

Macron and Starmer discuss war and attacks on migrants during state visit

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French President Emmanuel Macron's state visit to the UK—the first by a French leader since 2008 and the first by any European leader since Brexit—was marked by agreements on anti-migrant measures and continuing the war against Russia in Ukraine.

Amid continuing tensions among the European powers over how to respond to US President Donald Trump's zig-zagging policy towards NATO and the Ukraine war, Macron and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer made their latest effort to present an Anglo-French axis.

The pair's most significant announcement was the "Northwood declaration", confirming "for the first time," in Starmer's words, "that we are coordinating our independent nuclear deterrence. From today, our adversaries will know that any extreme threat to this continent would prompt a response from our two nations."

Macron added, "The decision is that we don't exclude the coordination of our respective deterrents. It's a message that our partners and adversaries must hear."

The UK and France are NATO's only European nuclear powers, possessing 225 and 290 warheads respectively. The "adversary" in their crosshairs is Russia.

London and Paris also agreed to update their Lancaster House defence pact, signed in 2010, with an *Entente Industrielle*.

New agreements include building the next generation of Storm Shadow cruise missile—a Franco-British weapon—many of which have been supplied to Ukraine and used to strike Russian Federation territory. Production of existing Storm Shadows will be stepped up. Another joint project will develop beyond visual range air-to-air missiles.

The two countries will begin work on high-tech radiofrequency weapons that can be used to disable drones and missiles, as well as AI projects to increase the lethality of their own drones and missiles.

Starmer told reporters, "As Europe's only nuclear powers providing about 40 percent of European defence spending, we share a unique responsibility for the security of this continent."

In the case of Europe's new €150-billion Security Action for Europe (SAFE) defence financing programme, however, France continues to lobby to limit the participation of UK arms manufacturers.

Starmer and Macron discussed plans for their "Coalition of the Willing" over Ukraine. "The Coalition of the Willing will have a new permanent headquarters in Paris, with plans in place for a future coordination cell in Kyiv, as command structures for the future reassurance force are finalised," read a Downing Street press release.

The British Prime Minister told reporters: "the Coalition of the Willing is ensuring we have a future force that can deploy following a ceasefire to deter Russian aggression for years to come."

"But as we continue to prepare for peace, our focus must also be on making it happen. So, alongside our partners, in the coming days and weeks, we will step up our support to keep Ukraine in the fight now, increasing pressure on Putin through crippling sanctions and ensuring Ukraine's Armed Forces have the equipment they need to defend their sovereign territory."

For Macron, the purpose of this still largely on-paper organisation is to establish greater European military independence, as far as possible under French leadership. He told the British Parliament, "We will have to de-risk our two countries from the excessive

dependencies on both the US and China... If we want to build a sustainable future for all children [we have] to de-risk our economies and our societies from these dual dependencies.”

He added that Britain and France had “a special responsibility for the security of the continent.”

For Starmer, the Coalition is primarily intended to persuade Trump to continue the war effort in Ukraine, offering the promise of a stepped-up European commitment, with Britain retaining its role as a bridge across the Atlantic. He announced happily on Thursday, “We have just co-chaired a meeting of the coalition for the willing, including representatives from the United States for the first time.”

These included Special Presidential Envoy, General Keith Kellogg, Senator Lindsey Graham and Senator Richard Blumenthal.

The balance of military force between the United States and a European continent only just beginning its efforts to close the gap means all of these plans still hang heavily on decisions made in the White House. Europe’s governments will be closely watching Trump’s trailed “major statement” on Russia next Monday.

Starmer in particular will be encouraged by reports Friday of a deal struck between the US and NATO for the alliance to purchase weapons from Washington, which it then sends on to Ukraine.

On migration, the two leaders agreed to a “one in, one out” agreement, which would see asylum seekers in France judged to have a claim to asylum in the UK exchanged one-for-one with those in the UK arriving via small boats across the Channel. The policy is part of Starmer’s efforts to make a right-wing xenophobic pitch to Reform voters.

Illegal migration, Starmer told a press conference, referring to efforts by war and poverty-stricken families to find a place to work and build a life, “is a global crisis, and it’s a European crisis. But it is also, very acutely, a crisis for our two nations—a crisis of law, security, humanity—and fairness.

“We face a sprawling, multibillion pound enterprise, run by organised criminal gangs leading hundreds of people to their death in the Channel. So we are determined, together, to end this vile trade.”

Calling for “hard-headed, aggressive action on all fronts to... secure our borders,” he praised the French

government for allowing “their officers to intervene in shallow waters and prevent more boats from launching.” French police have begun slashing rubber dinghies on the beach and are expected to change their protocol to allow interventions up to 300 metres out to sea.

The United Nations convention on the law of the sea explicitly bars any intervention at sea that is not a rescue.

Starmer’s “one in, one out” mechanism was first suggested by leading Tory politician—and possible candidate for leader—Robert Jenrick. It is a policy aimed at shoring up the bureaucratic wall used to deny “legal” asylum to all but a handful.

The Tories and Reform seized on Starmer’s announcement to demand he go further, attacking the European Union and pointing out that the pilot scheme agreed with France will return a maximum of 2,600 people a year—roughly 21,000 people have crossed the Channel this way since the start of this year.

France is unlikely to offer Britain substantially more. Macron was at pains throughout his visit to castigate Britain for its vote to leave the European Union: “A lot of people in your country explained that Brexit would allow you to fight more efficiently against illegal immigration”. But this had resulted in “the exact opposite”.

“The British people were sold a lie that the problems was Europe. By leaving, Brexit became the problem. For the first time in nine years we are bringing an answer.”



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