

# Brown's foreign policy is still a mystery

I cannot forecast to you the action of Gordon Brown. It is a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an

enigma." With apologies to Churchill, whose comments about Russia apply to the new Prime Minister's foreign policy.

There are, however, some things we do know. We know that the Prime Minister has appointed to high office several men who, when it comes to foreign policy, are anti-Biarritz, and have set Washington's teeth on edge, as well as the dentures of many in Britain who do not want to see Gordon Brown join David Cameron's and William Hague's efforts to scupper the special relationship.

First prize for appalling goes to Mark Malloch Brown, the man who specialised in attacking America while serving at the UN, and who defended Kofi Annan when Paul Volcker struck pay dirt in his investigation of the UN's oil for food programme. The PM is rewarding this behaviour with a peerage and appointment to the post of minister for Africa, Asia and the UN.

Washington's politically savvy politicians know that Brown has to distance himself a bit from the Bush Administration to satisfy British public opinion. But inviting Malloch Brown into this "government of all the talents" is to include one talent too many. Then there is John Denham,

who left the Government because of his opposition to the Iraq war. He will certainly add his voice to that of Malloch Brown in pressing the PM to pull out of Iraq – now.

The new Foreign Secretary, David Miliband, has his own reservations about the conduct of the coalition in post-Saddam Iraq, and opposed the Israeli response to Lebanon as "disproportionate". But he shares none of the visceral anti-Americanism rampant in his party, and has made clear that Britain intends to stand firm in dealing with Iran: he refuses to rule out military action if the multibals persist in acquiring nuclear weapons. No distancing from George W. Bush's America on the issue.

That's what we know about the PM's appointments in the foreign policy area. Now for a few informed guesses as to the light in which he views his choices. Denham will be bound by cabinet responsibility to whatever decisions Gordon Brown makes, and is anyhow out of the foreign policy loop in his role as Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills.

The same cannot be said of Lord-to-be M Brown. It is a very safe guess that had the PM known the intensity of the reaction to this appointment, he would not have made it. But, being stuck with this minister for Africa, Asia and the UN, he has probably detailed the able and reliable Shirri Vedera,



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herself headed for the Lords, with responsibility for economic development, to keep a close eye on Malloch Brown. That will be difficult as M Brown never did show any loyalty to Tony Blair while at the UN, and will use his post to meet representatives of other governments and discuss whatsoever he pleases.

But these appointments provide only an imperfect solution to the riddle of Gordon Brown as foreign policy practitioner. Further clues are provided by his own convictions, which I think it fair to say are clear. He believes that the special relationship with America has served British well, and will continue to do so. He will honour Britain's commitments to the coalition fighting in Iraq, and will continue to make troops available to fight the Taliban. He will continue to fight Muslim

terrorism, and to wage the war on terror, although it is not clear that he is fond of those terms.

He was more than a little angry last week when a story circulated in Britain, America and around the world that he had forbidden his colleagues to use the word "Muslim" or the phrase "war on terror". I understand that a turning Prime Minister labelled that story "complete rubbish", and even theorised that it was a "dirty tricks" effort by the Tories to undermine his relationship with the American administration.

How, then, to explain his new "security superno's" statements to *The Sunday Telegraph*? Admiral Sir Alan West, also headed to the Lords, said, "I have that expression [war on terror]... I think it came over from the United States... I don't like the fact that we talk about 'the Muslim community'... [We are fighting] a desperate core of people – based abroad primarily." Note the "primarily", which leaves plenty of room for worrying about Muslim terrorists living in Britain.

The PM is equally annoyed with critics who question his devotion to a sound working relationship with America, and, if I might use the phrase, to waging war on terror. But this is more a reflection of Brown's annoyance with dissent than of a considered view of his critics' complaints. For one thing, it is Brown who claims credit for engineering what is surely the

ceding of substantial control of British foreign policy to the new EU foreign minister, a move that will make his own foreign policy views far less relevant in the corridors of world power.

For another, there is the substantial gap between rhetoric and policy. Brown wants to attack terror and the causes of terror. But he can't effectively do the former unless he can deport the hate-mongers who have been so welcome in Britain – which he can't do unless he repeals the Human Rights Act. That, he is not prepared to do.

As for treating the causes of terror, the PM believes economic development will prove an attractive alternative to self-innoliation. He holds to that view despite the fact that the perpetrators of 9/11 were mostly rich Saudis, that the doctors allegedly involved in attempts to blow up central London and Glasgow airport were hardly poor, and that when given the tools of development in Gaza, Hamas dismantled the profitable greenhouses and sold them for scrap. But it is early days yet.

Fortunately, we should be able to solve the riddle and unwrap the mystery of the enigma that is the new Prime Minister before being called to the polls to make a judgment on his foreign policy.

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