

Donald Trump, Brexit and the EU

As Ambrose Evans-Pritchard pointed out shortly before June 23rd, the European Union was always an American project. The US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) devoted considerable money and effort to persuading the UK to join the project and then, two years after our accession, to ensuring that we stayed in when the first referendum was held. In this year's campaign, President Obama did not need much persuasion to come to David Cameron's aid and support the remain camp, although his threat that we would be "at the back of the queue" for any future trade deal with the USA rather backfired.

So what, if any, will be the implications for the Brexit process of the USA electing a President who spoke most enthusiastically about our decision to leave the EU at the time, calling it a "great thing" and has recently referred to his victory as "Brexit Plus Plus Plus"?

On the face of it, it looks like we will have a major leader firmly backing our decision to leave the EU. We can presume that a President Hillary Clinton, whose comments on Brexit were much less enthusiastic, would not have done much to help us with Brexit, but will President Trump retain the enthusiasm he showed for Brexit on the campaign trail once he enters the White House?

It's not that simple. Mr Trump has been called all manner of things, some of them not very pleasant, but "policy wonk" is not one of them. He is far stronger on rhetoric than detail and has had no experience of public office before – the first ever US President who has neither served in the military nor Congress.

He will therefore be very dependent on a team of advisors.

Furthermore, the checks and balances of the US Constitution do not give him untrammelled power. At a personal level, even if he retains the links he has forged with UKIP's Nigel Farage, this does is no guarantee that US foreign policy will shift decisively to favour and support Brexit.

The Trump campaign emphasised its commitment to rebuild the US manufacturing sector by repatriating outsourced jobs. Mr Trump also criticised a number of free trade deals, including the recently-signed Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement. On the face of it, the likelihood of TTIP, the US-EU Free Trade agreement, ever being signed off looks pretty remote.

Even here, however, this summary of Mr Trump's statements on Free Trade, largely made on the hoof, does not amount to anything resembling a detailed and consistent policy position. As far as Brexit is concerned, therefore, we can go no further than to say that he will *probably* be more supportive of Brexit than his predecessor has been or Mrs Clinton would have been, but it would be premature to assume anything more.

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