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## Undiplomatic Envoy

# Prince Andrew’s friendship with a convicted US financier is an embarrassment. He should resign as a trade envoy

Published at 12:01AM, March 7 2011

An envoy is a man or woman sent abroad to win friends, represent views and bring credit and benefit to the country. Over the past ten years the Duke of York has travelled many thousand miles as an unpaid ambassador of UK Trade & Investment, the official body set up to boost British exports and win new markets around the world.

The results have been questionable. Prince Andrew has, undoubtedly, impressed monarchs, Middle Eastern potentates and those eager to hobnob with British royalty. But those summoned to meet him have too often been left with an impression of boorishness, arrogance, questionable standards, sloppy preparation and dubious friendships. It is high time Prince Andrew relinquished his role, ended his visits to assorted despots and spared his mother and his country further embarrassment.

The revelations of the past week have crystallised the doubts, expressed with scant diplomacy by Britain’s ambassadors overseas, over the Prince’s judgments, behaviour and connections. His 16-year friendship with Jeffrey Epstein, an American financier who served a prison sentence for soliciting an underage girl for prostitution, has now linked the Prince to a messy and widely publicised scandal of underage girls, moral decadence, corruption and criminal investigations by the FBI. Buckingham Palace says Prince Andrew acknowledges that his four-day visit in December to New York, where he stayed with Epstein on his release from prison, was “unwise”. He has now, the palace insists, broken off all connection with Epstein and regrets the lapse of judgment in remaining friends with him.

Regret is scarcely sufficient. There is here an unpleasant whiff of the old Profumo scandal. The Prince, already notorious for his enjoyment of louche company and tasteless extravagance, has fatally undermined his own position. He has not been helped by the revelations that his business judgments have been equally unfortunate. It may be unfair to pillory him for cultivating connections to the Gaddafi family, when everyone else was looking for money from Tripoli. More blameworthy was his invitation to Buckingham Palace of the notoriously corrupt son-in-law of the deposed Tunisian president, only three months before the uprising that deposed Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. A former British ambassador in Tunis gave plenty of warning about the Ben Ali family. But his advice, like that offered by other envoys, seems to have been ignored by the Prince who came ill-prepared on the nuances of local politics.

Not a few businessmen will roll their eyes at the stories of Epstein’s parties with naked women and the corruption surrounding him but still believe it has been useful to have the fourth in line to the throne able to open doors for them in countries where connections and introductions are all-important. They ought, nevertheless, to reflect more on how Britain should win contracts in an age where cronyism and corruption are increasingly the target of angry demonstrations. There needs to be a professionalism of approach that does not rely on a famous name, a popular footballer or a royal connection. The concept of a Special Representative for International Trade and Investment must not be synonymous with celebrity endorsement. It is excellence, not their excellencies, that will sell British goods and services abroad.

It would be honourable for the Duke of York to suggest that, after a decade, he has flown enough for his country. A more useful role could be found closer to home. He has, for too long, been dazzled by the money and lifestyle of rich friends abroad. There are charities and causes over here that need support if the Big Society is to mean anything. Prince Andrew’s elder brother has inspired much good work in the Prince’s Trust. Prince Andrew should consider something similar if he wishes to win back the nation’s trust.

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 David Colquhoun ▾

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**John Barleycorn**

M

He should not resign.

Anyone comparing him to Blair (and you are usually the left-liberals) - you voted Blair in. Don't whine about Blair either.

[Recommend](#) [Reply](#)**Ralph Mason**

Momus. What is the return on investment ? Do you actually know anything other than your class hatred and prejudice? It is quite extraordinary how vitriol oozes out of peoples pores and the facts are ignored. Over the years many a business leader has expressed their thanks to HRH for services rendered. I'm sure I've been photographed with my arm around a 17 year old I had not met previously or since. (and I'm 73!). The PM does recognise the contribution HRH has made based on facts and hence is giving his full support. The huge press coverage by the liberal left w fraternity does not do the industry or journalism any favours. All very sad.

[Recommend](#) [Reply](#)**Malcolm Paton**

7, 2011 14:28

"It is excellence, not their excellencies, that will sell British goods and services abroad"

All very noble, but the writer of this leader must be the only person in the world who believes it !!!

