# Keir Starmer defends UK's free speech tradition during US visit



During a recent diplomatic visit to the United States, UK Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer addressed critical remarks made by US Vice President J.D. Vance regarding free speech in Europe. The exchanges took place in Washington as both leaders participated in meetings with President Donald Trump.

Mr Vance had previously voiced concerns during his appearance at the Munich Security Conference earlier in the month, stating that European governments, including the United Kingdom, had compromised their commitment to free speech and neglected the concerns of voters about issues such as migration. In an interaction that unfolded in the White House Oval Office, the Vice President elaborated on his position, emphasising the importance of free speech protections not only for British citizens but also for American technology companies and, by extension, American citizens. Vance remarked, “We do have, of course, a special relationship with our friends in the UK, and also our European allies, but we also know that there have been infringements on free speech that affect not just the British—what the British do in their own country is up to them—but also affect American technology companies and by extension, American citizens. So that’s something we will talk about at lunch.”

In response to Vance's comments, Sir Keir Starmer asserted the longstanding tradition of free speech in the United Kingdom. “We’ve had free speech for a very, very long time and it will last for a very, very long time. Certainly, we wouldn’t want to reach across US citizens, and we don’t, and that’s absolutely right, but in relation to free speech in the UK, I’m very proud of our history there,” he stated, reinforcing the UK’s commitment to this value.

The exchange marked one of the few tense moments in a meeting that largely consisted of warm exchanges and mutual compliments. For instance, President Trump praised Starmer’s accent, joking that it could have helped him win the presidency much earlier, while Starmer celebrated the prospect of Trump's second state visit to the UK, calling it a historic event.

Vice President Vance had drawn attention to the case of Adam Smith-Connor, a British man arrested for praying near an abortion clinic, framing the incident as indicative of a broader erosion of fundamental liberties in the UK. He described the situation as an example of how British law enforcement engaged in what he termed a “criminalization of prayer.”

As they navigated these discussions, both leaders acknowledged the complexities surrounding free speech and its implications in their respective nations. Starmer’s dialogue in Washington also came on the heels of French President Emmanuel Macron’s visit earlier in the week, as European leaders are increasingly engaging with the US administration amidst ongoing global challenges. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is set to visit the White House in the coming days, further underscoring the importance of these transatlantic discussions.

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

## References

* <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-uk-keir-starmer-ukraine-war-russia-europe-tariffs/> - This article discusses Prime Minister Keir Starmer's visit to the U.S. and his interactions with President Trump, but it does not specifically mention Vice President J.D. Vance or the Munich Security Conference. However, it highlights the diplomatic engagements between the U.S. and UK leaders.
* <https://www.state.gov/public-schedule-february-27-2025/> - This page provides information on the public schedule of U.S. officials, including meetings with foreign leaders, but it does not specifically address the content of discussions about free speech or Vice President J.D. Vance.
* <https://www.justice.gov/opcl/overview-privacy-act-1974-2020-edition/disclosures-third-parties> - This document discusses the Privacy Act and its implications for government disclosures, which is unrelated to the specific diplomatic interactions or free speech discussions mentioned in the article.
* <https://www.noahwire.com> - This is the source of the original article, but it does not provide additional external validation for the specific claims about Vice President J.D. Vance or the Munich Security Conference.
* <https://www.munich-security-conference.de/en/> - This is the official website of the Munich Security Conference, where Vice President J.D. Vance might have made comments about free speech. However, specific details about his remarks are not provided here.
* <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/> - This page provides official statements and releases from the White House, which might include information on meetings with foreign leaders but does not specifically address the content of discussions about free speech or Vice President J.D. Vance.