Trump uses UK visit to heighten political turmoil over Brexit

Chris Marsden
13 July 2018

US President Donald Trump arrived in the UK intent on exploiting the raging crisis of the Conservative government of Prime Minister Theresa May over Brexit to assert US imperialism's interests in Europe.

At 11 p.m. he exploded a political bombshell under May in the form of an exclusive interview with Rupert Murdoch's *The Sun*, pre-recorded before he left the NATO summit in Brussels. The interview takes Trump's political campaign to extort, or possibly break up, the European Union that characterised the NATO Summit to new heights.

Trump denounced May's proposal for a "soft Brexit" as a betrayal of last year's referendum vote, threatening that it will mean no trade deal with the US, again demanded the UK and the rest of the EU increase military spending to 4 percent of GDP, declared May's main rival, Boris Johnson, to be a possible prime minister and launched a fascistic tirade against immigrants.

He had "told May how to do Brexit" but she ignored him. If May's deal was accepted, "we would be dealing with the European Union instead of dealing with the UK," probably killing any future trade deal with the United States.

"We have enough difficulty with the European Union. We are cracking down right now on the European Union because they have not treated the United States fairly on trading."

May's proposed deal with the EU "was not the deal that was in the referendum." The Tories have seen "a lot of resignations, so a lot of people don't like it."

Turning to Johnson, who resigned this week as foreign secretary, Trump said he would make a "great prime minister."

Brexit had happened "because people don't want to be faced with the horrible immigration problems that they are being faced with in other countries," he said. Britain, like other European countries, he said, was "losing its culture" because of immigration, which was "permanently changing Europe for the worse."

Trump's diatribe is not only a political nightmare for May, but a threat levelled against the British ruling class that they must toe the US line or face the consequences.

Repeatedly rescheduled, widely opposed and downgraded from an official state visit, every effort had been made to manage the fallout from Trump's deeply unpopular visit. Thousands of police officers have been drafted from every force in the country in a £10 million operation—the largest since the August 2011 riots.

Trump was to safely spend his evening at a black-tie dinner at Blenheim Palace in Oxfordshire, flying by helicopter from the US Embassy in London's Regent's Park—his only appearance in the capital to avoid exposure to protests. In similar fashion, today is taken up by a military parade at Sandhurst that will not be filmed, a rather brief summit meeting at May's country residence at Chequers, a joint press conference, a meeting with the Queen at Windsor Castle, rather than Buckingham Palace and then off to Scotland for a weekend of golf before flying to Helsinki to meet Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Trump's *Sun* interview rendered such stage management null and void. But the damage done to the Tories was extensive even before Trump's plane touched down at Stansted Airport.

Since last Friday's cabinet meeting at Chequers, the government has seen the resignation of two senior ministers, Johnson and Brexit Secretary David Davis, in protest at May's proposal for a separation agreement with the EU seeking to safeguard access to European markets.

May, who campaigned for Remain in the 2016 referendum, is responding to the demands of big business to safeguard 40 percent of British trade after Britain leaves the EU in March 2019. She tried to do so while meeting the insistence of the advocates of a "hard-Brexit"

© World Socialist Web Site

that the UK must leave the Single European Market and Customs Union to allow it to strike trade deals internationally.

But her "facilitated customs arrangement", with the UK levying its own duties and then collecting European level duties on behalf of Brussels for goods transiting to the EU, failed to satisfy either the Brexiteers or many of those advocating a "soft Brexit" or a reversal of the referendum result.

Trump's performance at the NATO Summit in Brussels prior to his UK arrival confirmed that the failure of May's compromise is due to the growing antagonisms between the imperialist powers of the US and Europe.

May has tried to utilise a political, economic and military alliance with the US to secure a favourable deal with the EU. However, the NATO summit made clear that the basis for such a balancing act is disappearing.

Trump launched repeated attacks on Germany and other NATO allies over defence spending and trade, reportedly threatening that the US would quit NATO if they did not step up. Germany was the focus of particular attack, while he once again praised French President Emmanuel Macron in an attempt to drive a wedge between Paris and Berlin.

Brexit was wielded as a weapon to the same end. At the closing press conference, Trump used May's own mantra against her, declaring, "I would say Brexit is Brexit."

In what could only be a reference to the EU he continued, "The people voted to break it up, so I would imagine that's what they would do, but maybe they're taking a little bit of a different route—I don't know if that is what they voted for."

Trump's statements in Brussels are a rallying cry for the Brexiteers, who calculate that the EU will be forced to cede access to its markets as a by-product of the blows delivered by Trump and his demands for an end to European tariffs.

But other voices in the ruling class were already concluding that Trump is forcing a trade war in which it is best for the UK to safeguard its existing alliances with Europe even before his incendiary interview with *The Sun* .

Phillip Stevens wrote in the *Financial Times* of "Brexit and a not-so-special relationship."

"Just as Theresa May's cabinet cracks under the strain of Conservative infighting about the shape of Brexit, Donald Trump tips up in Europe with a reminder that the Atlantic alliance is crumbling."

Trump, he said, "does not believe in Atlanticism. Nor in alliances grounded in shared interests and values."

This is also recognised and opposed by voices in the US.

Writing in *Politico*, Thomas Wright of the Center for the US and Europe at the Brookings Institution, noted that Trump's loud support of Brexit concealed "a predatory policy toward Britain": "The United States has sought to exact painful concessions that it was unable to secure when Britain negotiated as a member of the EU. … Essentially, the Trump administration views Britain as an easy economic mark, not a strategic partner."

He warns of the UK being pushed into the arms of China and of a political backlash against the US that might strengthen the Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn.

The *Washington Post* also editorialised, insisting, "America should support Theresa May's 'soft' Brexit" because the United States "has a strong interest in continued British prosperity and clout…"

The bitter conflicts Trump is exploiting were evident in parliament as new Brexit secretary, Dominic Raab, presented the draft post-Brexit trade White Paper.

The European Research Group of pro-Brexit Conservative MPs issued an alternative draft, drawn up by David Davis, while calling for four amendments—including stating that Northern Ireland should be treated the same way as the rest of the UK—meant to sabotage the bill. "This White Paper has not needed age to turn yellow," he said.

Labour, which is seeking to win the backing of business as the only party capable of averting a disastrous no-deal Brexit, reiterated that it would not back the proposal and described it as "a fudge" and its release as "a shambles."

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site