

# The Conservatives, and the U.K., after Brexit

by Conrad Black

Though there have been no significant differences between the U.S and the U.K. for more than 150 years, and the two countries have been splendid allies in stirring times, there remains a combination of British envy and distaste for what is often considered the garish and raucous nature of the U.S. political process. The British have never really understood what the Americans were so upset about in 1775 and thereafter, as the stamp tax they were trying to collect was already being paid by the British, and the Americans were the wealthiest British population. Great Britain had doubled its national debt in the Seven Years' War, largely to satisfy American wishes to evict France from Canada (as well as to evict France from India and assist Frederick the Great's fledgling Prussia).

The British have never accepted that the Americans have been the chief propagator of democracy in the world, as they claim to have inspired American democracy, and led the pan-European resistance against domination of Europe by the Spanish (Philip II), French (Louis XIV and Napoleon), and Wilhelmine and Nazi Germany. The British also launched much of their old Empire, including Canada, Australia, New Zealand, India, and Singapore, as successful democracies. And the Royal Navy, not James Monroe and John Quincy Adams, kept the Europeans out of Latin America between Bolivar's uprisings and the end of the U.S. Civil War.

About a third of the British disapproved of George III's insane imposition of an uncollectable tax on America, and if he had listened to Pitt, Fox, and Edmund Burke, his leading statesmen, or to Benjamin Franklin, the most intelligent

American ever to set foot in Britain (probably up to the present), he would have avoided the conflict. He blundered into an impossible guerrilla war requiring almost the entire Royal Navy to sustain it, which became intolerably hazardous once Franklin had induced France into the war in support of republicanism and imperial disintegration (an act of French insanity). The British have never really believed that a small group of slaveholding plantation-owners and avaricious New England merchants and lawyers had any standing to tell the country of Locke and Adam Smith about the rights of man. Jefferson and Madison, in demobilizing the 20,000-man army and trained militia of Washington and Adams, dispensed with their deterrent against high-handed treatment of American ships on the high seas by the Royal Navy. This pushed the Americans into the War of 1812, and they did well to earn a draw in that war.

For 50 years after the War of 1812, the British and Americans eyed each other warily as both countries waited for the denouement of the deepening slavery crisis. Serious British statesmen knew as well as intelligent Americans did that Lincoln was correct that his country could not survive "half slave and half free." By the time matters had settled after that terrible struggle, Bismarck had united the Germans for the first time, and, as Benjamin Disraeli presciently stated in a parliamentary address on February 2, 1871: "The balance of power has been utterly destroyed." So it had been, and thereafter, the British judged the U.S. to be, with the British and German empires, the most powerful country in the world, and one with whose community of democratic institutions and shared language and common-law tradition it was worth identifying, especially when the political life of Europe became very dangerous, as it was through most of the 20th century. The highest level of statesmanship and effectiveness in the modern history of both countries was achieved by Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt and Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. It need hardly be recounted that

those leaders conducted the West to victory in World War II and the Cold War. Apart from such epochal times, there has been a British tendency to regard "America" as a wild animal, powerful but in need of guidance, particularly from wise old Britain. This is essentially self-serving bunk.

Americans can rightly view with amusement the farce unfolding in the storied halls of the palace of Westminster. Having developed a multi-partisan consensus for burying any thought of a U-turn away from political integration of the United Kingdom into Europe, the just-reelected prime minister, David Cameron, returned from European negotiations and presented his announced concessions for continued British approval of the quest for "an ever closer Union" (with Europe). He had gained permission to "apply" for a few trivial concessions. It was an insult to British self-respect. Cameron's Conservative party has been divided since Margaret Thatcher, in 1990, was forced from office by her own party on the European issue. Cameron had thought he could win by claiming a real concession and making it an all-or-nothing vote. After his defeat, he did the honorable thing by resigning. The leader of the Conservative Leavers, former London mayor Boris Johnson, surprised the country by declining to run for prime minister, a post that will be filled by a vote of the Conservative-party membership, after the party's members of Parliament have narrowed the field to two candidates. Johnson's previous chief comrade in the Leave campaign, justice secretary Michael Gove, announced his candidacy, and the whole over-centralized world of British politics and media has erupted in rage against both men.

This too, is all nonsense. Johnson did not pledge to run for prime minister and Gove did not pledge not to run. The British show again, in the vituperation from and towards all quarter in this debate, their penchant, however steadfast and brave they might be in real crises, to flap about like demented hens over slight adjustments to routine. For good measure, the anachronistic Labour party has just fortuitously dumped its

wacky-left leader, Jeremy Corbyn (though he denies this, even as he has been rejected by 75 percent of his MPs).

The overreactions to the referendum in financial circles, as was