The jealousy and cynicism in the comments so far are palpable. Everybody green with envy at someone else's fortunate position in life. Have we forgotten that Prince Andrew is also an extremely brave war veteran?

The Times is throwing mud at every public figure who has ever been connected with Libya in the hope that some of it may eventually stick. That is extremely poor journalism.

"There needs to be a professionalism of approach ... " This is the closest that the Times came to making an intelligent contribution to the debate. Problem is, in a region where "baksheesh" (or however it is spelt) is a normal part of everyday life, how do you do business without patronage?

[Recommend](#) [Reply](#)**John Hatch**

March 07, 2011 13:47

Who ever told you that royals were incorruptible? Queen Victoria used to promote this idea, precisely because she knew the reality was very different.

[Recommend](#) [Reply](#)**daniel case**

March 07, 2011 12:23

Let's not forget loony Blair's (he who has amassed a fortune) 'deal in the desert' or his loony sidekick Brown who allowed the Libyan mass murderer to go free for another deal.

[Recommend](#) [Reply](#)**Rodney Barker**

March 07, 2011 12:20

At last. I am sure that the vast majority of the country agree with this leading article. Prince Andrew does not carry this country's interests at all - he is too concerned with his own. He is, simply, the Royal Playboy.

[Recommend](#) [Reply](#)**Jill Shepherd**

March 07, 2011 10:51

I haven't really been following this story I just saw headline about an under aged 17 year old girl. Thought would she have been under aged in this country? And gave the story a miss. But of course the conviction for soliciting for prostitution of a person for prostitution puts a very different complexion on the matter.

One thing I would like to add is that I do not think it is fair to refer to the Profumo affair in the same breath as this case, because at least Christine Keeler was over 20.

[Recommend](#) [Reply](#)**Diane Purkiss**

March 07, 2011 10:50

So much for the idea that the royals are valuable because they are incorruptible and bring prestige.

[Recommend](#) [Reply](#)**momus**

March 07, 2011 10:38

don't be so silly. of course it's our business; we bankroll this buffoon and the return is unacceptable

[Recommend](#) [Reply](#)**Stephen Gudgeon**

March 07, 2011 10:37

What a singularly unintelligent remark 'Global Voter' , as OUR envoy his behaviour is surely OUR business.

**Bob Thompson**

They say that "He who supps with the Devil should use a long spoon". The longest I've seen was in a Namibian game park. A coach-load of excited kids arrived and set about cooking their idea of camp chow – a huge iron "cannibal pot" full of boiling African porridge (called mealies by Whites, for no obvious reason). To stir this monster brew, they used a lovely carved wooden spoon (probably Mopani there), about 1 metre long. Would that do for supping with the horrendous Epstein? I treasure a smaller one of these traditional spoons, given to me in a corrugated iron shack by the parents (both with AIDS) of a teenager whom I was supporting through school at the time. She now hosts them, her two sisters (one with baby) and a related AIDS orphan in the nice concrete house she bought on her 21st birthday. Maybe this footnote helps to remove the foul taste left by the Epstein affair.

[Recommend](#) [Reply](#)**Eroch**

While he continues to spend millions of taxpayers money on these dubious and sometimes embarrassing overseas visits then it is very much the business of the Public to know and Times to publish.

[Recommend](#) [Reply](#)**Gentleman living in Surrey**

And how much does this clown cost the tax payer every year?

MPs have been dragged through the mud over their expenses: isn't it time that in an "open" society we saw how much the tax payer is paying in expenses for the Royal Circus; I imagine that it would make the MPs indiscretions fade into oblivion!

[Recommend](#) [Reply](#)**Global Voter**

Who are the editors or public to judge these friendships. Mind your OWN business.

[Recommend](#) [Reply](#)**John Hatch**

7, 2011 01:30

It is now coming out that Saif Gaddafi had dealings with Peter Mandelson, Howard Davies, Nat Rothschild and Prince Andrew etc.

The Libyan government must surely now accept that he cannot continue as a credible representative for his country.

[Recommend](#) [Reply](#)**john papi**

March 06, 2011 22:11

'Clown' Prince Andrew has been an embarrassment from the start. He is a standing joke abroad and if he is not removed as Trade Envoy this country will be seriously damaged and embarrassed. He, like Tony Blair the so called Peace Envoy, may be better suited to 'Live at the Apollo'. We can all do with a good laugh or two !!!

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