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Six Key Priorities for President Trump's State Visit to the United Kingdom

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President Donald Trump will make a state visit to the United Kingdom from June 3 to 5. This is only the third state visit by a U.S. President to America's closest ally since 1945. While Presidents as important to the Anglo-American Special Relationship as Dwight Eisenhower and Ronald Reagan have visited Britain, none did so as part of a state visit. The President's visit will include a ceremonial welcome by the Queen and other members of the royal family, and a state banquet at Buckingham Palace.¹

The President's state visit is timed to allow him to participate in ceremonies marking the 75th anniversary of D-Day, when British, American, Canadian, and Allied forces fought side by side to liberate Europe from Nazism. The President will also participate in the D-Day commemorations at Portsmouth, a city on the English south coast that was an important embarkation point for Allied forces. This state visit offers a vital opportunity to strengthen the Special Relationship at a crucially important time in British history, as the United Kingdom prepares to leave the European Union.

Seizing the Opportunity to Strengthen the Special Relationship

The President's state visit will advance the Special Relationship and the transatlantic alliance as a whole,

strengthen U.S. leadership in Europe, reaffirm powerful U.S. backing for Brexit, and underscore that a U.S.-U.K. free trade deal will be a top priority for the U.S. Administration in the Brexit era.

While in London, President Trump should give a major policy address. Ideally, he should give this address before both Houses of Parliament, but the Speaker of the House of Commons, acting in a partisan spirit at odds with his office, has so far opposed this. If pressure from the British government does not force the Speaker to reverse his unwise course, the President's address should be delivered at another venue in central London.

The President should not be afraid to weigh in on Brexit. The U.S. has a tremendous stake in ensuring that Brexit finally happens. President Trump's views and statements carry a great deal of weight, and their energy will strengthen the positions of Brexiteers fighting for Britain to leave the EU. The point the President should make is simple: Britain has voted for Brexit, and when it leaves the EU, it will be welcomed with open arms by friends and allies around the world, including the United States.

The President should be acutely aware that Prime Minister Theresa May will likely only be in office for a few more months. Her leadership on Brexit has been extremely weak, and she is facing a large-scale rebellion by the grassroots of the ruling Conservative Party.

President Trump has three key audiences in the U.K. The first of these audiences is the rudderless British government headed by May. A more important audience is the next Conservative government, which could well be headed by Brexiteer and former Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson. If Johnson or

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another Brexiteer becomes prime minister, there will be a significantly warmer relationship between the White House and Downing Street.

Finally, the President's largest audience is the British people, 17.4 million of whom voted in 2016 to leave the EU. President Trump should state clearly that the British people have spoken on Brexit, and that he and his Administration look forward to even closer cooperation with a free and sovereign Britain outside the straitjacket of the European Union.

Six Major Issues the President Should Confront in Britain

During his visit, President Trump should:

1. Back the Choice of the British People—Back Brexit. Brexit will likely dominate the visit. It is fundamentally important for the President to express his wholehearted backing for Brexit by reiterating the support for the choice of the British people that he has given on many occasions. President Trump's voice on this issue is vital.

He should place strong emphasis on Britain leaving the EU by the new October 31 deadline. Any further delay for Brexit would make the prospects for Brexit perilous, and would create uncertainty that would be bad for the American and British economies alike. The President should make clear that the United States will do all it can to help ensure that Brexit is a success, regardless of whether Britain leaves the EU with or without a deal. He should emphasize that, if Britain leaves the EU without a deal, this will have no effect on the Special Relationship.

2. Emphasize Administration Support for a Major U.S.–U.K. Trade Deal. The state visit will be a powerful opportunity for the President to declare that his Administration will move forward full speed, as soon as Britain leaves the EU, to negotiate and implement a free trade deal between the world's largest and fifth-largest economies. The President should set a goal of signing a major U.S.–U.K. trade deal in 2020 to give this project a sense of urgency and immediacy. He should also reiterate the words and the sentiments of Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, who declared that Britain will be at "the front of the queue" for a trade deal with the U.S.² Finally, President Trump

should warn in plain language that if Britain does not fully leave the EU Customs Union, it will not be possible for Britain to negotiate free trade agreements with trading partners around the world, including the United States.

