

- **What is the special relationship? | CNBC Explains**

The Special Relationship explained to kids 😊. July 2018

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7PVeNj1qjp8&ab\\_channel=CNBCInternational](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7PVeNj1qjp8&ab_channel=CNBCInternational)

- **The Special Relationship - Timeline**

<https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-35783309>

<https://www.history.com/news/america-britain-special-relationship-alliance>

- **From the Office of National Statistics - UK trade with the United States: 2023**

A closer look at the goods and services the UK trades with the United States.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/nationalaccounts/balanceofpayments/articles/uktradewiththeunitedstates2023/2023>

## Document 1 – Starmer seeks ‘strong, special relationship’ with US after Trump election win

*Sir Keir Starmer promised to work with Donald Trump on protecting the special relationship in a ‘more volatile world’.*  
*The Independent*, Wednesday 06 November 2024

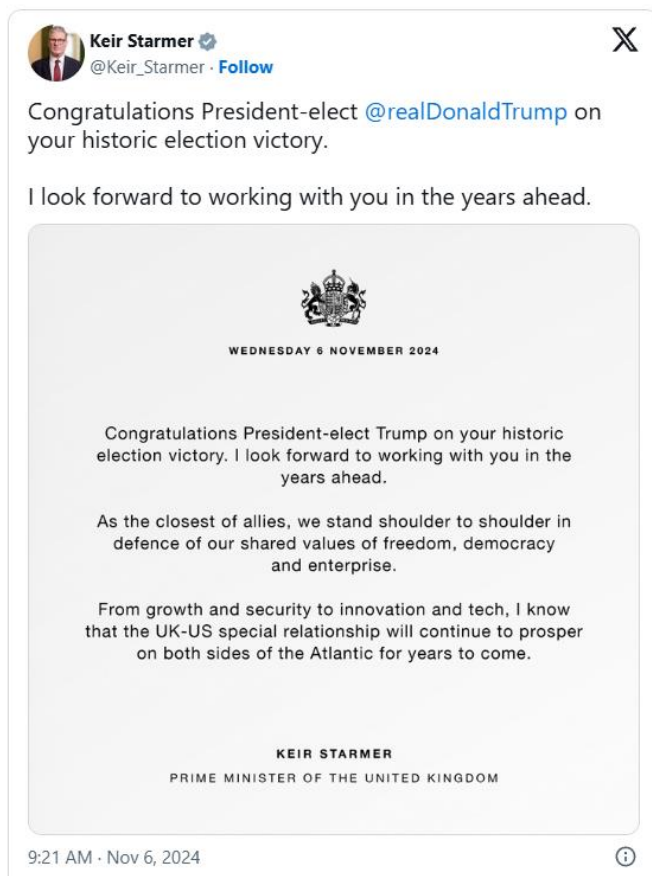
The UK will work with Donald Trump on economic and security issues, Sir Keir Starmer said as he insisted the “special relationship” will prosper with the new president-elect.

The Prime Minister congratulated Mr Trump on a “historic election victory” after American voters returned him to the White House. Sir Keir was among the first world leaders to congratulate Mr Trump as the Government sought to build bridges with the president-elect after the Republican politician’s campaign filed a legal complaint about Labour activists supporting rival Kamala Harris.

Senior Labour figures, including Foreign Secretary David Lammy, have also been strident in their criticism of Mr Trump in the past.

But the Prime Minister said: “As the closest of allies, we stand shoulder to shoulder in defence of our shared values of freedom, democracy and enterprise. “From growth and security to innovation and tech, I know that the UK-US special relationship will continue to prosper on both sides of the Atlantic for years to come.”

At Prime Minister’s Questions in the Commons, new Tory leader Kemi Badenoch urged Sir Keir to apologise for Mr Lammy’s 2018 description of Mr Trump as a “woman-hating, neo-Nazi-sympathising sociopath” who is “a profound threat to the international order”. Mrs Badenoch also called on Sir Keir to back an invitation for Mr Trump to address Parliament and revive talks on a UK-US trade deal.



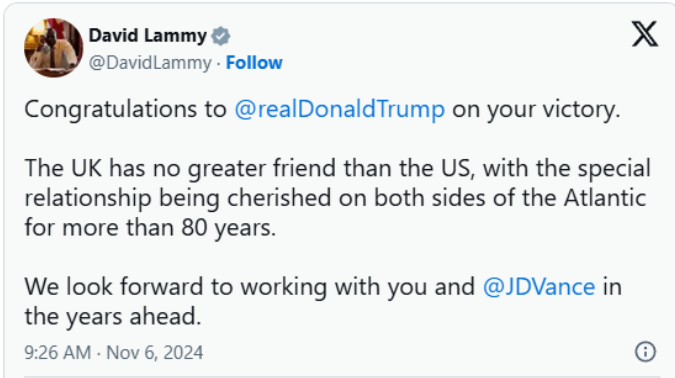
Sir Keir said: “Of course we will discuss issues of our economy with the president-elect, as we already have done.”

He told MPs: “We live in probably a more volatile world than we’ve lived in for many decades.

“It is absolutely crucial that we have a strong relationship, that strong, special relationship forged in difficult circumstances between the US and the UK.”

The return of Mr Trump to the White House could cause diplomatic headaches for the UK, with potential splits on global trade policy and the level of US support for Ukraine and Nato.

Mr Lammy has spent time seeking to form a close relationship with the Trump campaign, despite his history of outspoken criticism of his record – which also included calling him a “racist and KKK/neo-Nazi sympathiser” in 2017 and a “tyrant in a toupee” a year later.



The president-elect has long complained about US tax dollars funding European security and has been highly critical about Nato members not spending enough.

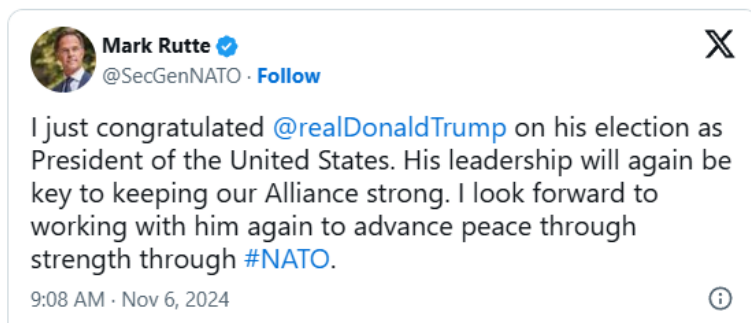
He has also repeatedly claimed he would bring the war in Ukraine to an end, although he has not set out how he would achieve this.



Ukraine’s Volodymyr Zelensky was quick to congratulate Mr Trump and said: “I appreciate President Trump’s commitment to the ‘peace through strength’ approach in global affairs. This is exactly the principle that can practically bring just peace in Ukraine closer. I am hopeful that we will put it into action together. “We rely on continued strong bipartisan support for Ukraine in the United States.”

