

Unlike Barack Obama, Donald Trump actually believes in Britain. A new age beckons for the Special Relationship

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In January 2009, Barack Obama began his presidency by [removing a bust of Winston Churchill from the Oval Office](#). Eight years later, President-elect Trump will likely bring it back, in a symbolic gesture that will speak volumes. America's hard-fought presidential election will have far-reaching consequences for the Special Relationship, the most important bilateral partnership in the world. For the first time in a quarter century, conservatives are in charge on both sides of the Atlantic, offering a historic opportunity to re-energize the alliance.

Under Barack Obama the relationship was critically weakened. The White House showed little enthusiasm for it, [preferring instead to cultivate ties with Angela Merkel's Germany, François Hollande's France, and a decaying European Union](#). His first Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, was happy to knife Britain in the back, standing shoulder to shoulder in 2010 with Cristina Kirchner in Buenos Aires, when the Argentine President called for UN-brokered negotiations over the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands, a British Overseas Territory whose 3,000 inhabitants overwhelmingly voted to remain British in a subsequent referendum. And President Obama himself eagerly proclaimed that America has no "stronger ally" than France when then President Nicolas Sarkozy came to call in 2011, at a time when British troops were fighting and dying in large numbers alongside their American allies in Afghanistan.



Barack Obama with Angela Merkel CREDIT: PABLO MARTINEZ MONSIVAIS/AP PHOTO

A deep-seated Eurofederalist mindset was pervasive throughout the Obama years, with Vice President Joe Biden even proclaiming that Brussels had a legitimate claim to be the “capital of the free world” [in a speech before the European Parliament](#). It culminated in President Obama’s decision not only staunchly to oppose Britain’s exit from the EU, but also directly to intervene in the domestic debate. Just weeks before the EU referendum he warned the British people, in front of Downing Street, [that they would be at the “back of the queue”](#) for a free trade deal with the United States if they dared vote to leave it.

Similarly, Hillary Clinton spoke out against Brexit during the presidential campaign, believing it to be a dangerous development for Europe. Her opponent had no such qualms declaring on British soil the day after the referendum that Britons [“basically they took back their country.”](#) Trump saw the vote as a momentous victory for sovereignty in the face of supranationalism. Unlike his Democrat rival, he prefers the idea of working with nation states over negotiations with multilateral organisations.

The Brexit vote was a shot across the bow of not only the EU elites but also the Obama presidency. For the next US administration, [Brexit is not a threat but an opportunity for the United States](#), a country with a huge economic stake in the UK. As the Congressional Research Service notes, there are \$5 trillion of US corporate assets in the UK, representing 22 per cent of total US corporate overseas assets. Britain is America’s largest foreign direct investor, and roughly a million US jobs depend on British companies based in America.

A Trump administration should make a US-UK free trade deal a foreign policy priority, riding a wave of momentum on Capitol Hill. There are already no less than five pieces of Congressional legislation calling for an Anglo-American free trade deal, the most prominent being the United Kingdom Trade Continuity Act, introduced in the Senate by Mike Lee of Utah and Tom Cotton of Arkansas, both rising stars in the Republican Party. It is also the view of Paul Ryan, the pro-British Speaker of the House of Representatives and a long-standing admirer of Churchill, that America must pursue a trade agreement with the UK. As he puts it, “we need to emphasise that they are our indispensable ally.”

With Republicans now in charge of the White House, Senate and the House of the Representatives, as well as 33 Governorships and 32 state legislatures, the next four years should be a time of revival for the Special Relationship. While the EU’s ruling elites remain in a state of denial and despair, over both Brexit and the Trump victory, Britain must forge ahead and seize the opportunity to strengthen defence, intelligence and strategic co-operation. This is not a moment for faint hearts or hesitation in London.

As Margaret Thatcher observed in a speech to the Foreign Relations Council of Chicago in 1991, “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.” And there can be little doubt that if the Iron Lady were leading Britain today, she would be instinctively moving swiftly to ensure that Britain is at America’s side in confronting the challenges the West faces across the world, from the deadly threat of Islamist terror to the prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran.

At the same time, the United States must shift its approach to Europe. For far too long, US administrations have backed and supported the European Project, all too often at the expense of national sovereignty. Together, the US and UK can advance prosperity on both sides of the Atlantic through genuine bilateral free trade based on the principles of self-determination and economic freedom.

The departure of Barack Obama and the defeat of Hillary Clinton, combined with the emphatic victory for the Brexit campaign, [marks the end of the current liberal order on the](#)

international stage. While the EU spirals further downward, engulfed by economic turmoil in southern Europe, a mounting refugee crisis, and a rising Islamist terror problem, Great Britain and the United States can encourage renewal.

Unlike the Obama White House, America's new leadership wants Brexit to succeed and Britain to flourish outside the EU. And Britain must help America to once again lead the free world, with strength, resolve and conviction after eight years of ruinously "leading from behind."

The Special Relationship is a great force for good. Its return should be welcomed by all who cherish the spirit of freedom and liberty.

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