

# Mr. Brown Goes to Washington

The new prime minister will be cordially, but not warmly, welcomed. **BY IRWIN M. STELZER**

**G**ordon Brown bears no physical resemblance to the lanky Jimmy Stewart who starred in the 1939 film *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*. But when he makes his first trip to the United States as prime minister this week, Mr. Brown's hosts are not likely to find his version of naiveté any more endearing than the Washington establishment found Mr. Smith's.

Smith thought congressmen viewed their jobs as doing what was right for the country; he was quickly disabused of that idea. Brown thinks the Bush administration is unaffected when he caters to fellow Labourites by putting some "clear blue water" between himself and the president.

Diplomatic courtesy will prevent the Bush administration from disabusing the prime minister of that idea when he comes to Washington later this week. So he will wing home convinced that he has persuaded the president that the appointment of Mark Malloch Brown as Britain's representative to the U.N., Africa, and Asia and the recent unfriendly emissions from his cabinet colleagues are not intended to consign the special relationship to the dustbin of history. Malloch Brown will be a particular hurdle, though, since the White House is said to be still fuming over his participation in the campaign to prevent Senate confirmation of John Bolton as U.S. ambassador to the U.N.

The prime minister hopes to maintain this balancing act for the remain-

ing 17 months of Bush's term—telling the Americans that he is true blue, while at the same time persuading the Brits that he has shaken loose from the old Bush-Blair relationship. By then he deems it likely that he will be interacting with a Democratic president, one less likely to have a foreign policy as aggressive in fighting terror as the neoconservative incumbent.

Not that Gordon Brown is soft on terrorism. After all, no sooner had he moved into No. 10 Downing Street than terrorists attempted to slaughter thousands in central London and at the Glasgow airport. Rather, it is that he firmly believes that the way to fight terrorism is to stimulate economic development in places such as Hamas-controlled Gaza, and in pursuit of that objective has sent his top colleague, Harvard-educated Ed Balls, on several trips to the Middle East in recent years. Show Gordon Brown a terrorist, and he will show you an unemployed young man yearning for a decent job.

Here is the state of play on the eve of the prime minister's visit. Brown's international development secretary, Douglas Alexander, the prime minister's closest associate with the exception of Balls, travels to America to tell the Council on Foreign Relations that Britain plans to "form new alliances," and that its foreign policy will emphasize multilateralism and "soft power," both of which America is supposed to oppose. The press was briefed by Alexander's staff in advance of the speech to make certain that reporters would notice how the language was chosen to distinguish Britain's approach to foreign affairs from America's. Alexander

also warns that Britain will no longer measure nations' might by "what they could destroy," which will come as a surprise to those who remember that it was the destructive power of the American military that helped prevent Alexander from growing up a German-speaker.

The press in both countries, taking its cue from the briefings, interprets this as telling America that henceforth it is, at best, one among equals, and then only if it mends its ways. Brown, advised by friends that the press reports are doing him considerable damage in Washington, announces publicly that the *Times*, the *Guardian*, the *Sun*, and the *Telegraph*, among others, are misrepresenting Alexander's speech, and privately assures his friends that all of the political analysts have it wrong. As for Malloch Brown, the prime minister professes to have been unaware of the administration's very negative reaction to the former U.N. bureaucrat's anti-American rants back when he was defending Kofi Annan's corrupt administration of the Iraq Oil-for-Food program. But he says he needs Malloch Brown because of his African expertise, and passes the word that his namesake is to be confined to African matters: If he strays into other areas, he is gone.

At which point Malloch Brown, perhaps annoyed that America led the charge against U.N. corruption in the Iraq Oil-for-Food scandal, perhaps to prove that "Mark is Mark," as one probably delighted Foreign Office wag put it, decides to grant an interview to the *Telegraph*. He tells that newspaper that he is proud to be a neocon-hater; "I am happy to be described as an anti-neocon. If they see me as a villain, I will wear that as a badge of honor." Malloch Brown is too savvy an operator not to know that the president of the United States is counted among neocons when it comes to foreign policy. Or that he was straying far beyond the strict boundaries of the area assigned to him by the prime minister. But he is not fired, as his boss had promised, and retains his seats in the House of Lords and at the cabinet table.

