

Starmer and Trump: a show not worth watching

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Starmer's meeting with Trump was billed as the most important transatlantic Summit in which the UK had participated for a generation, or more.

I dedicated my entire evening to watching news coverage of this summit last night, so hyped was the billing. I would now ask you to trust me; it did not live up to expectations.

Ignore the fact that Trump clearly tried to upstage the event by permitting the return of the Tate Brothers to the USA at almost the exact moment that Starmer was arriving at the White House.

Ignore too the fact that I am, as will be obvious to any reader of this blog, hardly a fan of either of the participants. You will just have to accept the reality of my predisposition to dislike them both.

Add to those facts, Starmer's opening stunt, which was to bring with him an invitation from Charles Windsor to Donald Trump, with the implication that he is being invited to partake in two visits for the UK. One seems as though it will be an informal event at Balmoral, and the second will be a full state occasion. Given that I have been a republican for more than 40 years, I was always going to be underwhelmed by such supposed showmanship, but it is fair to say that Trump undoubtedly fell for it, narcissist that he is.

Did I then, in all the time that I spent on this issue, observe anything that was a benefit as a consequence of the cosplaying that the two supposed national leaders took part in?

If you think that success was defined in terms of there being no major international incident that erupted as a consequence of the meeting, then your limited ambitions were fulfilled.

Likewise, if you think that Trump downplaying his accusation, made in the last week, that Zelenskyy is a dictator can be called a success, then add that to your list of summit

pluses.

In addition, in diplomatic terms, the fact that there was some bonhomie, despite differences being acknowledged, might be described as useful.

I presume that something might also have happened behind closed doors that could be used to add to this list. I am not privy to that, and so am struggling to expand it.

The downsides were longer, and bigger.

Trump's lack of preparedness, and basic knowledge, was apparent. He thought that his golf course in Doonbeg in Ireland was in the UK. It takes some pretty staggering international incompetence to get such things wrong when you are president of the USA.

There were some pretty awful comments, including Trump asking Starmer whether the UK could take on Russia, single-handedly.

Although the media did line up to ask a pretty good range of questions on this occasion, most of them seeking quite specific answers that would have put either or both leaders into difficult positions, the only consequence was that Trump and Starmer tried to outdo each other in their lack of willing, or inability, to address the points made to them.

Most spectacularly, Starmer pointedly refused to comment on issues concerning claims made by members of Trump's administration during the same day on the need for Canada to redraw its border with the USA, even though Charles Windsor is supposedly King of that country. Diplomatically, this was a first order gaffe, even if it probably appeased Trump in the moment.

As for other questions, waffle was the only thing on offer. I note the New York Times use the very same word this morning.

This, then, was a show, and one that was not worth watching.

The substantive discussions must also have been inconsequential, given that lunch was also consumed during the short period that the two leaders were together.

All that Starmer can claim is that he pulled off a successful stunt, and there were smiles during the course of the exchanges, as if that proved anything.

Were tariffs touched upon? Who knows. The issue was not addressed by either leader in any significant way.

Was anything of significance said on Ukraine, accepting the potential withdrawal of the claim that Zelenskyy is a dictator, noted above? Not that I noticed.

Was the situation in Garza mentioned? Inevitably, it was not.

Did Trump have the opportunity to make some quite absurd comments, without Starmer seeking to intervene? Yes, of course, he did.

If this was the most important transatlantic summit for a generation, then it says little for the rest. All that can be said is that it did not go horribly wrong. When aspirations are that low, politics is operating at a level well below that required for the hopes of people to be met. Using that criteria, this summit failed.