



HOUSE OF LORDS

International Relations and Defence Committee

Corrected oral evidence: The UK's future relationship with the US

Wednesday 12 March 2025

10.35 am

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Members present: Lord De Mauley (The Chair); Lord Alderdice; Baroness Blackstone; Lord Bruce of Bennachie; Baroness Coussins; Baroness Crawley; Lord Darroch of Kew; Baroness Fraser of Craigmaddie; Lord Grocott; Lord Houghton of Richmond; Baroness Morris of Bolton; Lord Soames of Fletching.

Evidence Session No. 2

Heard in Public

Questions 15 - 25

Witnesses

I: Greg Swenson, Chair, Republicans Overseas UK; Jennifer Ewing, Spokesperson, Republicans Overseas UK.

Examination of witnesses

Greg Swenson and Jennifer Ewing.

Q15 The Chair: Welcome. Thank you very much for coming to see us. This is our second public evidence session on the UK's future relationship with the United States. We are now hearing the Republican perspective on the transatlantic relationship, and we are hoping to hear from the Democrats at a later stage.

This session will be streamed live on the Parliament website, and a transcript will be taken. Once it is available, we will send you a copy, if we may. Members of the committee, if you have any interests to declare, please do so when first speaking.

May I ask you to introduce yourselves and perhaps give us some opening remarks, and then, if we may, we will pile in with questions?

Jennifer Ewing: Hi. I am originally from northern California. I have lived in the United Kingdom for the last 20 years. My background is emerging market cash equity sales and trading. I worked in the City. I also am involved in digital assets—crypto, Bitcoin and that sort of thing.

The one thing that I would say is that, as somebody who has lived here and loves this country—I am a citizen of this country—it is quite sad to see a little bit of divergence in some of the values between our two countries. I would highlight a few. Freedom of speech is a worry for a lot of people. The second one that we are diverging on a bit is regulation around businesses. The third one is probably energy security, which we are prioritising in the United States; it does not feel like that is happening here. Thank you very much for inviting us. We are looking forward to this.

Greg Swenson: Hi. I am an investment banker by training or by career. I worked at Lehman Brothers for my formative years, mostly in the US. I moved here 10 years ago to start an investment firm. We invest in infrastructure, agriculture and resources, mostly in Africa, although we are moving into other regions. I briefly worked for HSBC, from 2006 to 2008, and that is what really brought me over here to the UK.

I am the chairman of Republicans Overseas. I have been doing that for five years. I have had a really great experience with that and been much more integrated into Westminster since then. Both Jennifer and I do a lot of media, so you might see us occasionally on television.

I will just say that this is an opportunity here. In spite of some differences, the current Administration is very fond of the UK. We saw that in President Trump's first term, and this can be the return of a better relationship. I do not think that Biden really favoured the UK as President Trump does, so this is a great opportunity.

The Chair: Thank you so much. You have, to some extent, shot my fox, because I was going to ask you how the Republican Party, in particular,

views the United Kingdom and how relevant we are to the United States.

Jennifer Ewing: As Greg mentioned, President Trump is very fond of the United Kingdom. We know that his mother was from Scotland. He thinks he had a great relationship with the Queen, and he is a fan of England.

I do think that he worries about some of the larger issues, such as free speech, which I mentioned, and certainly the energy security issue. The other thing is that this is a President who wants peace. He is an anti-war President, and there is a little divergence going on there as well.

As Greg said, there is a huge opportunity. We have more similarities than differences. In terms of the cultural differences that I have noticed change over the last 20 years in the UK, it depends on what the UK wants to do, but the United States has made it very clear that it wants to look inward and would encourage the United Kingdom to do the same—to be patriotic, to be economic nationalists, and to look after its people so that they can continue to prosper and be free.

Greg Swenson: Let me just add that there is a slight difference between parties in the US. The Republicans are the conservative party of America, so, the word being “conserve”, they have an attachment to Great Britain, its history and great documents. The founding documents of the United States are based on great British documents, written mostly by Englishmen. There is that historical connection that the Republicans would have, more so than the Democrats in the US, which is, again, a great opportunity.

The Chair: How about the American population as a whole? Is there a generational divide?

Jennifer Ewing: That is a great question, and the answer is yes, there is. A lot of people over the age of 60 feel a much closer tie to the United Kingdom, perhaps because they remember wars that we fought in. When they were growing up, there was not as much exposure to other countries in the way that the younger generation has.

