

# UK Prime Minister May under attack over meeting with Trump

By Robert Stevens and Chris Marsden  
30 January 2017

The crisis engulfing Theresa May's UK government has worsened, following her meeting with US President Donald Trump.

Shortly after May departed from the US Friday, Trump enacted an executive order banning immigrants from seven predominantly Muslim countries for an initial 90 days. The order applies both to new immigrants and current permanent residents (green card holders) from Iran, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen.

May flew straight to Turkey for talks with President Recep Erdogan, the leader of the ruling Islamic Justice and Development Party. Erdogan made over 40,000 arrests following last July's failed coup attempt and is preparing for a broader military offensive against the Kurds in Syria and Iraq. He has also forged an alliance with Russia and is seeking to grant himself dictatorial powers in order to suppress domestic dissent.

Following the pattern set by her ingratiating performance with Trump in Washington, May raised none of these issues with Erdogan and Prime Minister Binali Yildirim as she signed a £100 million agreement for BAE Systems to collaborate with Turkish companies to build a fighter jet. May was still left reeling as the bombshell from Trump exploded under her feet.

In a press conference with Yildirim, May initially tried to avoid answering questions as to her position on Trump's anti-Muslim edict. When asked, for the third time, she would only comment, "The United States is responsible for United States policy on refugees. The UK is responsible for UK policy on refugees."

May's attempt to bury her head in the sand came unstuck within hours.

In the UK, Trump's order—under which those with dual nationality but were born in one of the named

countries are also banned—will affect many British citizens. Olympic gold medallist Sir Mo Farah, a British citizen, was born in Somalia but lives in the US city of Portland, Oregon. The athlete issued a statement: "It's deeply troubling that I will have to tell my children that daddy might not be able to come home—to explain why the President has introduced a policy that comes from a place of ignorance and prejudice."

An MP from May's ruling Conservative party, Nadhim Zahawi, said since he was born in Iraq and was now de-facto banned from the US, he would not be able to visit his sons who are studying at Princeton University.

There are 256,000 British citizens who hold dual nationality with just three of the countries on the Trump ban list—Iran, Iraq and Somalia who are all affected.

With protests taking place in the US and throughout the world, May was forced into an abrupt U-turn. A statement from her Downing Street Office read, "Immigration policy in the United States is a matter for the government of the United States. But we do not agree with this kind of approach and it is not one we will be taking."

During a conference call Sunday, May was said to have "ordered" Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson and Home Secretary Amber Rudd to phone their American counterparts to discuss the US travel ban.

Public revulsion continued to grow, with an online petition calling for May's government to cancel a planned state visit by Trump to the UK to meet the queen. During her press conference with Trump she made the visit central to the re-forging of the "special relationship" between the two countries. The petition, however, has gained over 1.2 million signatures, far

above the 100,000 required to be considered for a debate in Britain's parliament.

Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn, who had earlier let it be known he was planning to meet with Trump in the summer, was obliged to register a belated protest. He told the *Guardian* May would be "failing the British people" if she did not call off the visit by Trump. The call was also backed by Ruth Davidson, the leader of the Scottish Conservatives.

The existential crisis enveloping the British ruling elite is encapsulated in the weekend's political turmoil. Since the referendum vote last year for the UK to leave the European Union, May has made closer political and economic ties to the US the centrepiece of her programme of a "global Britain" supposedly turning out to the world. Preparing free trade agreements, she has made trips in just a few months to India, Bahrain and New Zealand as well as the US and Turkey.

May stated last week that she planned to visit China "relatively soon" to deepen Britain's trading arrangements with the world's second-largest economy. She told the *Financial Times*, "We're obviously looking at our trading relationship with China ... I think one of the things that was interesting to people in Davos was the speech that President Xi gave and the comments he made about the importance of free trade around the world."

In response, a Chinese official said, "China can potentially help the UK at a difficult time and the UK can also help China. ... We are just waiting to see what Mr. Trump's real policies will be."

The more Trump makes clear the ramifications of his "America First" agenda, based on a ferocious assertion of economic nationalism and protectionism, the more surely May's own strategy is going up in smoke.

As well as threatening Mexico with tariffs, Trump and his team have threatened to impose 45 percent penalties on Chinese imports at the risk of sparking a global trade war with devastating results for workers in America and internationally. Just days after taking office, referring to Chinese-controlled islands in disputed waters in the South China Sea, Trump's press secretary, Sean Spicer, threatened, "[W]e are going to make sure we defend international territories from being taken over by one country."

Now Trump has pitted the US not just against the seven named Muslim countries, but the 1.5 billion

adherents of Islam and 50 majority-Muslim nations.

Germany, France and other European powers have already been alienated by Trump's open support for the breakup of the EU. May's grovelling before Trump places the UK on a collision course with the rest of the world.

In the UK, her government is now at odds with powerful sections of Britain's ruling elite who never wanted Brexit and will now view the promise of a renewed "special relationship" with the US as cold comfort.

Like Trump, May is provoking widespread political revulsion that can galvanise broad popular opposition to her. Having finished her trip to Turkey, she returns to the UK as the political firestorm over Brexit escalates.

Tomorrow, two days of debate will begin over May's Brexit bill on the triggering of the Article 50 legislation that begins the formal process of the UK's exit from the EU.

To underscore the fraught character of what lies ahead, one of the major concerns of the majority pro-Remain wing of the British ruling elite is the economically disastrous implications of leaving the European Union Single Market and Customs Union implied by May's support for an end to the EU's insistence on the free movement of labour.

In order to appeal to the most right-wing Euro-sceptic wing of her party and to win back support the Tories have haemorrhaged to the UK Independence Party, May has made anti-immigrant rhetoric a bedrock policy. This could see her government rolling out bans on immigrants not dissimilar to those being imposed by Trump. The right of up to 1 million EU nationals to remain in the UK is under threat in a way that will split up families and foster outrage just as surely as Trump's targeting of Muslims.

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