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Emmanuel Macron's State Visit to Washington: Recommendations for President Trump

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French President Emmanuel Macron's three-day state visit to Washington from April 23 to 25 will be an important opportunity for the Trump Administration to strengthen the transatlantic alliance and reinforce U.S. priorities in Europe. Macron will be the first foreign leader hosted by the Trump White House for a state visit, and his trip comes in the wake of France's participation alongside the United Kingdom in U.S.-led airstrikes against the Assad regime in Syria.

While the deep-rooted Anglo-American Special Relationship unquestionably remains America's most important bilateral alliance, France under Macron has taken considerable steps to reinvigorate the long-standing U.S.-French partnership following the departure of socialist President Francois Hollande. Hollande's successor in the Elysee Palace has a distinctly more pragmatic approach toward the Trump Administration, based on engagement rather than confrontation, reflected in Macron's early invitation to President Donald Trump to attend the Bastille Day celebrations last July.

Although President Macron's administration is firmly opposed to some aspects of the U.S. Administration's foreign policy, including its decision to withdraw from the Paris Climate Accord, there is

room for close U.S.-French cooperation on Iran, Syria, Russia, the global war against Islamist terrorism, and support for Ukraine.

Fixing or Nixing a Flawed Iran Nuclear Deal

Since taking office, the Trump Administration has embarked upon a wholesale review of America's Iran policy, including a reassessment of the Iran nuclear deal (the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)) signed by the Obama Administration together with Iran, Russia, China, Great Britain, France, and Germany, as well as the European Union. On May 12, President Trump will announce whether the United States will stick with the deal or walk away from it. As Heritage Foundation experts have argued, "the Iran deal is a fundamentally flawed agreement that gave Tehran massive sanctions relief up front—while only requiring it to make temporary and easily reversible concessions on its nuclear program."¹ Since the deal was agreed in 2015, the Iranian regime has become increasingly emboldened and aggressive, significantly expanding its ballistic missile capability, its backing for terrorist groups, such as Hamas and Hezbollah, and its influence in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Yemen.

The Trump Administration's appeals to European allies to strengthen the deal together with the U.S., by pressing for the removal of its sunset clauses, the opening of Iran's military facilities to international inspection, and the imposition of restrictions on Iran's development of ballistic missiles, have so far not yet yielded any results. In his meeting with Emmanuel Macron, President Trump must make clear that the United States is fully prepared to walk

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away from the JCPOA unless European allies make concrete, substantial, and immediate moves by to “fix” the agreement.

The French government has been critical of the deal, but has not yet agreed for it to be amended, not least due to many French companies signing lucrative business deals with Tehran, including oil giant Total.² The American President must make clear that the United States will do all it can to prevent Iran from becoming a nuclear weapons power, and will sideline the Iran nuclear deal if it continues to be ineffective and impedes that goal.

Sending a Joint Message of Resolve to Moscow

Mounting Russian aggression in both the Middle East and Europe will loom large in the background of Macron’s visit to Washington. President Trump and President Macron should jointly call on Moscow to end its support for the Assad regime and cease its attempts to cover up Syria’s use of chemical weapons against civilians in the Damascus suburb of Douma. Russia has displayed a callous disregard for the loss of life in Douma, and has made every effort to shield the Syrian government from responsibility for the brutal murder of dozens of its own people.

On the European front, the U.S. and French leaders must strongly condemn Russia’s recent use of chemical weapons on British soil, with its brazen assassination attempt in Salisbury, and discuss the possibility of further U.S. and European sanctions against Moscow. Earlier this week, the White House considered, but did not proceed with, a new set of financial sanctions against Russian interests. These sanctions should be imposed at the earliest oppor-

tunity. Both Washington and Paris should also push back against pressure from Germany to limit the impact in Europe of U.S. sanctions targeting oligarchs close to the Kremlin.³ In addition, the U.S. and France should keep up pressure on Russia over its continued aggression in Ukraine, and work to support America’s Ukrainian allies.

