

Background Press Briefing on the Upcoming State Visit with President Macron of France

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Press Briefings

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James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

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SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Thank you all for coming on a Friday. Today's background briefing is on the subject of the state visit of President of France Macron. We're excited to be welcoming him and the First Lady to the United States.

And today's background briefing, for your situational awareness and not for reporting, your briefer is [senior administration official]. For attribution purposes, you may refer to him as senior administration official.

Today's call is embargoed until the conclusion of this briefing. And my colleague will run you through the schedule and lay out some broad themes that you may wish to consider as you cover this visit. Thank you.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Okay. Thank you again. Good afternoon again, ladies and gentlemen.

Next week, President Trump and the First Lady will host the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, and Mrs. Macron for the first state visit of the Trump administration.

The state visit will include, on Monday, April 23rd, a tour of Mt. Vernon and a private couples dinner. President Trump is eager to host the Macrons for this special event as he remembers, fondly, the dinner the couples shared together in the Eiffel Tower on the eve of Bastille Day that was last July in 2017.

On Tuesday, April 24th, President Macron will meet with President Trump in the White House, midmorning, for a one-on-one session in the Oval Office. That will be followed by an expanded working bilateral meeting with the French and U.S. delegations. The bilateral meeting will include the Vice President, the Acting Secretary of State, the Secretary of Treasury, the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of Commerce, the White House Chief of Staff, the National Security Advisor, the Assistant to the President for Economic Policy, and Ambassador Jamie McCourt, who is our ambassador in Paris.

The members of the French delegation include France's Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Economics and Finance, the Minister of Defense, and National Security Advisor, among others. Please contact the government of France for the latest details on the composition of its delegation.

There will also be a joint press conference on that day. There will be a State Department luncheon, which will also include the Vice President, followed by a wreath-laying ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery, and that evening, a state dinner here in the White House.

On Wednesday, April 25th, President Macron will address a Joint Session of Congress. The address will mark the anniversary of the day that French General Charles de Gaulle addressed the Joint Session of Congress, specifically April 25th, 1960.

I would like to stress three themes for this visit. First, the United States and France enjoy a long and enduring friendship. This visit will celebrate the close and continuing ties between France and the United States in this, the 100th anniversary year of the end of World War I. President Trump is continuing the legacy of French-American cooperation that stretches back to America's independence, and is working with President Macron to build upon the already strong ties between the United States and France.

Second, France is a valued trade and investment partner. France was the United States' first trade partner. And France remains a major destination for U.S. exports and a source of foreign investment in the United States.

Today, France is the United States' third largest trading partner in Europe, and averages over \$1 billion in commercial transactions every day. The United States is the top destination for French foreign investment. And in 2016, France invested \$19.3 billion in the United States. The U.S. is the largest foreign investor in France, and in 2016, we invested some \$78 billion there. In 2016, French investment supported a bit over 26,000 jobs in the United States.

Three, France is a strong and reliable ally. The United States works closely with France to combat terror around the world. And President Trump and President Macron will discuss recent joint operations in Syria in response to the Syrian regime's use of chemical weapons on April 7th; broader issues relating to Syria and the Middle East — these would include Iran's malign influence in the region; and also France's leading role in NATO and in global counterterrorism operations more generally, including in the Sahel, where France takes the leading role.

So with that, I'll be happy, at this time, to field questions of a general nature about the visit. Thank you.

I was hoping I'd get to say, "If there are no questions, thank you very much." (Laughter.) Yes, sir.

Q Are you expecting negotiations on some of these tariffs that the administration is proffering to Europe?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Yeah, yeah. Without going into details about economic trade policy, which is a little bit outside my portfolio, I'm sure that discussion will be on the agenda for the one-on-one and the bilateral discussion that will follow.