There is also a difference in foreign policy. If you talk to people under the age of 30, something like over 60% of them believe that the United States should have a more independent foreign policy. We have seen this not just with the United Kingdom. We have seen it with Israel; there are huge generational divides with regard to support for that. This is an entirely new generation. Especially with more decentralised media, they are exposed to a lot more things. There is a generational divide.

Q16 **Lord Darroch of Kew:** Can I ask about economic and trade relations between the UK and the US and the future perspective here? During the Prime Minister’s rather successful visit to Washington recently, and the press conference afterwards, both President and Prime Minister talked about a future free trade deal. If you looked at the detail, they seemed to be talking about slightly different things. Keir Starmer was talking about something that was limited to a couple of spheres, such as AI, IT, digital

trade and that kind of stuff. The President seemed to be talking about something rather more comprehensive.

If you look back on the first term, of course, we did start negotiations during my time there on a free trade deal, but they ran into a wall because of incompatibility over the top two requirements of the American negotiators. One was free access for US agricultural products to the UK, and there was something in there about, basically, the UK paying rather more like the US market price for US pharmaceuticals. There was also the issue about the UK taking steps to remove itself from the European regulatory environment and switching more to US regulatory regimes across a whole range of trade areas.

When the two leaders talked about this, have American ambitions for a free trade deal moved back towards the sort of thing that Prime Minister Starmer was suggesting—something rather limited to digital trade issues, AI and that kind of thing? Or is the American bottom line still going to be a more comprehensive deal that includes some of these areas that could be—who knows, since it is a different Government now?—rather problematic for the UK?

Greg Swenson: It is a great question. President Trump, as we know, is unpredictable, so I cannot really tell you what he is thinking all of the time, but I would say that he would lean towards something more comprehensive. Remember that the President loves bilateral trade deals. He does not love multi-lats, and he has been pretty clear about that in his campaigning and even in his comments as President. The opportunity is to do something more comprehensive.

It would be helpful to have some education rather than just headlines. My favourite is chlorinated chicken. It is everybody's favourite. When you really look at the details and realise that you are eating chlorinated blueberries and drinking chlorinated water, there is some hype about some of those things.

Jennifer Ewing: Plus Bobby Kennedy Jr is going to take care of that. We will not even have chlorinated chicken in the United States.

Greg Swenson: Yes, that is true. If anything, we are heading towards more EU-type food regulation, and so there might be some convergence there—it is a really good point. Generally speaking, the President would like to do something comprehensive. Again, he loves bilaterals.

The other thing that the UK has going for it is that there is no significant trade surplus. That is a big problem for the EU, at \$180 billion. It is a big problem for China, at \$330 billion. Those surpluses, or deficits from the American perspective, are being funded in the capital markets. We have been able to do that for ever because we have the biggest capital market in the world and we can just borrow money and fund those deficits. Now, it is a different story, because we have \$36 trillion in debt. Five years ago, we had \$24 trillion or \$25 trillion, and interest rates are double what they were.

These are issues that do not really make the headlines, but it is really important to understand that he is not just trying to be America First and get into trade wars. This is a fiscal deficit problem. We are not just defending the West with our defence and security. We all know the argument that Europe is not doing its fair share; the UK is. It is the combination of both: it is defence and security that we have funded. We have funded the protection of global trade. The American taxpayer pays for that. Now, we are funding trade deficits. Trade deficits do not matter to people. You do not really notice them. It is the debt associated with the deficits.

Lord Darroch of Kew: Thank you for that. I have a quick follow-up. Jennifer, in your introduction, you said that the President is fond of the UK, and I think that is right. He owns golf courses over here. His mother was Scottish. He is a great admirer of the Royal Family and all of that. In the first term, that did not translate into, for example, excluding us from the tariffs on steel and aluminium that were levied on pretty much everyone except for, strangely, Australia. There is another batch of tariffs in that area down the track, if not already implemented here. What are the chances of an exclusion for the UK this time around?

Jennifer Ewing: There is a chance of an exclusion this time around. You will recall that Trump was very vocal about being in favour of Brexit. He likes that. He likes small government. That gives the UK an opportunity to do something different from the EU. I know that, here in the UK, we did not turn into Singapore-on-Thames, as was talked about during the campaign, but Trump liked that independence and that small government. He is willing to reward the United Kingdom if it were to say, "Hey, we are different from the EU, and we want to have a bilateral agreement with you", as Greg mentioned. Yes, there is an opportunity.

