behaviour to his need to placate the Labour Left by distancing himself from Tony Blair's approach to the President, and to a natural Scottish reserve. And when Brown's Secretary of State for International Development and close political ally, Douglas Alexander, chose to unburden himself of a speech that attacked America in not-very-oblique terms for everything from unilateralism to relying too heavily on 'what they could destroy', old Washington hands were willing to guess that the intended insult had escaped the review of a new Prime Minister, still organising his office.

But since then it has become clear that one of the important foundations of Gordon

Brown's foreign policy is to distance himself from America. Long after he could use as an excuse the disorder attendant upon his move from No. 11 to No. 10 Downing Street, his Development Secretary was again in the United States, again at work to embarrass the President. One day after Bush called for tougher sanctions on Burma, Alexander convened a meeting in Washington to call for 'aid, trade and debt relief' for that country. Bush might wield the stick, but humane Britain would rely on the carrot. 'Senior figures in Mr Bush's National Security Council,' according to the *Times*, said that Alexander's initiative 'was seen as undercutting Mr Bush's announcement and giving confused signals to the junta. The Administration certainly wants to know why the UK failed to discuss this with them in advance.' A source high up in the Foreign Office argued to me that the timing of Alexander's not-so-subtle attack on the President's position was the result of a lack of co-ordination — the decreasingly plausible cock-up explanation. One anti-American speech by a close intimate of Gordon Brown might be carelessness, two is a misfortune for relations between the US and Great Britain.

Then there is Malloch Brown — not his history of hostility to America, nor his defence of UN corruption, nor his presumption of lobbying the US Senate in opposition to the confirmation of the President's choice of US representative to the UN (let those byones be byones, as the Prime Minister would have it), but his more recent performance. Brown went out of his way last week to say that Malloch

Brown 'is doing a good job', despite the fact that the Cabinet-attending minister told the House of Lords that Britain should negotiate with Hamas and Hezbollah, and assured the Syrian ambassador he is their man at Gordon Brown's Cabinet table, just as he has 'represented Syria inside the UN'. American policy-makers, about to convene delicate meetings in Annapolis with the Palestinians and the Israelis, can be forgiven for wondering whether British policy is represented by David Miliband, who recently completed what he describes as successful meetings with Condoleezza Rice on Middle East policy, or Malloch Brown, who proudly claims to represent terrorist-supporting Syria.

Any doubt that these incidents reflect the direction in which Gordon Brown is taking Britain was dispelled when the Prime Minister donned white tie to address the Lord Mayor's banquet. Recall: No. 10 trailed the speech as having as its main theme a demonstration that Britain still regarded America as its most important ally. Just as some funny things happened to David Miliband's Bruges speech between the draft leaked to the press and the one that emerged from the No. 10 cutting room — so some funny things happened to Gordon Brown's speech between its trailing on Sky News and in the press, and its delivery.

Instead of America being Britain's most important ally, it became 'our most important bilateral relationship'. Since Britain's relationship with the 27-state EU is not 'bilateral', this leaves Brown room to elevate Britain's relationship with Europe to prime position — a bit of linguistic now-you-see-it, now-you-don't of which the Foreign Office is particularly proud. Yes, Brown confessed himself 'a lifelong admirer of America', but those who know him well know that that admiration is reserved for American entrepreneurship, Americans' sense that anything is possible with hard work and risk-taking. It has never extended to American foreign policy.

Careful readers of the speech note that after that one reference to America as a sufficiently splendid place to make it Britain's most important 'bilateral relationship', all references are to the relationship between the US and — not Britain — but Europe. The world is a dangerous place when 'Europe and America are distant from one another'; 'Europe and America [can] achieve historic progress [by] working ever more closely together'. So that's to be the new special relationship — not between the United States and Great Britain, but between the United States and Europe. The route from Washington to Downing Street is now to be through EU headquarters in Brussels — or through Paris or Berlin if the Bush-friendly leaders in those countries have their way.

What Brown has done is to outsource foreign policy to a variety of international organisations. 'New frameworks' will require 'systematic use of earlier Security Council action', which distinguishes Brown from Blair in a way that must appeal to his Left. International institutions — the G8, the IMF, the World Bank and the UN — are to be reformed to make them fit for purpose in the 21st century. How

Brown will persuade the US to co-operate in restructuring the G8, the IMF and the World Bank, now that he has forfeited the right to be heard that Tony Blair won, is unclear. As for the UN, Malloch Brown, minister for Africa, Asia and (less often mentioned) the UN, will presumably be in charge of its reformation — never mind that he spent years as UN deputy-general fighting off every reform proposed to eliminate the corruption of the Iraq oil-for-food programme, nepotism, cronyism, and a host of organisational failings. One reform we know he favours is ceding Britain's and France's permanent seats on the Security Council to the new EU foreign minister (oops, High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy). Gordon Brown's willingness to let him make policy on Bush, neocons, Palestinian terror organisations, Syria and other matters suggests that Britain's UN representatives would do well to fasten their seat belts tightly indeed.

None of this is to criticise the Prime Minister. It is, after all, his obligation to recalibrate the foreign policy of the nation whose leadership he inherited from a man with whom he disagreed on many things. My guess is that his main foreign policy goal is to have less of it — spend less on it, so that funds are not diverted from growing the welfare state (so much less that Britain can now afford only a part-time Defence Minister); think less about it, so that intellectual energy is reserved for plans to meet the cherished domestic goal of redistributing income from the middle class to lower earners and the disadvantaged; and above all, give the Left no reason to accuse him of being the poodle of a President with whom he must work until a more agreeable partner is chosen by the American people just about a year from now.

The Prime Minister's reshaping of British foreign policy carries a price — a weakening of the alliance that preserved Western values from assaults by fascism and international communism, and has been waging a new battle against radical Islam. A high price to pay for straining what Oxford University professor Vernon Bogdanor recently called in these pages 'the profound bonds of amity and kinship which lie behind the modern Anglo-American relationship'.

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