Q How specific do you think the talks will be on the Iran nuclear deal? And what are some of the things that the President needs to hear from Macron in order to be persuaded to remain in the deal?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Right. I'm sure the topic will be a major topic of discussion. It's difficult to say what degree of detail the two Presidents will go into, because based on the President's statement back in January, there's a deadline of around mid-May before he has to make a decision. The Europeans, the E3 in particular, have been working hard on trying to address some of our most important or prominent concerns having to do with Iran's ballistic missile program, for example; the sunset clause; and the JCPOA, and so on. That work is not quite done yet. So I think the time to really have the final discussions and for the President to be ready to make the decision will be mid-May.

Q How much is this visit about substance on some of the issues these guys asked about versus on style or underscoring the importance of the relationship?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, I think it's fair to say that it will be about both. I mean, it's no secret that President Trump and President Macron enjoy a good working relationship — I may say, a close personal relationship. And there are aspects of the visit, I think, that both sides will want to celebrate — the 100th anniversary, that I mentioned, of the end of World War I — and even more than that, a very deep and a very old relationship that goes all the way back to the founding.

But obviously, there are some things which are best discussed face to face. Under the best of circumstances, they don't get to meet in person all the time, and so I'm sure they're going to get into some personal interaction on some of the pressing issues that are important to both of them.

Q And just to follow up on China — the French and EU officials have a lot of the same concerns that President Trump talks a lot about on Chinese economic practices. Is this an opportunity to start forging more of a unified front against Beijing?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Yeah, I'm sure they're going to want to talk about how to collaborate towards that end. No doubt about that.

Yes, sir.

Q Just on the style points, do you know the itinerary for Mt. Vernon? Do you think the Presidents will visit George Washington's grave, for example? And any details on the menu for the dinner that night?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I don't think I can help you with either one of those.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: They will put out the menu on Monday evening, so you'll get those details.

Q Guest list, too?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Guest list will be put out once they receive the final visitor on Tuesday evening. For the state dinner we're talking now? That's when we'll be transmitting that.

Q Is that outside or inside, the state dinner? Is it on the South Lawn or is it — do you know?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I don't have the details, but lower press definitely will have a more fleshed-out schedule with time, acts, and things like that, if you need more details like that.

Q President Macron has said publicly that he believes that he convinced or helped convince President Trump to not pull U.S. troops out of Syria or to be more assertive in the response on Syria. Can you tell us how specific you expect the two of them to get, in terms of trying to hammer out some sort of a forward path on how to respond post-airstrikes to the chemical weapons attack and to the ongoing conflict there? And how much should we expect to see out of this meeting in terms of a map forward for what we should look for next?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Yeah, I'm sure that the two Presidents will discuss, probably in some detail, the way ahead in Syria. They'll exchange their perspectives, which are broadly aligned. But I'm sure there are some national differences in the two of those.

How far they will go in terms of detail is difficult to say right now. The one-on-one will have a number of agenda items. I expect they'll get into this topic a bit more in a bilateral discussion that follows when they have both their teams there. But I'm sure we'll be reading about it afterwards.

Q Is there something specific that the President would like to hear or see out of France or President Macron on this topic? I mean, are there commitments that he would like to see made in terms of what France is willing to do in support of the U.S. action there?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Yeah, I think primarily what he's interested in is hearing President Macron's perspectives on the way ahead towards achieving joint goals and joint objectives in person, face to face.

Yes, please.

Q Thanks. I'm wondering if you can talk about what — this is going to sound stupid — what the President wants to — hopes to get out of this visit, both in terms of any deliverables on trade or Syria or what have you, but also in terms of how the world sees the visit.

I mean, I think in shorthand, we all recognize that Macron as probably, if not the person the President is closest to in the world of counterparts, at least certainly one of them. And since the President took office to now, it certainly seems like he is more out-facing about the importance of alliances and that kind of thing.

