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By [Kate Bennett](#), CNN

The Bidens' first state dinner features butter-poached lobster with a side of hospitality

На першій державній вечері Байденів готують омарів, приготованих у вершковому маслі, з додаванням гостинності

Президент США Джо Байден прийняв президента Франції Емманюеля Макрона в Білому домі, використавши першу державну вечерю за час свого президентства, щоб зміцнити відносини з ключовим американським союзником, які останніми роками погіршились. У своїй промові, виановуючи зв'язки між двома країнами, Д. Байден виголосив тост за «тривалий альянс між Францією та Сполученими Штатами», назвавши альянс «партнерством, яке відзначене багатьма досягненнями». Вечеря є частиною зусиль США відновити зв'язки з Францією. Це сталося через рік після того, як США оголосили про несподіване американсько-австралійське партнерство щодо постачання атомних підводних човнів, що зруйнувало угоду Франції з Австралією з побудови підводних човнів і викликало обурення французьких чиновників.

<https://edition.cnn.com/2022/12/01/politics/french-president-state-dinner-white-house/index.html>



US First Lady Jill Biden and White House Social Secretary Carlos Elizondo (back) look on as White House Executive Chef Cris Comerford (L) and White House Executive Pastry Chef Susie Morrison (R) present the menu during a media preview ahead of the State Dinner.

Oliver Contreras/AFP/Getty Images

CNN —

President Joe Biden hosted French President Emmanuel Macron at the White House on Thursday, using the very first [state dinner of his presidency](#) to shore up relations with a key American ally whose friendship has until recently [been on the rocks](#).

Sources close to the planning described a super-sized event under a tent on the White House grounds, including not only the many Democrats clamoring for social time at the White House but also a number of officials and policy staffers interested in strengthening relations with France.

In his remarks celebrating ties between the two nations, Biden offered a toast to “the enduring alliance between France and United States,” calling the alliance “a partnership that’s marked by so many firsts.”

The two presidents raised glasses, with Biden saying, “Vive la France and God bless America.”

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02:29 - Source: [CNN](#)

The moment takes on extra meaning because of how long the Bidens have waited to hold a state dinner – so long, in fact, that many Democrats worried they were squandering it as a valuable diplomatic tool.

Advisers to the president told CNN the dinner is part of the US effort to revitalize ties with France. It comes a year after the US announced [a surprise US-Australia submarine partnership](#) – upending France’s own submarine deal with Australia and infuriating French officials. The perilous relations are no small matter, given the array of major challenges facing the larger western alliance.

“If you look at what’s going on in Ukraine, look at what’s going on in the Indo-Pacific and the tensions with China, France is really at the center of all those things,” said John Kirby, the National Security Council’s coordinator for strategic communications. “President Macron has been the dynamic leader inside the G7 ... so the President felt that this was exactly the right and the most appropriate country to start with for state visits.”



['America's go-to partner': Macron to arrive in DC at key moment in France-US relations](#)

In an early sign of that diplomacy, the Elysee confirmed to CNN on Thursday a series of gifts exchanged between the world leaders and their spouses.

Macron gifted his US counterpart a centerpiece from French goldsmith and tableware house, Christofle, the Elysee said. The present, crafted in 2012, is a tribute to the French transatlantic liner, the “Normandie,” which sailed with a Christofle silverware collection in the interwar period, per the Elysee.

Biden was also presented with a vinyl record and CD of the soundtrack of the film “A man and a woman,” directed by Frenchman Claude Lelouch. The Elysee described the gift as a “nod to the personal history of the Biden couple” as they watched the 1966 film during their first date. The film also won France’s highest film award, the Palme d’Or at the Cannes film festival.

First lady Jill Biden received two French literary works: a copy of “Madame Bovary,” by Gustave Flaubert, as well as a collection of essays written by Albert Camus, per the Elysee.

Finally, Biden received two gifts from the Elysee Palace gift shop, a watch from watchmaker LIP and a jumper from the French brand Saint James.



Butter-poached Maine lobster and calotte of beef, shallot marmalade, are seen at the White House during a media preview of the state dinner for French President Emmanuel Macron. Yuri Gripas/Abaca/Sipa USA/AP

The dinner has domestic political overtones, as well. As the Bidens roll out the red carpet for Macron and his wife Brigitte, there's word they have two more state dinners in the works along with several other social events to come. Several people with knowledge of White House planning and operations, who spoke to CNN for this story, confirmed this State Dinner will be one of several hosted by the Biden administration in upcoming months.