Nato secretary general Mark Rutte said Mr Trump’s leadership “will again be key to keeping our alliance strong”, adding: “Through Nato, the US has 31 friends and allies who help to advance US interests, multiply American power and keep Americans safe.”

Addressing Mr Trump’s concerns about burden-sharing, he added: “Two-thirds of Allies now spend at least 2% of their GDP (gross domestic product) on defence, and defence spending and production are on an onward trajectory across the alliance.”



Reform UK’s Nigel Farage, a leading supporter of Mr Trump, said the president-elect would be a “genuine radical”.

He told BBC Radio 4’s Today: “What you are going to see from this Trump administration, and I’m guessing that Elon Musk will be the man that is tasked to do it, is there will be a big fightback against the administrative bureaucratic state which is far too big, far too powerful and actually very undemocratic. “What is very interesting about the Trump movement is that its critics call it all sorts of nasty names, the truth is in many ways it’s bringing Americans together.”

## Document 2 - Britain Faces a Dilemma: Cozy Up to Trump or Reconnect With Europe?

By Mark Landler and Patricia Cohen, Reporting from London  
*The New York Times*, Nov. 22, 2024

When Prime Minister Keir Starmer of Britain joined President Emmanuel Macron of France in Paris last week to celebrate Armistice Day — the first British leader to do so since Winston Churchill in 1944 — it was a striking illustration of his Labour government’s desire to reset relations with Europe.

5 But despite the rich symbolism and the palpable warmth between two centrist leaders, the visit was overshadowed by Donald J. Trump’s victory in the American presidential election a week earlier. With his history of antagonism toward the European Union, Mr. Trump’s return complicates Mr. Starmer’s intention to “turn a corner on Brexit” and pursue what he called a “once-in-a-generation opportunity” to rebuild ties with the rest of Europe.

10 What could have been an economically profitable, if politically delicate, bridge-building exercise for Britain’s Labour government now threatens to become more of a binary choice between the E.U. and the United States.

Closer British trade ties with Europe, warn diplomats and people in Mr. Trump’s orbit, could come at the expense of relations with the incoming American president, who is a confirmed Brexiteer and cheered when his last British counterpart, Boris Johnson, picked fights with the E.U.

15 “If the U.K. re-engages in these political and economic ties with the E.U., it makes it less likely that Trump will go for a free-trade agreement with the U.K.,” said Stephen Moore, a senior economic adviser to the Trump campaign. “You guys have to decide,” he said in an interview, addressing the British public. “Do you want to be more like Europe or the U.S.?”

For now, British officials reject that as a false choice. Mr. Starmer has balanced his diplomatic outreach to Europe with an assiduous effort to cultivate Mr. Trump. The two met for dinner in Trump Tower in September, during which Mr. Trump told Mr. Starmer, “We are friends,” according to a person who was in the room.

20 Peter Mandelson, a Labour Party grandee under consideration to be Britain’s next ambassador to Washington, recently said on a Times of London podcast that in the three-way relationship between Britain, Europe and the United States, “We have got to find a way to have our cake and eat it.”

25 Such an outcome, economists said, could feature advances on two tracks: With Europe, Britain could take more aggressive steps to smooth trade friction, like more closely aligning rules on agriculture, linking carbon tax systems, and allowing greater mobility across borders for young people. With the United States, it could pursue, if not a full-scale free-trade agreement, a partial deal that would cover strategically important areas like the digital economy.

30 Yet even when Britain was more ideologically in sync with the United States during Mr. Johnson’s premiership and Mr. Trump’s first term, the two sides failed to negotiate a trade agreement. This time, Mr. Trump’s trade policy seems more focused on his plan to impose across-the-board tariffs of up to 20 percent on trading partners, including, potentially, the E.U. and Britain.

At one level, far-reaching tariffs by the United States on the European Union “could be an unintentional gift to the U.K.,” said Abraham L. Newman, a political scientist at Georgetown University. It would put a “lot of pressure on the E.U. to expand its market,” he said, “and the U.K. is an obvious opportunity for them.”

35 But while Britain and the European Union could make common cause in responding to American tariffs, it is equally likely that a new wave of protectionism could divide them, diplomats said, particularly if Britain tried to cut its own deal with Mr. Trump that would exempt it from certain tariffs.

40 “If the U.K. did it alone, there would be a price to pay,” said Peter Ricketts, a former British national security adviser. “The U.S. would demand concessions, like access for its genetically modified beef, which could create problems with U.K. consumers and would cause problems with Europe.” “If you bandwagon with Trump, you’re never going to get E.U. market access” said Mark Blyth, professor of international economics at Brown University. (...)

If Britain is forced to make that choice, some argue that it should throw its lot in with Europe. Trade across the English Channel is more than two and a half times greater than that between Britain and the United States. British exports to the E.U. totaled 342 billion pounds, or \$433 billion last year, 42 percent of its total exports. Imports from the E.U. reached 466 pounds, or \$590 billion, 52 percent of its total.

45 Rebuilding those ties would help recapture some of the growth lost because of Britain’s departure from the E.U. A thicket of red tape, border delays and extra costs now ensnarl cross-channel trade. British exporters complain that they must monitor gas usage to comply with the E.U.’s carbon border tax. Shellfish exporters note that veterinarians must certify shipments of crabs and lobsters headed to France and Spain.

50 While the trade negotiations have so far been limited to relatively minor issues like accepting European veterinary safety standards, the British Chamber of Commerce has set out a long list of reforms that could go much further in smoothing trade.

Mr. Trump’s skepticism of NATO, and the growing belief that Europe needs to rely less on the United States for its security, is a further incentive to cooperate. Together, Britain and France account for half of Europe’s military capabilities, at a time when security and economic policies are more closely intertwined.

Drawing closer to Europe would not be easy for the prime minister, even without Mr. Trump. Britain’s Tory-leaning press 55 remains openly hostile to the E.U. and will be quick to condemn his rapprochement. Labour politicians worry that a pro-Europe strategy could hurt the party with voters in the so-called “red wall” districts, many of whom backed Brexit but came back to Labour in the last election.

**Mark Landler** is the London bureau chief of *The Times*, covering the United Kingdom, as well as American foreign policy in Europe, Asia and the Middle East. He has been a journalist for more than three decades.