Strengthening NATO

President Trump has made calls for increased defense spending in Europe a centerpiece of his European policy, a point he made emphatically clear in his speech to North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) leaders in Brussels last May. In 2017, France spent 1.79 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) on defense, below the 2 percent benchmark.⁴ However, France did meet the benchmark of spending 20 percent of its defense budget on equipment (24.17 percent) in 2017.⁵ France plans to increase defense spending by 35 percent over the next six years, attaining 2 percent of GDP by 2025.⁶

While President Trump should welcome French plans to increase defense spending, he should also ask President Macron to assist in pushing fellow European NATO members to increase their own defense spending. In 2018, only eight of 29 NATO member states will spend 2 percent of GDP on defense. In particular, NATO members who are also members of the EU (excluding the U.K.) lag behind, accounting for only 18 percent of all NATO defense spending in 2017.⁷ France should use its influence within Europe to join the U.S. in pushing for more defense spending from fellow EU NATO member states.

France is one of America’s most capable allies. French troops have deployed to Lithuania as contrib-

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1. James Jay Carafano, Luke Coffey, and James Phillips, “The Dangers of Trump Allowing Iran Deal to Continue,” *The Daily Signal*, April 16, 2018, <https://www.dailysignal.com/2018/04/16/the-dangers-of-trump-allowing-iran-deal-to-continue/>.
 2. Hashem Kalantari and Golnar Motevallii, “Total Signs Iran’s First Major Energy Deal Since Curbs Eased,” *Bloomberg*, July 3, 2017, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-07-02/total-to-sign-milestone-iran-energy-deal-since-sanctions-eased> (accessed April 19, 2018).
 3. Andrea Thomas and William Boston, “Germany to Push for Exemptions from U.S. Sanctions on Russia,” *The Wall Street Journal*, April 18, 2018, https://www.wsj.com/articles/germany-to-push-for-exemptions-on-u-s-sanctions-on-russia-1524047030?shareToken=st17f9e3c3d61641508bcd0c6d688fa263&reflink=article_email_share (accessed April 20, 2018).
 4. North Atlantic Treaty Organization, “Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2010-2017)),” March 15, 2018, p. 3, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2018_03/20180315_180315-pr2018-16-en.pdf (accessed April 18, 2018).
 5. *Ibid.*
 6. “France Commits to Boosting Defense Spending by 35 Percent Over Six Years,” *Reuters*, February 8, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-defence/france-commits-to-boosting-defense-spending-by-35-percent-over-six-years-idUSKBN1F518Q> (accessed April 18, 2018).
 7. *Ibid.*
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utors to the German-led battle group that forms the NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP) in that Baltic country. The U.S. serves as the framework nation for the Alliance's EFP battle group in Poland. The French and American Air Forces also frequently take part in the NATO Baltic Air Policing mission. In advance of the NATO summit in July, Presidents Trump and Macron should discuss the importance of establishing a permanent, robust NATO presence in Eastern Europe, such as the Baltic states and Poland.

Reiterating U.S. Support for Brexit

Donald Trump's meeting with Emmanuel Macron offers an excellent opportunity for President Trump to reiterate his long-standing support for Brexit, and affirm the U.S. national interest in seeing a successful British exit from the European Union. President Macron has been a fierce opponent of Brexit, referring to it as a "crime,"⁸ and his administration has pressed the European Commission to adopt a hard-line approach in negotiations over the terms of Britain's withdrawal from the EU. President Trump should make it absolutely clear from a U.S. perspective that Brexit is a great positive that will strengthen the transatlantic alliance and the enduring principles of sovereignty and self-determination. He must urge France and other governments within the EU to seek a constructive, not punitive, approach that will lead to a successful U.K.-EU free trade agreement that will ultimately benefit Britain, Europe, and the United States.

