

Brown's global vision is seriously flawed

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It's been a good few weeks for President Bush and America. Our Nato allies agreed to the construction of an anti-missile system, and Silvio Berlusconi improbably persuaded Italy's voters that he deserves another chance to solve their nation's problems. Add France's flamboyant Nicolas Sarkozy and Germany's solid Angela Merkel, and you have a pro-American line-up that brings a smile to the face of the President, and suggests that Bush has not completely alienated our allies, as his critics claim.

Last week that smile became a broad grin. Pope Benedict came over from Europe, leaving what columnist George Will calls the secular land of empty cathedrals for religious America. Americans loved his uplifting sermons, and he warmed to President Bush's agreement that there is room for religion in the public square.

The Pope also pushed Gordon Brown off the front pages of US newspapers, as the British press gleefully reported, but that in no way diminished the success of the Prime Minister's Washington visit. Brown had used his first visit to President Bush to demonstrate to his Left that he is no Tony Blair, no

Bush poodle, but a fierce bulldog. No casual clothes, no return of personal compliments. This time, the presidential and prime ministerial staffs cut a deal: Bush would not publicly remonstrate with Brown for keeping his troops safe in their Basra base while Americans did their fighting for them, and Brown would not use the White House press conference to air his usual complaint that the US is the source of the world's economic woes.

So all was sweetness and light at the lightly attended press conference. Brown rediscovered his pro-American leanings, and defied the anti-American faction of his party – and the much larger anti-Bush bloc of British voters – by praising the President. Which means that America can now count on all four major European powers to give its foreign policy needs serious consideration.

Unfortunately, Brown's visit to the John F Kennedy presidential library to hobnob with his favourite political clan and deliver what he considered an important policy speech was somewhat less successful. Not that he wasn't well received: the Kennedy's gave a predictably warm welcome to a left-of-centre politician who does not have as pro-Bush a history as did Tony Blair. Besides, they couldn't help noticing that Brown's effusive praise – Ted is "one of the greatest Senators in more than two centuries, and... the Kennedy family is respected and renowned not just in this continent but in every continent of the world" – exceeded anything

the PM could muster when praising President Bush. And it seems that in Brown's version of history, the destruction of the Berlin wall was "the result of the vision of one man" who "so famously denounced" it. Was this a reference to Ronald Reagan, who demanded, "Mr Gorbachev tear down that wall"? No, it was to Jack Kennedy, brother of that greatest senator in 200 years, who now happens to be backing the most protectionist of the

The PM wrongly believes poverty is the root cause of terrorism

candidates for the American presidency, Barack Obama.

The Prime Minister's speech did have a sort of nobility – Brown at his best, drawing on his extensive knowledge of history in a plea to our better natures, calling us to band together in an international effort to improve economic performance, cool the earth, fight terrorism, and prevent humanitarian disasters. But then comes implementation, and the

old belief that government institutions, the bigger and more multilateral the better, are the cures for what ails us.

Yes, there is a nod to individual action and charitable organisations. But in the end it is all about "international architecture". The International Monetary Fund is to develop an early warning system before the next economic storm. This is the organisation so poor at forecasting that it is avoiding going bust only by selling gold reserves and belatedly pruning its bloated staff. The Nobel laureate Joe Stiglitz accuses the IMF of pushing programmes that often make matters worse, while its bureaucrats are "more likely to have first-hand knowledge of [a country's] five-star hotels than of the villages that dot its countryside".

Then there is the World Bank, which Brown would have become a "bank for development and the environment – transferring billions in loans and grants to... the poorest countries". This is the same organisation that lends money to China, so needy that it is busily using its bulging vaults to buy financial and commodity assets around the globe. It is also the organisation that met charges that some of its projects are rife with corruption by firing its entire anti-corruption department. Its new president, Bob Zoellick, will do much to fix these problems, but he won't be there forever, and the odds of regression to the norm – corruption – remain sufficiently high to make one

wonder where those "billions" will end up.

Which brings us to the United Nations, which in Brown's new world order would help nations develop the rule of law, give Security Council approval to the use of military force, and receive still more money from members. This is an organisation so corrupt that one of its administrators has been found guilty of accepting bribes, so biased that its General Assembly spends most of its time condemning Israel, and so impotent that it resists efforts to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. Best of all, Brown has ennobled and given a ministerial job to Mark Malloch Brown, despised in the White House for using his time at the UN to defend it from its critics and resist reforms proposed by America.

Finally, there is the question of terrorism, being fought co-operatively and quietly by national security services, with little of the "architecture" that so attracts Brown. Which is a good thing, since it gives Brown little opportunity to impose his view that poverty is a root cause of terrorism – a view that every study proves to be false: it was, after all, rich Saudis who piloted planes into the World Trade Center and a very rich Osama bin Laden who funded the effort from a paid-for base in Afghanistan. The Prime Minister is a good man, but he has yet to learn that unaccountable bureaucrats are unlikely allies in his fight to make the world a better place.