

# Starmer joins European Union heads to discuss “defence”, refuses to back bloc in US trade war

Robert Stevens  
4 February 2025

UK Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer met with European Union (EU) leaders on Monday and confirmed British imperialism’s role as an avid backer of Donald Trump’s US presidency.

Starmer was the first UK prime minister to address a meeting of EU heads since Britain’s acrimonious departure from the bloc, following the referendum vote to leave in 2016. His appearance was trailed as part of his declared intention—part of Labour’s pitch to the ruling elite in last year’s general election—to “reset” UK-EU relations.

The European Council meeting was called to discuss issues of security and defence: specifically, as the *Financial Times* noted, a “proposed security and defence pact” between the EU and UK “which will also cover areas such as tackling illegal migration” and “is expected to be wrapped up into broader UK-EU negotiations over the coming months.”

These proposals have been made more urgent for Europe’s ruling classes by Trump’s “America First” presidency, his demands that European NATO members increase defence spending to 5 percent of GDP and threats to impose tariffs of up to 10 percent on European goods.

Trump’s military foreign policy is problematic for Britain and the EU alike, threatening a lessening of US support through NATO when the European powers are ill-equipped to sustain the Ukraine war themselves.

The EU sees this as disastrous, having for years allied with the Biden administration’s war policies against Russia. Pleading with Trump to continue this agenda, while still intensifying conflict with China as Trump demands, Donald Tusk, the Polish prime minister, said “Given the threat from Russia and China’s expansion, we [EU and US] cannot afford to be divided.”

At the same time, US policy is spurring discussions of a

European military force, as the continent’s main powers—Germany, France, Italy and Poland—all increase the flow of resources to the military.

Starmer has tried to position the UK as a leading voice for greater European military spending, which it hopes will convince Trump to continue US commitments in the theatre through NATO, therefore countering moves towards an independent European military policy. But this is difficult given that Britain’s own military spending is falling behind the curve.

Arriving in Brussels, the Labour leader told a joint press conference with NATO head Mark Rutte: “We must harden European’s defence,” including by “shoulder[ing] more of the burden” now carried by the US. But he had to acknowledge that, while the UK was “proud to be a leading NATO ally... Our defence spending is of course 2.3 percent of GDP... we are working hard to set the path to 2.5 percent.”

On tariffs, the Trump administration made a distinction between the UK and the EU. While declaring that the UK was “out of line” over its trade with the US, Trump said he believed that something “can be worked out”. The EU was meanwhile described as “an atrocity” which would “definitely” be on the receiving end of tariffs “because they’ve really taken advantage, you know, we have over \$300 billion deficit.”

In response French President Macron vowed that “If we are attacked in terms of trade, Europe—as a true power—will have to stand up for itself to make itself respected.” German Chancellor Olaf Scholz declared, “One thing is clear: as a strong economic area, we can shape our own affairs and also respond to tariff policies with tariff policies.”

Starmer pointedly refused to back the EU in any trade war with the US, stating at the European Council, “If you

look at our [Britain's] vital interests, it's really important that we work with both [US and EU] and that we don't see it as either-or... Both of these relations are very important to us. We are not choosing between them."

Downing Street was equally unwilling to criticise Trump's threats to annex Canada and Greenland.

*Politico's* London desk reported that Starmer's "spokesperson didn't want to discuss much else about Trump—including his threats over Greenland or his tariff attacks on other nations." It added that, when "asked whether Britain would stand up for Canada, a Commonwealth pal, in its battle against MAGA tariffs, the spokesperson didn't want to discuss trade relations between other nations."

UK Foreign Secretary David Lammy came close to endorsing the move in an earlier interview, telling Sky News on January 9 that he was "not in the business of condemning our closest ally" over his comments towards Greenland. Trump, Lammy enthused, had a mandate: "77 million people voted for him. Up in nearly all classifications, including, by the way, African Americans and Latinos." And that mandate was centred on "America's national economic security".

If the US President was "raising issues, in relation to the Panama Canal, and... Greenland," that was because "sitting behind that are actually quite serious national security and economic issues."

Starmer and Lammy's comments confirm the Labour government's desperation to maintain Britain's "special relationship" with the United States, as touted by their ideological predecessor Tony Blair after coming to office in 1997. His backing for the wars in Serbia, Afghanistan and Iraq made clear from the beginning that the only role Britain would be allowed to play by Washington was that of provocateur and attack dog.

Today, Labour's desired US-UK partnership is carried on under conditions in which the fascist in the White House has declared war on the world.

Starmer developed in the Blairite wing of the Labour Party and had established close ties with major players in Washington even before becoming an MP in 2015, during his years as the head of the Crown Prosecution Service (2008-13). He fought the 2024 General Election pledging that Labour, as "the party of NATO", would continue the backing of the Tory government for the US-led NATO war against Russia—the main pre-occupation of the Biden administration.

But when it became clear that Trump could win the November election, a sharp recalibration was required by

the now Labour government.

This was the basis for the meeting between Trump, Starmer and Lammy at Trump Tower in New York in late September. Nothing would prevent the required rapprochement, not even Lammy's description of Trump a few years earlier as "deluded, dishonest, xenophobic, narcissistic", "no friend of Britain" and "a woman-hating, neo-Nazi-sympathising sociopath".

Bending the knee, Lammy said last November that his previous comments were "old news". He had been a backbencher when he denounced Trump, whereas now "I am foreign secretary. There are things I know now that I didn't know back then." Namely, that Trump is "someone that we can build a relationship with in our national interest".

Since then, Trump has praised Starmer's pledge to accelerate the deregulation of the UK economy on behalf of big business. Meanwhile, his supporters—particularly oligarch Elon Musk, who has backed Nigel Farage's Reform UK party—have launched attacks on the Labour government aimed at shifting British politics further to the right, and whipping Downing Street into line, especially against the EU.

Labour's willingness to do as it is told has now been rewarded by the Trump administration accepting another leading Blairite, Lord Mandelson, as UK Ambassador to the US.

Mandelson, long an advocate of close relations with the European Union, had previously called Trump a "bully" and "reckless and a danger to the world".

Speaking ahead of his confirmation, Mandelson told Fox News that not only did he "consider my remarks about President Trump as ill-judged and wrong," but that Trump had won "fresh respect" with his barrage of fascist executive orders for "the dynamism and energy with which he approached not just the campaign but government as well."



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**