Q17 **Lord Grocott:** One of the questions that will keep recurring throughout our evidence is the question as to how much President Trump is a one-off, and to what extent he is a smooth continuum of Republican or American views that are likely to survive his presidency.

You described the Republicans as a conservative party, which is how we would characterise it, but the one thing that I would not describe President Trump as being is conservative. He is absolutely unpredictable, which you said as well.

Just to revert to the main question, are the trends that are clearly associated with him—namely, economic nationalism and a dislike of international organisations, et cetera—just mainstream American politics perhaps expressed in a rather idiosyncratic way?

Jennifer Ewing: The answer is that this is more than just one man. It is a movement, for sure. Greg and I probably differ a little in our thinking about how conservative the Republican Party is. I definitely come from the more libertarian wing of it. Part of the reason that Trump was able to win the election is because he brought on people such as Bobby Kennedy Jr and Tulsi. Trump was a Democrat not too long ago. This is not the old-

school, country-club Republican, conservative party. It almost looks like the Democrats on many issues, such as immigration and some other things, pre-Obama.

This is a movement, and what is going to further solidify it is decentralised media and the younger generation looking on their phones and thinking, "Hey, do we want to be in these forever wars anymore?" or, "Hey, why are we eating chlorinated chicken and poisoned cereal? Why do we have this vicious circle of food and drugs?"

These might not seem like typical Republican ideas, but this helped get Trump the suburban soccer mom vote—people who had said, "Oh, he is a disgrace because I do not like the way he speaks". Once he started talking about issues such as safety, women's rights in sports and all this stuff, he got a new coalition behind him. You will also see that the old-school Republicans—the Bushes or the Cheneys—are not in the room anymore. Yes, it is a movement, and more than just one man.

Greg Swenson: I will just add a little history here. The movement really started with the Tea Party in 2009, when there was a rapid escalation of government intervention in the economy and spending. It started in 2009, 2010 and 2011. The Tea Party movement somewhat disappeared for a number of reasons, but it carried on. Trump did not start the movement. He just saw what was really important to people.

The other historical note that I will mention is that we country-club conservatives—I am a reformed country club conservative; I just dress like one—were very sceptical of President Trump in the first term. We were afraid that he was not going to govern like a conservative but was just going to go full-on populist. We were really relieved that he did have textbook, down-the-middle, supply-side economics, tax reform and deregulation. Those were his big wins, most of which were pretty consistent with traditional conservatism.

It has changed a bit, and it has been more of a common-sense campaign and execution in his first two months. I do not think that we have lost the *National Review* conservative or William F Buckley conservative. They have had to morph a bit and get a better understanding of food and nutrition—things that we just did not notice as we were scarfing down Kraft products. That is the way we grew up. Again, there is some history there. The over-60s, like me, whose fathers and uncles fought alongside the UK, might think a little differently, but also the mediums are different. I am playing catch-up—Jennifer is always five years ahead of me.

- Q18 **Lord Houghton of Richmond:** By background, I am an ex-Chief of the Defence Staff, so I am one of the military people on the committee. I have felt very sensitive over the last 15 years about the degree to which not just European NATO but specifically the United Kingdom's Armed Forces have been in decline. Risk has been taken against them. Risk has been taken against national security. What is the institutionalised American view both of European NATO in general and UK Armed Forces in

particular? To what extent are the Americans underwhelmed by the degree to which Europe is pulling its own weight? How dramatically might the Trump threats to the continued unity of NATO manifest themselves, unless we accelerate out of the decline that we have experienced in the past 15 years?

Greg Swenson: President Trump, in spite of the rhetoric, is pro-NATO. He just wants a strong NATO. I would also differentiate between the rest of NATO, with some exceptions, such as Poland, and the UK. The UK has always been much more impressive to the American defence establishment and the military than anyone else, and so there is some history there, and that will continue.

Yes, he would like the UK to be more adequate, and I have argued, especially during the Biden Administration, that 3% cuts three years in a row, in real terms, was very detrimental to NATO and to US defence and security. We are very much on the same page here. Both countries understand that we need to upgrade ourselves.

In terms of freeloading from Europe, his lecture to the Germans in 2018 was proven right, not only on defence but on energy security. In many ways, energy policy is defence security or foreign security. These things—energy and defence—merge together, and you will see more of that. We all hope that the outcome is greater defence commitments from the Europeans, a bit more from the UK and, most importantly, a bit more from the US.