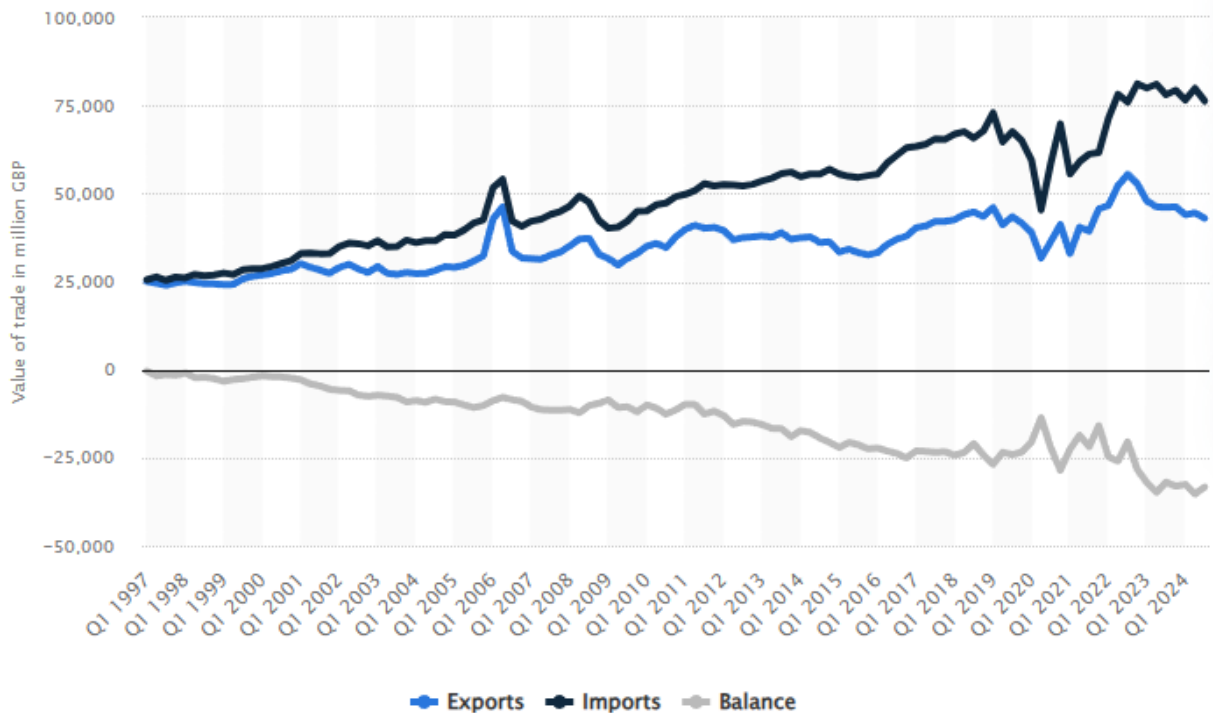
**Patricia Cohen** writes about global economics and is based in London.

**Document 3 - EU share of UK trade – From the House of Commons Library**

<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-7851/>

In 2023, the EU accounted for 42% of the UK’s exports (49% of goods exports and 36% of services exports). This share has been broadly stable over the last few years, although down from 47% in 2010 and 2011.

The EU accounted for 52% of UK imports in 2023 (55% of goods imports and 46% of services imports). The EU accounted for between 50% and 53% of UK imports between 2010 and 2020. This fell to 47-48% in 2021 and 2022. It increased to 52% in 2023, largely due to a fall in goods imports from non-EU countries, especially fuel.



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**Document 4 - Audio – St Cyr - Sir Keir Starmer should aim higher in his reset with the EU**

Leader, *The Economist*, Jan 23rd 2025

**Document 5 - In the Trump vortex, Keir Starmer must fight hard and fast to define Britain’s destiny**

Rafael Behr *The Guardian*, Wed 22 Jan 2025

*Difficult choices between alignment with Europe and the US are coming at the prime minister fast. He risks losing control of the debate*

When all eyes at Westminster are fixed on Washington, it is easy to forget how little attention is paid back in return. Unlike Mexico and Canada, Britain doesn’t have a long border with the US. It doesn’t rival America’s superpower

primacy on the planet, unlike China. And it doesn’t export more goods across the Atlantic than it imports – a trait 10 Donald Trump despises about the European Union.

No US president is indifferent to the country that insists on calling the relationship “special”. The historic bonds are thick, and that will inform decisions Trump makes when little Britain blips on his radar.



15 In the meantime, all the speculation and briefing about which UK politician enjoys what degree of intimacy with the new administration should be read as an expression of impotence by all involved.

Nigel Farage is always advertising his services as a  
20 Trump-whisperer to anyone who will listen. Various former Conservative ministers flapped on the periphery of the inauguration. There is no evidence that the flame cares about the moths.

There is ideological affinity between Britain's radical right  
25 and the Maga movement, with some mingling of minions between the two camps. Potentates make room for sycophants. But real insiders know that bragging about influence jeopardises their access.

Power talks to power. If Trump wants something from  
30 Britain – if there is a deal to be done – the person on the other end of the line will be the prime minister, not the MP for Clacton. The rest is noise, unhelpful and dangerous when it interferes with diplomatic signals, but not the substance of the relationship. Not yet.

The more substantial threat comes from Elon Musk, who  
35 really is an influential figure in US affairs (not to mention the richest person alive). The billionaire X founder has decided that Keir Starmer's democratically elected government is, in fact, a repressive woke junta that needs  
40 to be removed for freedom to flourish. Whether or not Trump believes that, he could adopt it as a stance to bully the prime minister when that suits his agenda.

The far right will play along, posing as dissidents looking  
45 to Uncle Sam for regime change. This mercenary service to an unfriendly foreign power will elicit no denunciation from supposedly patriotic Conservatives.

The challenge for Starmer is to establish a functional  
50 dialogue with the White House before he can be drowned out by malevolent Musketry. And he will have to do it while also fulfilling his pledge to strengthen relations with the EU.

The prime minister denies the tension there. He says there  
55 is no contradiction between his ambition to sustain the specialness of Britain's transatlantic partnership and his policy of a European "reset". He "utterly rejects" the suggestion that it is a binary choice, arguing that the national interest demands cultivation of both alliances.

He is right, up to a point. The tricky part is knowing when  
60 that point has been reached. The right will goad Starmer to show ever more craven fealty to Trump, justifying or celebrating each new spasm of tyranny. The prime minister will also come under pressure from his own party to prove that he has a conscience and finds the whole spectacle repugnant.

But Britain can't afford a sudden rupture from US power  
65 and foreign liberals can't shame America's government into being something it isn't. Realpolitik doesn't have to be abject, but it is necessarily discreet. Even if the prime minister is privately appalled by Trump, he has to ration  
70 rebuke and word it carefully.

It isn't just the domestic audience that will need to hear some dignified disavowal of Trumpism. European leaders

will want to know that Starmer seeks rapprochement in a  
75 spirit of solidarity. He has to bring a concept of future partnership to the table, not just a shopping list of amendments to the existing Brexit settlement.

The two sides' interests are aligned in the first stage.  
Starmer wants a security pact; Trump's contempt for Nato and his indulgence of Vladimir Putin make the EU eager  
80 to hook up with Britain's military and intelligence capabilities. But then it gets messy. The further a defence pact goes, the harder it rubs against questions of institutional integration – what bodies could the UK join? – and arms procurement – who will buy what from whom?

Downing Street has a scheme for the EU reset: defence  
85 cooperation generates the goodwill that then facilitates a friendly conversation about easing border friction in trade. That sequence doesn't hold if Brussels is facing a barrage of US tariffs before the negotiations have even started,  
90 while Starmer is lobbying the White House for exemptions.