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The prime minister then decides that he had better do something. British voters might be very annoyed with President Bush and America at the moment, but they don't want to see the White House welcome mat rolled up when their prime minister is in Washington. So he directs Foreign Secretary David Miliband to remind his cabinet colleagues that America remains Britain's most important ally. "It's very straightforward. Our commitment to work with the Americans in general and the Bush administration in particular is resolute," Miliband tells his colleagues and the media, setting the stage for the prime minister's visit with the president.

So now Gordon Brown is coming to Washington—but for a very quick visit since, he claims, he must hurry back to begin his family vacation. The implication of the prime minister's emphasis on his need for a quick turnaround is that even if asked to share the Colgate with the president at Camp David, as Tony Blair did on his first visit there, he must decline because of pressing obligations to his family. If you believe both that such an impromptu invitation is likely, and that it would be declined if extended, I have a bridge to sell you immediately after the next visit of the tooth fairy.

Don't misunderstand: Gordon Brown is a fan of America—but of its domestic economy. He admires American entrepreneurship; he prays that some day his countrymen will adopt the "everything is possible" attitude of Americans; he includes Bill Gates and Alan Greenspan in his pantheon of heroes. But he has been somewhere between noncommunicative and evasive when it comes to foreign policy.

I have little doubt that when he says to friends that he will stand with America in a crisis, his intentions are honorable. But I also have little doubt that he would think long and hard before overriding his cabinet colleagues, who will insist that any future deployment of British troops occur only with the approval of the U.N.—which Russia, China, or some

other member of the Security Council would certainly veto. And remember: His new security supremo, Admiral Sir Alan West, former First Sea Lord and now sitting like Malloch Brown on the Labour benches in the House of Lords, praised British sailors for not resisting capture by the Iranians because to have done so would have triggered a war.

If Brown is as dedicated as he claims to be to the special relationship with America, his visit provides the perfect opportunity for him to make that clear to an American audience that is confused by the conflicting statements of Malloch Brown, who claims to be the wise-man adviser to David Miliband, and Miliband, his putative boss at the Foreign Office. My guess is that the prime minister is eager to make his pro-American views known, and to stamp his authority on his so-far fractious subordinates. Whether he will risk the fallout at home to do just that we will soon know.

Any student of history knows that there have been hiccups in the special relationship. If you doubt that, cast your eye over Sir Robin Renwick's *Fighting with Allies*, or recall the tension between our countries when Prime Minister Harold Wilson refused President Lyndon Johnson's request for British troops to support the Americans fighting in Vietnam. And John O'Sullivan, my colleague at the Hudson Institute, might prove right when he argues that the special relationship will survive temporary suspensions because it is rooted in a common culture, and in a system of mutual defense cooperation that "suit[s] both . . . countries very well."

Let's hope so. But one of Gordon Brown's priorities is to placate the Europeans, with whom he has been unpopular since he prevented Britain from trading in its pound sterling for the euro. He expects his popularity in the EU to soar when he signs on to their new constitution-disguised-as-treaty without honoring his pledge to put the matter to a referendum of

the British people—a referendum that would undoubtedly result in the rejection of this further surrender of British sovereignty to Brussels. Surely, this courting of the EU suggests that in an EU-vs.-U.S. dispute, America cannot count on Gordon Brown. In which case, the White House switchboard might decide in the future to forward crisis calls from No. 10 Downing Street to the paper entity known as the European army.

But that is for later. Right now, there are enough areas of agreement to allow for an amicable meeting. Bush and Brown are determined to pressure the U.N. to take meaningful action to end the slaughter in Darfur; the prime minister will assure the president that he will not withdraw troops from Iraq without consulting with the Americans; he will also tell Bush that Britain will honor its commitment to help rid Afghanistan of the Taliban, and join America in calling for tighter sanctions on Iran. Both men will promise to do what they can to fight the rising tide of protectionism in America and in Europe. And, if they have a spare moment, they will exchange recommendations for summer reading.

Brown might suggest his own *Courage: Eight Portraits* to the president, with its reassuring message that "people who took brave decisions in the service of great causes . . . are for us exemplars and icons" or, if modesty forbids, two of his favorites: Gertrude Himmelfarb's *The Roads to Modernity*, with its emphasis on the intellectual contribution of many great Scots, and David Nasaw's biography of his model philanthropist, Andrew Carnegie, who used his great fortune to equalize educational opportunities. Bush might respond by suggesting that the prime minister would better understand the importance of the special relationship to the maintenance of world order were he to put Andrew Roberts's *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples Since 1900* atop his summer reading pile. Perhaps this shared passion for reading will prove more enduring than a shared preference for toothpaste. ♦