Encouraging France to Step Up its Efforts against Islamist Extremists

France is keenly aware of the nature of the Islamist terror threat. Such terrorists have targeted France more frequently than any other European country: from the Métro and RER bombings (1995) to modern atrocities in Paris (January and November 2015) and Nice (July 2016).⁹

Both France and the U.S. can—and should—do more to respond to Islamist terror around the world. President Trump should encourage France to pri-

oritize prosecuting foreign fighters returning from the "caliphate" as a deterrent to future terrorist travel. The two countries should also work hand-in-hand to prevent an ISIS comeback in Syria and Iraq while exploring ways to deepen intelligence sharing on national security issues. The U.S. and France should also reiterate their commitment to defeating al-Qaeda, a group that has been largely overlooked in recent years due to the focus on ISIS.

President Trump and President Macron should explain that Islamism as an ideological movement poses a strategic threat. They should stress that this ideology encompasses the violent terrorists of ISIS as well as purportedly non-violent movements, such as the Muslim Brotherhood. President Trump and President Macron should pledge to redouble their efforts to take on this ideology, as only its ultimate defeat will cause the terror threat to recede in the long-term.

Recommendations

Emmanuel Macron's visit to the White House is an excellent opportunity to strengthen transatlantic cooperation. In speaking with President Macron, President Trump should:

- **Urge France and European allies to get tough on Iran.** Since the deal was agreed in 2015, the Iranian regime has become increasingly emboldened and aggressive, significantly expanding its ballistic missile capability, its backing for terrorist groups, and expanding its regional influence. The U.S. should press France to work to strengthen the deal, removing its fatally flawed sunset clauses, ensuring that Iran's military facilities are open to international inspection, and imposing restrictions on Iran's development of ballistic missiles.
- **Send a joint message of resolve to Moscow.** Presidents Trump and Macron must unequivocally condemn Russia's recent use of chemical weapons on British soil, and impose additional sanctions on Russia over its actions.

8. Faisal Islam, "French Election: What the Emmanuel Macron Presidency Will Mean for Brexit," *Newsweek*, May 9, 2017, <https://news.sky.com/story/how-would-an-emmanuel-macron-presidency-affect-brexit-10849659> (accessed April 19, 2018).

9. Robin Simcox, "European Islamist Plots and Attacks Since 2014—and How the U.S. Can Help Prevent Them," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 3236, August 1, 2017, <http://www.heritage.org/europe/report/european-islamist-plots-and-attacks-2014-and-how-the-us-can-help-prevent-them>.

- **Continue robust support for Ukraine.** The U.S. and France should continue to impose costs on Russia over its continued aggression in Ukraine, while helping to support Ukraine, including by ensuring that Ukraine is on the agenda for the NATO summit in July.
- **Encourage increased defense spending for NATO members.** President Trump should encourage France to continue to work toward spending 2 percent of GDP on defense, while pressing France to use its influence within Europe to join with the United States to press for more defense spending from fellow European NATO member states.
- **Support a permanent NATO presence in Eastern Europe.** Presidents Trump and Macron should announce their support for a permanent, robust NATO presence in Eastern European member states, such as the Baltic states and Poland.
- **Reiterate U.S. support for Brexit.** President Trump should reiterate his long-standing support for Brexit, and affirm the U.S. national interest in seeing a successful British exit from the European Union.
- **Encourage France to step up its efforts against Islamist terrorists.** President Trump should discuss the need for France to prioritize prosecution for foreign fighters and should work to deepen U.S.–French intelligence sharing cooperation. In addition, the President should reiterate a commitment to defeating al-Qaeda; pledge to take on Islamism, the ideological root causes of terror groups like ISIS; and work with the French to prevent an ISIS comeback in Syria and Iraq.

Conclusion

President Trump’s meeting with Macron provides an important opportunity to press his French counterpart on several key areas of U.S. national interest on the world stage. While Presidents Trump and Macron have distinct ideological differences, there are many opportunities for Washington and Paris to work closely together. America’s focus in Europe should be to enhance ties with key European national capitals, strengthen NATO’s capacity to stand up to the Russian threat, and increase Europe’s resolve to confront Iranian aggression and nuclear ambitions.

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