
WORLD PROTOCOL ACADEMY

WPA WORKING PAPER · No. 006

Series: Protocol Theory and Practice

THE STATE VISIT OF KING CHARLES III TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA (2026)

An Anatomy of Ceremonial Diplomacy and Soft Power through the Prism of Protocol

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sande Smiljanov

Author · World Protocol Academy

Independent digital educational and authorial platform in development

[ORCID: 0009-0008-3219-394X](https://orcid.org/0009-0008-3219-394X)

Skopje · 2026 · version v1.3

“Negotiation is optional. Protocol is absolute.”

“Protocol is the music of human relations.”

Author Note

The author has long-standing practical experience in state and diplomatic protocol and serves as Head of the Department for Protocol Events and Activities. This working paper was prepared in an academic and authorial capacity and does not represent the position of any state institution.

Abstract

This paper examines the state visit of His Majesty King Charles III and Her Majesty Queen Camilla to the United States of America (27–30 April 2026) as an integral object of protocol study. Taking the state visit to be the highest ceremonial form in the conduct of relations between sovereign states, it dissects the visit day by day and reads its constitutive parts — reciprocity, the invitation, military honours, precedence, the exchange of gifts and the rites of commemoration — as a codified language of sovereignty and esteem. A second analytical layer interprets the visit through the theory of soft power, construing the monarchy as a supra-partisan strategic instrument whose ceremonial yields measurable diplomatic and commercial returns. A comparative chapter then sets the British royal and the American presidential traditions of protocol side by side as two of the finest in the world. A further chapter weighs the reciprocal balance of visits between the two nations. The method throughout is that of a qualitative case study grounded in official sources and in the leading newspapers and broadcasters of both countries.

Keywords: state visit; state protocol; ceremonial diplomacy; soft power; precedence; military honours; gift exchange; commemorative protocol; Charles III; special relationship.

1. Introduction

Between 27 and 30 April 2026, His Majesty King Charles III and Her Majesty Queen Camilla made a state visit to the United States of America at the invitation of President Donald Trump and First Lady Melania Trump. The visit was timed to coincide with the commemoration of the 250th anniversary of American independence, and it marked several firsts at once: the first state visit by a British sovereign to the United States since 2007, when Queen Elizabeth II was received by President George W. Bush; Charles's first visit to the White House as King; and the first state visit of President Trump's second term (The White House, 2026; Time, 2026).

For the student of protocol, the visit is an almost perfect specimen: within four days it gathers nearly the whole expressive vocabulary of ceremonial diplomacy. This paper reads the visit not as a political event but as a work of protocol: what each element means, why it exists and which rules govern it. It then widens the inquiry through the theory of soft power, a comparison of the two finest protocol traditions, and a reckoning of the balance of mutual visits.

2. Theoretical and methodological framework

The paper proceeds from the understanding of protocol as a non-negotiable civilisational framework standing above politics and momentary interest (Smiljanov, 2021; 2023). In the classical literature, protocol is defined as a system of codified rules of precedence, ceremonial and conduct in the relations between states (Wood & Serres, 1970; Satow, 1979), and its place within modern diplomatic theory is developed by Berridge (2015) and by Jönsson and Hall (2005).

A second theoretical pillar treats ceremonial as communication and signalling. Cohen (1987) describes diplomatic ceremonial as a theatre of power, in which non-verbal messages carry decisive meaning; Goffman (1959) offers a framework of performance and presentation; and Kertzer (1988) shows that political ritual not only reflects but also produces and legitimises power. On this view, every honour rendered at a state visit is at once a message.

The third pillar is the theory of soft power (Nye, 2004; 2008), by which states secure influence through attraction and legitimacy rather than coercion alone. To it are joined the studies of diplomatic practice and representation (Constantinou, 1996; Neumann, 2012) and of the historical roots of ceremonial (Mattingly, 1955). It is at the intersection of these three pillars — protocol, ritual and soft power — that the analysis moves.

