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In Meeting with Cameron, Obama Should Advance the U.S.–U.K. Special Relationship

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President Barack Obama will host British Prime Minister David Cameron at the White House on May 13. Publicly, it has been announced that the visit will be dominated by events in Syria, economic cooperation, countering terrorism, and priorities for the next meeting of the G-8.

Privately, David Cameron is likely to raise a number of sensitive issues, such as the U.S. position on the Falkland Islands and the future relationship between the United Kingdom and the European Union (EU). This visit offers an opportunity for President Obama to get the Special Relationship back on track.

The Significance of the Special Relationship. The U.S. has no closer friend than the U.K. Both nations are liberal democracies that have been willing to use force to defend the free world. Today, the U.S. and Britain continue to cooperate closely in the realms of defense and intelligence, they have economic and financial ties of unparalleled depth and importance, and they share a fundamental interest in economic freedom and a belief in personal liberty. A recent poll found that 88 percent of Americans have a favorable opinion of Great Britain, second only to Canada's 91 percent favorable rating.¹

Instead of building on the Special Relationship, the Obama Administration has indulged in a series of petty insults against Britain. Secretary of State John Kerry has even diluted the term “special relationship” by stating that the U.S. wants such a relationship with the People's Republic of China as well as with Britain.

A strong Anglo–American alliance is no obstacle to good U.S. relations with any other country, but a weak relationship is a betrayal of a friend as well as a stark reminder of America's tendency to forget that it cannot expect to keep its allies if it refuses to take their concerns seriously.

The Obama Administration Has Snubbed the Special Relationship. President Obama's Administration is less committed to the Anglo–American Special Relationship than any Administration in recent history. The President, in particular, has demonstrated this lack of regard through a number of deliberate and misguided acts throughout his presidency. Some of President Obama's early snubs, such as his removal of the bust of Winston Churchill from the Oval Office, are already well documented. But recent incidents show that the Administration's lack of regard for Britain has not improved and threaten to weaken the Anglo–American relationship even further.

■ **Skipping Lady Thatcher's funeral.** The decision not to send a senior delegation, led at a minimum by Vice President Joe Biden, to represent the United States at Lady Thatcher's funeral was embarrassing, undignified, and wrong. The Administration clearly misjudged the public mood in the U.K. and the U.S. and minimized

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both Lady Thatcher's vital role in strengthening Anglo-American relations and her lifelong admiration for the U.S. The only serving U.S. government official to attend the funeral was the charge d'affaires at the U.S. embassy in London. To put this demeaning decision in perspective, the U.S. also sent the charge d'affaires at its embassy in Venezuela to Hugo Chavez's funeral.

- **Meddling in Britain's internal politics.** Britain is in the midst of a major political debate about its future relationship with the EU. Cameron has promised a referendum on British membership in the EU in 2017. For decades, the EU has pursued an "ever closer union"—a growing centralization of economic and political power with no concern for enhancing economic freedom, national sovereignty, and democratic accountability. Although public opinion in Britain is opposed to continued membership in the EU, senior officials in the Obama Administration continue to call on Britain to stay in the EU.
- **Falkland Islands embarrassment.** The Obama Administration has failed to recognize the outcome of the recent referendum in the Falkland Islands, a British Overseas Territory in the South Atlantic, even though 99.8 percent of those who voted declared that they wanted to remain part of the U.K. The Obama Administration has weighed in on the mounting tensions between Great Britain and Argentina by backing Argentina's call for a U.N.-brokered settlement. By supporting Argentina's demand, the U.S. risks alienating Britain and encouraging Argentina to take even more aggressive actions. The question of sovereignty was emphatically settled by the war in 1982 between Britain and Argentina, which was sparked by Argentine aggression, and again by the referendum in 2013. This question is not open for discussion, and the U.S. should stop suggesting that there is anything at all to negotiate.

Time to Promote the Special Relationship.

The faults in the Anglo-American relationship do not rest solely with the U.S. Cameron has failed to

make the British case on all these points with sufficient vigor and, during his visit in 2012, even allowed himself to be used as a campaign prop by President Obama. This is not only undignified; it means that vital British interests are not being vigorously defended. Parts of the British press, and all of the major British political parties, also indulge in criticisms of the U.S. legal and judicial systems that are unfair and prejudicial.

Nevertheless, the U.S. has in recent years made most of the errors in the context of Anglo-American relations, and it is time to set things right. In order to get the Special Relationship back on track, President Obama should:

- **Back the Falkland Islanders' right of self-determination.** The U.S. should recognize the outcome of the recent referendum as an official and legitimate expression of the will of the Falkland Islanders and of their right to choose their own government.
- **Apologize for snubbing Lady Thatcher's funeral.** Lady Thatcher was one of the most inspirational and transformative leaders of the 20th century. She was also a staunch ally of the U.S. Failing to send a senior member of the U.S. government at the head of a strong U.S. delegation to attend her funeral was grossly disrespectful.
- **Stay out of British politics.** The debate on Britain's future relationship with the EU is an internal political matter for the British people. President Obama and members of his Administration should stop calling for continued British membership of the EU.
- **End U.S. defense cuts.** Defense cuts harm Anglo-American defense cooperation. In particular, President Obama should guarantee that the B-variant of Joint Strike Fighter and the introduction of the *Ohio*-class submarine will not be delayed. A delay in, or the cancellation of, these programs would detract from Britain's ability to preserve its nuclear deterrent and rebuild its carrier strike capability.

1. Gallup, "Country Ratings," February 7-10, 2013, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/1624/perceptions-foreign-countries.aspx> (accessed May 10, 2013).

Rebuild Close Ties. Instead of taking positive steps to reassert U.S. leadership in Europe, and to build on the U.S. ties with its best allies in Europe—particularly Britain, which is outside the eurozone—the Obama Administration has strongly backed the European Union in its destructive assault on national sovereignty. This is an approach that is guaranteed to alienate Britain, weaken U.S. influence in Europe, and leave the U.S. with fewer, poorer, and less capable democratic allies.

The Administration's disdainful treatment of Britain is not just wrong in itself. It also stands at the very center of its inability to develop a grand strategic approach to Europe and its decision to outsource the defense of its interests in Europe to the EU. As the failure of the eurozone becomes ever more obvious, it is time to end this policy and to rebuild close ties between the U.S. and Britain.

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