Trump's hostility to the EU is personal and ideological. He  
hates it as a manifestation of the idea that mutual economic dependency between states, underpinned by international  
95 laws and treaties, can be a source of collective strength and rising prosperity. He is offended by the economic heft of the single market. He sees its regulatory reach as an affront to American supremacy and the whole European social model as a decadent racket, achieved by free-riding on  
100 Pentagon security guarantees. He wants to divide and conquer, neutralising and disarming Brussels as a soft power player.

Embattled European leaders will want signs that Britain is  
a full-time ally, not a part-time agent of their American  
105 tormentor. Meanwhile, Reform and the Tories will bellow that Labour is selling the country into Brussels bondage and squandering the chance to complete the Brexit revolution with a US trade deal on whatever terms Trump dictates.

To navigate this labyrinth, Starmer needs clear priorities  
110 informed by a coherent strategic purpose. When so much is uncertain, there is a pragmatic case for keeping all channels open, refusing to pick sides. But hard choices are coming and they won't wait for the prime minister to  
115 indulge his usual ponderous method.

Geopolitical orientation isn't something that can be put out  
for consultation or made subject to a review, reporting in  
2028. We are in the Trump vortex now, a frenzy of bewildering events and conflicting demands. It could  
120 paralyse a leader who likes to collate the data and mull the options before making a decision. The uncertainty won't stop. It is a design feature of a Trump presidency. The risk, then, is that pragmatism mutates into passivity. A prime minister who takes too long to choose could end up  
125 outsourcing the choice to people who don't have Britain's interests at heart.

- Rafael Behr is a Guardian columnist

## Document 6 - America isn't Britain's special friend. It couldn't care less

Madeline Grant, *The Telegraph*, 17 January 2024

The role of US ambassador to Britain is a curious one. Your official residence is a Regent's Park mansion, boasting 35 bedrooms and the second largest private garden in London (after Buckingham Palace). Unlike being envoy of, say, Guatemala or Bahrain, UK political leaders will come trotting to your door at the drop of a hat. However, there are downsides. I suspect phone conversations with Joe Biden are not particularly riveting. There is also a more existential problem, namely that your entire job is built on a mirage – convincing the world that the “special relationship” is not just real, but flourishing.

In truth, the special relationship, such that it ever existed, lives primarily in the minds of our political class, and the occasional utterances of American politicians when they want a favour. Like clockwork, US Ambassador Jane Hartley resurrected the trope from its usual rigor mortis yesterday in a column following the joint US-UK strikes on the Houthis in Yemen.

“In light of inflection points we face in the coming year,” she wrote, “I’m certain the world needs the special relationship now more than ever.” In diplomat-speak, there’s a big orange elephant in the room; Donald Trump has been called many things over the years, but an “inflection point”?

The article demonstrates the asymmetry, which is visible even in diplomatic appointments. While we send seasoned officials to Washington, America dispatches donors and chums of whoever is in power. Dame Karen Pierce, current British ambassador to the US, cut her teeth outmanoeuvring the Russians and Chinese on the UN Security Council and brings a wealth of diplomatic experience. Hartley was first appointed to the diplomatic corps by Barack Obama, off the back of her Democrat fundraising efforts. The same was true of her predecessor, a longtime Republican donor.

The fact that an ambassadorship is invariably a plum job for a much-valued fundraiser or friend surely shows just how little actual listening and bilateral engagement with allies matters in the formation of US foreign policy. Who needs a career diplomat in London or Paris when the decision has already been taken in Washington?

In a way, the relationship is special, in the sense that it is demonstrably worse – we expect things but rarely get them, and are surprised when we don't. Other countries, which take a more realistic view, are rarely disappointed in the same way. [...]

Our two countries have many shared values and interests, but our recent wars together have given us cause to regret blindly following the US. From Biden's abandonment of Kabul to the Troubles, indeed all the way back to Suez, Britain has often been treated most shoddily by the nation our politicians maintain is our closest ally. As Kissinger, our essential window into the realities of foreign policy, said, “To be America's enemy may be dangerous, but to be its friend is fatal.”

This isn't just a military fact, either. It is strategic and economic, too. Barack Obama rather said the quiet bit out loud with his infamous “back of the queue” quip in 2016. Regardless of your view on Brexit, this provided a clear insight into Washington's thinking. We are useful insofar as we are its man in Brussels. Should we deviate from US interests, we can expect nothing, despite all the public genuflection, despite all the blood and treasure spent abroad. However justifiable air strikes on the Houthis may be, the idea that UK support will earn us “points” that we can use to our advantage in Washington is for the birds. [...]

Meanwhile, the US economy steams ahead, not just of Britain but the entirety of Europe. No one should begrudge America its domestic success; if anything we could learn from its dynamism and naked self-interest. Our real beef ought to be with a UK political class that insists on prostrating itself before America and believing the myth, in spite of the evidence.

## Document 7- What will happen to the US and UK ‘special relationship’ with PM Starmer in charge?

Jon Sopel, *The Independent*, 6 July 2024

In British elections, things happen at warp speed. There is no languid two-and-a-half-month interregnum from the close of polls to the taking up of the reins of power, as there is in the US. Prime minister Starmer will move into Downing Street imminently, and before he’s worked out how to use the remote control or found out where the loos are, he’ll be on a plane to Washington for the NATO summit next week.

5 There, the most newly minted Western leader will take his first baby steps on the world stage. But – to put it mildly – it’s going to be weird. There’s going to be Keir Starmer, with his whopping, great big mandate, shaking hands with Joe Biden who – how can one put this gently – is looking a touch past his sell-by date. In November, as things stand (and it is my belief this might change), Keir Starmer will be either spending his premiership dealing with a US president who appears mentally compromised or one who is morally compromised.

10 Never mind, as the politicians are wont to tell us, they will deal with whoever is the occupant of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, and from the grand Lutyns House a mile or so away on Massachusetts Avenue, the British ambassador, Karen Pierce, will be doing her best to smooth the path of the new PM and his fledgling administration.

It would be conventional now to talk about the “special relationship” but it is a phrase I came to hate in my eight years in the US. It is something the British – and our press – obsess about but which the Americans don’t think twice about. The travelling  
15 British press pack when Starmer goes will be on high alert for anything that could be construed as a snub. Will there be a bilateral? Or will it just be a corridor brush past? How long will it last? Did Macron get more? And on and on it goes; a totally meaningless confection.

What’s so silly is that Downing Street often plays up to it – purring with delight when the meeting goes on longer than scheduled, or becoming brittle and defensive when the president says he’s too busy for a photocall.

20 Look, in certain areas, the special relationship does exist and is absolutely real and vital: national security, intelligence sharing and defence. But America has interests and will do what it sees as being in its interests at any given time. And remember, the transition from Trump to Biden in 2021 made no difference in terms of the UK getting a post-Brexit trade deal with the US. Trump wasn’t that interested in giving Britain one, and neither was the Biden administration. Further, if there is to be one, remember who has the leverage. It’s not us.

