# Starmer and Merz sign Kensington Treaty to deepen UK-Germany cooperation amid post-Brexit shifts



Standing in London's Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A), British Prime Minister Keir Starmer and German Chancellor Friedrich Merz etched a pivotal moment in post-Brexit European diplomacy by signing the Kensington Treaty on July 17, 2025. Draped in the national flags of both countries, the leaders formalised a comprehensive bilateral agreement encompassing defence, trade, migration, and climate cooperation, marking a significant upgrade in UK-German relations since World War II. This move comes amid heightened global instability, with mounting concerns over Russian aggression and the unpredictability of US commitment to NATO under President Donald Trump.

The Kensington Treaty reaffirms mutual commitments to limiting global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius and bolsters bilateral trade within existing EU-UK frameworks. On the security front, it expands cooperation through joint military exercises, coordinated arms exports, cyber threat countermeasures, and collaborative defence industrial projects, including the development of a deep precision strike capability. The agreement also encompasses mutual military assistance and coordinated support for Ukraine, alongside a bilateral mutual defence clause supplementing NATO obligations. Additionally, the treaty addresses migration challenges by intensifying law enforcement against smuggling networks across the English Channel and criminalising facilitation of migrant smuggling to the UK, with enhanced youth exchanges and visa reforms promoting easier student travel between the two countries.

This treaty, though smaller in scope than the UK-France agreement signed during French President Emmanuel Macron’s recent state visit, which notably included unprecedented joint nuclear coordination, nonetheless anchors the trilateral E3 alliance—comprising the UK, Germany, and France—as a central pillar of European security diplomacy. The resurgence of the E3, originally an ad hoc coalition focused on Iran’s nuclear program, now represents a flexible but strategic hub for these three largest European military and economic powers to coordinate rapidly on foreign policy, defence, and migration outside the bureaucratic constraints of Brussels.

These developments signal a clear post-Brexit pivot under Starmer’s Labour government, which is working to stabilise and rebuild once-fractured UK-EU relations. The sequence of events—from the EU "reset" in May, through Macron’s state visit, to the UK-Germany Kensington Treaty—reflects growing momentum towards better bilateral and trilateral ties across Europe. British public opinion supports this shift, with recent polls highlighting increasing disillusionment with the United States under Trump and a rising preference for closer relations with the EU, driven by concerns over the reliability of the former special relationship.

The treaty also responds to the reality of diminished American influence in European defence, a consequence of shifting US policies under the Trump administration. Experts note that the UK, Germany, and France’s enhanced cooperation forms a "circle of friends" acting in Europe’s strategic interests more independently. Nonetheless, while the E3 collaboration strengthens European defence capabilities and policy coordination, analysts caution that it cannot fully bridge the gaps left by Brexit between the EU and NATO. Moreover, there is widespread understanding that these treaties do not presage the UK’s re-entry into the EU or single market structures.

Looking ahead, the Kensington Treaty promises practical initiatives such as joint military drills, coordinated arms exports, collaboration on North Sea energy projects, and regular ministerial and leadership summits to maintain momentum. It also opens pathways for potential infrastructure projects like a London-Berlin direct train link and visa-free school travel by 2025. Analysts emphasize the importance of expanding this cooperation beyond the E3 to include other European nations, such as Poland, to build a more resilient and cohesive security framework capable of facing ongoing global challenges.

