# Jon Sopel brands Keir Starmer’s Trump letter 'cringe' amid doubts over British diplomacy



Former BBC presenter Jon Sopel has launched a sharp critique of Labour leader Keir Starmer's presentation of an invitation from King Charles to Donald Trump during a visit to the White House in February. Sopel characterised the gesture as “cringe,” emphasising that it lacked both subtlety and effectiveness in diplomacy. The letter, partly obscured by Trump’s hand, invited the former president for a “historic second state visit” to the UK, but Sopel questioned what tangible commitments emerged from this exchange. He remarked, “Was it clever or subtle for Keir Starmer to reach into his pocket and flourish a letter from the King? It was cringe. It was awful.”

Sopel’s comments reflect a broader concern regarding the nature of British diplomacy, particularly in dealings with politically polarising figures like Trump. He further elaborated that even if Trump were to make commitments, trust in his assurances might be misplaced. With a metaphorical analogy suggesting one should be wary of a dubious loan offer, Sopel expressed scepticism, implying that the outcomes of such overtures are often ephemeral and possibly illusory.

In the context of Starmer’s diplomatic strategies, public perception has been mixed. Some analysts view Starmer’s approach as unnecessarily sycophantic, especially in light of an opinion piece in The Guardian that described his congratulatory remarks following the 2024 US presidential election as hypocritical. Critics argue that such gestures may undermine the integrity of British values and diminish Starmer’s credibility on the international stage. This concern aligns with Sopel's view that a more nuanced approach is essential to effectively engage with international leaders.

During his appearance at the Hay Festival, Sopel did not shy away from discussing his broader discontent with the media landscape, particularly criticising the BBC’s “both sides-ism” as a significant factor in his departure from the organisation in 2022. He stated, “The media is enabling [Nigel] Farage,” reflecting on how the renewed interest in political fringe movements has prompted a re-evaluation of media narratives. This perspective is especially relevant in the current climate, where the media's role in shaping public discourse around figures like Trump and Farage is under scrutiny.

Amid the exchange between Starmer and Trump, there were notable reactions from Starmer’s team, with staff reportedly left “open-jawed” during one of Trump’s more incendiary rants. This incident underscores the unpredictability inherent in engaging with a leader such as Trump, where diplomatic expectations can be met with erratic behaviour. Such situations foster uncertainty around the efficacy of presenting overtures like royal invitations and may reinforce Sopel's assertion that British diplomacy needs to evolve beyond simplistic gestures.

As Starmer continues to manage interactions within the complex landscape of global politics, he faces the delicate challenge of maintaining a cordial relationship with the United States while safeguarding British interests that may sometimes diverge from those of the current US administration. The critical dialogue surrounding his approach underlines the necessity for a recalibrated strategy that prioritises substance over symbolism in international relations. This ongoing discourse about diplomacy, leadership, and trust is likely to shape the narrative as Starmer navigates the complexities of British-American relations in the years to come.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/news/jon-sopel-keir-starmer-cringe-donald-trump-b2760981.html), [[2]](https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/news/jon-sopel-keir-starmer-cringe-donald-trump-b2760981.html)
* Paragraph 2 – [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/commentisfree/2024/nov/06/sunk-by-keir-starmer-sycophantic-words-of-congratulation-to-donald-trump), [[4]](https://www.the-independent.com/voices/starmer-trump-white-house-king-invitation-state-visit-b2706534.html)
* Paragraph 3 – [[5]](https://www.itv.com/watch/news/starmers-staff-open-jawed-watching-trump-rant-deputy-political-editor/x19ndgg), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/apr/13/do-you-yearn-to-hear-starmer-condemn-trump-if-so-youre-going-to-be-disappointed)
* Paragraph 4 – [[7]](https://www.standard.co.uk/comment/conservative-party-conference-tories-republicans-us-politics-birmingham-b1185650.html)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/news/jon-sopel-keir-starmer-cringe-donald-trump-b2760981.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/news/jon-sopel-keir-starmer-cringe-donald-trump-b2760981.html> - Former BBC presenter Jon Sopel criticised Keir Starmer for presenting a letter from King Charles to US President Donald Trump during a visit in February. Sopel described the gesture as 'cringe' and questioned its effectiveness, suggesting it lacked subtlety and did not yield a tangible commitment from Trump. He also expressed scepticism about trusting Trump's promises, drawing a parallel to a hypothetical loan scenario. This criticism follows Sopel's departure from the BBC in 2022, citing issues with the network's 'both sides-ism' approach.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/commentisfree/2024/nov/06/sunk-by-keir-starmer-sycophantic-words-of-congratulation-to-donald-trump> - An opinion piece in The Guardian criticises Keir Starmer's congratulatory message to Donald Trump following the 2024 US presidential election. The author describes Starmer's words as sycophantic and hypocritical, questioning the sincerity of his support for shared values of freedom, democracy, and enterprise. The piece suggests that such statements are either delusional or insincere, highlighting concerns over Starmer's approach to international relations and his stance on Trump's presidency.
4. <https://www.the-independent.com/voices/starmer-trump-white-house-king-invitation-state-visit-b2706534.html> - An article in The Independent discusses Keir Starmer's visit to the White House and his presentation of an invitation from King Charles to Donald Trump for a second state visit. The piece notes that the meeting went as well as possible, with Trump being warm and offering reassurances on trade. However, it cautions that Trump's commitments may not be reliable, referencing past instances where his promises were not honoured. The article underscores the transactional nature of Trump's diplomacy and advises caution in trusting his assurances.
5. <https://www.itv.com/watch/news/starmers-staff-open-jawed-watching-trump-rant-deputy-political-editor/x19ndgg> - An ITV News report highlights the reaction of Keir Starmer's staff during a meeting with Donald Trump. Deputy Political Editor Anushka Asthana describes Starmer's staff as 'open-jawed' while watching Trump's ill-tempered rant at Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. The report underscores the tension and unpredictability of interactions between Starmer's team and Trump, reflecting the challenges in diplomatic engagements with the US president.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/apr/13/do-you-yearn-to-hear-starmer-condemn-trump-if-so-youre-going-to-be-disappointed> - An opinion piece in The Guardian discusses Keir Starmer's approach to Donald Trump, suggesting that those expecting Starmer to condemn Trump will be disappointed. The author notes that Starmer continues to refer to the US as a friend, despite Trump's actions that may not align with shared values. The piece highlights Starmer's commitment to maintaining a cordial relationship with the US, even when it behaves in ways that are not in line with British interests or values.
7. <https://www.standard.co.uk/comment/conservative-party-conference-tories-republicans-us-politics-birmingham-b1185650.html> - An article in the Evening Standard by Jon Sopel compares the Conservative Party Conference to the Republican National Convention, highlighting stark differences in structure and atmosphere. Sopel notes that the Republican Party is now fully aligned with Donald Trump, whereas the Conservative Party appears leaderless and rudderless. He contrasts the flamboyant nature of US political conventions with the more subdued British conferences, emphasising the unique characteristics of the UK's political landscape.