

You are welcome, Mr President



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Today we should welcome the President of the USA to the UK on a state visit.

The USA is our principal military ally. Her leading presence in NATO has been crucial to our safety over the last seventy years, as we have dealt with the Soviet threat of the 1950s and 1960s, and the more complex and various threats to our security of more recent years. The USA is the world's most powerful democracy. The UK is one of the world's oldest and most experienced democracies. Together we project democratic values, argue for freedom, defend free speech and free enterprise, and stand up against dictatorships, genocides and abuse of power.

Many MPs and some of my constituents dislike Mr Trump and say we should not afford him the courtesies of a state visit. The MPs and protesters have done all in their power to limit where he can go and what he can do whilst in our country. I regret that. I will be honouring the office of President. The whole point of a State visit is it bestows on the State visitor the trappings of power whilst with us and confirms the power of the office the visitor holds. We respect the office, whilst reserving the right to disagree with the office holders politics, words and actions as an international politician. On many a state visit a visitor has been told in private communications exactly what the UK's position is on issues of the day and how we would like the visitor's country to change or to accommodate our views.

On this visit I will find myself in agreement with Mr Trump over Brexit and the UK's good future outside the EU. The President urged Mrs May, as I and others did, to take a firmer line in the talks she held with the EU to get a better deal. Unfortunately she was tarnished with the view that Mr Trump was a difficult person for UK tastes and did not accept his good advice. She failed to follow up promptly and vigorously on his offer to see if we can agree a Free Trade Agreement between our two countries, to sign as soon as we leave the EU.

I agree with Mr Trump's policy of promoting prosperity by lower tax rates and selective higher public spending. We can learn a lot from the much faster growth rate in the USA than in Europe. I agree with the President that the West needs to ensure cyber security at a time of unprecedented technological challenge, which will have an impact on our commercial alliances. I also agree with his approach to Middle Eastern politics, where he has bombed less

and not intervened on the ground in the belief that further military intervention will not help. This is a welcome change from Presidents Bush, Clinton and Obama.

I study why some so dislike Mr Trump. They argue that his wish to secure US borders and to build a wall at the Mexican frontier is unacceptable. They did not say the same when Mr Clinton built a substantial wall along part of that frontier, or when various EU countries rushed up walls at the height of the migration crisis in 2015-16. They say his attitude to women is unacceptable, though he has not stood accused of improper relations with a young female intern in the way Mr Clinton was. They dislike some of his language about migrants. They think that underlying his policies are intolerant attitudes towards foreigners and unpleasant attitudes towards women. I am not here to apologise for all that he has done in his private life before becoming President nor to defend all his tweets.

I say to his critics we should respect the democratic decisions of our ally, and leave it to US politics to decide what are acceptable attitudes in their democracy. We do not go into the failings and wrong doings of State visitors from tyrannies and monarchies abroad, but we let them come and make their own statements. We have entertained dreadful people from thug states without a murmur of protest from MPs. Why be less courteous to a democratic ally who has stood the ultimate test of democratic scrutiny and media fury in his own free country? I do not agree with some of the things Mr Trump says, and sometimes disagree with his policies as with features of his trade war that have a wide adverse impact. I do think we should welcome Mr Trump to understand him better and to collaborate with the USA as ally and friend in as many ways as are to our mutual advantage.