

President Biden is going to be equally challenging for the UK and the EU

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*Neither the EU nor the UK should be under any illusions about the outcome of this election: talking trade, security and wider global politics with President Biden is going to be difficult, writes **Tim Oliver** (Loughborough London). The one consolation is that it will be difficult in ways that British and European leaders, diplomats and officials will find less nauseating.*



President Trump's has shown nothing more than a mediocre understanding of the UK and European politics, Brexit, or the ideas of Boris Johnson and other European leaders. As a case in point, the substantive benefits for Johnson of his relationship with Trump have been minimal. Trump liked Johnson almost entirely because he saw in him a gratifying reflection of his own politics. It's meant that as with so many other countries and world leaders, the UK and Boris Johnson have struggled to deal with an administration that lacked anything resembling a strategy because the focus was on a President who has operated largely by impulse.



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That does not mean Biden's strategy will make life easy. The UK needs to remember that the 'Special Relationship' only goes so far. The core of the relationship remains intelligence, special forces and nuclear weapons. The US and UK trust each other in those three areas far more than they trust anyone else, largely thanks to long-standing and very close working relations between civil servants and military personnel. That

core has long been protected from the vagaries of presidential and prime ministerial relations or other tensions. That remains the case despite the past four years. While there are also strong economic links, such as between London and New York's financial industries, there are, as an advisor to a US Senator made clear to me many years ago, 'no special relationships in international trade.'

For a US President, and more importantly the US Congress (whoever controls the Senate or House), the special relationship they naturally care about most is that with American businesses and consumers. When you add to this that in international trade size matters a lot, there can be little doubt that US businesses and consumers will come out on top in any trade negotiations with the UK. Negotiating with the Biden Administration will, therefore, be another step along the steep learning curve about the realities of trade deals that Britain has been on since 2016.

The EU's economic size does not mean it can expect an easy ride. It is, along with the USA, the world's other economic and regulatory superpower (with China fast catching up). Their comparable size makes it difficult for either side to prevail on purely economic or regulatory grounds (even if the EU leads more on the latter). A US president, however, has the edge because the USA can call on the full spectrum of hard and soft powers. The USA can shape (or at least try to) the global economy, norms and institutions in ways the EU remains incapable of doing.

That does not mean the EU, or the UK, always have to work with the USA. A second Trump presidency would have seen both the EU and the UK try to find ways around US opposition to global cooperation on the environment or trade. Those efforts would have been far more difficult and likely to fail. Being able to at least work with rather than around the USA will make a Biden Administration more palatable. It means, however, that Europeans, Brits included, will spend the next four years looking to the USA for global leadership and agonising over who the next occupant of the White House will be in 2024.

This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of LSE Brexit, nor of the London School of Economics.