25 At the end of Barack Obama’s term, I had breakfast with his press secretary and he confided the tricks of the trade: when the Brits are in town, you talk about the “special relationship”; when it’s the Canadians or Mexicans, you talk about the “closest relationship” (which geographically of course it is); and when it’s the French, it’s the “oldest relationship” – two republics born at around the same time. Everyone wants to feel they are important when they go to Washington.

David Cameron had it right when he acknowledged openly that Britain was the junior partner. Starmer should do the same –  
30 whether it’s Biden, Trump or anyone else, for that matter, in the White House. Arguably, the two in the last half century that had the closest relationship were Thatcher and Reagan, but that didn’t stop the US from completely blindsiding the British with the invasion of Grenada – a Commonwealth country – and not telling Downing Street anything about it until it happened. [...]

As with so much else, there will be a ton of reading for Starmer to do on the flight over to Washington. But I do think the best description of British foreign policy is this: find out what America is thinking and do a little bit less. I have no reason to think that  
35 will change under Prime Minister Starmer.

## Document 8 - The end of the UK-US special relationship?

Blogs LES, October 31st 2024

*The UK-US “special relationship” has survived for many decades, but Brexit and the hollowing out of the British defence forces means that the UK is no longer as strategically important as it once was to the United States.*

5 *Even though another Trump presidency will present unique challenges to Labour’s Government, the “special relationship” is likely to continue to erode, whoever wins the 2024 US Presidential election, argues Michael Cox.*

10 It’s difficult to recall a time when there has been so much international interest, almost bordering on the obsessive, in the upcoming American elections. The

reasons are clear. For one thing, America continues to matter more than any other country in the world, so what happens there impacts on us all in ways that no other state  
15 does. And for another, the US today is more polarized than at any time in recent history, and quite understandably its allies and partners worry that a less than united America isn’t going to be a reliable partner in an increasingly dangerous world.

### 20 A special relationship?

So, when it comes to the UK, what difference will the election result make? Does it even make any difference to



London who wins? History often teaches us nothing, but if it points to anything it is just how durable the relationship has been since the Second World War. Macmillan got on with Kennedy. Thatcher stood alongside Ronald Reagan in the 1980s. Meanwhile, Tony Blair simply couldn't get enough of his new liberal ally Bill Clinton a decade later. But then the liberal Blair had no trouble standing alongside a neo-conservative like G.W. Bush when it came to Iraq. We also know that Trump liked Boris Johnson and Johnson Trump. But when Johnson was finally replaced by Rishi Sunak, Sunak's foreign policy team at No. 10 got on perfectly well with the Biden people, so much so that in June 2023 Sunak visited Biden in the White House, while a month later Biden was talking in the warmest of terms with Sunak in Downing Street.

### Cracks in the special relationship

Yet there is no hiding from the fact that the world has moved on since that golden era when Thatcher and Reagan stood side-by-side waging ideological war against socialism and Blair and Clinton forged a new "third way" which they hoped would redefine the world in the era of globalization.

One should not exaggerate. The "Brits" still remain America's most reliable friend of choice; and there's no doubting how much the UK depends on the United States for its security. But a number of things have happened over the past ten years that have made the relationship a good deal less "special" – one being Brexit which meant Washington no longer had a reliable pro-American partner working within the European Union, and the other the hollowing out of British defence forces thus making the UK less significant as an ally. As an unnamed US general reportedly told Defence Secretary Ben Wallace back in January 2023, inside the Pentagon there were many who no longer considered the British Army to be among the world's top-tier fighting forces.

Nor did America's decision to get out of Afghanistan in haste in the autumn of 2021 do much to reassure London that it still held much sway in Washington. As Wallace made clear, "a superpower" that was not "prepared to stick at something isn't probably a superpower" any longer. "It is certainly not a global force, it's just a big power," he added for good measure.

Long before the 2024 election therefore the special relationship was facing more than a few problems. But if Trump rather than Biden's successor were to be elected, this could make matters decidedly difficult for the new Labour government in the UK.

The distance between the two on most issues looks almost unbridgeable. Trump as we know favoured Brexit: the Labour Party in the majority voted Remain. When Trump was President and visited the UK, half of all Labour

75 MPs opposed him speaking to Parliament: Trump was not amused. Labour is broadly speaking internationalist in outlook, whereas Trump believes in putting America first and the world second. Like the Democrats, Labour favours more government: Trump obviously favours less. Furthermore, while Labour has been consistent in its opposition to Putin's war in Ukraine, Trump has not only wavered when it comes to Ukraine, but with his running mate J.D. Vance has made it abundantly clear that he wants to bring the war to an end in double quick time on terms that would, by definition, favour Russia

Nor have more recent visits by Labour across the Atlantic done much to improve relations with Trump. Starmer might claim that his government "can have a good relationship" with a Republican President in the White House. But one suspects Trump is not going to forget the fact that Britain's current Foreign Secretary, David Lammy, once referred to him as a "racist" and a "dangerous clown". Then, as if to make matters more complicated still, only two to three weeks before the election, we had the decidedly bizarre spectacle of the Trump team calling out the Labour government for (in its own words) of "illegal foreign interference" into the US election. Yet this may not be Labour's biggest problem.

### The loss of the UK's strategic importance to the US

The bigger issue may not just be Trump but rather how the UK is now viewed in the United States more generally. Sentiment can only carry a country so far, and the US right now has much more on its proverbial plate than worrying about its relationship with a country like the United Kingdom which no longer, in the famous words of Douglas Hurd uttered back in 1993, 'punches above its weight'. But no longer it would seem.

Indeed, whoever wins in November, the person sitting in the White House will have a lot more to worry about than the UK. With China rising, Russia continuing its war in Ukraine, and the Middle East on fire, the special relationship so-called now looks like very flat beer. As Lord Palmerston once observed, states don't have permanent allies or perpetual enemies, only interests. And at this particular moment in history when both the Democrats and Republicans are beginning to put America's own interests first, one suspects that what is said in London – or indeed anywhere else in Europe for that matter – will carry some weight, but much less than it did in earlier times.

