

FRENCH DIPLOMACY AT DAVOS: MACRON'S DEFIANCE AND BARROT'S LONG GAME

DO NOT BE INTIMIDATED" E.MACRON SAID

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USPA NEWS - At the 2026 World Economic Forum in Davos, France used the global stage to push back against Donald Trump's threats while reaffirming its own diplomatic agenda. Emmanuel Macron framed the moment as a historic turning point for Europe, warning against "the law of the strongest" and vowing that the continent would emerge "more powerful," especially on defence. In Paris and New York, meanwhile, Foreign Minister Jean Noel Barrot was juggling immediate tensions with Washington over Greenland and tariffs with longer term work on a future UN convention on crimes against humanity. Together, their messages painted a picture of a France determined to say "no" to what it sees as unacceptable US pressure while deepening multilateral and strategic partnerships elsewhere.

MACRON'S DAVOS MESSAGE: "DO NOT BE INTIMIDATED"

In his speech at Davos, Emmanuel Macron directly addressed mounting pressure from Washington, insisting that Europe must not "let itself be impressed" by threats of punitive tariffs or geopolitical coercion. He warned that submitting to "the law of the strongest" would lead to a "vassalisation" of Europe, a future in which the continent would be subordinated to other powers rather than acting as a sovereign pole in global affairs. The president concluded his twenty minute address by promising that Europe would emerge "stronger," particularly in defence, signaling that the answer to economic and strategic pressure must be greater European autonomy, not retreat.

GREENLAND, TARIFFS AND A FIRM "NO"

President Macron's remarks came as Donald Trump hardened his stance on Greenland and trade, telling reporters in Washington that Europeans would "see" how far he was prepared to go to "acquire" the Arctic territory. The US president has already threatened to impose 200% tariffs on French wines and champagnes in retaliation for France's refusal, "at this stage," to join his new "Council of Peace," and for its criticism of his Greenland ambitions. In Davos, Macron responded by making clear that such threats would not dictate French or European foreign policy, reinforcing a message echoed at home by Jean Noel Barrot: "When the Americans put forward a proposal that is unacceptable, we fully assume telling them no."

MARKET SHOCK AND EUROPEAN COUNTERMOVES

Trump's tariff rhetoric has not been cost free: Wall Street extended its losses after his new warning tied trade measures directly to the Greenland dispute, pushing the S&P 500 down by more than 2%, with similar declines on the Dow Jones and Nasdaq. On the European side, the political response has also hardened, with the European Parliament freezing ratification of a trade agreement that would have locked in 15% tariffs on European exports to the United States while eliminating most duties on US goods entering the EU. This combination of market turbulence and institutional resistance underscores the stakes of the confrontation for both economies and strengthens Emmanuel Macron's argument that Europe must organize collectively rather than submit individually.

FRENCH MFA BARROT'S LINE: STRATEGIC AUTONOMY AND CLEAR RED LINES

From Paris, French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jean Noel Barrot has become one of the clearest voices articulating France's red lines in the face of US pressure. In a televised debate titled "The Return of Empires," the foreign minister repeated that France "perfectly assumes" saying no when Washington's proposals cross what Paris considers acceptable limits. On social media and in interviews, he has linked tariff threats and geopolitical pressure to a broader effort to weaken European autonomy, arguing that France's role as current G7 president is precisely to resist such dynamics and to build coalitions around European interests and international law. His interventions provide the diplomatic backbone to Macron's more high profile appearances at Davos.

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MULTILATERAL DIPLOMACY: FROM MADAGASCAR TO THE UN

Even as French diplomacy confronts Washington, it continues to invest in long term multilateral and bilateral agendas. On 20 January, Barrot met in Paris with Madagascar's foreign minister, Christine Razanamahasoa, reaffirming the "friendly, intense and high quality" relationship between the two countries and preparing a renewed partnership framework aligned with Madagascar's priorities. The two ministers reviewed projects agreed in late 2025 in health, food security, urban planning and energy, including a new phase of justice sector support and French Red Cross assistance in responding to the mpox outbreak. They also discussed future initiatives in higher education and digital training and pledged to work toward high level visits in both directions, underlining that France's Indo Pacific and African relationships remain a central pillar of its foreign policy.

CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY: A LONG VIEW BEYOND THE CRISIS

At the United Nations, France is simultaneously pushing an agenda that looks far beyond today's tariff battles. On 19 January, the first meeting of the Preparatory Committee for a future convention on the prevention and punishment of crimes against humanity opened in New York. France, which welcomed this step as "important" for filling a gap in international law, has committed to taking an active part in the two week preparatory work that will lead to a full diplomatic conference in 2028 and 2029. Paris has praised the International Law Commission's draft articles as a solid basis, arguing that, at a time when atrocities against civilians are multiplying, a dedicated convention is "more necessary than ever" to reinforce accountability and prevent future mass crimes.

FRANCE'S G7 PRESIDENCY: LINKING DAVOS TO JUNE 2026

All of this unfolds in a year when France holds the presidency of the G7, whose summit is scheduled for 14 June 2026. President Macron's Davos speech and Barrot's public line can be read as early markers of a G7 agenda built around European strategic autonomy, resistance to economic coercion and renewed commitments to international law. By pairing sharp rhetoric on tariffs and Greenland with quieter work on Madagascar, development projects and the UN crimes against humanity convention, Paris is signaling that it does not intend to let the Trump confrontation define its diplomacy. Instead, it is trying to use Davos and the months leading up to the G7 summit to argue that a stronger, more united Europe is both a necessary counterweight and a proactive force in shaping global norms. (Source: French ministry of Foreign Affairs)

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