



The Ambassadors Series: British Ambassador Sir Kim Darroch Discusses the Evolving U.S.-U.K. Relationship

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Hudson Institute, Washington, D.C. Headquarters
1201 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Suite 400
Washington, DC 20004
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Please note: This transcript is based off a recording and mistranslations may appear in text. The names of participants in the Audience Q&A have been removed. A video of the event is available: <https://www.hudson.org/events/1631-the-ambassadors-series-british-ambassador-discusses-the-evolving-u-s-u-k-relationship112018>

Kenneth Weintstein: Well, good afternoon, and welcome to the Betsy and Walter Stern Conference Center here at Hudson Institute. I'm Ken Weinstein, president and CEO of Hudson Institute. And I'm delighted that we have a capacity crowd, on what is a rainy Monday here in Washington after the Thanksgiving holiday, for the latest installation of our Ambassadors Series, which features leading figures on Embassy Row in conversation with Hudson Institute's Ravenel B. Curry III Distinguished Fellow in Strategy and Statesmanship, Walter Russell Mead. I want to also acknowledge the presence of our good friends in the C-SPAN viewing audience, and we appreciate all the work that C-SPAN does to bring our policy work and the policy work of our fellow think tanks to people around the country, especially at this critical time.

We at Hudson are especially delighted as well to welcome the British ambassador to the United States, Sir Kim Darroch, here to Hudson Institute for a discussion that could hardly be more timely, given developments back home, developments in Brussels over this weekend. This has been yet another absolutely extraordinary week in the debate over Brexit, and we look forward to the ambassador's observations shortly. Hudson Institute's mission is to promote U.S. international leadership and global engagement for a secure, free and prosperous future. Central to our work is promoting a great deal of work on U.S.-European relations. We have various initiatives on U.S.-EU relations, U.S.-German relations, U.S.-French relations, relations with the Baltics, the Scandinavian nations, Finland, among others. And we have a very long history of work on the U.K and the U.K.-U.S. relationship, including that of our Senior Fellow Irwin Stelzer, who was based for many years in London. Our work today on U.S.-U.K. relations is led by Senior Fellow Craig Kennedy, the former president of the German Marshall Fund.

And I'm delighted to note, within that context, that Hudson Institute, in partnership with our friends, the Henry Jackson Society, will be holding a bilateral and bipartisan Congress-Parliament workshop in mid-December in Oxford. Now, of course, no one is better suited in Washington to give us a better sense of the current dynamics over Brexit, the future of U.K.-EU relations and U.K.-U.S. relations than Ambassador Darroch. He has held many of the United Kingdom's leading diplomatic posts, including serving as national security adviser to then Prime Minister David Cameron, where he handled such thorny issues as the rise of ISIS, Syria and Iraq, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Prior to serving as national security adviser, Sir Kim was the U.K. Permanent Representative to the EU from 2007 to 2011, most notably during the Eurozone crisis, and prior to that period, he was the EU adviser to the prime minister.

Sir Kim, of course, will be in conversation with Walter Russell Mead, the dean of observers of U.S. foreign policy. Walter's "Global View" column in The Wall Street Journal is the most widely-read foreign policy column today in the United States. His numerous books, of course, include the award-winning of "God And Gold: Britain, America, And The Making Of The Modern World," about the Anglo-American tradition of world power from the 17th century to the present. Without any further ado, it's my pleasure to turn it over to Walter.

Walter Russell Mead: Thank you, Ken. Thanks for being here. And again, welcome to all the folks watching on C-SPAN, as well as all the people in the hall. Sir Kim, Ambassador Darroch, what do you prefer?

Sir Kim Darroch: Just Kim is fine.

Walter Russell Mead: All right. Well, I think the question that everybody wants to get an answer to these days is what's going on with Brexit? We seem to have a Schrodinger's Brexit.

Sir Kim Darroch: (Laughter).

Walter Russell Mead: We're not sure whether Britain is going to be in or out of the EU, or what's going to happen, I guess, December 12. So can you tell me what the state of play is?

Sir Kim Darroch: Yeah. I thought we might do other subjects rather than Brexit today, actually. But...

(LAUGHTER)

Kim Darroch: Just joking. But what the prime minister has negotiated - and I think it's an exceptional achievement. And I say that having done 15 years of my career on European Union work. She has delivered what the British people voted for, which is an orderly, smooth exit from the European Union, on the basis of this deal. It's a deal which delivers what the British people voted for back in June 2016. It provides for regaining control of our borders, of our

money and of our laws, but it also - with this transitional or, more correctly, implementation period, which lasts from the day we leave, 29 March 2019, until the end of December 2020, so it's a 19-, 20-month period, when, for the business community, everything will remain as it is, and they have that continuity and that assurance of continuity through that time, while we negotiate the details of the future relationship. But it also provides for us to continue to cooperate with the EU in areas which are of benefit to us, whether it's economic or national security or foreign policy or data exchange.