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## Part 2 – The first signs of renewed American Imperialism

### Document 9 - Groenland, Panama : Donald Trump renoue avec l'impérialisme de Theodore Roosevelt

5 La doctrine Monroe, qui fait de « l'hémisphère occidental » une aire d'hégémonie américaine, a été réinterprétée dans un sens offensif, conduisant les Etats-Unis à prendre le contrôle de l'Alaska, de Cuba, de Porto Rico, des Philippines et du Panama. Par Arnaud Leparmentier (New York, correspondant) *Le Monde*, 9 janvier 2025

Un air de déjà-vu. Donald Trump a choqué ses alliés, mardi 7 janvier, en n'excluant pas d'user de la force pour reprendre le canal de Panama ou acheter le Groenland. Avec ce coup de bluff, le président élu renoue 5 avec une vieille tradition, celle de l'impérialisme américain au tournant du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Cet âge doré, qui s'ouvre après la guerre de Sécession, est celui dont Donald Trump rêve : il est fait de fortunes colossales, de corruption généralisée et de repli sur soi avec des droits de 10 douane qui protégeaient l'industrie américaine et permettaient de ne pas avoir d'impôt sur le revenu. Et surtout d'impérialisme pour assurer l'hégémonie des Etats-Unis sur l'hémisphère occidental. En cette période, les Etats-Unis achètent l'Alaska aux Russes (1867), 15 envahissent Cuba, Porto Rico et les Philippines « libérées » en 1898 du colonialisme espagnol et creusent le canal de Panama achevé en 1914.

Les Etats-Unis instaurent ainsi une chasse gardée sur la moitié du globe, allant de l'Alaska au cap Horn, des 20 Caraïbes aux confins du Pacifique, aux Philippines. Pour se protéger à l'époque des Européens et des Japonais. Cent vingt ans plus tard, Donald Trump veut faire de même, avec un Groenland riche en ressources minières comme naguère l'Alaska et stratégique militairement car il 25 permet de verrouiller, avec le détroit de Bering, l'Arctique libéré des glaces et de contrôler les Russes.

Quant au canal de Panama, rétrocedé en 1999 conformément à l'engagement pris par Jimmy Carter en 1977, il est tout aussi stratégique, mais les 30 Américains s'inquiètent : son exploitation est déléguée à une entreprise chinoise soupçonnée d'espionnage par les trumpistes ; la fluidité du trafic est réduite par la sécheresse due au réchauffement climatique – les écluses doivent éjecter vers la mer de l'eau douce à chaque passage. Dans 35 les deux cas, les Etats-Unis invoquent leur sécurité et c'est pourquoi les menaces de Trump ne sont pas balayées d'un revers de main. Sa volonté de rebaptiser le « golfe du Mexique » en « golfe d'Amérique » résume son ambition : transformer en hégémonie sa zone d'influence dans la 40 veine d'un Vladimir Poutine ou d'un Xi Jinping.

#### Doctrine défensive envers les Européens

Cette politique a été théorisée par le président James Monroe (1817-1825) mais appliquée fermement près d'un siècle plus tard par Theodore Roosevelt (1901-1909), 45 héros de l'impérialisme américain. Lorsque le président

Monroe s'exprime devant le Congrès en 1823, la sécurité de la jeune république n'est pas encore garantie : le pays a connu une quasi-guerre avec la France post-révolutionnaire tandis que les Anglais ont incendié 50 Washington en 1812. Il exige que les Européens n'interviennent plus aux Amériques, par le biais de la colonisation ou de régimes fantoches. « *Nous devrions considérer toute tentative [étrangère]... d'étendre leur système à n'importe quelle partie de cet* 55 *hémisphère comme dangereuse pour notre paix et notre sécurité* », déclare Monroe. En échange, les Etats-Unis déclarent qu'ils ne se mêleront pas des affaires européennes.

A court terme, cette doctrine est essentiellement défensive 60 envers les Européens. Les Etats-Unis sont faibles et ont pour priorité l'expansion territoriale intérieure au-delà des Appalaches, rendue possible par le rachat de la Louisiane – en réalité l'immense bassin du Mississippi-Missouri – à Napoléon en 1803 et achevée en 1848 avec la guerre 65 americano-mexicaine, qui, après le Texas, fait basculer la Californie dans l'Union. L'Alaska est une sorte de coup de chance, racheté en 1867 par le secrétaire d'Etat William Seward aux Russes – qui ne veulent pas vendre à l'Angleterre, alors puissance ultradominante. On parle 70 alors de « *folie de Seward* », l'Alaska ne révélant ses atouts que lors de la ruée vers l'or à partir de 1897, pendant la guerre froide puis la crise pétrolière.

En réalité, il faut attendre l'émergence de la puissance industrielle américaine à la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle pour que 75 puisse s'appliquer pleinement la doctrine Monroe de manière offensive. C'est le président Théodore Roosevelt qui en sera l'incarnation. A chaque fois, les Américains disent servir la bonne cause, leur sécurité ou la défense des peuples colonisés. Ainsi, après l'explosion du navire USS 80 Maine dans le port de La Havane, en 1898, qui tue 262 marins américains, le président McKinley (1897-1901) déclare la guerre à l'Espagne. Son vice-ministre de la marine, Theodore Roosevelt, devient un héros en prenant d'assaut la colline de San Juan, près de Cuba. Les 85 Américains conquièrent ainsi Cuba, Haïti, Porto Rico – qui verrouille le golfe du Mexique – et, côté Pacifique, Guam et les Philippines, dont la population découvre bernée qu'elle est passée d'un maître à l'autre. Ils annexent aussi Hawaï.

90 Territoires soucieux de s'affranchir

L'histoire du canal de Panama qui s'ensuit est édifiante car elle révèle l'habile manipulation de Theodore Roosevelt, devenu président après l'assassinat, en 1901, du président McKinley. Après la faillite retentissante en 1889 du projet du Français Ferdinand de Lesseps, la voie est libre pour les Etats-Unis, qui veulent pouvoir relier la côte Est à la Californie sans passer par le cap Horn. Roosevelt négocie avec la Colombie qui possède alors l'isthme de Panama un traité pour creuser ledit canal. Mais le texte, léonin, est rejeté par les Colombiens.

Roosevelt ne se décourage pas : il déploie deux vaisseaux de guerre des deux côtés du futur canal et soutient une rébellion locale qui peut proclamer l'indépendance du Panama en 1903. Il négocie alors immédiatement un traité avec le nouvel Etat : pour 10 millions de dollars et 150 000 dollars par an, les Etats-Unis achètent une bande de 10 miles de large autour du tracé, creusent le canal et assurent la sécurité du nouveau pays dépourvu constitutionnellement d'armée. Le projet parachève le contrôle de la région par les Etats-Unis. C'est un triomphe pour Theodore Roosevelt, chantre de l'impérialisme américain et pourtant prix Nobel de la paix en 1906 pour sa médiation entre la Russie et le Japon, qui entendait gérer sa politique étrangère avec un « *gros gourdin* ».

Il avait dès 1904 apporté dans un discours un « corollaire » à la doctrine Monroe, l'intervention américaine dans les Caraïbes pour y faire régner la Pax americana. « *Si une nation (...) s'acquitte de ses obligations, elle n'a pas à craindre l'ingérence des États-Unis. Dans l'hémisphère occidental, l'adhésion des États-Unis à la doctrine Monroe peut contraindre ce pays, même à contrecœur; dans des cas flagrants de méfaits ou d'impuissance, à exercer un pouvoir de police internationale* », affirma Roosevelt. Là où Monroe édictait les interdictions des Européens, Theodore Roosevelt exprime les droits nouveaux que s'arrogent les Etats-Unis.