Lord Houghton of Richmond: The worst thing that could happen is some sort of fatal abandonment of European NATO by America. It is our own fault that we have backed ourselves into this corner, but we do need time to regenerate conventional deterrence here in Europe. If not, dare I say it, any talk of a ceasefire between Ukraine and Russia probably plays to Russia's strength, because they have a war economy in place. Do you think that the reality, despite some of the rhetoric, is that this is not going to end up with abandonment?

Greg Swenson: No, not at all. In fact, it is better for NATO that the US can pivot to the Pacific, protect the shipping lanes for the UK and for the Europeans, and protect the West from any potential threat from China. A stronger Europe will be able to protect the West from potential risks with Russia or any other enemy. It all works. In terms of what American voters were probably looking at, it was never delivered this way until recently. We always just thought, "America is so big and we are so great that we can protect the West. That is what my father did". It was baked into our philosophy.

What we have learned in the last five to 10 years is that the Europeans and, to a certain degree, the UK have six weeks' vacation, free healthcare and a bloated welfare state on our backs, because the US taxpayer is paying for their defence and, to a certain degree, the trade deficit. It is a win-win. If Europe steps up—and they possibly have, finally, in the last few weeks—that is great for the alliance and for the world.

Jennifer Ewing: You started your question by asking about the average American. In the past, the average American was not paying attention to any of the minutiae that were going on with this, but now, again because of younger people paying attention and being engaged, everybody saw that White House thing with Zelensky, Trump and JD Vance. As Greg just pointed out, everyone is now aware that, "Wow, Europeans get six weeks' vacation and have free healthcare, and we are paying for their defence", so you are going to see pressure from the average American in a way that you have not in the past, simply because people were not paying attention to it, and now they are.

We look at this as Trump having put pressure on the EU to pay their fair share and to step up, which, you could argue, should have been done in the last three years so that we could get peace in this Ukraine war. Now it is happening. Because he made a threat or was too aggressive with Zelensky—whatever you want to say—the end result is that Europe now came up with €800 billion or something. The United States is like, "Well done. That is exactly the result that we wanted".

Greg Swenson: We have to weave economic policy in here too, because that is what wins or deters wars. President Trump is a deterrence President and was very much so in his first term, building up military strength. He did not use it very much. When he did, it was very specific and very narrow. He wants to avoid war by preparing for war.

That is not inconsistent with traditional Republican conservative thought, but the economics is what wins. That is what happened with Mrs Thatcher and Reagan in the 1980s, and we think that that can happen again. The combined economies of the EU are 10 times what Russia is, and yet it feels like Russia has the upper hand. It should not be feared; it should be marginalised, not only by more defence spending as a percentage of GDP, but by more GDP. Liberate the economies, because that is, ultimately, what wins.

Q19 **Lord Soames of Fletching:** I am so sorry that it so difficult for you to live here with our terrible wokery. It must be very distressing for you.

Greg Swenson: We are not blaming you.

Lord Soames of Fletching: It is impossible to, in a way, take the President seriously. How is it possible that America could have voted at the United Nations alongside Russia, Syria, the Central African Republic, North Korea and Belarus? How is that possible? What I really do think is extraordinary is the perversion of the so-called Republican Party that can genuinely think that Putin was not the aggressor in Ukraine and expect the world to believe it, and then sees the repulsive defenestration of Zelensky in public as part of a television show. It all creates a really bad impression. I worked in the Senate for two and a half years. I love America, but it is not an America that I know.

Jennifer Ewing: You are right. America is changing, for sure. There is no doubt about that. With regard to Putin being the aggressor, everyone has said that Putin is the aggressor.

Lord Soames of Fletching: No, they have not.

Greg Swenson: They did not think it was productive to make a big deal out of that.

Lord Soames of Fletching: The European Union, of course, was created, according to President Trump, to screw America. Literally, without the Americans, there would not have been a European Union. It is a perversion of history and it is very worrying to me that America's policy is being driven by what appears to be a deep and profound misunderstanding of the truth.

Jennifer Ewing: You are right, because it is coming from the people, so what you are saying is that the American people do not have a deep understanding of the truth.

Lord Soames of Fletching: I do not think it is the American people. The President does not have a clue. That is deeply worrying.

