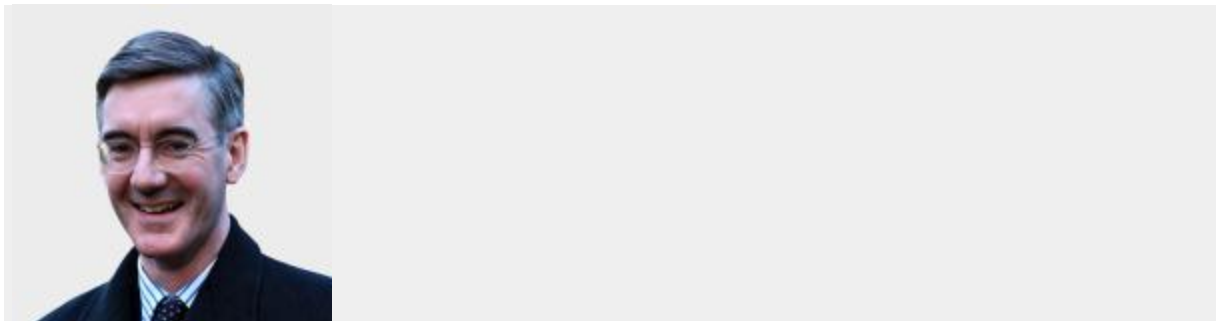


The May 1st edition of the Times included a column by Jacob Rees-Mogg in the Comment section. The article 'got my dander up' so much that I immediately shot off a 'letter to the Times' (via email). This was not published but many others were. My 'letter' and those of two other readers, one from Lord Ricketts and the other from New York are shown beneath the Rees-Mogg article which follows here. I will leave the reader to draw his or her own conclusions.

President Trump will be our greatest ally after Brexit

jacob rees-mogg

Freed from ties to the EU, Britain can build a truly special relationship with this US president



The planned visit of the President of the United States, Donald Trump, to the United Kingdom in July is well-timed and of great importance. By then the European Union Withdrawal Bill ought to have passed into law and a mere three months of negotiations are scheduled to settle the terms of our departure. Once we have left our alliance with the EU, the United States will be even more central to our foreign policy than it currently is, especially as we are unlikely to be flavour of the month with the EU after our departure.

It is our national good fortune that the president with whom we will develop this new arrangement is Mr Trump. His election depended upon similar factors to those that led to [Brexit](#). He appealed to voters left behind by the metropolitan elite and he exudes confidence about his own nation and a determination not to be a manager of decline, which also inspires the Brexiteers.

This has had an important effect on American foreign policy which had consistently supported Britain's engagement with the European Union from the days of the Coal and Steel Community in the 1950s. Former President Obama's rude and counterproductive intervention in the referendum debate, telling us to get to the back of the queue, was an undiplomatic reminder of how the US saw its position.

It will, therefore, be necessary to show the Americans how our departure from the EU will be in their national interest, too. Donald Trump has supported Britain's decision to leave the EU out of conviction and principle but if that could be bolstered by robust self-interest, so much the better.

The standard US view was that Britain could temper the incipient hostility to its power within the European councils. The proposition was that if one of the key member states were a true friend who could lessen some of the jealousy and unnecessary competitiveness exhibited towards the US this would advance America's interests. In this way Britain could make an important regional power marginally more helpful to the US in pursuing its global aims.

The US accepted that because of its ties to the EU, Britain could not be as supportive as it might otherwise have wished to be in all circumstances. It could be held back by the sometimes irrational concerns of other member states, and the unwillingness to impose sanctions against Russia in recent years is a case in point.

As the US is about to lose a moderating ally in a major but sometimes difficult regional organisation, what is it going to get in return? This is where Britain has something genuine to offer to America, for so many of its values are similar. Indeed, with the common law and a parallel constitutional settlement the two nations are the world's most longstanding democracies.

Free from its ties to the EU, Britain will be able to co-operate more fully with the US in its global efforts. Sometimes the sheer size and power of America makes it harder for it to deal with a smaller nation with whom we may have an excellent relationship.

