

It's decision time for Starmer

Published: January 12, 2026, 9:09 pm

Trump has, off the cuff, and whilst mid-air on Air Force One, [announced that the US](#) will impose new, universal 25 per cent tariffs on steel and aluminium imported into the USA, starting from today. The details are a bit sketchy as yet - which must make it fun for US tax collectors trying to get matters right on the ground, but it seems that the tariff means that most existing exemptions from such charges are withdrawn, meaning that these charges will have a big impact both in and outside the USA.

Let's ignore for a moment the international politics of tariffs - which are complicated in a world where supply chains themselves are complicated, long and very hard to unpick after decades of increasing globalisation. These facts mitigate against these tariffs having much success in terms of job creation and market protection for the USA. Simultaneously, they suggest that those tariffs will have a widespread impact outside the USA.

One of the countries that will be impacted will be the UK. We export steel to the USA. The standard response to the imposition of a tariff is to impose one in return. That is how trade wars start and are perpetuated.

The question is, what will the UK do? Will Starmer fight back, as would be expected? Or will he continue to suck up to Trump and turn on his back to have his tummy tickled in the hope of getting a trade deal with a fascist?

In the case of Starmer, who knows? I am making no predictions. But his choice of prevarication will be harder to maintain soon. If Trump is attacking the UK, Starmer has to be seen to be doing something. The options of waiting, appeasement, or prevarication (you take your pick; multiple options can be chosen) will be over. Starmer will have to do what he has never seemingly been trained for: a decision will be required of him. At the very least, this will be interesting to watch. It might also tell us a great deal about where we are heading.