So in the sense of trying to find - remember, the Brexit vote was quite close. I mean, it was 17-and-a-bit million to 16 million - 52 percent to 48 percent. So the prime ministers have to try to find a balance between those who are concerned about the impact of Brexit and those who are enthusiastic about it. Well, I think she's found it. And though, as Jean-Claude Juncker said at the conclusion of the European Council yesterday, this is the best deal that can be done. And so he hopes that he gets the support of the British Parliament in December, as do I.

Walter Russell Mead: How does that look?

Sir Kim Darroch: At the moment, it looks - I mean, she has got, first of all, support from the cabinet. That was about 10, 12 days ago. She has now got support from the other 27 European Union leaders. This is the third stage. It's the most difficult stage. And no one would deny that it looks quite a tight rope to get across, to get this vote in Parliament. But if you're a strong supporter of Brexit and you vote against this deal, you are risking no Brexit. You're essentially letting the perfect be the enemy of the good.

If you are a strong supporter of Remain and you vote against this deal, then you are risking a new deal, halt Brexit, which most observers believe would be highly disruptive, if not chaotic and could be quite damaging to the economy. So this is the right way through. So yes, it looks, at the moment, like - if you're a journalist - I'm having quite a lot of fun now finding people who say they're going to vote against. But when they come out, then I think you'll find quite a lot of people actually think this is the best way forward. So it's difficult. It's going to be tense. But I was back in London last week as it happens, and they are confident, inside the government, that they can get a majority for this.

Walter Russell Mead: By very cleverly having an unwritten constitution. Written makes it hard for foreigners to figure out where things are going. But if the government were to lose the vote on Brexit, is that the kind of vote that normally breaks up a government, and you get an election or a new prime minister?

Sir Kim Darroch: I mean, what the government is carefully avoiding saying is what they will were the vote to be lost. I'm afraid I can't announce any great sort of way forward, Plan B, now. The intention is very much to win the vote and to persuade enough MPs between now and then who are thinking about their positions, that they actually - they're best route forward is support this. By the way, there was an opinion poll over the weekend, suggests there's quite a lot of public support, a majority of public support for the deal that the Prime Minister has done. And so if you are, you know, representing constituents, which MPs are doing, then you might think quite carefully about where the public view is. But I mean, as a technical matter, if the government lost the vote, then they would have to decide where to go next, whether to proceed to leaving without a deal, which is an option, or whether to ask for an extension or find some other way forward. But there is nothing I can say about what they will do because that, as I said, isn't the plan.

Walter Russell Mead: Would they need to have another vote in Parliament before a hard exit, or do they just - if they do nothing and the date for Brexit arrives, then the U.K. is out of the EU without a vote?

Sir Kim Darroch: Yeah. This is all speculative, and I'm no expert on parliamentary procedure. But I don't - it's not obvious to me, if this vote were lost and if the government decided that leaving without a deal was the way forward, whether that - it's not clear to me that needs a further vote in Parliament. But as I said, this is speculative, and I couldn't claim that's a definitive answer. You would probably get different answers. If you asked a dozen MPs, you'd get a dozen different answers on that, so.

Walter Russell Mead: One of the key issues in the negotiations, as they went forward, was the question of the Irish border. And that's particularly politically tricky, I understand, because the government depends on a Northern Irish Unionist Party. By the way, for Americans, a unionist party means they're in favor of union with the United Kingdom, not in favor of union with the rest of Ireland. So how has that party's weight in politics affected things? I gather they, right now, seem very skeptical of the deal.

Sir Kim Darroch: Well, I think they have 10 members of Parliament, and they were in full agreement to support the government. So you see, those are 10 significant votes, given how tight things are in Parliament. But the Prime Minister has really made exceptional efforts to deliver a deal which does what she promised, which is no re-establishment of a hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. That was her promise, and that is what she has delivered. And it's been controversial within her own party amongst her own supporters, but she has done it. So she has absolutely gone to the edge to deliver on what she has promised on that. And you now have the transitional period - the implementation period. While we stay, basically, within a customs arrangement with the EU, there will be no need for a hard border or any re-establishing border controls in Northern Ireland.

The intention is, in that 19-month period, that we will do a deal with the EU that keeps trade as frictionless as possible. And I have to put it in those terms because we also want to do free trade deals with the rest of the world. So we have to find a balance going forward on that. But we think we can do a trade deal with the EU that keeps trade as frictionless as possible. That means a minimum of controls on borders. That would keep the border open. But if we can't do that deal in the implementation period - this 19 months, then you have the famous backstop, which, essentially, will allow these - it's a temporary thing. Distressingly, it's temporary - the backstop that will allow these arrangements to continue until we have done that trade deal. But it's in both sides' interests to do a trade deal. The EU sells a lot of stuff to us, and we do in the other direction. So I would be confident that we will do the deal, hopefully within the implementation period, and the question of needing the backstop or using the backstop won't arise.

