

ISSUE BRIEF

No. 4649 | JANUARY 25, 2017

The Trump–May White House Meeting: Five Key Recommendations for Advancing the Special Relationship

Nile Gardiner, PhD, and Ted R. Bromund, PhD

On January 27, just seven days after taking office, President Donald Trump will meet with British Prime Minister Theresa May in Washington. It will be the first visit to the White House by a foreign leader since Trump's inauguration, and the meeting sends a clear signal that the Anglo–American alliance will be at the heart of strategic thinking in the new Trump Administration. The Special Relationship has been the world's most powerful bilateral partnership for over 70 years and is fundamentally important to both Washington and London. It has played a vital role in the defense of the free world since World War Two and has been instrumental in advancing economic freedom across the globe.

May's visit comes just seven months after the June 23, 2016, Brexit referendum in which the British people voted by a margin of 52 percent to 48 percent to leave the European Union. The Brexit vote allows Britain to chart a new course as a sovereign, free nation, able to implement free trade agreements with countries across the world as soon as the United Kingdom exits the EU in 2019.

The prospect of a free trade agreement between the United States and the U.K., the world's largest and fifth largest economies, respectively, will be central to the discussions between President Trump

and Prime Minister May. Their talks will also focus on revitalizing the NATO alliance; the growing threat posed by Russia, Iran, and a host of Islamist terrorist groups, ranging from ISIS to al-Qaeda; and the wars in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya.

The Trump–May meeting is a valuable opportunity both to project robust U.S.–U.K. leadership on the world stage and to advance the Special Relationship. The following are five key recommendations for the White House and the Trump Administration as it prepares for the arrival of the British prime minister.

1. Move forward with a U.S.–U.K. free trade deal. The Trump Administration should make a U.S.–U.K. free trade deal a foreign policy priority. There is strong support on Capitol Hill for a free trade agreement between the United States and the United Kingdom, including the United Kingdom Trade Continuity Act introduced by Senators Mike Lee (R–UT) and Tom Cotton (R–AR). America has a huge economic stake in the United Kingdom. As the Congressional Research Service notes, there are \$5 trillion of U.S. corporate assets in the U.K., representing 22 percent of total U.S. corporate overseas assets.¹ Britain is America's largest foreign direct investor,² and roughly a million U.S. jobs depend on British companies based in America.

President Trump should instruct the U.S. Trade Representative and the White House National Trade Council to fast-track the pursuit of a U.S.–U.K. trade pact by putting forward clear negotiating objectives, pursuant to congressional guid-

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at <http://report.heritage.org/ib4649>

The Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20002
(202) 546-4400 | heritage.org

Nothing written here is to be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of The Heritage Foundation or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress.

ance, that will advance the Special Relationship between the two countries. The free trade deal should be implemented within 90 days of Britain's leaving the EU.

2. Back Brexit and national sovereignty in Europe. Britain's decision to leave the European Union should be viewed as a hugely positive development by the new Administration and offers tremendous opportunities for Britain and the United States to strengthen their partnership. President Trump has called the Brexit result "a great thing," declaring on British soil the day after the June referendum that "basically they took back their country."³

A supranational European Union that stifles sovereignty and the freedom of European allies to act independently is not in America's national interest, and the White House should not back the mantra of "ever closer union" across the Atlantic. It is in America's interest to cultivate ties with key national capitals rather than lending its support to a crumbling European Project. A strong and enduring transatlantic alliance rests upon the bedrock principles of self-determination, economic freedom, and mutual defense.

The new U.S. Administration should rethink American support for the EU and conduct a National Security Council-led study on how best to advance U.S. interests in Europe.

3. Project robust leadership on NATO. The NATO alliance remains vitally important to the defense of the West, even more so with the resurgence of Russian militarism and aggression under Vladimir Putin. The U.S. and U.K. are NATO's biggest contributors and the backbone of the alliance. Washington and London must work

together to reenergize NATO, calling on European allies to spend more on defense, while at the same time rebuilding their own militaries after years of defense cuts under Barack Obama and successive British prime ministers before Theresa May. The United States and Great Britain must send a clear signal to Moscow that any attempt to violate the sovereignty of NATO member states in the Baltics or Eastern Europe will be met with military force through the alliance's Article V commitment.