The inquiry is guided by three questions: first, which protocol elements constitute the visit and what each of them signifies; second, how the ceremonial functions as soft power; and

third, how the visit compares with other systems of protocol and with the reception the same host accorded other leaders. Methodologically it is a qualitative case study in which each event is coded along five dimensions — venue, military honours, hospitality, symbolic additions and format — which later feed the model in Chapter 11. Sources are triangulated from official communiqués, the leading newspapers and broadcasters of the United States and the United Kingdom, and the scholarly literature; a limitation is the reliance on near-real-time reporting, mitigated by triangulation with the primary statements and with the earlier papers in the series (Smiljanov, 2026, WP-001; WP-002).

3. The protocol framework of the state visit

In the diplomatic hierarchy the state visit is the highest order of hospitality a nation may extend to a foreign head of state. It is distinguished from the official, working and private visit by the intensity of its ceremonial, by the fact that the host is the head of state in person, and by the presence of the full military-ceremonial apparatus (Smiljanov, 2021).

Two principles are essential to understanding the visit. The first is reciprocity: the King's visit was the direct return of President Trump's state visit to the United Kingdom in September 2025, hosted by the King at Windsor Castle, which left Trump the only American president to have been accorded two British state visits (Fox News, 2026). The second is the invitation, which issues from the host head of state and came "on the advice of His Majesty's Government" (*Buckingham Palace / The Royal Household, 31 March 2026*), placing the visit at the summit of state representation. The whole was directed by the Office of the Chief of Protocol of the United States, under Ambassador Monica Crowley (CNN, 2026). Despite the security incident in the capital shortly before the start, the Palace confirmed that the visit would proceed as planned, with adjusted arrangements (*Buckingham Palace / The Royal Household, 26 April 2026*). This is a living example of the doctrine of "Plan B" in protocol (Smiljanov, 2026, WP-002): the ceremonial form shows flexibility and resilience in a crisis without losing its essence.

4. Day one (27 April): the soft arrival

Against the common impression that a state visit opens with cannon, the first day was deliberately low in intensity — a gentle entrance into the ceremonial. The President and the First Lady received Their Majesties at the South Portico of the White House, followed by tea in the Green Room of the state floor and a tour of the enlarged White House beehive (The White House, 2026).

The private first contact before the great ceremony establishes the personal rapport and warms the air ahead of the exactly ordered second day. In protocol terms it is the step that governs the gradation of intensity across the whole visit.

5. Day two (28 April): the summit of ceremonial

The second day carried the full weight of the visit.

5.1. The state arrival ceremony

The morning arrival ceremony on the South Lawn rests on a usage that, in the American setting, descends from the eighteenth century. The details of the programme were published by the White House (*The White House, 25 April 2026*); each of its parts carries a precise meaning (see also Al Jazeera, 2026; Military Times, 2026):

- Military honours by the United States Army Herald Trumpets — the audible announcement of the guest's entrance.
- The two national anthems by the United States Marine Band. The order is itself a statement: the guest's anthem is played first, as a mark of esteem.
- A 21-gun salute by the Presidential Salute Battery — the highest artillery honour, reserved for heads of state and reigning sovereigns alone.
- An inspection of the troops, attended by the Old Guard Fife and Drum Corps.
- A pass in review of 300 service members, with nearly 500 personnel from all six branches, and the first public appearance of a Space Force honour-guard detachment.
- A flypast of four F-35 aircraft as the closing expression of air power.

The weather supplied an unforced moment: the rain abated minutes before the start, and the President opened his remarks by observing that it was “a beautiful British day” (CBS News, 2026).

5.2. The bilateral meeting in the Oval Office

After the ceremony the guests walked through the Rose Garden to the Oval Office for bilateral talks (Fox News, 2026). The passage from open ceremonial to a closed, working format is the customary sequence: public representation yields to substantive exchange.