Walter Russell Mead : Well, let's assume that things go roughly as planned and that Brexit goes through. Then, presumably, Britain will need a foreign policy for post-Brexit. What - and you talk about free trade agreements. Presumably, Britain will want some kind of free trade agreement or trade agreement with the United States. What would that look like? What is Britain hoping to achieve?

Sir Kim Darroch: On foreign policy generally, Walter, I mean, remember that we are permanent members of the Security Council. We're the second-biggest contributors to NATO. We have a leadership role in the Commonwealth. We will continue to cooperate on foreign policy and union. We are global players in terms of defense. We are - we have military people - often very small numbers, but stationed in dozens of countries around the world. So we feel we are good global players, and the intention is that that will continue, if not be enhanced in the future. That's the bigger vision. In terms of a free trade deal with the U.S., we want, as we've said and as the U.S. administration has echoed, an ambitious deal which covers both goods and services, which exploits the similarities in our two economies, which increases what is already a very, very big amount of bilateral trade - something like 200 billion a year, and we send more than 20 percent of our exports to the U.S. So that's already a big - the biggest single bilateral trade relationship, but it can be much bigger. And that should ultimately, we hope, involve improved no-tariff, no-quota access for goods from us coming into the - from the U.K. coming to the U.S., and vice versa, and, hopefully, the removal of barriers on services as well. So it's as ambitious as we can get.

Walter Russell Mead: What about people? I mean, certainly, a lot of American bankers are in London and others. But I know immigration - is migration sensitive in both countries?

Sir Kim Darroch: Yeah. I mean, the post-Brexit immigration arrangements - we know broadly where the direction we are going in, but the detail still has to be finalized. But the likelihood is, after Brexit, a profile - we still are a country that will have people coming in because we need them for our workforce. But a profile may change, so it will be fewer from Europe and more from the rest of the world. But in terms of the American companies that are invested in a very valuable part of the British economy who talk to us about their concerns about needing to be able to bring the best and the brightest in, certainly, it's our intention that should continue to be the case. And we tell these companies that we value their presence in the U.K. and we want them to stay. We want them to expand. And we will adopt immigration policies that give them the kind of supply of talent that they need.

Walter Russell Mead: Is the U.S.-U.K. relationship, from what you can see, still special? And if so, what makes it different?

Sir Kim Darroch: I mean, you can debate over whether the word, special, is the one you want to use, or I can just tell you that it is both exceptionally, uniquely wide and deep. So whether you look at trade, where the U.S. is certainly our biggest export market, whether you look at inward investment, where a million Brits go to work in American

companies in the U.K. and a million Americans go to work in British companies over here, if you look at culture, I'm just, you know, fascinated by just how many British actors seem to find employment in Hollywood. Maybe fewer American actors come over to the U.K., but they're very welcome.

Walter Russell Mead: Have you noticed that they often - the British often play villains in Revolutionary War...

Sir Kim Darroch: Yeah.

Walter Russell Mead: ...Movies?

Sir Kim Darroch: That used to be the case, you know? But I just remember a British actor playing Martin Luther King in "Selma" a few years back, and that's about as iconic a role as you can imagine. So when we've managed to get that kind of level, then I think we're doing OK. But - and that's before you get into military relationship, where there is just a huge amount going on. We are buying something like \$50 billion worth of U.S. equipment over the next decade - 130 of F-35s, 50 Apache helicopters, 9 P-8 maritime patrol aircraft. There's the whole cooperation on our nuclear weapon program. There are something like 800 or 900 Brits embedded in the U.S. armed forces at any one time. We have dozens of projects going on all the time in terms of operational weapon systems. National security and intelligence - the relationship between the intelligence security agencies is closer than it's ever been now. Look at that across the whole breadth of the relationship, and it is exceptional and unique. So I think the word, special, is appropriate.

Walter Russell Mead: I think one challenge that must give you personally is when Washington is as polarized as it is and American politics are bitter in many ways, as someone who wants to maintain - Britain has a long history of working effectively with both parties in the United States. How do you manage to keep your channels open and communications clear with both parties?

Sir Kim Darroch: To be honest - excuse me - to be honest, Walter, it really isn't a problem, at least hasn't been in my 2 1/2 years here. We find open doors and a welcome on both sides of the political aisle. I spend two afternoons a week, whenever Congress is in session, visiting and meeting Senators and Congressmen, members of the House of Representatives. I always do a combination of Republicans and Democrats, and, you know, we get a welcome in both sides. And we have - if you've been to it, if you haven't, we'll invite you - the residence is built for large parties, and we have a lot of them. And, again, we always make them bipartisan. And we find, you know, both sides of the political spectrum come. So the British ambassador and his British mission can tell you it is no problem. I mean, I recognize what you say because I read about it a lot - that part of politics to be partisan here. But for the Brits, we're getting to work on both sides.