Jennifer Ewing: The people voted for the President. He ran on ending the war in 24 hours. That was very clear.

Lord Soames of Fletching: That was a very silly thing to say, was it not?

Jennifer Ewing: He said it. We are a month and a half into it, and we are closer than we have ever been in the last three years. Until yesterday, I did not hear Ursula von der Leyen or anybody else calling for peace. The President has got things going. We will see if he is successful. I know that Steve Witkoff is on his way to Moscow today.

If you look at who the President aligned himself with in his cabinet, these are a lot of people who do not want these wars to continue. The Americans voted for these people versus Biden and Harris, who just wanted the war to continue endlessly. Nobody could say what winning looks like. The American people, once they saw that, thought, "What does winning look like in Ukraine?"

Again, nobody is saying that Putin is not the aggressor. If you are upset because President Trump did not trash Putin in his meeting with President Zelensky, he explained that. He is trying to bring the two of them to the table. Why is he going to anger Putin just for media clicks? He took a hit getting bad headlines, and now they are talking. This is a good thing. The Biden Administration were not talking to Putin in the way that Trump is. Do you know what? We like diplomacy. Whether it is talking to North Korea or Venezuela, more talk is better. It does not mean that you agree with everything, but not talking has not served our country very well. I am sorry that you feel that it is a perversion, but this is what the American people voted for.

Greg Swenson: We also have to look at the alternative. Trump is all about outcomes. It is impolite, it is imperfect, it is provocative and it is very unsettling for many Europeans, especially in the diplomatic class. He cares only about the outcome and, if he has to take some hits in the meantime, he will. I would try to focus on the outcomes here.

In many ways, President Trump is so different from anyone we have had. I do not know that we will have another Trump personality, but, going back to our earlier point, the party has changed. It is going to be more common sense. It is going to be more practical, maybe without the fundamental conservative values that we had from the *National Review* and *Wall Street Journal* days, but it is not terribly different. He is an anti-war President and wants to end this war.

Q20 **Baroness Crawley:** Greg, you said that Trump is pro-NATO. As far as Europe is concerned, in economic terms, outside NATO, does the Republican Party still see Europe, as a multilateral organisation, as allies, or is it simply a transactional bilateral relationship with each European country from now on?

Greg Swenson: There will be a bit of both. The EU is the EU. From an economic perspective, even though Trump prefers bilaterals, he understands that it is a multilateral with economics.

Republicans in general love Europe. They love the history. This is the continent where everyone goes on their first trip abroad. This is where American university students do their semester overseas. Maybe some go down to Argentina or to Asia, but it is very rare, and so the cultural connections are still really deep. The Republicans are probably more connected culturally than you would see on the other side of the aisle.

Q21 **Baroness Crawley:** To go off at a tangent, when you opened up, Jennifer, you said that there were three points of divergence between America and the UK. One of them was freedom of speech. Could you say a bit more about how you see that we diverge from the US on that?

Jennifer Ewing: When I was visiting my family this summer in California, a lot of people were asking me, "Is it true that people in the UK are being arrested for tweets or for posts on social media and that sort of stuff?" It was the first time in 20 years of going back that I heard somebody ask that question. Whether it is Elon Musk or social media, people are starting to notice that there is not free speech.

There is not the first amendment to the degree that we have in the United States of America. We do not have hate speech in the United States of America. People have talked about the Scotland hate speech laws. Again, these are some of the people who got arrested around riots. Whether this is spun in a way that is true or not true, it has been highlighted to Americans: "That is crazy". That is just something that I have noticed that I never noticed before and that people had not brought up before. That is what I was talking about.

The Online Safety Act is another one that people have paid attention to. Again, these are all things that, in the past, the average American would not know is going on in the United Kingdom or Germany. There was that thing on "60 Minutes" the other day talking about Germany and how they found people for free speech and then went after them. That is haunting to Americans, who value the first amendment more than anything else.

- Q22 **Lord Bruce of Bennachie:** I wonder if I could change tack. I understand everything that you have said. There is a domestic agenda, and that is the prime agenda for the Administration. I get that, but America has a huge global footprint, which it appears to be dismantling with the sudden destruction of USAID, the reduction of the State Department and the closing of consulates. These are all influences for America. They are conduits. They are what people's perceptions in these countries are about America. Is there no worry that that will give the impression that America is so withdrawing into itself that it no longer cares about the rest of the world, and that, therefore, the rest of the world should not really care about America? Is there no downside to that?