It may suggest, said those familiar with the thinking around future state dinners, Biden indeed wants to run for a second term, something he has said [he intends to do](#), but a decision that also hinges on the consent and support of his wife and extended family.

"These are intricate – and expensive – events," said one of the people, who has worked in the White House, of state dinners. "If the administration is willing to sink budget dollars into them, there's probably a larger strategy at play."

The guest list for Biden's first state dinner was big from the start, made extra-large to include all of the people who have missed out on key social time with the president due to Covid-19 restrictions. Having done the mental calculations months ago as planning began, said two people familiar with the dinner's details, the East Wing, the West Wing, the State Department and the National Security Council's lists ballooned.

Among those attending the state dinner were celebrities and musicians, as well as top lawmakers, according to a printout of guests from the White House. Stephen Colbert, Anna Wintour and John Legend were among the invitees to rub shoulders with the likes of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and GOP Leader Kevin McCarthy.



[Macron heads to the White House for first state visit of the Biden administration](#)

Two guests of Macron – the head designers for fashion house Oscar de la Renta, Laura Kim and Fernando Garcia – confirmed to CNN that Jill Biden wore the luxury label at the dinner.

Garcia said they collaborated with the first lady for about two months on the dress, getting her input on what she wanted for the look, which included “a sense of ease.”

This first State Dinner offered the opportunity to finally make amends to VIPs and diplomats, members of Congress and deep-pocketed donors. A decision was made to hold the dinner in a tent on the South Lawn, which would allow them to comfortably seat the more than 400 guests expected to attend. (The White House is referring to the tent as a “pavilion,” as it has clear panels on the sides.)

An indoor dinner in the State Dining Room is limited by space restrictions – only about 120 guests can be accommodated. The second and last Trump administration State Dinner, for Australia, was held in the Rose Garden, which could seat approximately 200 for a formal dinner. “We’ve always expected a larger guest list as it’s the first state dinner of the Biden Administration,” Vanessa Valdivia, Jill Biden’s press secretary, told CNN.



A table is set during a media preview ahead of the State Dinner in honor of French President Emmanuel Macron, in the State Dining Room of the White House in Washington, DC, on November 30, 2022.

Oliver Contreras/AFP/Getty Images

The dinner for France was actually supposed to take place months prior, said the two people, but scheduling conflicts, including campaign trips for midterm elections, foreign travel [and the wedding of Naomi Biden](#), meant the date was pushed back more than once. Thursday evening was ultimately where the schedules of several executive branch agencies landed with clear calendars.

Unfortunately for the White House social offices and usher’s office, the final date also meant pulling off the ritual of holiday decorations and dozens of White House holiday parties in tandem with a debut State Dinner, something that has not been done before during a modern presidency. The White House calligraphers, kitchen staff, service teams and floral shop all worked to juggle the demands of overlapping, high-caliber events.

Ancillary kitchen space has been added with refrigeration units placed outside the White House kitchen area, as is usually the case for multiple or large social events, especially during the busy holiday party season where there can be as many as two or three receptions per day. (Three of the industrial-sized refrigerators outside earlier this week were labeled with the word “cheese,” in black magic marker – unclear whether for the French dinner, or holiday party nibbles.)

For the State Dinner, the Bidens have opted to use rental dishes, glasses, flatware, table accoutrements and linens. The venue, though on the White House grounds, does not allow for the official White House china services to be used for the dinner, said White House social secretary Carlos Elizondo. White House curators, who oversee the use of all items in the White House

collection, do not count the temporarily installed tent as part of the campus – and thus the china of presidents’ past would not be part of the service.

The overall design and the floral arrangements were put together by an event planner, Jung Lee, and her company, Fete, a posh party design outfit favored by celebrities.

A stage and dance floor was erected in the tent for the evening’s entertainment from singer Jon Batiste, a New Orleans native, a city Jill Biden said Wednesday is “shaped by both French and American culture.” The Macrons will visit New Orleans after Washington, before returning to France.



White House Executive Chef Cris Comerford presents the menu during a media preview ahead of the State Dinner in honor of French President Emmanuel Macron, in the State Dining Room of the White House in Washington, DC, on November 30, 2022.