En dépit de multiples interventions et de coups d'Etat orchestrés par les Etats-Unis après la seconde guerre mondiale, cette prétention fut officiellement abandonnée par Franklin D. Roosevelt dès 1934. Donald Trump revient aux temps anciens, jouant sur les mêmes ressorts que Theodore Roosevelt : des territoires soucieux de s'affranchir d'une vieille tutelle mais ne pouvant vraiment franchir le pas sans aide en raison de leur faiblesse. C'est le cas du Groenland avec le Danemark, dont M. Trump estime manifestement qu'il est à prendre, mettant en avant des prétendues menaces à la sécurité américaine comme à Panama. Les fruits parfois peuvent tomber, par intimidation, sans que la moindre invasion soit nécessaire. C'est le pari de Trump face à ses adversaires tétanisés.

### Document 10 - Trump hates 'globalism.' But he seems to like imperialism.

*Ahead of his second term, an emboldened Trump has articulated a vision of hemispheric expansionism. What's he playing at?*  
*The Washington Post*, January 10, 2025  
Column by Ishaan Tharoor, Today's Worldview Newsletter

**“The future does not belong to the globalists,”** declared then-President Donald Trump at the dais of the U.N. General Assembly in 2019. The audience of dignitaries in New York and most analysts were already accustomed to the key pillars of the Trumpist stump speech: A coterie of jet-setting global elites with no allegiance to the lands of their birth, aligned with liberal technocrats, were the source of all societal ills. Multilateral international institutions were an impediment to national interests. America must always come first.

Ahead of his second term, an emboldened Trump has not dropped his scorn for “globalists.” But in recent weeks, his populism has been overshadowed by something else: a newfangled 21st century imperialism.

Much to the bemusement of U.S. allies, Trump has articulated a vision of hemispheric expansionism. He called for the U.S.'s acquisition of Greenland, an autonomous Danish territory. He has repeatedly suggested Canada should become the U.S.'s 51st state. He raised forcefully retaking control of the Panama Canal, complaining about fees for passage and Chinese influence over the strategic waterway. In perhaps the mildest provocation of the bunch, he said the Gulf of Mexico should be renamed the Gulf of America.

**Trump's hectoring has drawn immediate rejection.** At a news conference, Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum pointed to a 17th century map of the New World, where the bulk of the North American landmass was labeled “America Mexicana.” The Gulf of Mexico, for what it's worth, was named as such by cartographers well before the United States had won independence.

And while the president-elect cast his country's northern border as an “artificially drawn line” that can be erased to create a continental superpower, few in Canada are going along with the joke. “That's not going to happen,” Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau told CNN on Thursday, adding that a cornerstone of Canadian identity is that they are not American. He suggested Trump was trying to distract from the conversation about the harm his proposed tariffs on Canadian exports may cause U.S. consumers.

José Raúl Mulino, the president of Panama, responded that “every square meter of the Panama Canal and its adjacent zone belongs to Panama and will remain so.” Diplomats stressed that there was no truth to claims by Trump and his associates that 25 Chinese troops are controlling the pivotal waterway.

Denmark has repeatedly said Greenland is not for sale to the United States. Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen convened a meeting of Danish party leaders on Thursday to weigh how to respond to Trump’s threats. Pipluk Lyng, a Greenland lawmaker, told Politico that the United States ought to reckon with its own history of abuse of Arctic Indigenous peoples before claiming the lands of others.

30 “We know how they treat the Inuit in Alaska,” Lyng said. “Make that great before trying to invade us.”

After Trump refused to rule out using economic or military force to achieve his goals in Greenland, a number of European leaders issued their own statements of concern. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said there was a “certain incomprehension” about Trump’s statements. “The principle of the inviolability of borders applies to every country no matter whether that’s in the east or the west,” he said, gesturing to Western opposition to Russia’s landgrabs in Ukraine.

35 **So what’s Trump playing at?** The Wall Street Journal’s conservative editorial board argued that Trump is, in the instance of Canada, simply “trolling.” But his designs over Greenland may have more substance, and tap into a long-standing U.S. fascination with Greenland, which U.S. officials also eyed at the time they purchased Alaska in the mid-19th century. Its mineral resources and strategic position in the Arctic make it all the more geopolitically relevant in the 21st century. On Wednesday, Trump’s son, Donald Trump Jr., took an entourage on a private visit of the island, replete with photo-ops with 40 Greenlanders wearing MAGA-style red hats.

For Trump, talk of annexation and expansion is part of his brand of populism. “It makes America dream again, that we’re not just this sad, low-testosterone, beta male slouching in our chair, allowing the world to run over us,” Charlie Kirk, a far-right influencer who accompanied Donald Trump Jr. on his trip to Greenland, said in a recent podcast. “It is the resurrection of masculine American energy. It is the return of Manifest Destiny.”

45 Some analysts have offered a less metaphoric interpretation of Trump’s recent moves. John Bolton, Trump’s former national security adviser turned vocal critic, told the Associated Press that Trump’s strategy is “transactional, ad hoc, episodic and really viewed from the prism of how it helps Donald Trump.” Analysts have long mused over the efficacy of Trump’s “madman” approach to foreign affairs, his hectoring of allies and frequent use of threats. But it’s not clear what he stands to gain from this latest episode.

50 “When you do things that make it less likely you’re going to achieve the objectives, that’s not master bargaining, that’s crazy,” Bolton said.

There’s arguably no contradiction between Trump’s neo-imperialist belligerence and the America First, anti-globalist populism he has voiced for much of his political career. After all, 19th century mercantilism — the antecedent of the economic worldview that seems to grip Trump and advocates of tariffs and other protectionist measures in his camp — was a core 55 element of 19th century imperialism. And the president-elect’s recent demands appear to signal that the putative gloves are coming off.

“Trump, [Elon] Musk, and their minions appear to be convinced that they can bully the entire world,” wrote Stephen Walt in Foreign Policy, adding. “This approach goes well beyond quid-pro-quo transactionalism; it’s a blatant attempt to blackmail, bully, and cow others into preemptive concessions, based on their fear of what Trump might do to hurt them.”

**« Après la “mondialisation heureuse”, nous pourrions assister à un phénomène étrange en Europe : la “vassalisation heureuse” »**

**Tribune** Gilles Gressani, enseignant à Sciences Po, dirige la revue *Le Grand Continent* et préside le Groupe d’études géopolitiques.

Gilles Gressani, spécialiste en géopolitique, analyse, dans une tribune au « Monde », les conséquences des ambitions impérialistes de Donald Trump, qui entreprend de « refaçonner l’Occident » pour faire des Etats-Unis le seul Etat souverain. *Le Monde*, 23 janvier 2025

Contrairement à 2017, Donald Trump a un plan plus radical, mieux défini. En s’appuyant sur la coalition qui l’a porté au pouvoir, en alliant les laissés-pour-compte d’une société cassée aux oligarques de la Silicon Valley, le président des 5 Etats-Unis est en train de mener une profonde consolidation impériale. Washington ne deviendrait pas la capitale d’une Amérique isolationniste, mais le centre rayonnant d’un grand espace. La frontière s’ouvre : du Panama à la planète Mars, en passant par le Groenland. La géopolitique est de retour à 10 la Maison Blanche.

