

Snubs, Bumps and Donald Trump in Britain

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He may not be popular in Britain, but he still has shavings of appeal. For a country that has time for Nigel Farage, pro-Brexit enthusiast and full-time hypocrite (he is a member of the European Parliament, the very same institution he detests), President Donald Trump will garner a gaggle of fans.

One of them was not the London Mayor, Sadiq Khan, trenchant in [his belief](#) that the US president should never have been granted a state visit.

"It's quite clear that Theresa May was premature in making this invitation, and it's backfired on her."

But Trump's tendency to unhinge his critics is not so much levelling as lowering: Khan's coarse remarks a day before Trump arrived were timed to create a Twitter scene.

Trump, [he wrote](#) spitefully in *The Guardian*, was leading a push from the right "threatening our hard-won rights and freedoms and the values that have defined our liberal, democratic societies for more than seventy years." The UK had to stop "appeasing" (that [Munich analogy](#) again) dictatorial tendencies. (Oblivious, is Khan, to the illustrious record Britain has in providing receptions and banquets for the blood thirsty and authoritarian.)

This semi-literate historical overview had the desired result. Just prior to landing in London, Trump [tweeted that Khan](#) "who by all accounts has done a terrible job as Mayor of London, has been foolishly 'hasty' to the visiting President of the United States, by far the most important ally of the United Kingdom." For good measure, Trump insisted that the mayor was "a stone cold loser who should focus on crime in London, not me..."

The mood was set, and the presence of the president overseeing Britain's increasingly feral political scene [reminded](#) *The New York Times* of boardroom takes of *The Apprentice* (reality television, again) though it came uncomfortably close to an evaluation of the "rear of the year" or a wet t-shirt competition of the fugglies. This was aided by the absence of a one-to-one meeting between Trump and the soon to depart Theresa May, there being no preliminary meeting in Downing Street.

Trump felt at home, sizing up candidates to succeed May as British prime minister. While he could muster choice words to describe Boris Johnson and Jeremy Hunt, Michael Gove barely registered. "Would do a good job, Jeremy? Tell me."

A few candidates did their best to impress, a spectacle that did, at points, verge on the grotesque.

The Conservative Party is deliriously panicked: Farage's Brexit Party is proving so threatening its pushing the old guard to acts of pure desperation. This is riveting, if troubling stuff [for political watchers](#) such as Tim Bale of Queen Mary, University of London.

"A lot of the constraints have come off British politics. Whether they've come off permanently, or whether it's because the Conservative Party is at panic stations, is something only time can tell."

Foreign secretary Hunt was particularly keen to show his wet shirt to the ogling Trump. He no doubt felt he had to, given that Johnson had [already been praised](#) as a person who "would do a very good job" as British prime minister. To repay Trump for his acknowledgment, Hunt [dismissed](#) the views of the London mayor.

"I agree with [Trump] that it is totally inappropriate for the Labour party to be boycotting this incredibly important visit. This is the president of the United States."

The situation with Johnson cannot but give some amusement. Trump, rather memorably, had been a subscriber to the theory that parts of London had become a dystopian nightmare replete with psychotic, murderous residents of the swarthy persuasion. Johnson, for all his faults, was happy to give Trump a nice slice of demurral on his city when mayor. He [also opined](#) that Trump was "clearly out of his mind" in making the now [infamous suggestion](#) on December 7, 2015 for a "total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States." But politics is an odd stew, throwing together a strange mix of ingredients. For his part, Johnson [declined an invitation](#) to see Trump in person, preferring the comforting distance of a 20-minute phone call.

Away from rear of the year proceedings were those who had consciously boycotted any event associated with Trump. Prince William and Prince Harry [preferred to avoid](#) a photo opportunity with the president at Buckingham Palace. Jeremy Corbyn of the Labour Party preferred to join protests against Trump over attending the state banquet. The act will no doubt be seen as admirable in some quarters, but hardly qualifies as those of a potential future prime minister.

"Corbyn," [noted](#) The Independent, "has again dodged the stately bullet and had instead taken the easy way out."

To the echo chamber he went.

Beyond the visit, more substantive matters are going to be troubling for diplomats in the UK Foreign Office. One of the things touted during the Tuesday press conference was the prospect of a trade agreement between a Britain unshackled from the EU, and the United States. Trump [even went so far as to press May](#) to stay longer for the negotiations. Not one for briefings, he ventured a suggestion: "I don't know exactly what your timing is but, stick around, let's do this deal."

The issue is fascinatingly premature: Britain, having not yet left the EU, let alone on any clear basis, faces an orbit of sheer, jangling confusion for some time to come. In terms of numbers, the issue is also stark: the UK has the EU to thank for half of its trade; the United

States comes in at 14.7 percent.

The troubling feature of any free trade proposal coming out of the Trump administration will be its rapacity, or, as Trump likes to call it, “phenomenal” scope. Nothing will be exempt. Agriculture and health are two fields of contention. Access for US exports will entail easing limitations on animal feed with antibiotics and genetically modified crops. More headaches, and bumps, await the relationship between troubled Britannia and groping Uncle Sam.

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