

US President Obama warns against Britain leaving the European Union

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US President Barack Obama arrived in Britain Thursday night for the start of a three-day state visit. Officially, it was to join celebrations on Queen Elizabeth II's 90th birthday. Its real purpose, however, was for Obama to make the most forthright intervention possible in support of Britain voting to remain in the European Union (EU) in the June 23 referendum on UK membership.

Obama set out the standpoint of the US administration in his article published Friday in the pro-Conservative eurosceptic *Daily Telegraph* newspaper. Headlined, "As your friend, let me say that the EU makes Britain even greater", the column was an unprecedented intervention by a US president into political events in the UK.

Obama's article noted that in 1939, "[US] President Franklin D. Roosevelt offered a toast to King George VI in the White House", and "[N]early 80 years later, the United Kingdom remains a friend and ally to the United States like no other. Our special relationship was forged as we spilt blood together on the battlefield."

Obama bracketed the EU alongside the main capitalist institutions formed in the post-war period under the leadership of the US: "From the ashes of war, those who came before us had the foresight to create the international institutions and initiatives to sustain a prosperous peace: the United Nations and Nato; Bretton Woods, the Marshall Plan, and the European Union."

In the run-up to his visit, the Leave campaign had denounced any intervention into the campaign by the US president, with Boris Johnson, the Conservative mayor of London stating it was "plainly hypocritical for America to urge us to sacrifice control—of our laws, our sovereignty, our money and our democracy—when they would not dream of ever doing the same."

Obama noted the hostility his trip had fuelled among sections of Britain's ruling elite, saying, "I realise that there's been considerable speculation—and some controversy—about the timing of my visit".

Such is the concern of significant sections of the US ruling elite of the economic, political and military implications of a

UK break from the EU, that Obama made a full-scale attack on the various claims of those in the Leave campaign who support a Brexit (British exit from the EU).

America had fundamental and strategic interests at stake in the referendum, Obama wrote, adding, "the outcome of your decision [the referendum vote] is a matter of deep interest to the United States."

"The United States sees how your powerful voice in Europe ensures that Europe takes a strong stance in the world, and keeps the EU open, outward looking, and closely linked to its allies on the other side of the Atlantic."

Obama stressed that the challenges of "terrorism and aggression; migration and economic headwinds... can only be met if the United States and the United Kingdom can rely on one another, on our special relationship, *and on the partnerships that lead to progress [emphasis added]*".

It was critical that these alliances were maintained to facilitate the global plans of US imperialism, under NATO auspices, Obama wrote, citing specifically NATO provocations against Russia.

The US and Britain "must work to resolve political conflicts in the Middle East—from Yemen to Syria to Libya—so that there is a prospect for increased stability", Obama wrote. He continued, "We must continue to invest in Nato—so that we can meet our overseas commitments from Afghanistan to the Aegean, and reassure allies who are rightly concerned about Russian aggression". The "full array of these challenges" is to be the subject of further discussions with Prime Minister David Cameron and an "informal" meeting with Cameron and the leaders of France, Germany and Italy in Hanover, Germany on Monday.

In advance of these discussions, Obama stressed, "even as we all cherish our sovereignty, the nations who wield their influence most effectively are *the nations that do it through the collective action that today's challenges demand [emphasis added]*".

A central argument of the Leave campaign is that the UK will remain a strong economic and political ally of the US even if it leaves the EU. Obama torpedoed such claims,

warning that EU membership was critical to the UK's "special relationship" with the US and, indeed, any status it retained globally.

Without the UK's alliance with the US as an EU member state, Britain would be cut down to size and risked irrelevance, Obama warned. Stressing repeatedly that Britain's relations with the US and the EU "magnified" the UK's "voice", he wrote, "So the US and the world need your *outsized* influence to continue – including within Europe [emphasis added]".

In a challenge to the Leave campaign's projections that the British economy faced a tumultuous decline by remaining in the EU, Obama said, "When it comes to creating jobs, trade and economic growth in line with our values, the UK has benefited from its membership in the EU—inside a single market that provides enormous opportunities for the British people."

The US president was even more direct in the press conference held later that day with Cameron. The UK will go to the "back of the queue" for trade deals with the US if it leaves the EU. Warning of the dangers of "strains" and "faultlines" in the EU, he reiterated the importance of European countries giving over 2 percent of GDP to defence spending, as required by NATO.

If Obama's strident tone was an unprecedented intervention by the US into British political affairs, the belligerent response to it by the eurosceptics was no less so.

In an article posted also Friday in the *Sun* newspaper, owned by the billionaire oligarch Rupert Murdoch, Johnson insinuated that Obama was anti-British by virtue of his Kenyan heritage.

Some had said that, upon becoming president, Obama had removed a bust of Britain's wartime Prime Minister Winston Churchill, from the White House. Johnson wrote, "Some said it was a snub to Britain. Some said it was a symbol of the part-Kenyan President's ancestral dislike of the British empire- of which Churchill had been such a fervent defender."

Johnson's revival of these claims is a purposeful attempt to align himself with the most ultra-right sections of both the US and UK establishment. The US Tea Party, the so-called birthers and Republican Presidential candidate Donald Trump have all claimed that Obama was born in Kenya and is therefore not eligible to become president.

More specifically, Johnson's remarks deliberately echoed the statements of Nigel Farage, leader of the UK Independence Party, who co-heads the anti-EU Grassroots Out campaign. Farage said, "I know his [Obama] family's background. Kenya. Colonialism... It's just that you know people emerge from colonialism with different views of the British. Some thought that they were really rather benign

and rather good, and others saw them as foreign invaders. Obama's family come from that second school of thought and it hasn't quite left him yet."

He added, "Mercifully, this American president, who is the most anti-British American president there has ever been, won't be in office for much longer, and I hope will be replaced by somebody rather more sensible when it comes to trading relationships with this country."

That a leading member of the Conservative Party is prepared to write in such an openly hostile manner to a serving US president is extraordinary. It underscores the extreme tensions that are developing internationally, under conditions of global economic slump and the drive to militarism and war.

Divisions with the Cameron government and the Conservative Party more generally over the EU referendum are already febrile, with more than 100 MPs out of 330, and a majority of the wider party in favour of a Brexit. Despite the government authorising a pro-Remain mailshot, at a cost of £9 million, being sent to every household in the UK last week, the latest polls show the Remain and Leave camps almost neck and neck.

The *Guardian* commented that Obama's visit marked "the end of a week which started with the Treasury publishing its 200-page report on the economic costs of Brexit, and it means that Remain/Number 10 have now fired two of the most powerful missiles in their arsenal. If Obama and the fear of perpetual relative poverty can't win the referendum for Cameron, it is hard to know what can."

The author also recommends:

For an active boycott of the Brexit referendum!
<https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2016/02/29/pers-f29.html>

UK Chancellor touts Treasury analysis to promote
European Union membership
<https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2016/04/22/brit-a22.html>



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