

US-UK relations in turmoil over Falklands and Ireland

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The Trump administration has moved on multiple fronts over the past fortnight to undermine the Labour government of Prime Minister Andy Burnham, to keep British imperialism subordinated to Washington's "America First" agenda and thwart moves towards a rapprochement with the European Union.

In the space of little more than a week, US President Donald Trump called into question Britain's control of the Falkland Islands, and called for a united Ireland—each intervention calculated to remind London of its subordinate position to Washington amid a fracturing post-war order. These attacks came ahead of the first face to face meeting between Trump and Burnham, to take place Tuesday, on the sidelines of the United National General Assembly in New York.

Trump used a two-day visit to Ireland on September 12 and 13 to deliver the most provocative of his blows. Days after calling into question Britain's control over the Falklands, known in Argentina as the Malvinas and secured by London as the result of a war in 1982, he declared his backing for a united Ireland.

Sitting beside Taoiseach (prime minister) Micheál Martin at Farmleigh House in Dublin on September 12, Trump said he would "love to see it unified", that it was "going to happen eventually" and "may as well happen now". He repeated the sentiment hours later at the US ambassador's residence, calling unification "a very cool thing". On September 13, Trump brushed aside Burnham's opposition to a border poll, dismissed him with the words, "Everybody says that. Then things happen."

The *Financial Times* noted that the off-the-cuff remarks broke with decades of careful American diplomacy. Washington played a pivotal role in securing the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, ending the three-decades of conflict known as the Troubles. This allowed US corporations to rake in super-profits from successive governments in the Republic, while constitutionally enshrining sectarian divisions in the north as the basis of power-sharing between Unionist and Irish republican parties, led by Sinn Féin.

Downing Street could only restate Burnham's position that there was no majority support for a referendum, so a border poll remained "off the table", while Communities Secretary

Angela Rayner said nothing more than "Donald Trump is Donald Trump".

Kemi Badenoch—the leader of the opposition Conservative and Unionist Party—which has always relied on the backing of an influential Unionist base in Northern Ireland—complained the president was "shooting from the hip as usual". Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) leader Gavin Robinson insisted the province's future would be settled by its own people, "not by commentary in London, Dublin or Washington". Even the far-right Reform UK, who invariably back Trump politically, had to push back, with Robert Jenrick stating that Trump "shouldn't have weighed into British politics" on this scale.

Sinn Féin, which seeks a unity referendum this decade, seized on the intervention. Party president Mary Lou McDonald said she acknowledged Trump's comments, adding, "The conversation on Irish unity has shifted, and the onus is on the Taoiseach to begin planning." She continued: "We have secured peace, and as we approach the thirtieth anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement our national journey is now reunification, which is organised, planned and a peaceful transition."

The following day, September 14, the leaders of the three nationalist parties signed a memorandum of understanding in Cardiff coordinating their campaigns to effectively break-up the UK. For the first time, all three devolved administrations are led by nationalist parties—Sinn Féin in the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Scottish Nationalist Party in Holyrood, and Plaid Cymru in the Welsh Senedd following its rout of Labour in May.

Scottish First Minister John Swinney, Welsh First Minister Rhun ap Iorwerth and Northern Ireland First Minister Michelle O'Neill declared each nation within the UK had "the right to determine its own future, through democratic means". Swinney, demanding a second independence referendum following the last in 2014, predicted that Burnham "will be the last prime minister of the United Kingdom". Fawning before Trump, Sinn Féin's McDonald, alongside O'Neill, told reporters it was hardly startling that a New Yorker would see "the logic, the good sense of unity".

Greeting the endorsement of American imperialism's most ruthless representative—presiding over the war on Iran, the

arming of Israel's genocide in Gaza and his repression of democratic rights at home, such comments only demonstrate the political bankruptcy of these pro-capitalist forces. Their drive is to establish new capitalist states, beholden to the same oligarchic interests imposing austerity on both sides of the border on the island of Ireland and throughout Britain.

"You weren't there to help me"

On August 28, the *Telegraph* published a report, citing an unnamed senior US official that Pentagon officials were weighing opposition to British sovereignty over the Falklands as leverage to push Burnham to increase military spending. With the Burnham government refusing at that time to set a date when the UK would achieve 3 percent of GDP on military spending, a US official said "nothing is being ruled out."

Asked at the White House in late August whether he was reviewing the US position on the Falklands, Trump replied, "I always review every position. That's just one of many." On September 3, asked by the right-wing *GB News* whether Washington would come to Britain's aid against Argentina, Trump refused to say yes, denouncing London for not joining the US-Israeli war on Iran. "You get a big percentage of your oil from the Strait of Hormuz, and you weren't there to help me," he said, and Britain "is not the same country it was" in 1982. Trump mocked Burnham's predecessor Keir Starmer who he said told him that the Royal Navy—hit by decades of spending cuts—had no ships to send to the Middle East.

In a televised address that very evening, flanked by his entire cabinet, Argentina's fascist President Javier Milei declared, "There are winds of change in the world that are favourable to our claim." The US, he said, was "assessing their historical position in regard to the Falklands... That is not empty words as they understand that Argentina is a reliable partner and a valuable ally for decades to come". The UK he described as a nation "in decline".

Milei, whose government has imposed savage austerity through his "chainsaw" cuts, has seen his approval rating collapse to around 34 percent ahead of next year's elections. He announced a new naval base at Tierra del Fuego in defense of Argentina's claim to the Malvinas, as well as sanctions against companies developing the Sea Lion oil field through offshore drilling, 140 miles north of the islands. Sea Lion holds an estimated 1.7 billion barrels, with first oil expected by March 2028, according to London's *Times*.

The measures target British firm Rockhopper Exploration, which holds a 35 percent stake in the project, and Israel's Navitas Petroleum, which owns the remaining 65 percent and operates it. Argentina has since opened proceedings against 45

entities and filed criminal charges against Navitas.

In pursuit of its strategy to control the western hemisphere from Greenland to the Falklands, and to deny all other global powers any foothold, Washington moved quickly to bolster's Argentina's military. This pointedly ignores Britain's strict export controls that prevent the sale of equipment that would enhance Argentina's military capability.

With US officials lauding Argentina as a major non-NATO ally—whose military build-up would advance American security objectives in South America—on September 10, the State Department notified Congress of a sale to Argentina of four UH-60L Black Hawk helicopters, two T700-GE-701D engines and navigation and radar equipment, valued at \$140 million (£103 million). Buenos Aires had already agreed to acquire 235 US-built Stryker armoured vehicles from the United States, while previously purchasing 24 second-hand F-16 fighters from Denmark.

Trump's policy towards British imperialism is a warning not to buck Washington in any way—on Iran, on NATO spending, on China.

Given that UK government sources have told the *Financial Times* that Chancellor John Healey will make no commitments in his October 28 budget to meeting the NATO demanded 3 percent of GDP on military spend by 2030, the US is planning to step up its offensive against London. The *Telegraph* reported a US official saying that the UK would receive "special attention" and "nothing is being ruled out as far as options for encouraging the sort of burden-sharing that we seek."

Britain retook the Falklands in 1982, not just because it had a far larger navy from which it assembled a 127-vessel "Task Force", but because Ronald Reagan's Washington administration backed British imperialism over the Argentine junta it had previously armed—supplying intelligence, fuel and logistics for a war waged 8,000 miles away.



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