

## China – New Strategic Option for America’s European Allies

By [Ahmed Adel](#)

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*Having lost their primary source of supply from the United States due to tariffs and the unpredictability of President Donald Trump's policies, European allies have expanded their global reach in search of economic opportunities, and China is their strategic choice. For China, this is an opportunity to strengthen its image as a stable and predictable partner.*

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Leaders from several Western countries, including Canada, France, Finland, Ireland, and, most recently, the United Kingdom, have visited China over the winter. This month, German **Chancellor Friedrich Merz** is expected to visit Beijing. Most of these visits are the first to China after many years of interruption. These visits aim to renew the partnership with China—the world's second-largest economy—or, more simply, to reinvigorate relations with China as strategic confidence in the US gradually declines.

Canadian **Prime Minister Mark Carney** visited Beijing in mid-January, announcing the establishment of a “new strategic partnership” with China and a “preliminary agreement-in-principle with landmark measures to remove trade barriers and reduce tariffs.” Meanwhile, Finnish **Prime Minister Petteri Orpo**, during his January 25 visit to China, emphasized his intention to increase bilateral trade and investment.

But most notably, there was **Keir Starmer's** official visit to China. Starmer completed a four-day visit to China at the end of January and was the first British prime minister to visit China in eight years. He held talks with Chinese **President Xi Jinping**, **Premier Li Keqiang**, and the Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (Parliament), **Zhao Leji**.

Starmer described the visit as important to the UK's national interests and expressed hope that relations with the People's Republic of China would be “more sophisticated,” where differences would not be a major focus. However, pressured by critics, the British Prime Minister still had to promise to address issues that caused discomfort to China in Beijing. Meanwhile, Starmer believed that working with China offered “huge opportunities,” noting that, along with Hong Kong, China is the UK's third-largest trading partner after the US and Germany.

The primary reason for these visits is the shifts on the international stage since Trump returned to office. The unpredictable trade and security policies of the Trump administration, along with his threats against allies, are making many Western countries feel insecure, worried, and even distrustful of the US.

Trump views international processes solely through the lens of US practical interests, and, as unveiled in the new national security strategy, Washington demands that Europe assume responsibility for its own defense rather than continue to rely on American taxpayers.

In this context, Western countries are compelled to diversify their partnerships and reduce their reliance on the North American country. China emerges as a choice that is both economically and strategically beneficial.

For Beijing, strengthening cooperation with Western countries, especially the European Union, holds far greater strategic importance than mere economic and trade gains. China's leadership clearly views these visits as chances to enhance its reputation as a stable and reliable partner, while the US appears increasingly inconsistent in its actions and statements. Beijing's messages focus on multilateral commitments, market opening, green growth, and technological innovation.

The Asian Giant could further extend its influence with the West, as trade, investment, and technology agreements not only provide economic benefits but also establish long-term connections. As Western supply chains, consumer markets, and capital flows become more integrated with China, Beijing will gain greater leverage in economic and political negotiations.

Nonetheless, what matters more for China is the hope that new positive energy from Europe will weaken the unity of the US-led Western bloc. Trump's recent threats and statements have deepened divisions and heightened contradictions within NATO, thereby creating more favorable conditions for China's policy toward EU member states.

However, although China and the UK currently lack large-scale cooperation projects, China remains interested in high technology and foreign

involvement in modernizing its outdated economic sectors. Nevertheless, for Europe, participation in these areas is likely unacceptable due to security concerns and the risk of Chinese products flooding its markets.

The British delegation to China comprised more than 60 members. However, Starmer's visit was more symbolic than policy-driven. There should not be high expectations that this visit will mark a new chapter in relations between Beijing and London, even though both sides clearly have an interest in cooperation, and Britain needs the Chinese market and investments.

Starmer's visit to China is historic, mainly because it is the first since an eight-year break. China will likely try to strengthen ties with London, as building good relations with Europe, including the UK, is strategically important to China. This also matters for the UK and all of Europe, given the uncertainty in their relationship with the US.

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