

The Guardian view on British foreign policy: the lost art of diplomacy



1. Match the words to their meanings.

1	Sycophantic (adj)	a	feel bitterness or indignation at (a circumstance, action, or person).
2	Relegation (n)	b	a situation in which someone expects another person to do something that they do not want to do or that is not convenient
3	Resent (v)	c	worsen, make worse
4	Clout (n)	d	a system of dividing expenses and incomes among the various branches, departments, etc., of a business.
5	Disparity (n)	e	a great difference
6	Allocation (n)	f	is a defunct appendix to a draft Brexit withdrawal agreement, that aimed to prevent an evident border (one with customs controls) between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland after Brexit.
7	Imposition (n)	g	the action of assigning to an inferior rank or position.
8	Exacerbate (v)	h	a strong vertical column made of stone, metal, or wood that supports part of a building or stands alone for decoration ALSO someone or something that is an important part of a group, place, or activity
9	Run-up (n)	i	praising people in authority in a way that is not sincere, usually in order to get some advantage from them
10	Northern Irish backstop	j	to increase the size or effect of something
11	Amplify (v)	k	a system that has been established for a long time
12	Pillar (n)	l	influence or power, especially in politics or business.
13	Edifice (n)	m	the final period of time before an important event

2. Fill in the gaps in the article using the following words and expressions:

precedence	pitifully naive	rooted in
sulking	at leisure	spelled out
slow track	crumbles	engage with
better off	put Britain at risk of	peer-to-peer
leverage	adopt	foreign policy
boosts		Eurosceptics

Boris Johnson's cabinet is 1) _____ at Brussels and **sycophantic** in Washington. Neither approach advances Britain's interests as it faces Brexit.

During the EU referendum campaign Barack Obama warned that Brexit 2) _____ **relegation** as a global trading power. Boris Johnson, then mayor of London, hit back, attributing the US president's view to "ancestral" dislike of the UK, 3) _____ "part-Kenyan" heritage. It is not unusual for British politicians to **resent** being reminded of their country's junior status in relations with the US (although most manage to express that frustration without nasty racial insinuations). There is no symmetry of **clout** in the "special relationship". One side is a superpower, the other is not. Inability to grasp that **disparity** is a weakness among 4) _____.

The belief that Britain would be 5) _____ without EU membership is sustained by an inflated sense of the country's capacity as a solo actor on the global stage. That generates obsession with the idea of trading 6) _____ with the US, which has led to a **misallocation** of diplomatic efforts across the Atlantic. Dominic Raab, the foreign secretary, briefly met Donald Trump in Washington this week. Liz Truss, the international trade secretary, was also in the US, promising business audiences that Britain would be "fast-tracking" a trade deal.

Such assiduous attention 7) _____ only the vanity of the ministers involved. It is 8) _____ of Ms Truss to suppose that the tempo of a trade deal can be dictated by Britain. Terms will be set by the superpower 9) _____, not the supplicant nation in a hurry. It does not matter that President Trump has said approving things about Mr Johnson, nor even that his secretary of state Mike Pompeo says that the US will be waiting "on the doorstep, pen in hand". In reality, there will be no favours, just an **imposition** of brutal realpolitik. It is Congress that can satisfy or frustrate UK preferences, and in that arena the interests of Iowa farmers and US corporations have 10) _____.

The truth about the balance of power in a UK-US trade negotiation was 11) _____ this week by former US trade secretary Larry Summers when he said: "Britain has no 12) _____. Britain is desperate." That vulnerability will be **exacerbated** by Brexit. Yet Mr Johnson is putting no effort into relationships with Angela Merkel, Emmanuel Macron or any of the players on the EU council that will settle Britain's fate in the **run-up** to the 31 October Brexit deadline.

This is partly an affectation to signal that the negotiating strategy has changed. Continental leaders are meant to observe Mr Johnson's unflinching march towards a no-deal outcome, and conclude that, unlike Theresa May, he is not bluffing. They are then expected to soften their insistence that the **Northern Irish backstop** be part of any withdrawal agreement.

Sulking in Brussels will not work any better than sycophancy works in Washington. The EU would prefer an orderly Brexit, but Britain's negotiating strength decays at an accelerated rate in the messier scenarios. Mr Summers' equation – leverage decreases as desperation increases – applies to deals with the EU too.

Mr Johnson appears to think that dealings with Brussels are made harder by the formal article 50 Brexit process. The opposite is true. Article 50 is not generous to the leaving member state but it is efficient: a genuine fast track. Ms Truss will experience the 13) _____ once she negotiates with Brussels as a trade minister from a non-EU country.

For decades, British 14) _____ was designed on the principle of the bridge between the US and continental Europe. London had a unique mediating function which was valued in Brussels and in Washington, **amplifying** UK power in both capitals. Brexit knocked down one supporting **pillar** of that bridge, and yet Mr Johnson appears not to have noticed or not to care as the **edifice** 15) _____ and slides into the sea.

It is not too late to 16) _____ a more realistic approach. He might yet 17) _____ EU leaders in a spirit of professionalism and respect. Sadly, those are not qualities often exhibited by Mr Johnson. Diplomacy was once a source of British influence in the world. It should not come as a surprise if the country ends up diminished by its chronically undiplomatic prime minister.

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