Walter Russell Mead: All right, maybe that's a bipartisan consensus in favor of Scotch whisky. I don't know, but it's good to hear. After Brexit, you're going to have a lot of complicated issues with the EU and the eurozone. Still, you'll have a large economic relationship. How is Britain going to manage that portfolio? Will it be primarily through the representative in Brussels, through national missions? How are you going to manage it?

Sir Kim Darroch: It's a good question. And, certainly, we will need a substantial - I headed the U.K. representation in Brussels for five years. It is quite a large mission. Here is larger, but it's quite a large mission. And I don't think it's going to be much smaller post-Brexit. I looked across at countries that were outside the EU, including, by the way, your U.S. mission, and they were all quite sizable because there's a lot to cover. And with the kind of - excuse me - close and cooperative relationship that we want with the European partners post-Brexit, I think we'll need to have quite a lot of people there. But we are also in the process of expanding somewhat bilateral embassies in most of the main EU member states. So there will be a big role of diplomacy, both bilaterally and the multilateral institution in terms of the EU post-Brexit. It's not just, of course, the commission that you need to talk to. You need to talk to the other member states to try to influence decisions taken. You need to talk to the European Parliament and the other institutions. So it's a big job.

Walter Russell Mead: We're seeing the sort of emergence - there have always been some factions in the EU, but it appears both that, you know, the different political parties in the Parliament are becoming stronger, but also, you're getting groups of countries - the Visegrad types, the new Hanseatic countries. People seem to be organizing in

different ways. Is that some - and, obviously, some of these groups will have positions more in sync with British ideas. Is this going to be - going to play a role in how Britain thinks?

Sir Kim Darroch: I think - well, honestly, that it's long been a feature of the EU, particularly the expanded EU - 27 members. That was the reality when I was ambassador to the EU - 28 with Croatia. There's long been this - these subgroupings. They tend to be quite fluid, by the way, because you've got subgroupings around issues. Every time the EU budget negotiations come up, those member states that are basically contributors to the budget, as we are, at the moment, tend to form one group, and those who are mainly recipients of the budget tend to form another. You get geographical groupings, as you've described.

You've always had that particular alliance between France and Germany - the kind of Franco-German motor. We used to work very closely - still do - other members with the Nordic countries and with Netherlands. But all these things are fluid and can change. They can be issues-based, as I say, or geographically based. And in the end, when you go to the European Council, you need everyone to agree to the conclusions. So however you have organized your discussions up to that point, in the end, everyone has a say. By the way, also with the groupings, you find - or in EU groupings, you find political groupings. The right-wing party's a part of European People's Party and the left wing is part of the European Socialist Party. And there are other, smaller groups there are as well. So there's a whole range of different formations.

Walter Russell Mead: That certainly has...

Sir Kim Darroch: Sorry I'm such an EU geek. Having done 15 years of my career, I could go on forever about this stuff.

Walter Russell Mead: No but studying divisions in Europe has long been a core British skill - maybe. I realize those days are past. Looking further abroad to the Commonwealth, I know Britain gave up some very close economic relations - was forced to give them up with New Zealand, Australia when it entered the EU, or EC, I guess it still was. And that led to some bad feeling. You're now leaving the EU. Is there hope that these relationships can become much stronger and deeper? Are you looking for bilateral treaties with, say, Australia, another with New Zealand and Canada, or some sort of grouping? How are you approaching this?

Sir Kim Darroch: Again, these are decisions - final decisions that we take in this area, but I think the No. 1 priority when we come to post-Brexit trade deals will be with the U.S. But not that far behind, you will find trade deals with some Commonwealth countries. Of course, Australia, New Zealand and Canada are the obvious choices there. And then we're also very interested in doing deals with some of the bigger economies around the world. And India is obviously up there and also a Commonwealth member. So I think it'll be bilateral rather than trying to do some great multinational deal. And, obviously, there will be resource constraints with how many can you negotiate at once? But these will be high on the priority list.

Walter Russell Mead: The other big trend that we see in the world today, besides Brexit, is the return to geopolitics and great power competition. And Britain, you know, is with, as you say, global interests, but as a middle power, has to work out a relationship with China, with Russia. With Russia particularly, it seems you've had a very contentious relationship. And the Russians have sent agents to murder people on British soil. How is Britain going to approach Russia after Brexit, or just in general?

