

# ISSUE BRIEF

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## David Cameron's Visit to Washington: An Important Opportunity to Renew Anglo–American Leadership

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President Barack Obama will host British Prime Minister David Cameron at the White House on January 15–16. This will be Cameron's last visit to the United States before the U.K.'s general election on May 7, 2015. Five issues should dominate the visit: (1) Russia's aggression in Eastern Europe; (2) the crisis in Iran and the Levant; (3) the future of the U.K. inside the European Union (EU); (4) the proposed Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP); and (5) defending the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands at the upcoming Organization of American States (OAS) Summit.

For the past six years, the Obama Administration has failed to pursue policies that would enhance the Special Relationship between the U.S. and Great Britain. The White House should use Prime Minister Cameron's visit to renew U.S. commitment to the Anglo–American Special Relationship by addressing the following issues:

**1. Russia's aggression in Eastern Europe.** After Russia annexed Crimea and invaded eastern Ukraine, supporting separatists in the Donbas region, the U.K. was quick to bolster NATO's defenses in Central and Eastern Europe. The U.K. was the first NATO country after the U.S. to send

ground forces for training in the Baltics soon after Russia seized Crimea. The U.K. has deployed naval assets to the region, fighter jets to the Baltic Air Policing mission, and 1,350 personnel and more than 350 armored vehicles to Poland. But British deployments to the region may be short lived in the wake of further cuts in defense spending. The U.K. is currently one of only four alliance members (out of 28) that meet the NATO target of spending 2 percent of gross domestic product on defense. If London fails to continue meeting that benchmark, it would be a symbolic blow to the Alliance and put British deployments in Central and Eastern Europe, and elsewhere, at risk.

**2. The crises in Iran and the Levant.** The West faces serious security crises in Iran, with its covert nuclear program and support for terrorism, and the broader Levant, where the radical Islamist group ISIS widened its control in Syria and Iraq in 2014 and the Assad regime consolidated its power in Damascus with the support of Moscow and Tehran. In 2013, the House of Commons voted down British military action against Syria after President Bashar al-Assad used chemical weapons against his own people. When the U.K. government decided to join the coalition against ISIS last fall, David Cameron was only able to secure parliamentary authorization for British military participation in Iraq—not in Syria. Only eight ground-attack jets, four armed unmanned aerial vehicles, one air-to-air refueler, and one reconnaissance aircraft have been deployed to the region. While the U.K.'s contribution is better than nothing, Britain

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should make a contribution commensurate with its global stature and stand firm against unwise concessions to Iran that would legitimize its nuclear program.

**3. The future of the U.K. inside the European Union.** David Cameron has pledged to hold a referendum on British membership in the EU by 2017 if he is returned to Downing Street this May. Cameron will campaign for Britain to stay inside the EU, while pushing for reform of that unwieldy and undemocratic 28-nation body. Despite the prime minister's position, several members of Cameron's cabinet are known to be in favor of an EU exit, and the prospect of genuine and fundamental reform of the EU, or a renegotiation of Britain's relationship with Brussels, is zero.

The Obama Administration has aggressively intervened in the British debate by pressing Britain to stay inside the European Union. This is the wrong message. If the British people vote to leave the EU, the result should be welcomed in Washington and seen as an historic reaffirmation of British sovereignty. A "Brexit" from the EU will strengthen, not weaken, the Special Relationship, and will provide momentum for the negotiation of a U.S.-UK free trade area.

**4. The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP).** The U.S. and the EU—including Britain—are currently negotiating a wide-ranging trade treaty. If this treaty genuinely reduced barriers to trade, it would be a modest economic positive. But both the U.S. and the EU have made it clear that the goal of the negotiations is to arrive at harmonized standards for goods and services that would apply to both sides of the Atlantic. These harmonized standards would impose substantial and rising costs on all U.S. goods and services, and would detract from American sovereignty by giving the EU a voice in domestic rule-making. Instead of bolstering the EU's economically destructive system of managed and expensive trade, the U.S. and U.K. should advance trade by agreeing to recognize each other's standards and by making mutual recognition the basis of their wider approach to free trade diplomacy.

**5. Support the Falkland Islands at the OAS Summit.** The Obama Administration has failed to support the inhabitants of the Falkland Islands, a British Overseas Territory in the South Atlantic. In March 2013, the Falkland Islands held a referendum in which 99.8 percent of those voting declared that they wanted to remain British. 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. The reported Argentine lease of long-range Su-24 strike aircraft from Russia poses a serious military threat to the islands. Furthermore, during previous OAS Summits, the U.S. has refused to join Canada in supporting the Falkland Islanders' right of self-determination. The OAS Summit to be held in Panama in April offers an opportunity for the U.S. to back the right of the islanders to choose their own future.

### **Support the Special Relationship**

The relationship between the U.S. and Britain rests fundamentally on shared interests and values, but if the relationship is to be vibrant, it must also be reflected in shared policies. The United States and the United Kingdom must seize this opportunity to pursue policies that will promote security, sovereignty, and freedom.

- **Stand firm on Russia and Iran.** The Obama Administration tried to reset relations with Russia. It continues to try to secure an Iranian reset. The prime minister should remind the President of Britain's long involvement in the effort to control the Iranian nuclear program and to free Eastern and Central Europe from Russian oppression, and pressure him to stand firm against these aggressive autocracies.
- **Seek assurances on U.K. defense cuts.** The U.K.'s limited contribution in the campaign against ISIS reflects its damaging defense cuts over the past decade. President Obama should seek assurances from the prime minister that the U.K. will meet NATO's 2 percent target over the next parliament.
- **Support free trade, not managed trade.** As a great trading nation, the U.K.'s national interest is in freeing trade around the world. The EU, by contrast, stands for managed trade. The U.S. and U.K. should cooperate to promote free trade that relies on the mutual recognition of standards, not harmonization.

- **Back the Falklands at the OAS Summit.** The U.S. should join Canada and back the right of Falkland Islanders to self-determination at the upcoming OAS Summit. The U.S. should also join with the U.K. in warning Argentina that the acquisition of Su-24 aircraft from Russia will be destabilizing to the peace of the South Atlantic.

### **Conclusion**

Since entering office in 2009, President Obama has demonstrated little interest in strengthening the Anglo–American Special Relationship. His Administration has actively opposed British interests in the Falklands, with the White House openly disdaining America’s closest friend and ally. At the same time, Prime Minister Cameron has undercut the partnership with the United States by weakening Britain’s military capabilities and has made only very modest contributions to the military coalition to defeat ISIS.

When the U.S. and British leaders meet in Washington this month, they must be prepared to demonstrate robust Anglo–American leadership in the face of mounting threats from Islamist terrorism, the Iranian regime’s nuclear program, and the imperial ambitions of Vladimir Putin. The world is a safer place when the United States and Great Britain stand united in the defense of the West.

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