Greg Swenson: We have always talked about soft power. America is still the most powerful country in the world. We have the hard power, the economic power and the soft power still, in spite of the cuts in USAID. We have the intellectual power in terms of innovation. It is still very powerful, but there are a few things that have changed. You do not have to endorse the America First policy, but understand that "America First" is not "America alone". A stronger America is better for the world. I mentioned protecting the shipping lanes earlier. We cannot do that without a powerful military and a pivot toward Asia, and perhaps a bit to the Middle East to keep the straits open.

It starts with economic power. Higher wage growth means higher taxes, higher tax revenues and, ultimately, a stronger military. That is better for the world. This is not a retreat.

There were some absurd things that, as Jennifer mentioned, people were not aware of. I was not aware of them, and I am pretty dialled in. There was a trans opera in Peru. I know that those are small things, but when an American voter sees \$47 million going to a trans comic book for Colombia, it is just obscene. It is also damaging to American soft power, because the people in these places are saying, "What is wrong with these people? What is wrong with America that they are trying to teach my children this nonsense?" There has to be some common sense.

- Q23 **Lord Bruce of Bennachie:** Is that a reason for closing the whole operation down as opposed to reviewing it?

Greg Swenson: No. That is a great point. The problem is that past Republican Administrations have always campaigned on this: "We are going to reduce government. We are going to get rid of the crazy bureaucracy that is not only wasting our taxpayer money but over-regulating business and people's lives". No one ever really did, so what would happen is a Democrat Administration would come in, do a little

more spending, a little more taxing and a little more nonsense, and then Republicans would come in and say, "That is bad. That is bad. That is bad", but not really do much about it and just complain about it. It was great campaign rhetoric.

What is happening this time is that they are going in and saying, "We have tried to be polite about this for generations, and now we just have to break things and move quickly". It is unpleasant, and there may be some collateral damage in terms of the baby being thrown out with the bath-water. I am working quite deliberately with HALO to make sure that it is on the top of the list for getting an exemption. So far, we have been successful with that, and we have to keep fighting for it. It is important. There are going to be fewer trans operas and more aid, because we can shift from stupid things to good things. For example, the US DFC, which has been a powerful proponent in Africa, is not going away, because it is well run, and taxpayer dollars are typically not lost, if ever. You will see American soft power.

The last thing—and this is a shame, but it is just reality—is that defence policy in America has always been, "We need the ability to fight wars on two fronts, just like in World War II". Obama reduced that ability and was quite honest about it, and he took it down from two to one and a half. I do not know how you fight half a war, but Biden took it down to one. Right now, unless there is a complete restructuring and rearmament in America, we are prepared, like it or not, to fight on only one front.

That is why Europe has to step up. This is not withdrawal. This is saying, "Europe, you have to look after yourselves, but not because we do not like you". We love Europe. JD Vance was quite deliberate about that in Munich He is worried, like a big brother worries about the little sibling. He wants Europe to go back to traditional values, and he is worried about it.

What is going to win the bigger war, besides deterrence, is democratic institutions, free speech, education and democracy. All of those philosophical or soft things are really what win in the long run. You cannot do it without hard power; do not get me wrong. The view of the United States is not to retrench and just put up some anti-missile shields in America. It is to maintain its global presence, but we cannot do it on two fronts.

The Chair: We are running short of time, and I have four more people who want to ask questions. What I might do is do this in pairs, so can I ask Baroness Blackstone and Baroness Coussins to ask their questions? Perhaps you could address those, and then we will take the final two.

Q24 **Baroness Blackstone:** I want to come back to freedom of speech. In the White House, when Keir Starmer was there, Vice-President Vance argued that there is a big issue about freedom of speech in the UK. This is not people in California talking about online freedoms and so on; this is absolutely in the heart of the presidency. Keir Starmer pushed back on it, but I wonder what it really means that the Vice-President was able to say something like this. It does not look like a very positive view of the UK.

In fact, it is deeply hostile.

Baroness Coussins: My question links in slightly with this. Going back to what you were saying earlier about the different strands within the Republican Party now, which you characterised as country club and libertarian, is there now general acceptance or approval, across those various strands of the Republican Party, for the appointment of and the role being played by Elon Musk as an outsider but now, apparently, at the heart of the Government? Would you say that Elon Musk's influence on the younger generation in particular accounts, at least in part, for what we have heard about opinion polls saying that younger Americans regard US-UK relations as less important?

