**President Donald Trump arrives to Britain in 'turmoil'**

[**Jane Onyanga-Omara**](http://www.usatoday.com/staff/29687/jane-onyanga-omara/)**, USA TODAY**Published 9:40 a.m. ET July 12, 2018 | **Updated 6:13 p.m. ET July 12, 2018**

LONDON — President Donald Trump and first lady Melania Trump arrived at the opulent Blenheim Palace — the birthplace of wartime leader Winston Churchill — for a black-tie business dinner on Thursday, the evening of Trump's first visit to the United Kingdom as president.

The couple were welcomed at the palace in Oxfordshire — about 60 miles outside of London — by Prime Minister Theresa May and her husband Philip, before witnessing a performance by the Scots, Irish and Welsh Guards military bands. Anti-Trump protesters lined the road up to the building, but it is unlikely the Trumps — who arrived via helicopter — saw them.

"Time and again, the common threads that hold us together — our shared history, our shared values, our shared language and culture — conspire to inspire mutual respect, and to make the United States and the United Kingdom not just the closest of allies, but the dearest of friends," May said at the dinner, according to excerpts from her speech released before the event. She added that more than a million Americans work for British firms.

"Now, as we prepare to leave the European Union, we have an unprecedented opportunity to do more," she said. "It’s an opportunity to reach a free trade agreement that creates jobs and growth here in the U.K. and right across the United States."

May is eager to secure a trade deal with the U.S. after the U.K. departs the EU next year.

Woody Johnson, the U.S. ambassador to the U.K., said last week that Trump "knows how important the special relationship (with the U.K.) is firsthand and that's why the bust of Churchill is actually in the Oval Office as we speak. This is not an accident."

Trump's working visit comes days after he said the nation was “in somewhat turmoil" following the resignations of two senior government figures over Brexit.

The Trumps landed Thursday afternoon local time at Stansted Airport, 40 miles northeast of the British capital. The couple took a 16-minute helicopter ride on Marine One to Winfield House, the U.S. ambassador’s residence in Regent’s Park, central London. Beatles music was playing in the background with a large group of people waiting in front of the house for what looked like a garden party to welcome Trump.

Holding hands, the Trumps walked past the pool, together with Ambassador Johnson. Trump smiled but did not say a word. White House Chief of Staff John Kelly and National Security Adviser John Bolton followed close  behind.

The Trumps participated in a meet and greet at the [new $1 billion U.S. Embassy](https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2017/12/15/new-u-s-embassy-london/954882001/) on the banks of the River Thames on Thursday. Trump has previously described the high-tech embassy as [a “bad deal.”](https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2018/01/16/new-u-s-embassy-opens-britain/1035188001/)

Large scale protests expected here and across Britain prompted authorities to  add extra security.  The U.S. Embassy on Tuesday [warned Americans in the capital](https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2018/07/10/britain-protesters-donald-trump-london/771429002/) to keep a low profile.

Tens of thousands of protesters plan to rally against Trump's four-day trip in London on Friday. Protests are also planned at locations including Windsor, where Trump will [meet with Queen Elizabeth II](https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/2018/07/11/what-expect-when-trumps-meet-queen-elizabeth-ii-her-favorite-castle/775447002/). Since the president will travel by helicopter to locations, it is unlikely he'll actually see the demonstrations.

A poll by market research firm YouGov published this week said 74% of Britons believed Trump was sexist, 63% thought he was racist, and 38% thought he was a strong leader. Another YouGov poll released shortly before Trump's arrival said half of Britons thought the visit should go ahead, and 37% thought it should be cancelled.

Trump said at a news conference at the NATO summit in Brussels shortly before he left for Britain that he had no problem with the protests.

“I think it’s fine, I think they like me a lot in the U.K., I think they agree with me on immigration,” he told reporters. “That’s why you have Brexit in the first place, because of immigration.”

High levels of immigration and a desire for sovereignty were some of the reasons that Britons voted 52% to 48% to leave the 28-member European Union in a historic referendum in 2016.

Trump questioned May's plans for leaving the EU. “The people voted to break it up, so I imagine that’s what they’ll do. But maybe they’re taking a little bit of a different route, so I don’t know if that’s what they voted for,” he said.

When asked for his views on Brexit, which he has previously backed, Trump said “it’s not for me to say what they should be doing in the UK. I would say Brexit is Brexit. The people vote to break it up so I would imagine that’s what they’d do. I just want the people to be happy. They’re great people.”

May published a white paper of her Brexit plan Thursday, days after the resignations of Boris Johnson as foreign secretary and David Davis as Brexit secretary. The pair quit over May’s proposals to retain close trade ties with the EU after the U.K. leaves the alliance in March 2019 . Trump told reporters ahead of his Europe trip that he got along "very well" with May and that Johnson is a "friend of mine."

Johnson and Davis' resignations have added pressure for May to step down over her handling of Brexit as prime minister.

Amnesty International hung a 50 foot-long banner emblazoned with the words “Human Rights Nightmare” and a large image of Trump on a bridge close to the new U.S. embassy.

The Bow Group, a conservative British think tank, said it would host a rally in parliament  to back Trump.  The organization said speakers will include pro-Brexit politician Nigel Farage — an associate of Trump’s.

Trump on Friday holds talks on foreign policy with May at Chequers, the prime minister’s country home in Buckinghamshire – 47 miles outside London – before meeting the queen at Windsor Castle – 26 miles from the capital.

Trump and the first lady then spend the weekend in Scotland, where Trump said he will visit his Turnberry golf course.