Sir Kim Darroch: Yeah. I mean, your current relations with Russia is right. I mean, when you see people poisoned with lethal nerve agents on our soil, it's quite difficult to have a normal, good, bilateral relationship, not to overstate things. So we wish relations with Russia weren't as they are. But when things like that happen, lots of other things that we disapprove of or disagree with Russia as - I mean, Ukraine, which erupted again over the weekend, is just one example. There are lots of aspects of Russian behavior we take issue with, so the relationship isn't good. And, you know, we've expelled a number of Russian diplomats, and they've expelled some Brits. We had good reason to. They didn't. And so we end up in a place where we're pretty small in terms of embassies as well. We would like to have better relations with Russia. We would have important commercial and economic and trading interests. They're, you know, big players on the global energy scene. They are big players internationally. They're members of the U.N. Security Council. But that's not possible while Russian behavior continues on the lines that it does. So things are not

going to change for us in terms of relations with Russia. We will keep the channels open. And we will keep talking to them until their behavior changes. That's just the sad reality.

Walter Russell Mead: With China, the situations may be more complex, that the relation in some ways looks - the bilateral relation, at least to an outsider, looks better. But there seem to be some emerging points of contentiousness there. Britain has stepped up its participation in the South China Sea and the South Pacific and seems to be announcing an intention to build up its presence in the Pacific.

Sir Kim Darroch: On relations with China, they have been on a steady and significant path of improvement for some years now. When I worked as national security adviser in David Cameron's first administration, that's when we started this upward trend. In my time in that job, it culminated in David Cameron taking 300 businessmen on a week-long tour of China with, you know, memorable visits and meeting President Xi and this kind of thing. And it's continued since then. And we believe very strongly that the way forward with China is centered on engagement and participation in the Chinese economy. And our exports are doing very well there, though it's not just about commercial activity. They were up, I think, 22 percent last year. So there's a lot that is good and strong and growing about the U.K.-China relationship.

All that said, what we do in the South China Sea is not intended as a kind of provocation to China. It's about exercising internationally recognized rights of freedom of navigation. And we will continue to do that because that's part of the international order. And our ships have a right to sail through certain - on certain routes, and they're going to do that. And so it's not intense provocation, just as an expression of our support for international law. There are issues about China's trade practices, mostly around intellectual property, where we share the concerns very much of the U.S. administration and where we would like to see changes. We are in - always talking to the Chinese about Hong Kong, where basically the deal we did a couple of decades ago on Hong Kong has worked well. But we keep watching it and keep ensuring that it's lived up to in both the letter and in spirit. So, you know, it's not a kind of, you know, monochrome wonderful relationship. There are issues and problems as there are in all bilateral relationships. But basically, we are - we feel in a good place with China.

Walter Russell Mead: There has been some commentary from Hong Kong that the one country two systems agreements are working less well and that Hong Kong's distinctive position is being eroded. Is that a concern?

Sir Kim Darroch: I don't think - I mean, again, I'm not a massive expert on Hong Kong. But my impression is that we think basically one country two systems is working well and that our Chinese partners are living up to the deal that was done two decades ago. Yes, there are issues sometimes. And we are - that's why we are talking basically all the time to Chinese administration about Hong Kong. But we think it basically works well. I mean, if you look at Hong Kong now, it is thriving. It is a real center of entrepreneurship and enterprise and commercial strength. I think the judiciary are notably independent there. So it's not perfect, but it's pretty good.

Walter Russell Mead: Let's turn quickly to the Middle East. And then I will invite the audience to ask some questions. At least from where I sit, it looks as if the most important trend in the Middle East today is the decline of Arab power, that we see a number of Arab states have been torn by contention. There are countries like Syria that was once a sort of bastion of Arab nationalism is not in control of its own territory. It has foreign forces present. The Gulf monarchies are looking at long-term declines in oil revenue and rising population, a number of trends that have them worried. Britain has a long history of engagement in this part of the world and a lot of relationships that go back for, in some cases, centuries. Do the Greeks have any advice for the Romans in this particular part of the world?

Sir Kim Darroch: Yeah. That's a very - I mean, that's a very big-picture assessment. And what you've described is quite a compelling view of what is happening there. And obviously, I remember being in Brussels as U.N. ambassador when the Arab Spring happened. And I remember the hoop that was around in the Western world then that this was something of a fresh start for Arab nations, would lead to great things. If you look at Libya and Syria in particular, that's not how it's worked out. So, as I say, there was quite a lot in your picture. But look, for us, it's still a hugely important part of the world, where as you say, there is a lot of British history. A lot of those lines that are disputed around the world, we drew. So people here are reminding us of that, which is nice of them.

