



*Dear Simon,*

*It is difficult from abroad to judge the leadership qualities of David Cameron. Has he been a particularly weak prime minister or a clever 'navigator in troubled waters'?*



The easiest way to understand David Cameron is to assume that he has no strong beliefs. He does – as with his strong support for gay marriage – but most of time, he is very tactical in his politics.

In part, this is because he has to manage a coalition government, which makes it harder to pursue more ideologically pure policy positions. But mostly, it's because it's in his nature: he has always had a strong sense that things can be worked out and that he can pick out a path as he goes. You might argue that this is perfectly reasonable for someone how has to deal with a huge range of conflicting interests and surprise events, but it does make for less-than-reassuring politics.

In particular, his adaptability has been exploited by others, especially among his own party. Backbenchers – those without government roles – have constantly pushed him about on many points of policy, most obviously the EU. Like many parties of the right, the Tories have a culture of doing what is necessary to secure power and they have little concern about pushing Cameron aside if they decide he's an electoral liability. Hence, much of his work is about keeping them onside.

All of this has rather overshadowed his record on policy-making, despite his apparent success in managing the economic recovery of recent years. In part, his domestic focus has meant that he has not really developed a strong profile internationally, a problem that has been reinforced by his unwillingness to get involved too deeply in foreign adventures. As such, he would not be much missed on the international stage.

Talk soon,

*Simon*