3. Call Out and Challenge EU Protectionism. The President should call for an end to trade protectionism by the EU, and repeat his call for zero tariffs on both sides of the Atlantic, thereby throwing down the gauntlet to Brussels. The British government has already pledged to remove the vast majority of EU-imposed tariffs after Brexit. This is an opportunity for the U.S. and the U.K. to take a joint stand in support of free trade and emphatically reject the defensive mentality that prevails across the EU.

The President should also emphasize that, as great financial and service powers, both the U.S. and Britain have a fundamental interest in resisting the EU's efforts to impose rules on invisible trade that would damage the Anglo and American economies. It is therefore vital that Britain avoids binding itself by promising to adopt EU rules on services for the sake of a deal on visible trade.

4. Challenge the Prime Minister May's Support for the Iran Nuclear Deal. Urging the British to recognize and confront the Iranian threat should be an important part of President Trump's visit. The President should reiterate the statements of Vice President Mike Pence and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and urge Britain and U.S. allies in Europe to leave the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Iran's announcement on May 8 that it will stop complying with parts of the JCPOA means that the Iran Nuclear Deal, which was always a bad deal, is now no longer a deal at all.

While Prime Minister May is attached to the Iran nuclear deal, several members of her cabinet are not. As May will likely step down later this year and be replaced by a new Conservative prime minister, the President should not hesitate to make a powerful case against the JCPOA and the collaboration with the Iranian regime that it entails. The President should send his policy message not only to the present British government, but also to the next one, which may be far more open to working closely with the U.S. to constrain Iran.

1. The Royal Household, "State Visits," 2019, <https://www.royal.uk/state-visits-2> (accessed May 8, 2019).

2. Kamal Ahmed, "Brexit: US Ready for an 'Attractive' UK Trade Deal," BBC, January 25, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-42815836> (accessed May 8, 2019).

5. Support the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Genuine Transatlantic Defense.

London will host the next NATO summit in December 2019. The British government will want to know how the President plans to approach this summit.

The President should underscore his Administration's unyielding and steadfast commitment to NATO, while urging all NATO allies to follow the lead set by the U.S. and U.K. in meeting their defense spending commitments. He should also ensure that, at the end of the state visit, the United States and the United Kingdom send a robust joint message to Moscow that NATO will resist any Russian attempts to threaten the Alliance.

Finally, the President should make it clear that he and his Administration will vigorously oppose any efforts by the European Union to undermine NATO through the development of a European Union army. Britain has resisted EU efforts to subvert NATO for decades, and it is imperative that it oppose any efforts to tie it to EU defense plans and programs as it exits the EU.

6. Convey How Seriously the U.S. Takes Concerns Over Huawei. The President should make it crystal clear that U.S. concerns about any inclusion of Huawei, and other major Chinese technology firms, in Britain's fifth-generation (5G) network are extremely serious. Were Britain to include these firms as it builds out that network, the impact on intelligence-sharing and cooperation could be severe. U.S. concerns are not bluster. Not all Chinese investment is bad or undesirable, but in this realm, the risks of Chinese involvement are too high to tolerate. The British effort

to find a compromise that would allow China into the supposedly non-critical portions of its 5G network rest on the erroneous belief that there are non-critical portions of the network, and excessive self-confidence that Britain can detect and prevent intrusions by a top-tier cyber threat.

What the U.S. Should Do

The relationship between the U.S. and Britain is deep and close. But, even leaders who were as closely aligned personally and ideologically as Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher disagreed from time to time, and clear points of difference exist between President Trump and Prime Minister May. The media on both sides of the Atlantic will enumerate every one of these, and play them up, as the President's state visit approaches.

But nations, like people, agree easily only when nothing serious is at stake. Differences about things that matter are the mark of a relationship that mattered 75 years ago in Normandy, and that matters to the U.S., Britain, and the world today. The President should listen courteously to the views of his British hosts, but he should speak plainly about all the issues of the day, making it clear that an independent and sovereign Britain will continue to be the United States' closest ally.

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