And our bilateral relations, particularly with the Gulf countries but also with some of the countries of North Africa, are very, very important to us. We put a huge amount of foreign offices into them. I mean, if you want to look more optimistically at things, whether some of the things that are happening in the Gulf in particular in terms of more liberal ideas gaining hold may be a good sign for the future. In terms of oil reserves running out, well, yes, but quite a long time in the future. So these are still countries that will have a big say on world energy supplies in the future. In, you know, in both in Syria and in Libya, we are part of the international community that's trying to work hard to re-establish security and peace and political processes there. And we'll continue to put a lot of resources into that. But it's - I mean, it's a tragedy what's happened in both of those places, especially the loss of life and the destruction of Syria. I remember my friends in the foreign office who specialized in the Arab world used to think that Syria was just the best posting you can have. And it's a tragedy where the state that country now is in. And I question whether it is now retrievable, but we're trying.

Walter Russell Mead: We have some young people in the audience and some others watching on CNN. Do you have any advice for young people who are curious about the U.K., would like to follow U.K. news and learn more about the U.K.? What should they read? What should they do?

Sir Kim Darroch: You know, there are so many more ways of following current events, following the news now than there used to be. I've kind of got used now to news apps and doing stuff online. But I'm still old-fashioned enough to revert to a newspaper in my hands and read all that stuff. But nowadays, you know, when I wake up in the morning far too early, the first thing you look at is - there's a Politico early morning kind of news summary. And they - CNN one, there's a Washington Post one. And then there is the excellent Axios stuff as well which is new. So you have to go through all that before you get, you know, a proper newspaper in your hands. But there are so many ways of following what's going on in Britain now that young people will know more options than I do. I still think the BBC and the BBC websites are an extraordinary - the BBC's a wonderful institution. And what they do is great. And they're so objective and fair in their coverage. But, you know, in the age when there is a lot of criticism in the media, I think the British newspapers are great as well. I try and read all of them. I can see one or two of the - at the back there. I think you're great guys.

Walter Russell Mead: OK. He likes them all. All right. OK. Any questions from the audience at this point? Yes, ma'am. Please wait for the microphone. Please introduce yourself. And please make your questions short.

Audience Member: Thank you, Ambassador. U.S. and U.K. diplomats held a meeting in London 10 days ago with maritime insurance companies and commodities traders to seek ways to prevent North Korea's illicit ship-to-ship transfers and ways of evading U.N. sanctions. What is U.K.'s - the scope of U.K. and U.S.'s cooperation in helping block North Korea evading sanctions? And what is your case position to the calls for easing sanctions on North Korea at this time as called for by South Korea, Russia and China at a time when North Korea didn't take any significant denuclearization?

Walter Russell Mead: OK. I think we have the question.

Sir Kim Darroch: Look. We basically strongly support U.S. policy on North Korea. We think that it is dangerous for international security for North Korea to have a military nuclear program. We want to see denuclearization there. And it's clear to us that sanctions have been an important element in bringing North Korea to the table. But so far, you have had a historic summit between the two presidents. But we haven't seen yet real denuclearization happen in North Korea, and until we do, we think that sanctions need to continue. We have an embassy in Pyongyang. And so we know a bit about what's happening in the country. And sanctions are certainly having an impact. And, you know, that policy has to continue until the North Koreans deliver what they have promised, which is to end their military nuclear program. And yes, we do cooperate a lot with the U.S. administration on these issues. If we get denuclearization, we will cooperate on that as well because we have some expertise in these areas, but we're not there yet. So while we're not there, sanctions are the right policy. We will support and help to make them effective.

Walter Russell Mead: Yes, sir.

Audience Member: Thank you. Excuse me. You've mentioned books that would be recommended to the young people. I've recently discovered a British journalist during the '30s, '40s, up till early '50s, Douglas Reed, who was

very renowned internationally until he wrote, in particular, a book - "The Controversy Of Zion." Also, he wrote a book about American history titled "Far and Wide."

Walter Russell Mead: What's the question?

Audience Member: Yes. What are your thoughts about Douglas Reed? He should be well-known to you and to Britain. He's been a bit demonized, but I think young people may value his writings.

Sir Kim Darroch: Yeah. This is going to sound horribly ignorant of me, but I've not read any of his books. And so I don't know, I'm afraid. The best book I've read recently is called "Hello, World." And it is about - a book about impact - that sounds very kind of technical, it's actually beautifully written and very easy to understand for a non-expert like me. It's about the impact of algorithms across different areas, whether medicine or driverless cars or a whole range of different things. And if you want instruction - if you want a recommendation and a book worth reading, maybe all the modern generation understand all this stuff that and didn't need to know about it, but for me, this was the best piece of learning that I've done in recent months.

Walter Russell Mead: Thank you. In the back here.

Audience Member: Hello. Thank you very much for coming. It's very, very lovely to see you again. I've got actually three quick..

Walter Russell Mead: And your name. One question, please.

Audience Member: I'm sorry.

Walter Russell Mead: Choose one.

Audience Member: So you mentioned the Irish border, right? So the question is, do you know what it says in this particular deal regarding it as a soft border, hard border? And is there a likelihood that if this doesn't pass that it would be would be a referendum - a national referendum if this isn't passed know? Do you know what I'm saying?