Jennifer Ewing: That is a good question. Just to give you a little in the weeds, there is a debate going on within the Republican Party between, say, populists such as Steve Bannon and the original MAGA movement, and the Elon Musk side of things, where it is a little more the tech bros and that sort of situation. There is infighting going on, discussions and, of course, growing pains within the Republican Party, because this is a big adjustment from the way that things used to be to the way that things are evolving.

Elon Musk has less of an effect on what viewers are thinking, although he does have some, because he bought Twitter and freed it. In the past, before he owned it, we know that two of the biggest modern events in history were censored—Covid-19 and the US 2020 election. Once Elon bought Twitter, people were able to see things as they were. He changed it by buying it and unlocking more free speech.

With regard to your question on free speech, the US is very sensitive about censorship, especially in the Republican Party, whether it is the laptop from hell, the Russian hoax or any of these things that were allowed to exist in the so-called mainstream media as fact and now have, basically, been discredited. We now know that the Russia hoax was a Hillary Clinton initiative. People are very sensitive to anything that is blocking free speech, whether it is about climate change, race relations or business. Now that it has opened up, it is going to be messy. Everything is not going to be 100% correct. In America, if it is a bad idea or hate speech, you fight it with more speech. You do not fight it by suppressing it.

Greg Swenson: JD Vance is 40, and so he is much more connected to social media and the new way that young people get information and news. To your point about the sense that there is some scar tissue, it is not just because of the first amendment and the history. There was so much censorship. In a way, we imported that here, regretfully, but there is some sensitivity to it. It has become a really important issue.

Elon is very popular. In terms of what he is doing with DOGE, cutting costs and reducing bureaucracy, I do not even know where it polls with Republicans. Something tells me that it is 90. Generally, in America, it is polling in the 70s. Nothing polls in the 70s in a 50-50 country. What he is

doing is extremely popular, so I would imagine that it is popular with Republicans too.

The Chair: Perhaps Baroness Fraser and Lord Alderdice could put their questions now.

Q25 **Baroness Fraser of Craigmaddie:** I just want to come back to Lord Soames's point. We are looking at the future relationship between the UK and the US. I would just question, particularly after all that you have said about how important censorship and things like that are viewed in the States, why we can rely on an ally that votes with North Korea and the Central African Republic.

Lord Alderdice: As I am listening to you—and I have been thinking a lot about this in the last little while—it seems to me that there is an absolutely profound divergence between the culture of the United States and that of this country and Europe. I am not sure that it is bridgeable anymore. I wonder whether there is any appreciation within the Republican Party and within the United States that this divergence is so deep.

Reflecting on what my colleague Lord Bruce said, there was a time when, in the newspapers here, they would have said, "Fog in the Channel: Europe cut off", because people here were so tied up with themselves and their view of the world. I just wonder if that is the problem that has developed in the United States: that it is all about the United States and not much understanding of, or even interest in, how the rest of the world regards the United States now.

Greg Swenson: To address the first thing, it is much more outward-looking than it used to be, believe it or not. America is a massive country. When people want warm weather, they go to Florida or California. If they want to go skiing, they do not have to fly to Switzerland. You are always going to have that sort of independence, but it is much more outward-looking. People travel much more than they used to. Students go abroad much more than they used to.

Regarding the UN document, the way that President Trump looked at this was, "What is the most productive thing to get Putin to the table?" It might not be nice; it is provocative. He also does not really care that much about the UN. After what the Security Council has done historically in terms of picking on Israel, which is a different topic that we can get to another time, he is not that worried about what a multilateral organisation says.

He thought it was more important at the time to get Putin to the table: "Why provoke? Why poke the bear? Let us just get him to the table". Again, it goes back to outcomes. It is really unsettling, provocative and uncomfortable. It is not necessarily the way that I would do it, but it is what works. He is all about stopping the war and will do anything, without sacrificing people. He does not want cannon fodder anymore.

The Chair: Thank you very much indeed. We have taken much more of

your time than we should have, but it has been very interesting.

Jennifer Ewing: Thanks for having us.

Greg Swenson: We are happy to address anything that we missed and to chat later or at your convenience. It has been quite an honour to be here, for both of us, and we really appreciate it.

Jennifer Ewing: It is, thank you.

The Chair: Thank you for coming.