

Prince Andrew a distraction as royal wedding approaches

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LONDON — Less than two months before a fairytale wedding anticipated by much of the world, Britain's royal family finds itself fighting an inconvenient distraction: revelations that Prince Andrew, the queen's second son, is friends with a convicted sex offender, was photographed with a teenage prostitute, and has been accused of ties to Moammar Gadhafi's Libyan regime.

The Duke of York also hosted the son of the Tunisian dictator shortly before a popular uprising drove him from power — and the buildup of embarrassment has sparked calls that he be stripped of his role as special U.K. trade representative.

Buckingham Palace is in damage control mode as it attempts to keep the public's focus on the April 29



Prince Andrew

wedding between Prince William and tabloid favorite Kate Middleton, his college sweetheart.

British officials have rallied to Andrew's defense. The foreign secretary expressed his "confidence" in Andrew on Sunday, and a U.K. trade official voiced support for the prince to remain in the position, saying he does a "very valuable job."

But pressure is mounting and there is growing speculation over how long Andrew can hang on to his post.

Since becoming a special trade representative in 2001, Andrew has drawn criticism for reportedly taking lavish trips in his role as an unpaid trade ambassador.

The latest revelations in the British media have centered on Andrew's friendship with convicted pedophile Jeffrey Epstein.

Photos recently published in the British media show Andrew strolling in a park with Epstein — the New York billionaire jailed for soliciting underage prostitutes in Florida. Most recently, a photograph emerged showing Andrew with his arm around the waist of the teenage prostitute at the center of that case.