5.3. The exchange of gifts

The exchange of gifts is among the oldest and most heavily symbolic parts of protocol (Smiljanov, 2021). The King presented the President with a framed facsimile of the 1879 design plans for the Resolute Desk — the Oval Office desk fashioned from the timbers of HMS Resolute, which Queen Victoria gave to President Hayes. The President replied with a facsimile of John Adams's 1785 letter to John Jay, describing his reception by King George III as the first American minister. At the state dinner the King also presented the bell of a former British submarine, a token of naval cooperation (CBS News, 2026; Fox News, 2026; CNN, 2026). The three gifts share a single historical thread: in place of a costly but impersonal present, each recounts a portion of the shared past. The exchange is thus not of objects but of narratives — a form of symbolic reciprocity (Smiljanov, 2021).

5.4. The address to Congress

That same day the King addressed a joint meeting of Congress — an occasion of singular weight, for it was only the second time in history that a British monarch has done so. He was received by the Speaker of the House, Mike Johnson, and the invitation had been issued by joint letter of the leaders of both chambers (*Office of the Speaker of the House, 1 April 2026*), lending it added ceremonial legitimacy. Following the address, the Palace stated that the King had been deeply honoured by the reception (*Buckingham Palace / The Royal Household, 28 April 2026*).

5.5. The state dinner in the East Room

The evening brought the state dinner in the East Room. The menu, the programme, the décor and the guest list were released by the Office of the First Lady (*Office of the First Lady, 28 April 2026*); the list included justices of the Supreme Court, members of the cabinet, legislators and persons of distinction, and the drawing of that list and the seating plan are among the most delicate questions of protocol, for every place is a statement of standing and relation (CNN, 2026). The exchange of toasts is a strictly ordered rite: the King first offered his sympathy over the security incident of the previous weekend, then recalled Queen Elizabeth II's visit of 1957, and lightened the tone with the remark that the dinner was “a very considerable improvement on the Boston Tea Party”; the text of the toast was released by the Palace (*Buckingham Palace / The Royal Household, 28 April 2026*).

6. Day three (29 April): New York and the diplomacy of the people

On the third day the centre of gravity shifted from state ceremonial to commemoration and the diplomacy of the people. The royal couple visited the 9/11 Memorial in Lower Manhattan to mark the 25th anniversary of the attacks, laying flowers at the edge of the memorial pool — a rite of shared grief that binds the two nations (CNN, 2026). A visit to a community gardening project in Harlem belongs to soft diplomacy: less formal occasions whose purpose is to connect the monarch with citizens rather than institutions.

7. Day four (30 April): the leave-taking

The final day closed the visit with two sequences. The first was the formal farewell from the President and the First Lady at the White House, with a group photograph — a ceremonial bookend mirroring the first day's welcome. The second was the visit to Arlington National Cemetery, the most heavily charged moment of the day (CNN, 2026; Fox News, 2026): a 21-gun salute, a reception by the Chief of Protocol and a senior military officer, the playing of both anthems, a wreath laid by the King and a posy by the Queen at the Tomb of the

Unknown Soldier, four muffled ruffles and Taps, and a minute's silence. The wreath-and-posy division is a codified, gendered form of homage of long tradition. From there the royal couple formally departed the United States with a ceremonial send-off at Joint Base Andrews, bound for Bermuda.

8. Ceremonial diplomacy as soft power

Beyond the protocol reading, the visit admits a strategic one: the monarchy as an instrument of soft power. What was earlier analysed as form may be read as function — Britain deliberately expends ceremonial splendour to cultivate the relationship with the United States (Nye, 2004; Deutsche Welle, 2026).

8.1. The monarchy as a supra-partisan instrument

Unlike a politician, the sovereign stands above the day's politics and party division. That station makes him a fitting bearer of messages of state that, from an elected official, would invite controversy. With its historical legitimacy the monarchy generates goodwill that may later be converted into diplomatic capital.

