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Donal Trump file pic

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1 hour ago

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Reporting from Air Force One

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Getty Images Composite of Donald Trump standing in front of an American flag wearing a blue suit and red tie and Sir Keir Starmer wearing a dark suit and blue tie with white spots Getty Images

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Can opposites Trump and Starmer find common ground?

"I get along with him well. I like him a lot," Trump said of Sir Keir.

"He's liberal, which is a bit different from me, but I think he's a very good person and I think he's done a very good job thus far.

"He's represented his country in terms of philosophy.

"I may not agree with his philosophy, but I have a very good relationship with him."

Trump was speaking during a visit to the press room on board the presidential plane on Saturday.

He was asked about his relationship with Sir Keir after responding to a question about where he might go for the first international trip of his second term.

"It could be Saudi Arabia, it could be UK. Traditionally it could be UK," he said.

"Last time I went to Saudi Arabia because they agreed to buy \$450 billion of American United States merchandise."

Sir Keir and Trump spoke by phone following Trump's re-election in November, with Downing Street saying at the time that the two had agreed the relationship between the UK and US was "incredibly strong" and would "continue to thrive".

Last week, Foreign Secretary David Lammy said Sir Keir would visit Washington for talks with Trump "within the next few weeks".

Several diplomatic challenges loom for the government, including Trump's pledges to introduce trade tariffs and to cut US support for Ukraine.

It is also unclear whether Trump will agree to the UK's proposed deal to cede sovereignty over the Chagos Islands, where there is a joint US-UK military base, although the UK has said the new US administration will be given the chance to "consider" the deal.

There have been further questions raised about whether Trump will accept Sir Keir's nomination of former Labour minister Lord Peter Mandelson as the British ambassador to Washington.

Last month, Chris LaCivita, the co-manager of Trump's election campaign, called Lord Mandelson "an absolute moron" and said he "should stay home".

Earlier this month Tesla boss Musk, who is an adviser to the president, criticised Starmer in a series of messages on his X social media platform over the grooming gangs scandal, saying the prime minister was "deeply complicit in the mass rapes in exchange for votes".

In response, Sir Keir, who was director of public prosecutions between 2008 and 2013, has accused critics of "spreading lies and misinformation" and says he tackled prosecutions "head on".

Lammy has described his own criticism of the president, made when he was a backbencher, as "old news".

In 2018 he described Trump as a "tyrant" and "a woman-hating, neo-Nazi-sympathising sociopath" but the foreign secretary has since had dinner with him alongside the prime minister.

