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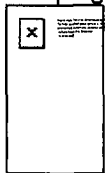
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- EUROPE NEWS
- FEBRUARY 25, 2010

Obama Advisers to Aid Tories' Election TV Battle

By IAIN MARTIN

Advisers close to U.S. President Barack Obama have been drafted by David Cameron to help the Conservatives in their election campaign against Gordon Brown and Labour.

The Tories have signed a contract with Squier, Knapp, Dunn Communications—a Washington-based Democrat-leaning political consultancy—to help them prepare for the first-ever television debates between leaders during a British election campaign.



David Cameron

The firm also is expected to offer some advice more broadly to the Tory leader on the Conservative campaign in the lead-up to voting, likely to take place on May 6.

Opinion polls have suggested a narrowing of the gap between the two main parties—with the Conservative lead cut to six to seven points in the two most recent polls earlier this week.

A Conservative spokesman confirmed Wednesday night that Squier, Knapp, Dunn will act as consultants for the television debates.

Anita Dunn, one of the firm's senior partners, was hired by Mr. Obama in 2006 ahead of his run for president and was the communications director at the White House until November. Bill Knapp, another senior partner and veteran of the successful Obama campaign, is a close adviser to the mayor of New York City, Michael Bloomberg.

Tory campaign insiders say they have been talking to the firm for several months after a recommendation from Mayor Bloomberg, who retains close links with the British Tory leadership.

He was a lifelong Democrat who switched to the Republicans when he first ran for mayor.

The British general election is taking on a particularly American flavor, with the prime minister also understood to be seeking advice from a consultant based in the U.S. The Times of London reported that Joel Benenson, a polling and strategy adviser who worked on the team that readied Mr. Obama for the American TV debates, is helping Mr. Brown.

None of the British parties has experience of leaders' debates and as a consequence are looking outside for help.

However, it is the decision of the Tories to reach out across the traditional ideological divide to senior Democrats that is surprising. Their party usually has looked to Republican strategists for advice, with Labour and the Democrats retaining close links.

Ms. Dunn is a veteran of Democrat politics, beginning her career in Jimmy Carter's administration and subsequently working as a consultant on many election campaigns. She returned to the White House with President Obama but left late

last year when her husband, Robert Bauer, the president's personal attorney, was unveiled as the incoming White House counsel.

Mr. Knapp made television ads for the Obama campaign, has worked on five presidential campaigns and played a leading role in Mayor Bloomberg's three election wins.

The pre-election atmosphere in the U.K. has become increasingly fraught, with the parties trading blows on allegations of bullying inside No. 10 Downing Street made in a new book on the Labour government by journalist Andrew Rawnsley.

In the latest developments, the prime minister Wednesday in a GMTV breakfast television interview denied that he had known about briefings by some of his aides against Alistair Darling, his chancellor of the exchequer.

In a remarkably frank interview Tuesday with Jeff Randall of Sky News, Mr. Darling said that when he remarked in the summer of 2008 that the worst global recession in 60 years was underway, No. 10 had "unleashed the forces of hell."

Mr Brown said on GMTV: "I was never part of anything to do with this. Look, this was the most amazing time...and lots of things were happening in this time. But I would never instruct anybody to do anything other than support my chancellor, and I think Alistair will confirm that."

At a rowdy Prime Minister's Questions in the House of Commons Wednesday, Mr. Cameron questioned Mr. Brown on the row.

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