In this way Britain can change from being a lukewarm friend exercising a calming influence to having a real special relationship. This is only "special" if it is in the United States' interest, for every country in the world knows that its link to America is its overriding foreign relationship. Whether it is Germany, India, Israel or Taiwan, all view their link to the US as "special" but for America all this specialness is routine.

After Brexit, the US and Britain could push our shared values in all international forums, arguing for new solutions for the next generation rather than being held back by the EU's efforts to protect vested interests.

However, this opportunity is dependent upon Mr Trump's presidency. Without him the US would be offering no support for Brexit and would be seeking to frustrate it. He ought to be treated with every possible courtesy when he comes, both as befits the office he holds and in gratitude for his goodwill towards the nation of his mother's birth. The red carpet that is laid out must be spotless and the evidence of our close relationship on clear display.

In addition, we would be wise to offer the US something tangible that would help the president's agenda, not just fine words. If that means presenting a free trade deal or suggesting a London-New York agreement on financial regulation, which would become the global standard, the duty of "sincere co-operation" with the EU must not be an impediment. Opportunities need to be grasped and not evaded because of passing bureaucratic convenience.

Inevitably there will be demonstrations when Mr Trump visits but the US constitution has greater protections for freedom of speech than our own, so protest is part and parcel of political life. It is the official welcome that matters and it should be of the greatest warmth, ideally backed up by a clear vision of how our two great nations can co-operate in future.

Perhaps then Harold Macmillan's vision of our playing the Greeks to America's Romans would at last be fulfilled.

Jacob Rees-Mogg is the Conservative MP for North East Somerset

Sir, In making the case that Brexit will free up Britain to become President Trump's best friend, Jacob Rees-Mogg (Comment, May 1) glosses over two key points. First, Britain has no copyright on a special relationship with the US. Mr Rees-Mogg seems to have missed the enthusiastic reception for President Macron on his state visit to Washington. Macron has emerged as the leading European statesman with a global vision and an active foreign policy. With Brexit consuming all the political energy in London, Britain is contributing little in present international crises. This is bound to diminish our influence in the world and in Washington. Second, we will still have many interests in common with our European neighbours. They will remain our largest trading partners. We are closer to them than to the Trump administration on issues from free trade to climate change and the Iran nuclear deal.

It is welcome that President Trump will be paying a working visit in July. The US will continue to be a close ally. But after Brexit, Britain will still be a European power, 20 miles off Calais.

Lord Ricketts

Head of the Diplomatic Service 2006-10, House of Lords

Sir, Jacob Rees-Mogg shows a worrying ignorance about what is happening on this side of the Atlantic. The US does not have a foreign policy or vision other than the president's ad hoc vanity projects. Trump's much-lauded tax cuts have not brought about the economic growth he predicted and the US budget deficit is larger than ever. Trump's understanding of the EU is limited; he would not be able to offer a rational argument about Britain staying or leaving. He sees the French and German leaders as far more influential than Theresa May. Domestically he has personal legal problems and the special counsel investigation. His party is predicted to take heavy losses in the mid-term elections. Trump is keen to visit the UK and receive a warm welcome. He has, in the words of Mr Rees-Mogg, a vested interest. Himself.

Chris Kessell New York

Sir, It is hardly credible that a supposed contender for the Tory leadership could be responsible for the tripe in the Comment column on May 1st. He knows very well (as do other mischief-makers) that former President Obama's intervention in the referendum debate was designed to expose world trade realities while, as a supporter of a the EU, reflecting that Britain's future would be much more insecure in a fragmented Europe. Indeed Mogg's 'Trump has supported Britain's decision to leave the EU' exposes the absurdity of his position. Of course he has, so has President Putin. A weakened Europe is to their advantage. Mogg says that in being a 'true friend', outside the EU, Britain could advance America's interests and help the US in pursuing its global aims. Really? Is the advancement of America's interests to be our new foreign policy? And, apparently, this is all 'dependent on Mr Trump's presidency' and for his July visit 'the red carpet that is laid out must be spotless'. America has a phrase for such sycophancy and obsequiousness; it includes the colour brown rather than red. This column should surely have appeared in the April 1st edition.

Paul Turner

Rudloe