8.2. The address to Congress as a vehicle for a message

Behind the ceremonial, the address to Congress carried certain British priorities. The King stressed the importance of NATO, the defence of Ukraine and the climate, and gently recalled the principle that executive power is subject to checks and balances, invoking Magna Carta — a formulation that drew approval from a portion of the legislators (Nezavisen, 2026; Telma, 2026). The ceremonial form thus served as a fitting vessel for content that would otherwise be difficult to utter in such a setting.

8.3. Charm as statecraft

The King performed with measured courtesy: he praised the historic alliance, then introduced gentle historical reminders through humour — quoting Oscar Wilde that the two countries have everything in common “except, of course, the language”, and joking that the British had already attempted their own “redevelopment” of the White House in 1814 (Plusinfo, 2026). The humour is no ornament but a diplomatic tool: it creates intimacy while quietly reaffirming British historical weight.

8.4. The tangible returns

Attraction produced a measurable return: in the King's honour the President announced the removal of tariffs on Scotch whisky (MKD.MK, 2026). For soft power this is an eloquent indicator — ceremonial yielding a concrete commercial outcome.

8.5. Reciprocity and the invitation as soft gestures

The exchange itself bears the marks of soft influence. As early as February 2025 the British Prime Minister handed the President a letter from the King — an invitation to a second state visit, described as “unprecedented” (MKD.MK, 2025). The invitation was at once an honour and an open channel of influence, long before the visit took place.

8.6. The balance: influence against neutrality

Candour requires a counterpoint. The reading of “instrumentalisation” is one interpretation; Buckingham Palace would describe the same as the building of a relationship. More importantly, the sovereign remains firmly within the bounds of constitutional neutrality — his messages are carefully measured and never overtly partisan. The soft power of the monarchy works precisely because it does not pass into open political intervention; its strength rests on the ceremonial distance it preserves.

8.7. The mediatization of ceremonial

Modern ceremonial is ever more fashioned for the camera. Cannadine (1983) observes that the coronation of 1953 was the first great British ceremony shaped above all for a television audience; ever since, the effect of ritual has depended less on those immediately present and more on its transmission. The King’s visit was just such a media event — the flypasts, the South Lawn welcome and the address to Congress were staged for the global screen as much as for the room, with live coverage (CNN, 2026). In this sense social media and live broadcasting extend soft power: it is the image, not merely the presence, that carries the message (Nye, 2004; Cohen, 1987). The same logic appears in the comparative section — Putin’s ceremonial welcome operated chiefly through its televised image (see Chapter 11).

9. The British and American traditions of protocol: a comparison of two pre-eminent systems

Both traditions are reckoned among the finest in the world, yet they rest on different foundations: one upon a hereditary Crown and centuries of continuity, the other upon republican election. Their meeting during this visit is, for that very reason, instructive. The comparison below is illustrated with examples drawn from the visit itself and from the return at Windsor in 2025.

9.1. The source of authority

British protocol issues from the Crown as the embodiment of the state’s continuity; its rules pass down through tradition, heraldry and long practice. American protocol, by contrast, rests upon an elected President who is at once head of state and head of government. The difference is one of spirit: the British code is oriented to the permanence of the institution, the American to the legitimacy of the office.

9.2. The institutions that conduct protocol

In Britain protocol is conducted by the Royal Household — the Lord Chamberlain's Office, the Marshal of the Diplomatic Corps and the Master of the Household, with the Earl Marshal for the greatest ceremonies. In the United States the centre is the Office of the Chief of Protocol at the State Department (established in 1928), while the White House shapes state dinners and the Military District of Washington furnishes the honours.

9.3. The ceremonial idiom, with examples

The British idiom is gilded and historic: the Windsor return of 2025 displayed carriages, the Household Cavalry, the Beating Retreat and a Red Arrows flypast. The American idiom is military in cast: the Washington welcome of 2026 was dominated by the South Lawn, the 21-gun salute, the fife-and-drum corps, the pass in review and the F-35 flypast. The one radiates the splendour of tradition, the other the power of the state. Symbolically, the contrast runs deeper: where Britain leans on the cavalry and centuries of tradition, the inclusion of a Space Force detachment in the American welcome quietly projects modern state power into new domains.