Oliver Contreras/AFP/Getty Images

The décor for the dinner was inspired by red, white and blue, the shared colors of the American and French flags, and “our common values: liberty and democracy, equality and fellowship,” said Biden at a preview of the table settings and menu.

The trick of a successful State Dinner format, says a former White House social secretary, is to seamlessly and organically combine elements from both the United States and the visiting country, an offering of hospitality on the side of a main course of diplomacy. But without being too hokey about it.

The flowers on the tables Thursday night were mostly roses; American Beauty varietals and Piano Roses, deep red blooms because, as Elizondo said, Emmanuel Macron likes the piano. French-made Champagne flutes were used for toasting, but filled with American sparkling wine. Tall candelabras holding blood-red candles are meant to mimic the Statue of Liberty, France’s gift to the United States. And so on.

The table setting is something the first lady has said is always her first consideration when hosting anyone for a meal, a memory from her childhood and her mother. “Even if we were only having fish sticks from the freezer, she always made our dinners feel special,” said Biden, who is expected to make remarks at the dinner.

“The first lady has been involved since the beginning, it’s been important to her that the dinner reflects the warmth and approachable hospitality that the Bidens are known for,” Valdivia said.

A person with knowledge of the first lady’s hands-on approach to the dinner said she was involved with all aspects of the planning, down to doing tastings of each dish and overseeing the seating chart, much like her immediate predecessor, Melania Trump, whose first state dinner also happened to be for the Macrons. Unlike the Trump dinner, the Bidens served caviar and butter-poached lobster for a first-course, Calotte of beef and watercress and sunchoke salad for

the main. Trump went with goat cheese gateau with tomato jam, and a rack of lamb. Though the two dinners would share a dessert: crème fraiche ice cream.



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Oliver Contreras/AFP/Getty Images

Another common thread with Biden's immediate predecessor is the lack of a high number of state dinners by this time in his presidency. However, for much of it, Biden has not been able due to the pandemic to host parties. Trump had a third State Dinner in the works – for the King and Queen of Spain – but canceled it as the pandemic took hold around the world.

Biden is also not as inclined socially to host big events at the White House, Covid-19 restrictions or not. The first couple has notably spent most weekends away from Washington [in Delaware](#) or Camp David, and as a closely bonded family, there are few occasions where guest lists for dinners expand beyond relatives.

Previous presidents have used the White House frequently to entertain, typically with a subtext, whether political or cultural. In recent history, Barack and Michelle Obama hosted birthday parties and music concerts, bringing together celebrities and politicians for fun-filled, late nights of elbow-rubbing and bonding. The Obamas' State Dinner for then-French President Francois Hollande in 2014 brought a star-studded guest list that included Bradley Cooper, Julia Louis-Dreyfus, Stephen Colbert and Elon Musk.

Singer Mary J. Blige entertained at the dinner. By contrast, Trump's two state dinners lacked bold-faced guests and headliners, as his political leanings were often antithetical from those of mainstream Hollywood. (For the Trump State Dinner for Macron, the Washington National Opera performed, which a guest told CNN was lovely, "but it wasn't Beyonce.")







US President Gerald Ford dances with Britain's Queen Elizabeth II during a state dinner in Washington, DC, in 1976.

Ricardo Thomas/Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library/Reuters















































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Going back further, presidents accumulated State Dinners as a means to help soothe icy relationships, or build support on geopolitical crises.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt, for example, continued to hold State Dinners during World War II, to pull in allies. Dwight Eisenhower in 1959 hosted Nikita Khrushchev, the first State Dinner for a Soviet leader, to help quell concerns of escalating nuclear tension. Jimmy Carter was not a big party guy – the State Dinners hosted by the president and Rosalyn Carter did not include hard liquor, just beer and wine – but he had held 33 State Dinners by this time in his tenure. After the signing of the Panama Canal treaties, Carter hosted one state dinner for 18 Latin American heads of state, according to data collected by the White House Historical Association.

As time went on, guest lists for the dinners routinely grew, observed by the orders for presidential china sets, which went from accommodating about 100 people, to the most recent official set for the Obamas, which accommodated 320 people. Biden, in other words, still has the time and the space to showcase the highest form of diplomacy this country can offer another world leader. And he intends to.

“There are more being planned and in the works for the future,” said one of the people with knowledge of the larger Biden State Dinner strategy. “This is just the start.”

This story has been updated with additional developments.

CNN's Joseph Ataman and Sonnet Swire contributed to this report.