

# Coalition cracks are about policy not media spin

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Who would have thought that a lumbering performance by New Labour's unloved Witchfinder General would trap the Golden Boy of British politics? I doubt that it was all a cunning ploy by Jack Straw, but today's [Prime Minister's Questions](#) witnessed a masterclass in [snatching defeat from the jaws of victory](#) by Nick Clegg.



Rhetorically he was all over Straw, taunting him as if it were the Lib Dems in Government with an unfettered mandate to end 'illegal wars' and set a precise date for British withdrawal from Afghanistan. But then onlookers remembered that this was the coalition government dispatch box not a pre-election Lib Dem party conference podium. These are policy issues of the highest importance and Clegg does not seem master of his brief, let alone in line with his coalition partners.

As Paul Waugh writes, Clegg [was not alone in his tactical errors](#) which may indeed add up to the 'worst day' for the coalition so far.

I am not an opponent of coalition government and [I have written](#) about how the UK media has to adapt its usual destructive approach in the face of the variable geometry of partnership politics.

But today reminds us that Government is about policy and it is politicians that set the agenda for the media, not the other way around. In this case Clegg has done us all a favour by reminding us of the real divisions within the marriage of convenience. I am sure the relationship will survive once Father gets home from his trip abroad. But it is clear that this is not an entirely happy family.

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