Sir Kim Darroch: I mean, I - yes on...

Walter Russell Mead: Irish border and second referendum.

Sir Kim Darroch: If there is - I mean, I think a second referendum is extremely unlikely, given that both of the main political parties in Britain are opposed to it. So I don't see how you get from where we are now, with a deal on the table - (unintelligible) people support it or not support it - to a second referendum which would need a new act of Parliament. I just don't see the process that takes you there. On the Irish border, look, as I said earlier, I just think that prime minister has gone a long way as far as she possibly could to deliver a promise no hard border in Northern Ireland. And that's why you have - basically, it was part of the reasoning behind this implementation period when we basically have a customs arrangement that will be similar to the customs union during that 19 months until the end of December 2021. And if we don't get - sorry, 2020. And if you don't get by then the trade deal, then you have the backstop. And, I mean, that is as much as you could possibly have asked of her to ensure that people have confidence that she's delivered on her promise. And, you know, we are not going to jeopardize all the achievements of the Good Friday Agreement and beyond that by reimposing controls on the Irish border - we're just not.

Walter Russell Mead: Thank you. Yes, lady here yes. Yes.

Audience Member: Hi. Thank you. I just had a quick follow-up on sort of U.S.-UK trade relations post-Brexit. I know that you've said that you want the U.S. and U.K. to be aligned closely with the EU but also be able to have a free trade deal with the U.S. And I was wondering if there's any sense yet how both of those things can be true considering sort of the U.S.'s sort of opposing regulatory regime from what the EU does and the sort of customs arrangement that you will have in the interim.

Sir Kim Darroch: Yeah. Look. It's a good question. I understand why you ask it. And it goes to the core of the negotiations. Once we have got this Brexit deal agreed by the European Parliament - sorry, by the British Parliament - the European Parliament to agree it too - once that deal is agreed, it's the core of the future negotiation, the one that will start, I guess, by Easter next year, though I'm not announcing that's the start of it. That's my sort of expectation. And I think the two negotiations may run in parallel, but we will have to basically try and find a way through that keeps us frictionless, the border and trade between the U.K. and the EU, as possible, but allows us the freedom to do the kind of deal we want to do with the U.S. And on how we do it, another area is where I'm not an expert is in trade policy. But I am assured by trade experts that we can do something that is ambitious in both directions, both towards the EU and towards the U.S. Of course, I trust my colleagues. I think we can.

Walter Russell Mead: OK. Yes, sir.

Audience Member: Thank you. I'm a retired foreign service officer. I wanted to ask you about the intermediate nuclear force agreement which may be on its last legs. Britain has a nuclear force of its own. Do you see any future coordination with the European Union after Brexit on your nuclear force, or would that be done through NATO or some other channel?

Sir Kim Darroch: Yeah. On the - on INF, the INF treaty, I mean, there's no doubt the Russians were cheating on it. So we understand why the administration wants to withdraw from it. On the future, we don't see nuclear weapons as an issue from the EU. Actually, it's questionable whether defense - a tool should be an issue for the EU. But there is - we have supported a limited European kind of defense initiative designed to do things in parts of the world or activities which NATO either isn't appropriate for or doesn't want to do. But that's as far as it goes, the cornerstone of Western defense. And in terms of any coordination around our own nuclear deterrence - it's - whether it's a bilateral issue for us and Americans or it's something that we would be talking about in NATO, that's where it is. It's not for the EU.

Walter Russell Mead: Yes, sir. Your microphone's coming.

Audience Member: Hi. My question is about the U.K. military and their ability to exert influence without much support from the U.S. If the U.S. is going to withdraw, could the U.K. do a forward operation for an extended period of time?

Sir Kim Darroch: Yeah. I mean, when I was national security adviser, we were just on the back of a security and defense review, a new strategy in which the objective was to be able to do two foreign - target for our collective armed forces. We ought to do two foreign interventions simultaneously. And I think that is still the objective. We have just built the two biggest. One is actually doing trials off the east coast of eastern seaboard at the moment. The other one hasn't yet set off on its sort of tests and trials, whatever, which we'll do, I think, next year. So we will have the two biggest aircraft carriers - the Royal Navy - two biggest ships the Royal Navy has ever had. Add to that the tens of billions of expenditure I talked about earlier in terms of acquiring and upgrading our equipment, add to that a defense budget that is 2 percent of GDP, so as GDP rises - which it's doing - we're spending more on defense. And, I mean, our capability, both the quality of it and, you know, the amount of it is improving all the time. So, yes, the intention is that we should be able to do things by ourselves. But obviously, the optimum for political, as well as, you know, military reasons, would be to do things as part of coalitions of the willing or as part of NATO or whatever. But in terms of our national capability, the intention is that we can do things by ourselves if we need to.