In essence, the UK-Germany treaty and the renewed E3 alliance signify a new phase of realistic, pragmatic diplomacy in Europe—one aimed at cementing a self-reliant defence posture and enhanced cooperation amid a shifting geopolitical landscape, where dependence on the United States is no longer a given.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://english.news.cn/20250720/c57802311e2a4c618678fa65addf4345/c.html), [[6]](https://www.theweek.com/politics/uk-germany-treaty-starmer-brexit-reset), [[5]](https://www.apnews.com/article/ce3262ca8a2dba4b7472465ee6d87514)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://english.news.cn/20250720/c57802311e2a4c618678fa65addf4345/c.html), [[4]](https://www.chathamhouse.org/2025/07/after-brexit-e3-new-treaty-puts-uk-germany-and-france-back-heart-european-security), [[5]](https://www.apnews.com/article/ce3262ca8a2dba4b7472465ee6d87514), [[6]](https://www.theweek.com/politics/uk-germany-treaty-starmer-brexit-reset)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://english.news.cn/20250720/c57802311e2a4c618678fa65addf4345/c.html), [[4]](https://www.chathamhouse.org/2025/07/after-brexit-e3-new-treaty-puts-uk-germany-and-france-back-heart-european-security), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/fb29477b-6212-4974-963f-530e96491a29), [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/c9dc0285-3a64-4526-9aca-900834bf0fec)
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* Paragraph 6 – [[6]](https://www.theweek.com/politics/uk-germany-treaty-starmer-brexit-reset), [[4]](https://www.chathamhouse.org/2025/07/after-brexit-e3-new-treaty-puts-uk-germany-and-france-back-heart-european-security)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://english.news.cn/20250720/c57802311e2a4c618678fa65addf4345/c.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/fb29477b-6212-4974-963f-530e96491a29> - The UK, France, and Germany are enhancing their defence and security cooperation in response to Russian aggression in Ukraine and uncertainties about U.S. commitment to NATO under President Trump. The UK-French summit led to the Northwood declaration, reaffirming mutual defence commitments and announcing enhanced nuclear coordination. German Chancellor Friedrich Merz is set to sign a broad cooperation treaty with the UK, aiming to reduce dependence on U.S. military power and develop European defence capabilities. This renewed alliance underscores a decisive shift in European defence post-Brexit. ([ft.com](https://www.ft.com/content/fb29477b-6212-4974-963f-530e96491a29?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/c9dc0285-3a64-4526-9aca-900834bf0fec> - During French President Emmanuel Macron’s state visit to the UK, both nations aimed to renew and strengthen their historically significant alliance, strained since Brexit. Macron emphasized a 'reconvergence' of mutual interests and a shared responsibility, particularly regarding European security amid global uncertainties and decreasing US commitment to European defence. He and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer agreed to expand joint military cooperation, including co-coordination of nuclear deterrents and increasing the Combined Joint Expeditionary Force to 50,000 personnel. This deepening bond reflects the urgent need for Europe to reduce dependency on US military assets and suggests a new vision for European defence leadership spearheaded by the UK and France. ([ft.com](https://www.ft.com/content/c9dc0285-3a64-4526-9aca-900834bf0fec?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2025/07/after-brexit-e3-new-treaty-puts-uk-germany-and-france-back-heart-european-security> - The UK–Germany Kensington Treaty, signed by Prime Minister Keir Starmer and Chancellor Friedrich Merz, signifies a significant upgrade to the bilateral relationship. The treaty focuses on foreign, security, and defence policy cooperation, including structured cooperation on defence industrial projects, such as a deep precision strike capability, defence exports coordination, cooperation on NATO’s eastern flank and in the North Sea, as well as a bilateral mutual defence clause on top of existing NATO commitments. The treaty also aims to intensify trilateral cooperation between the UK, Germany, and France, anchoring the E3 as a central pillar of European security. ([chathamhouse.org](https://www.chathamhouse.org/2025/07/after-brexit-e3-new-treaty-puts-uk-germany-and-france-back-heart-european-security?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.apnews.com/article/ce3262ca8a2dba4b7472465ee6d87514> - On July 17, 2025, the UK and Germany signed a significant treaty boosting cooperation on defence, trade, and migration, amid rising tensions with Russia and reduced U.S. involvement under President Trump. The treaty builds on a prior defence pact and includes mutual military assistance, coordinated weapons support for Ukraine, and collaboration on defence manufacturing. It also aims to tackle illegal migration through strengthened law-enforcement efforts, especially targeting smuggling across the English Channel. Additionally, Germany committed to criminalising facilitation of migrant smuggling to the UK, while both nations pledged to increase defence spending to 3.5% of GDP. The agreement also fosters youth exchanges, allowing easier student travel between the two countries. Though Starmer has maintained a stance against rejoining EU structures, the treaty signals improved bilateral ties post-Brexit, positioning the UK and Germany, alongside France, as leading voices in shaping European defence and policy. ([apnews.com](https://apnews.com/article/ce3262ca8a2dba4b7472465ee6d87514?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.theweek.com/politics/uk-germany-treaty-starmer-brexit-reset> - The UK and Germany have signed a historic bilateral treaty—named the Kensington Treaty—marking their first agreement since World War II. Signed at London's Victoria & Albert Museum, the treaty symbolises a redefined post-Brexit relationship aimed at deepening cooperation in defence, trade, science, and green energy, as well as coordinating policy through regular ministerial and leadership summits. It comes in response to growing global instability, notably threats from Russia and changing US-Europe dynamics. While parts of the treaty reaffirm existing NATO commitments, it introduces practical initiatives like joint military drills, arms exports, and collaboration on North Sea energy projects. It also formalises the trilateral alliance between the UK, Germany, and France, signalling a streamlined European response mechanism to global crises. Commentators note the treaty bolsters Germany’s rising defence role and may reduce the UK's influence in NATO, given Germany’s increasing defence spending and larger economy. Upcoming policies include visa-free school travel by 2025 and a London-Berlin direct train link. Analysts suggest the treaty and emerging E3 alliance could bridge EU-NATO gaps, but broader inclusion, especially of countries like Poland, is crucial for lasting impact. ([theweek.com](https://theweek.com/politics/uk-germany-treaty-starmer-brexit-reset?utm_source=openai))