The Trump Administration should oppose any efforts by the European Union to create a competing EU defense identity or EU Army and should ensure that NATO retains its primacy over and the right of first refusal for all Europe-related defense matters.⁴

4. Advance U.S.–U.K. defense cooperation. The U.S. can buy the defense it needs more efficiently if it works as closely as possible with its best allies, and it has no better ally than Britain. It is prudent to buy American if that is the best and most efficient option, but America's allies have good ideas and clever inventors too, and the United States owes it to its taxpayers and troops to develop with them when that is what makes sense. Above all, the U.S. should do more to ensure that, as is too often the case today, its own rules and procedures do not discourage its allies from buying American when they want to do so.

Section 811 of the fiscal year (FY) 2018 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), among other provisions, mandates a Defense Department study of ways to improve the integration of the U.S. defense industrial base, including Britain and Australia.

1. See Derek E. Mix, "The United Kingdom: Background and Relations with the United States," Congressional Research Service *Report for Members and Committees of Congress*, April 29, 2015, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33105.pdf> (accessed January 24, 2017).

2. See Rudy Telles, Jr., "Foreign Direct Investment in the United States: Update to 2013 Report," U.S. Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration, Office of the Chief Economist, *ESA Issue Brief* No. 02-16, June 20, 2016, <http://www.esa.doc.gov/sites/default/files/foreign-direct-investment-in-the-united-states-update-2016.pdf> (accessed January 24, 2017).

3. See Ashley Parker, "Donald Trump, in Scotland, Calls 'Brexit' Result 'a Great Thing,'" *The New York Times*, June 24, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/25/us/politics/donald-trump-scotland.html?_r=2 (accessed January 24, 2017).

4. See Luke Coffey and Nile Gardiner, "The United States Should Not Back a European Union Army," Heritage Foundation *Issue Brief* No. 4616, October 20, 2016, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2016/10/the-united-states-should-not-back-a-european-union-army>.

The Trump Administration should commit to (1) energetically supporting and conducting the study mandated by the FY 2018 NDAA, (2) reducing barriers to the export of U.S. defense goods and services, and (3) to developing collaborative programs with Britain and Australia.

- 5. Strengthen borders and combat terrorism.** It is all but impossible to protect the security of the British or American homelands without effective border controls. One essential part of Brexit is Britain's recovery of its ability to control who enters Britain. The massive number of migrants to Europe only makes it more important that Britain exercise this right effectively, as Islamist terrorists have already hidden in migrant flows in order to reach Europe and commit attacks.

On the other hand, the U.S. and Britain, as global leaders, do not want to—and cannot—close themselves off from the outside world. They should exercise the inherent sovereign right to effective border controls but also should work to make sure that those border controls do not impede lawful commerce.

The Trump Administration should welcome Britain's renewed ability to exercise border controls and, while working with it to improve border security, should seek to develop approaches, such as the rumored "passporting deal," that make it easier for law-abiding businesses and individuals in each nation to work and invest in the other.⁵

The Administration must also revitalize the Five Eyes initiative of cooperation among the senior border and immigration officials of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Revitalizing the Special Relationship

President Trump's decision to bring back Sir Jacob Epstein's bust of Sir Winston Churchill on the day he entered the Oval Office speaks volumes about the willingness of the new U.S. Administration to work closely with its British allies. After eight years of the Obama Administration's lukewarm approach to Great Britain, the Trump presidency is in a strong position to revitalize the Special Relationship. It is a partnership that rests upon deep-seated cooperation in defense, trade, intelligence, and a host of other areas stretching from educational exchange to the arts.

As Margaret Thatcher once remarked, "the special relationship does exist, it does count and it must continue, because the United States needs friends in the lonely task of world leadership."⁶ Its revival and renewal over the next four years will strengthen the security of the West, advance prosperity on both sides of the Atlantic, and enhance America's ability to lead the free world.

—*Nile Gardiner, PhD, is Director of and Ted R. Bromund, PhD, is Senior Research Fellow in Anglo-American Relations in the Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom, of the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for National Security and Foreign Policy, at The Heritage Foundation.*

5. Christopher Hope and Ben Riley-Smith, "Donald Trump to Meet Theresa May Before Any Other Foreign Leader Since His Inauguration as New Deal Planned for Britain," *The Telegraph*, January 22, 2017, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/01/21/donald-trump-plans-new-deal-britain-theresa-may-becomes-first/> (accessed January 24, 2017).

6. Margaret Thatcher, "Speech to Foreign Relations Council of Chicago," June 17, 1991, <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/108275> (accessed January 24, 2017).
