

Trump uses press conference with UK Prime Minister May to restate anti-EU agenda

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UK Prime Minister Theresa May suffered a public humiliation at the hands of US President Donald Trump during their joint press conference Friday.

May arrived in the US Thursday with her government trumpeting the fact that hers was the first visit of any foreign leader to the White House since Trump's inauguration.

On her first day in the US, she addressed senior Republican policymakers in Philadelphia offering a series of eulogies to the "special relationship" between the US and Britain and pledging to do whatever was required to preserve it.

The "burden" of democracy for the past century had been shared with the UK and "defined the modern world" in the course of two world wars and during the post 1945 Cold War period. Today Eastern Europe lives "in freedom and peace" thanks to "Mrs Thatcher and President Reagan," she concluded.

Maintaining the special relationship, embedded in the US-led NATO alliance, was essential to avoid "the eclipse of the West" by Russia, China and India, May declared.

In her negotiations with Trump, May was charged by competing factions of Britain's ruling elite with firming up the promise of a US trade deal to offset the impact of Britain's leaving the European Union in two years' time. But this would ideally be backed up with a pledge of continued US support for NATO and Trump rowing back on his overt support for the break-up of the EU—so that the UK could placate the angry response of Germany and France and maintain the possibility of tariff-free access to the market of its largest trading partner.

The *New York Times* accurately summed up the crisis facing the British ruling class, noting that "Since Britain's decline from a global power in the years just

after World War II, the country's foreign policy has rested on two pillars. First is the American-British partnership, which allows Britain to project its power and safeguard its interests globally. Second is European unity, which is essential for Britain's economic prosperity and, by removing the centuries-old diversions of European conflict, frees up Britain to act on the world stage."

With the breakup of the European Union, Russian resurgence and particularly "Mr. Trump's threats to step away from Europe," the *Times* warned, "both of those pillars could now be crumbling."

Ultimately, however, the shape of the press conference was determined not primarily by Britain's decline as a world power, but by the growing conflict between the imperialist powers that has found political expression in Trump's elevation and his self-proclaimed "America First" agenda of trade war, protectionism and stepped up military aggression. It is the increasingly bitter struggle between the US and its major rivals, including Europe, for control of global markets and resources that imparts such an incendiary character to world politics—and which finds acute expression in the bullying rhetoric emanating from Trump.

May began her address to the press with a display of grotesque fawning before Trump. As she congratulated him on "a stunning victory" in the Presidential election, Trump smiled smugly and preened as he acknowledged the praise to someone in the audience.

She followed this by telling the media that the Queen had offered to fete Trump at a State Banquet in London on an official state visit later this year. But despite abasing herself, on all three issues of concern to Britain, May essentially walked away empty-handed.

Despite claims that she would be "frank" in raising

Britain's differences with some of Trump's previous statements and political views, May did nothing of the sort.

All she could say regarding talks on trade was that "the President and I have mentioned future economic co-operation and trade."

On US commitment to NATO, May looked nervously towards Trump—who earlier this month described NATO as "obsolete"—as she told the press, "Mr. President, I think you said, you confirmed that you're 100 percent behind NATO."

Trump never deigned to back up May's assertion and avoided mentioning NATO during the conference. Instead, he reiterated his readiness to come to a deal with Russian President Vladimir Putin—the very issue that has thrown the European powers into panic.

In a further attempt to ingratiate herself with Trump, who has railed against the US footing Europe's defence bill, May stated, "I have agreed to encourage my fellow European leaders to deliver on their commitments to spend 2 percent of their GDP on defence so that the burden is more fairly shared."

One might ask, what fellow European leaders? The reality is that following the Brexit vote, the UK's influence in Europe has collapsed and is diminishing by the day so that May is routinely excluded from all high-level meetings of EU leaders.

It was left to BBC political editor Laura Kuenssberg in the short questioning period allowed, to ask Trump, "You've said before that torture works, you've praised Russia, you've said you want to ban some Muslims from coming to America, you've suggested there should be punishment for abortion."

"For many people in Britain those sound like alarming beliefs. What do you say to our viewers at home who are worried about some of your views and worried about you becoming the leader of the free world?"

The reality of the "special relationship" was summed up in Trump's hostile reply as he looked at May and said, "This was your choice of a question? There goes that relationship."

Trump then proceeded to reiterate his defence of torture and said he supported it regardless of the views of any members of his administration. "I happen to feel it does work." May stood in silence.

The theme continued as May was asked a question

about Trump's executive order to build an anti-immigration wall on the US's southern border with Mexico. Making clear that he would not appreciate comment from May, Trump told the press for her that May had other issues to deal with.

After Trump reiterated his plans, May dutifully told her questioners that relations between the US and Mexico were the exclusive business of the US and Mexico. In contrast, when it came to Britain's exit from the EU, Trump was free to say whatever he wanted.

For the Trump administration, "post-Brexit" Britain's main value is not as a trading partner but a political weapon to be used *against* the European Union, and above all against Germany, which Trump views as a major economic rival to the US. Bracketing Brexit with his own election, and alluding to the further breakup of the EU, Trump said, "Brexit was an example of what was to come... I think Brexit will go down as being a fantastic thing for the United Kingdom... and not a liability."

He went so far as to confide to the media that he privately referred to the EU as the "consortium" and used the occasion to complain that it had once prevented him from successfully concluding a business venture.



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