

Macron achieves balance in Washington DC

By [Patrick Walker](#)

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Image :Dominique Pineiro

The first ever state visit to the US was a display of awkward conflict and utterly bizarre physical affection. Macron's trip to Washington came at a time of political difficulty at home, and he recognised that a good showing around Trump would restore confidence in his premiership. The American President, as far as Trump strategies go, wanted to reject Macron's views on key issues: Iran's nuclear programme, the US' ongoing trade war, and America's climate change agenda.

The two men certainly didn't seem keen to air these differences, at least for the first two days. They were strangely affectionate with each other, exchanging the traditional French kiss on the cheek, and hugging. At one point, Macron placed his hands on Trump's knee. The display was a stark contrast to the chilly reception Merkel, or the prolonged handshake that went viral after their first meeting. Both leaders seemed desperate to convince the media their relationship was an ongoing success, and they achieved this. The New York Times declared the state visit 'Le Bromance'. Trump has either begun to listen to his advisors, or has decided that having at least one ally in Europe would be beneficial to a country about to level trade tariffs on a global scale.

Macron's first goal for the visit to manage Trump was a resounding success. His address to Congress struck a different tone, and while he added the usual imperatives on 'unbreakable bonds' and international cooperation, he also set about an impassioned criticism of Trumpism. His method demonstrated good political understanding. Knowing that American politicians enjoy discussing America's leadership the world, he defended a number of topics through that lens. He argued that multilateralism was "invented" by America, and made a plea that the US "help preserve... it." He also expressed discontent at the US' exit from the Paris Agreement, and said that he hoped they would rejoin "one day". He even found time to criticise Trump's domestic policies. As the Supreme Court was deciding whether to permit Trump's travel ban just minutes from the US capitol, Macron passionately declared that he did not share Trump's "fascination" with the "illusion of nationalism".

Macron's attempt to separate his diplomatic ideology from that of Trump didn't stop there. Trump smartly worked hard to ensure Democrats were excluded from the good press surrounding the state visit, not inviting them to dinners, and spending most of the visit by Macron's side. Despite this, Macron found time to meet Democratic leaders, notably embracing Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.) a civil rights leader who marched with Martin Luther King Jr. Lewis had previously been dismissed by Trump as "all talk." Other Democratic

leaders expressed contentment at these displays, including former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, who praised Macron on Twitter.

For Macron, the trip to Washington was a success. He demonstrated his differences with Trump, endearing himself to his own country, where the American President is very unpopular. Simultaneously, he gained Trump's respect and avoided the bad press surrounding their previous meeting that alleged the two leaders' policy rifts were irreconcilable. Trump must also feel pleased. He reinforced the importance of a 'special relationship' with France, in light of May and Merkel's embroilment in domestic political difficulty, and demonstrated his aptitude for state visits. The message the Trump team ultimately wanted was that Obama wasn't the only president capable of a charm offensive. That said, state visits are good, and easy to win. If Trump continues his trade war, he may find the 'special relationship' a little harder to maintain.



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