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UK-US Trade Deal Highlights Brexit Opportunities

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In a striking admission, Lord Peter Mandelson, a prominent figure in the 2016 Remain campaign and former EU commissioner, has acknowledged that the UK's recent trade discussions with the United States were made possible only because of Brexit. Now serving as Britain's Ambassador to the US, Mandelson highlighted the deal's benefits for British industries, particularly carmakers, in an interview with The Times. "Undoubtedly, we couldn't

have done this deal if we had remained part of the European Union,” he stated, noting that while Brexit brought losses, it also opened doors to such opportunities.

A trade arrangement with the US President Donald Trump’s administration significantly reduced tariffs on UK-made vehicles and aerospace products. A 27.5% US tariff on imported cars has been reduced to 10% for the first 100,000 UK vehicles annually, giving brands like Warwickshire’s Aston Martin a competitive edge over European rivals such as Mercedes and Ferrari. “That’s very gratifying for me and the embassy team,” Mandelson told *The Times*. “It means those Aston Martins and similar British products have a 17.5% competitive advantage.” Tariffs on UK aerospace exports to the US have been eliminated, though the 25% tariff on British steel and aluminium remains subject to ongoing negotiations.

Mandelson, who served as a Cabinet Minister under Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, also offered praise for Trump, describing him as a “unique politician” with a “grasp of power” unmatched by recent US presidents. “He’s not a man for endless seminars and thinking,” Mandelson said. “He has a quick way of grasping the core points about an issue, and more often than not, there’s a kernel of truth in what he says.” He recounted Trump’s charm during their initial meeting, with the president calling him “a handsome guy.” This personal rapport appears to underpin the strengthening UK-US relationship, exemplified by the trade deal.

The agreement comes as Trump announced a 30% tariff on EU goods, further underscoring the advantage Brexit has afforded the UK in negotiating independent trade terms. However, the current Labour government’s handling of international relations has drawn scrutiny, with some questioning its ability to capitalise on such opportunities without ceding too much ground to foreign leaders. Mandelson’s comments suggest a pragmatic approach, focusing on respect rather than sycophancy in dealings with the US administration.

Looking ahead, Trump is expected to visit the UK in September 2025, an unusual occurrence for a US president unless formally designated as a second state visit. Mandelson predicted a “warm reception,” citing Trump’s admiration for Britain and his trust in Prime Minister Keir Starmer. However, the visit’s timing during the political party conference season means Parliament will not be sitting, potentially avoiding a repeat of the protests or boycotts that have marked Trump’s previous engagements. Mandelson appeared unfazed by reports of Labour MPs organising a petition to prevent Trump from addressing Parliament, dryly noting, “Well, there’s a surprise.”

While the trade deal marks a clear win for post-Brexit Britain, it also reignites debate about the broader implications of leaving the EU. Mandelson himself acknowledged the losses incurred but pointed to this agreement as a tangible benefit. As the UK navigates its new global role, such deals will be critical in proving the value of its regained sovereignty, even as domestic political tensions and the Labour government's approach to foreign policy remain under close watch.