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The Queen's U.S. State Visit: Strengthening the Special Relationship

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Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and His Royal Highness Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, will visit the United States from May 3 to May 8 to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the founding of the Jamestown settlement in Virginia. It will be the Queen's fourth state visit to America, following previous trips in 1991, 1976, and 1957. The visit includes a speech at the White House on May 7, alongside President Bush, and the laying of a wreath at the World War II Memorial in Washington on May 8.

The state visit carries huge symbolic significance as a powerful declaration of the ties that bind the United States and Great Britain, which comprise the most enduring and successful alliance in modern history. The Queen has served selflessly on the world stage as a great ambassador for the British people for over half a century. Her visit to the United States is an important exercise in public diplomacy that will reinforce and strengthen the Anglo-American Special Relationship.

In contrast to this week's lackluster U.S.–EU summit, which merited barely a footnote in the American press, the Queen's state visit will be a major media event due to intense public interest, reinforcing the fact that America's relationship with Britain is far more important, strategically and symbolically, than the Washington–Brussels nexus.

U.S.–U.K. Cooperation in the War on Terror. The Queen's state visit comes at a crucial time for the U.S.–U.K. alliance, when American and British forces are fighting side by side in the main theaters of the war on terrorism. The United States

and the United Kingdom lead the global battle against al-Qaeda and state sponsors of international terrorism, while much of the world looks on from the sidelines. Washington and London also stand at the forefront of international efforts to prevent the emergence of a nuclear-armed Iran, and Britain has doubled its naval presence in the Persian Gulf, alongside the U.S. Navy, as a warning to the Iranian regime.

Over 7,000 British troops are based in southern Iraq, and over 145 British soldiers have sacrificed their lives there. Prince Harry, the Queen's grandson and third in line to the throne, will shortly be dispatched to Iraq, emphasizing the British commitment to the country. Prince Harry's decision to fight alongside his countrymen in the face of mounting threats from insurgent groups is a commendable display of courage and leadership that underscores the continuing importance of the monarchy in the 21st century.

More than 5,000 British troops are engaged in military operations against the Taliban in southern Afghanistan as part of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force, and a further 1,500 are due to be deployed this summer. Fifty-three British soldiers have died in combat in Afghanistan since

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2001. The English-speaking nations of the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand have contributed 23,300 troops to the ISAF mission, making up nearly two thirds of the 36,750-strong NATO operation.¹

The bulk of the fighting against the Taliban is being carried out by British, U.S., Canadian, and Australian forces, with support from Dutch, Danish, and Estonian troops. In contrast, other European contingents in Afghanistan continue to operate under up to 70 “caveats” designed to keep them out of harm’s way. Ironically, many of the same European countries that condemned the war in Iraq as a distraction from securing Afghanistan now refuse to shift their weight in the battle against the Taliban and its al-Qaeda allies.

Threats to the Special Relationship. The defense of the free world is, fortunately, in the hands of the Anglo–American alliance rather than unelected bureaucrats sitting in Brussels or Turtle Bay. There are, however, major threats to the Special Relationship on the horizon, including the rise of anti-Americanism in Britain and the further loss of British sovereignty in the European Union.

There is growing public disillusionment in the U.K. with British support for U.S. foreign policy and mounting rejection of American global leadership. In a September 2006 *Financial Times*/Harris poll, a staggering 33 percent of Britons surveyed described the United States as “the greatest threat to global stability.” (Just 21 percent named Iran, and 10 percent, North Korea.)² Nearly 70 percent of Britons questioned in a November 2006 *Guardian*/ICM poll stated that U.S. policy had made the world “less safe” since 2001.³ And just nine percent of British respondents in a March 2007 YouGov poll agreed with the proposition that “Britain should continue to base its foreign policy on its close relationship with the United States.”⁴

Both the U.S. and British governments have, in recent years, failed to demonstrate to the British public that there are tangible benefits from the Anglo–American alliance. The rise of anti-Americanism is not a temporary phenomenon but a dangerous long-term trend that will have far-reaching implications for the Special Relationship and America’s ability to project power on the world stage.

For both London and Washington, the defense of the Special Relationship must become a top priority. The Bush Administration should step up public diplomacy efforts in the U.K. Little has been done so far to effectively project and communicate America’s foreign policy message to British and European audiences. At the same time, the Labour government must do more to explain how the alliance with America enhances Britain’s national security and why the special relationship operates as a two-way street.

The further centralization of political power in Europe also poses a direct challenge to the Special Relationship. Already, half of British laws originate in Brussels, a shocking state of affairs that must be reversed. Britain is at a turning point in its history, faced with a stark choice between further political, legal, military, and economic integration with the European Union and a deepening of its alliance with the United States. The rise of the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) threaten to undermine Britain’s ability to operate its own independent foreign and security policies and stand alongside the United States where and when it chooses to do so. The defense of British national sovereignty is in not only Britain’s interest but that of the United States as well.

Conclusion. An America without Britain alongside it would be weaker, more isolated, and less able to project power on the world stage. There is no

1. International Security Assistance Force Fact Sheet, at www.nato.int/isaf/media/pdf/placemat_isaf.pdf.
2. Financial Times/Harris Poll of Adults in Five European Countries, September 25, 2006, at www.harrisinteractive.com/news/allnewsbydate.asp?NewsID=1097.
3. Julian Glover, “British Believe Bush is More Dangerous Than Kim Jong-il,” *The Guardian*, November 3, 2006, at www.guardian.co.uk/usa/story/0,,1938434,00.html.
4. YouGov Poll on Defence and Britain’s Place in the World, March 26-28, 2007, at www.yougov.com/archives/pdf/TEL070101008_3.pdf.

realistic alternative to the Special Relationship. Its collapse would be damaging to America's standing as a global power and would significantly undermine America's leadership of the war on terrorism.

For Britain, there is much to lose from any weakening of the Anglo-American alliance: the further loss of sovereignty, the diminution of British global power and influence, the loosening of defense and intelligence ties, and the unraveling of the close-knit financial, trade, and investment relationship.

The Queen's state visit to the United States should serve as an important reminder of the bonds that link the world's two most powerful nations. It will be a potent symbol of the historic strength of the Anglo-American Special Relationship, a partnership that must continue to flourish if the West is to defeat the scourge of global terrorism and defend the cause of liberty and freedom across the world.

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