

US and Britain agree “Atlantic Declaration,” pledging economic warfare against Russia and China

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US President Joe Biden and British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak held talks at the White House Thursday, agreeing to an “Atlantic Declaration” to strengthen economic ties between the countries in areas related to military production.

The meeting was the fourth in four months between Biden and Sunak, following meetings to discuss the AUKUS military alliance, the anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement on Northern Ireland and at the G7 summit in Hiroshima.

Biden and Sunak discussed the situation in Ukraine following the beginning of the Ukrainian counter-offensive against Russia. Also discussed was the development of closer economic ties centred on the declaration that includes commitments to ease trade barriers, for closer defence industry ties and a data protection deal.

The declaration, “A framework for a twenty-first century US-UK Economic Partnership” makes clear that cooperation between the US and Britain is based on confronting Russia and China. It states, “We face new challenges to international stability from authoritarian states such as Russia and the People’s Republic of China (PRC).”

It continues: “Over the past year, we have taken steps to deepen our unrivalled defence, security, and intelligence relationship across every theatre in the globe in which we cooperate, recognizing the indivisibility of security in the Euro-Atlantic and the Indo-Pacific and other regions.”

NATO’s war against Russia is declared to be pivotal to further cooperation. The declaration states: “We have stood shoulder to shoulder in our resolve to support Ukraine for as long as it takes in the face of

Russia’s illegal, unjustifiable, and unprovoked war of aggression and to preserve a free, independent, and sovereign Ukraine. We are committed to continuing to strengthen NATO’s ability to deter further attempts to undermine Alliance security, in support of NATO’s new Strategic Concept.”

On Britain’s role in confronting China, in alliance with the US and Australia, the declaration states: “We have taken significant steps to implement AUKUS, including announcing our plans to support Australia acquiring conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarines. Through our deeper engagement in the Indo-Pacific we are working more closely than ever before with our partners to support a free and open region.”

In a joint press conference, while not using the term “special relationship,” Biden nevertheless commented: “We don’t have a closer ally than Great Britain. ... Prime Minister Churchill and Roosevelt met here a little over 70 years ago, and they asserted that the strength of the partnership between Great Britain and the United States was the strength of the free world. I still think there’s truth to that assertion.”

Britain, of course, remains an important military ally for Washington, with the *New York Times* noting ahead of the leaders’ meeting, “Britain’s robust military support for the Ukrainian Army has kept it a central player in the Western response to Russia’s invasion.” London’s pledge to increase defence spending above the 2 percent of GDP demanded of NATO members by the US is crucial, as the US insists that the major European powers stump up the cash and follow Britain’s lead in sharing the expense of war against Russia.

In his press conference answers, Sunak said the “UK is proud to be, behind the US, the biggest contributor to the military effort in Ukraine. And I think it’s right that other countries also step up and do their part. We’re lucky to have America’s investment in European security, but we need to share the burden alongside you, which is why defense spending in the UK has—was—been above the 2 percent NATO benchmark. It’s on an increasing trajectory, and we would encourage other countries to follow the lead that the US and the UK set, because our security is collective.”

A critical role played by Britain is its use by Washington as a counterweight to German and French domination of Europe. However, this has been gravely undermined by Brexit, Britain’s leaving the European Union (EU), against the express wishes of Washington, leading to a significant further collapse of British influence on the world stage. Leading up to the summit, Biden’s visit to Ireland was fractious, as the UK’s conflict over post-Brexit trade arrangements between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland was regarded as a threat to the Good Friday Agreement and America’s substantial economic investment in the South.

The real character of the “special relationship” was made abundantly clear—with Washington instructing London, “Do as you are told, or else.”

Sunak was only allowed 40 minutes for private talks with Biden, followed by a press conference of around 30 minutes. Biden had originally allocated even less time for private discussion, but the *Independent* reported that the press conference was delayed “because discussions between the two leaders started late and continued longer than planned.”

Among the issues discussed were Britain’s proposal to hold a global summit in the autumn around the regulatory issues raised by Artificial Intelligence, with Sunak arguing for the UK to play a major role. However, as the *New York Times* noted, “because Britain left the European Union in 2020, it is not part of the dialogue between the United States and the European Union on how to deal with it.” The *Times* cited Kim Darroch, a former British ambassador to the United States, who warned, “If the US and EU agree, the rest of the world follows, and Brexit Britain is in danger of being squeezed out.”

This is not the only area where its departure from the

EU means that Britain is being squeezed out. Ahead of his trip, Sunak was forced to acknowledge that the main goal of the Brexit agenda that he backed—the signing of a free trade deal with the US—was now at best a distant prospect. Instead, what was required was to minimize the economic damage to Britain caused by Biden’s Inflation Reduction Act.

Only on the military arena and related to fundamental conflicts with China and Russia could Britain make any headway. Sunak wanted a deal over access to the US electric vehicles market to be secured by lining up with Washington in opposition to China’s domination of the global production of critical minerals. The Atlantic Declaration specifies: “With congressional consultation, we intend to immediately begin negotiations on a targeted critical minerals agreement covering the five relevant critical minerals most important for electric vehicles—cobalt, graphite, lithium, manganese, and nickel that are extracted or processed in the United Kingdom count toward sourcing requirements for clean vehicles eligible for the Section 30D clean vehicle tax credit of the Inflation Reduction Act.”

This would benefit UK firms, which will qualify for tax credits of \$3,750 per vehicle under Biden’s Act.

The agreement also pledges increased efforts by the UK to shut Russia out of the global nuclear market.

But the UK is already well behind the curve in reaching such a deal with the US, even with its professions of hostility to China and Russia, with the Biden administration prioritising negotiations with Japan, the EU and Australia. There is virtually nothing concrete in the Atlantic Declaration that Sunak could point to as a concession from Washington. The *Financial Times* cited Duncan Edwards, chief executive of the British American Business group, who said the 4,000-word declaration was “laudable” but only signalled “intent rather than actual agreement” on many of the issues raised.



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