Walter Russell Mead: This lady up here in the front. She's bringing him the mic.

Audience Member: Thank you. As the G-20 summit is coming, we heard that Prime Minister May, she will join the summit as well. So can you give us some insight about what will be your - what's your expectation for that? Will President Trump meet with Prime Minister May? And will they talk about the trade issue or Brexit and so on? Thank you.

Sir Kim Darroch: G-20. I think the most - I mean, the main agenda items at the end of this week are climate change and trade, which will be interesting, quite contentious. We'll see. And, of course, the bilateral that everyone is watching is the two presidents, Presidents Trump and Xi, in the margins of the preliminary discussions at the G-20. As it happens, the prime minister and the - and President Trump will be sitting next to another in the preliminary sessions, I think, from what I know of the seating plan. So they will have plenty of opportunity to talk. I'm sure they will

talk about Brexit. I'm sure they'll talk about other stuff that is going on on the international scene at the moment. They spoke on the telephone just a couple weeks ago. They speak every two or three weeks on the telephone. So it's a very strong, substantive relationship. And, you know, I mean, we haven't - because they're sitting next to one another, we haven't organized a formal because there will be so many informal opportunities for the two of them to interact. But I'm looking forward to hearing how the discussions go.

Walter Russell Mead: In the front here.

Audience Member: Thank you. A recent piece in The Washington Post described the U.K. basically as a Trojan horse in the EU and asserted that you might actually lose value in the eyes of the U.S. after leaving the EU. I'd like to know your reaction to that. Thank you.

Sir Kim Darroch: When I was doing my 15 years of EU specialization, I must say I never felt particularly horse-like or that I spent my whole time getting instructions from Washington and then relaying them to my European partners. So I never really bought that description. Look. It's up to us. We have the potential, both to continue to be players in Europe in terms of cooperation on foreign policy and security and other issues and for being way more significant international players because we will have the freedom to - on foreign policy terms, to do some of our own thing when we need to. So I don't worry about influence.

In the end, if we can succeed economically outside the European Union, and I believe we can, if we thrive economically, if we continue to invest in our defense and our national security and our intelligence, all the other bits of value we bring to the table, if we continue to be active in the security council and in NATO and in the commonwealth and in other international forums, I'm confident about the future. But, you know, I'm confident that we can continue to cooperate with our closest European partners, including, of course, our friends in Paris and Berlin and in other places, but also across the Atlantic with the U.S. and more widely with Beijing and Delhi and others.

Walter Russell Mead: Yes.

Audience Member: Thank you very much. And thank you both so much. As an Irish-American dual citizen and a Oxford graduate, this has been really interesting. At different points in history, the personal relationships between diplomats have had a really big impact, particularly in terms of the U.S.-UK special relationship. When you look around the world now, what areas do you think that's most true in?

Sir Kim Darroch: One of the strengths - I mean, this is not - I won't begin and end with - I'll begin with the U.S. when I'm done with the U.S. relationships. One of the strengths of our - of the U.S.-UK relationship is one of the things - one of the realities that one notices is just how strong the personal links are between diplomats with various specializations at various levels across the Atlantic, across the pond. So the political directors - U.S. and U.K. talk almost daily. The national security advisers talk almost weekly. And, you know, our Middle East expert, for example, Neil Crompton, talks to his American counterparts, you know, every - every couple of days and so on. And that makes a huge difference to how well the relationship functions and how close we are on policy objectives and on operational decisions. And it means that, you know, when you ask ministers to approve actions or positions or whatever, you can tell them exactly what the U.S. administration is thinking.

Now, that's not unique to U.K.-U.S. And, for example, similar relationships exist between the British and French and German - political directors or national security advisers or other experts - and more widely. So when I was national security adviser, I went off to Beijing a number of times and talked to my counterparts there. I went to Delhi, and they came to the U.K. and talked to them and others. I even, in my time, when U.K.-Russia relations looked a little bit better than they do at the moment, used to go off to Moscow and talk to Putin's diplomatic adviser. And that relationship still happens because keeping those channels open is still important. I think the dialogue is a little less - a little more direct. And there's more problems to talk about than there were. But, you know, as a basic principle, a lot of work can be done diplomat to diplomat. And that can be really beneficial in sorting out quite a lot of the problems, though in the end, decisions, I should stress, are taken by ministers and prime ministers and presidents.

Walter Russell Mead: All right. Well, thank you very much. It's been really helpful. I know the ambassador is on a tight schedule and Washington is a little rainy today, so we're going to try to get him out here and he can get out and fight the traffic as quickly as possible. Thank you all for coming. Thanks again to C-SPAN and others who've been

watching us. And look forward - like I said, our next event in this series is tomorrow. So perhaps I'll see some of you then.

Sir Kim Darroch: Thank you very much for the invitation. Thank you.