So both from a deliverables perspective and just kind of narrative-wise, what would be a few examples of what the President would be really happy with that would happen during this visit?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, I think, number one, clearly, it's a state visit; it's the first state visit for this administration. So in that sense, it's something of a celebration of the relationship, and I think it's indicative of a desire to continue to forge a close relationship, a stronger relationship, a relationship that's already very strong, I think — among the strongest that we have of any allies and partners in the world.

I think there's going to be a full and free airing of points of view, as I said earlier, many of which we feel are pretty closely aligned France, and then a few which may not be as tightly aligned. But more than anything, I think what the President would like to hear from President Macron is his counsel and his point of view and his perspective.

Whether we will actually solve, or come to closure, or a full detailed agreement on some of the issues that we've touched on is difficult to say at this remove.

Q Do you expect some trade announcements? I mean, you don't have to say what they are but —

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Hard to say. Don't know if there will be a trade announcement following the state visit or not. Just don't know.

Q You didn't mention — Lighthizer is not going to be at the bilat, that you know of?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Not that I know of. Don't know.

Q There was some speculation earlier this week about additional economic sanctions on Russia. Do you expect any sanctions to be announced as part of the visit by Macron? Or do you have any updated guidance on when we may see additional sanctions on Russia?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Yeah, unknown if an additional round of sanctions would be announced in conjunction with this visit. The President has already said publicly that those, sort of, remain an option for consideration based on Russian behavior and Russian actions downstream, but unknown if that's going to be relevant to this visit or not.

Q On Syria, the President has said he would prefer to get all U.S. troops out of Syria. What would he need to hear from President Macron? Does he want, maybe, France to do more on the ground to maybe keep some forces there in kind of a share of responsibilities? Anything like that?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Yeah, I think you'll appreciate that the answer to that complicated question is not completely dependent upon what President Macron says in this meeting. I'm confident they will discuss potential French contributions in the campaign, and then we'll see where it goes from there.

Anybody calling in with questions? No?

Q One more. We expect, obviously, after Macron, Germany will also be coming through — Angela Merkel. Do we expect Theresa May to visit the U.S. before the Iran nuclear deal deadline of the 12th?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Don't know right now that that kind of a visit is on the schedule. I know the President, later in the summer, right now is looking at a visit to the UK where they would meet, but I don't have any information one way or the other on whether the Prime Minister will be here before the deadline.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: For the visit to Mt. Vernon, there was a question about where they might go, but they will visit Washington's tomb.

Q Washington's tomb?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Correct.

Q I wanted to ask you one about the Iran deal. You mentioned that the discussions with the E3 have focused on dealing with concerns about ballistic missile programs and the sunset provision. Are any of the discussions focused on us reassembling a multilateral sanctions group in the event that the decision is to withdraw from the deal?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: A little bit outside of my lane. I think the President's three priorities with respect to the JCPOA are the sunset clause, the ballistic missile program, and more broadly, Iran's malign activities throughout the region and throughout the world. That's what he's asked the E3 allies and partners to look most closely at. This is where we're hoping for real contributions, and we'll see if we get across the finish line right there.

Q Is there anything President Macron could say to make President Trump reconsider the Paris climate deal? Do you think that will be discussed?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Yeah, I don't have an insight on that for you to share. I'm sorry.

Q It's not on the agenda at this time?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Not as far as I know, unless it's brought up by President Macron.

Q There's been some reporting, just in the last hour or so, that President Macron plans to bring a seedling to be planted here in Washington to President Trump. Is there anything in particular — any gifts or gestures the President is planning to make that you

can preview for us for his visiting counterpart?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I'm very confident there is. My office and (inaudible) probably wouldn't know about it, though. Other people get paid to worry about those things. But I'm sure there is. Yes.

Any other questions?

Q Can you speak to the guest list and the criteria for this first state dinner and what you're looking for?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I'm sorry, I don't have any information on how protocol (inaudible) that, to be honest.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Okay. If there's no other questions, thanks very much for your time. Appreciate it.

END

3:52 P.M. EDT