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TRADE DIPLOMACY

**KABUL IN A CHINA SHOP:** Would Boris Johnson have been so forthright in pushing Joe Biden to extend his August 31 deadline for the American withdrawal from Afghanistan if a trade deal between the U.S. and U.K. was still hanging in the balance? The need for a quick agreement with Washington — long lauded as the grand prize of Brexit — meant former Prime Minister Theresa May and her successor did much tongue-holding while Donald Trump was in the oval office.

**Getting real:** But now a trade deal is so far on the backburner that contradicting the U.S. on foreign policy might be seen to come with few consequences. “Reality must have sunk in” in Downing Street, said Harry Broadman, a former trade negotiator under ex-President Bill Clinton and now managing director at Berkeley Research Group.

**Yes and no:** One U.S. business leader with a close eye on trade said it was true that the U.K. might feel freer to step out of line on foreign policy or climate because “they don’t have to worry about mucking up their chances” of clinching a trade deal. But the same person added: “Then again, the U.K. is busily scouting about for post-Brexit legitimacy on lots of issues ... and the U.S. can help them with that drive. But if the Brits are too far out in front, that might dampen how enthusiastic the U.S. is.”

**No crossover?** Some in the trade department believe the Afghanistan issue is too grave to be lumped in with the trade debate, and the two are totally separate. But it’s hard to believe Johnson would be as outspoken as he has been if a deal was on the cusp of being inked.

**But, but, but:** That said, the prime minister didn’t have much luck trying to bang heads together at yesterday’s G7. The meeting came against the backdrop of a striking Taliban [proclamation](#): foreigners could keep leaving until U.S. troops’ planned withdrawal on August 31, but Afghans not pre-approved for foreign travel now couldn’t. So in the end, however much pressure the U.K., France and others could put on America, the big decisions were made before the meeting even began. [More from our colleagues](#) in Westminster, Brussels, Paris and Berlin.