Dans un élan et une ambition qui détonnent par rapport au débat asphyxié de nos espaces politiques, Donald Trump évoque la « *destinée manifeste* », signe des dizaines de décrets exécutifs, promet l’expulsion de plusieurs millions de 15 sans-papiers, annonce un plan d’investissement faramineux pour gagner la course à l’intelligence artificielle, et lance un *meme coin [une cryptomonnaie]* à son effigie qui démultiplie sa fortune.

Au Capitole, dans une cérémonie aux airs de sacre, rendue 20 inédite par la présence pour la première fois de plusieurs chefs

d'Etat et de gouvernement étrangers, il déclare : « *Mon message aux Américains aujourd'hui est qu'il est temps pour nous d'agir à nouveau avec le courage, la vigueur et la vitalité de la plus grande civilisation de l'histoire.* »

## 25 Porter le trumpisme sur Mars

Il est facile d'être pris de court par la force de cette mise en scène. Nous devons toutefois chercher à comprendre ce qui se joue, sans déférence ni fatalisme. Sur le plan interne, la matrice politique du nouveau trumpisme s'appuie sur une nouvelle forme de césarisme profondément influencée par le numérique, sa culture, son infrastructure et ses modèles économiques radicalement monopolistiques.

Dans ce nouveau régime, l'innovation technologique et l'extrême concentration de la richesse sont articulées à un souverainisme expansif, militarisé et à une politique agressive de protection identitaire. Dans l'intention de Donald Trump et des élites qui participent à la consolidation de cette doctrine – que nous pourrions appeler « technocésarisme » –, il faut accompagner la transformation d'une république redondante et inefficace en un empire organisé pour faire passer l'Amérique à l'échelle.

Sur le plan externe, ce projet profondément révisionniste s'articule en deux temps. Il s'agit d'abord de refaçonner l'Occident pour qu'il ne reste plus qu'une seule entité dotée de souveraineté : les Etats-Unis.

Fondant sa puissance sur une domination sans partage des domaines militaire et numérique, qui fusionnent d'une manière toujours plus évidente, Donald Trump entreprend de transformer l'OTAN en une sorte de pacte de Varsovie, en neutralisant toute poche de souveraineté concurrente résiduelle. Qu'il s'agisse des positions européennes sur l'espace public numérique ou sur le climat, jusqu'aux prétentions territoriales d'alliés pourtant fidèles comme le Danemark, il vise à empêcher toute autonomie réelle. Il s'agira alors de projeter à l'échelle planétaire cet Occident consolidé, et enfin intégralement aligné sur les intérêts de la métropole, en neutralisant la Chine, la seule puissance qui pourrait menacer l'hégémonie américaine.

Dans cette stratégie, Elon Musk joue un rôle pivot. Sur le plan interne, l'homme le plus riche du monde est le moteur du technocésarisme, qu'il incarne dans sa vision futuriste d'une civilisation multiplanétaire portant le trumpisme sur Mars.

Sur le plan externe, le propriétaire de X est devenu le capitaine d'une nouvelle compagnie des Indes, installée au sein du gouvernement fédéral, censée permettre à Washington de s'approvisionner en données – la soie et les épices de notre temps – tout en imposant sa domination aux divers peuples d'Asie, d'Afrique et, surtout, d'Europe. Avec un objectif : remplacer des adversaires potentiels par des affidés affaiblis et alignés.

Ce projet impérial change de signe à la mondialisation, sans l'arrêter. La circulation des personnes, de l'information et des biens atteint un niveau sans précédent et reste, de manière parfois contradictoire, dans l'intérêt de la coalition trumpiste.

Gilles Gressani,

C'est la phase libérale de la mondialisation – structurée par l'ouverture, l'horizontalité, la fin des frontières – que Washington cherche à boucler définitivement.

Ce nouveau trumpisme impérial propose d'offrir une solution technocésariste aux crises et aux contradictions qu'elle a engendrées : économique, d'abord, avec des inégalités qui ont écartelé de l'intérieur nos systèmes politiques. Une crise de l'autonomie du politique, ensuite, de l'efficacité de l'Etat empêtré entre réformes impossibles, poussées technocratiques, inconséquences stratégiques et indécision. Une crise idéologique et anthropologique, enfin, liée aux chocs des modes de vie face à une culture centrifuge incapable de reconnaître et d'impliquer les masses des espaces périphériques.

## 90 Obéir ou réagir

Après la « mondialisation heureuse », nous pourrions assister à un phénomène étrange en Europe. Avec *Le Grand Continent [revue de géopolitique fondée en 2019, dont l'auteur de ce texte est directeur de publication]*, nous avons proposé de le désigner par une nouvelle notion : « vassalisation heureuse ».

La vassalisation heureuse passe par un deal particulièrement troublant, tant l'échange paraît asymétrique, transactionnel et unilatéral : l'obéissance et le refus de toute autonomie, en échange d'une forme de protection contre l'agression impériale. Dans le vertige des transformations radicales que nous devrions accompagner, cet alignement promet une forme de stabilité à des systèmes politiques sans cap, au prix d'une victime collatérale : notre souveraineté.

Pour parvenir à installer ce régime, Trump et Musk ont un obstacle externe : la France et l'Union européenne. C'est pour cela qu'ils cherchent aujourd'hui à nous faire croire à l'inéluctabilité de leur projet, en nous faisant douter de notre force et de notre puissance. Cela convient bien à un système définitivement convaincu de l'inévitabilité de son décrochage et incapable de réagir, préférant se résigner à une agonie pourvu qu'elle soit lente, promettant à une dernière génération de profiter de ce qui reste des dividendes de la paix. Nous sommes comme un lapin hypnotisé par les phares d'un véhicule.

Les Etats-Unis de Donald Trump ne sont toutefois pas encore la Russie de Poutine. La démocratie américaine est dotée de contre-pouvoirs et dispose de capacités d'action. Les contradictions internes à la coalition trumpiste sont nombreuses – et la consolidation impériale est loin d'être aboutie. Il s'agirait de comprendre stratégiquement le rôle historique de l'Europe. Ce petit cap d'Asie pourrait aujourd'hui se donner cet objectif : protéger la démocratie en Amérique et propulser l'idée républicaine au XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle.

Face aux tentations de la vassalisation heureuse, l'Europe reviendra-t-elle un jour ou assisterons-nous passivement à sa marginalisation totale ? Donald Trump et Elon Musk sont en train de construire un projet impérial – mais, comme le disait le boxeur américain Mike Tyson, « *tout le monde a un plan, jusqu'à ce qu'il reçoive la première droite dans la figure* ».