9.4. Precedence, honours and dress

The British order of precedence is strictly codified and underpinned by orders of chivalry, with the sovereign above all. The American presidential order of precedence is attended by “Hail to the Chief” and the 21-gun salute for heads of state. In dress the difference is plainest: the British code calls for morning dress, white tie with decorations and tiaras, whereas the American leans on business-formal attire, with white tie reserved for the grandest dinners — an expression of republican restraint (Smiljanov, 2026, WP-001).

9.5. The points of convergence

For all their differences, at the very summit the two systems meet. Both employ the 21-gun salute for a head of state, both play the two anthems, both exchange gifts of historical meaning and both render commemorative homage — Britain at the Cenotaph, the United States at Arlington. This visit showed that, at the highest level, the two schools speak a common language, each with its own accent.

9.6. The British tradition: features peculiar to it alone

The British tradition is among the few in the world to rest upon an unbroken monarchical continuity of centuries. Its rules are not invented but inherited, which lends it an authenticity scarcely to be had by prescription. From this spring its most distinctive features, the greater part of which exist in such depth in no other system (Smiljanov, 2021; Debrett's, 2016).

- A living heraldry and the College of Arms, with the Earl Marshal presiding over the greatest ceremonies — an institution of medieval root still in working order today.
- The orders of chivalry — the Garter, the Bath, the Thistle — and the investiture as an act of protocol through which the Sovereign is the fount of honour.

- Offices of the Royal Household bearing titles of centuries: Lord Chamberlain, Master of the Household, Marshal of the Diplomatic Corps.
- An equestrian ceremonial — carriages, the Household Cavalry and the state landau.
- A state banquet with its gilt service, white tie worn with tiaras and decorations.
- A strictly codified order of precedence with the Sovereign at its apex, and an exact protocol of the Royal Standard.
- A calendar of state rites — the State Opening of Parliament, Trooping the Colour — that keeps continuity perpetually in view.

These features are very nearly unique precisely because they issue from an institution that has lived without interruption for centuries: here tradition is not imitated but continued. Yet, as Cannadine (1983) has shown, much of the monarchy's modern ceremonial splendour was deliberately fashioned in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries — tradition as much refined for a modern public as inherited. In theoretical terms, the sovereign embodies what Bagehot (1867) called the dignified part of the constitution, as against the efficient — the ceremonial role that lends legitimacy to the political order.

9.7. The American tradition: its good practices

The American tradition, though younger and republican in spirit, has developed a number of practices now held up as a model the world over. Lacking the inherited continuity of monarchy, the United States built a system that distinguishes itself by professionalism, codification, discipline and openness. As Mary Mel French, a former US Chief of Protocol, shows, American protocol is a non-partisan body of courtesies and a codified order of precedence, conceived as the connective tissue of relations rather than a political instrument (French, 2010).

- A professionalised institution — the Office of the Chief of Protocol (since 1928) and a clearly codified order of precedence.
- Military precision and joint-service ceremonial — the Old Guard, the Presidential Salute Battery and the pass in review — disciplined and repeatable, with room for new formations, as the first appearance of the Space Force detachment attested.
- Standardised honours — the 21-gun salute and “Hail to the Chief” — clear and instantly recognisable.
- The state dinner as an instrument of soft power — the First Lady's Social Office composing the menu, the décor, the entertainment and the guest list with strategic intent.
- Openness and public communication — the White House publishes the programme, the menu, the guest list and the gift exchange, and does so in real time through its official digital platforms, a model of transparent protocol that multiplies soft power before a global audience.
- Commemorative discipline — Arlington, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and the bugle call Taps — dignified and standardised.

— Gifts directed to meaning rather than to value — documents and Americana bearing a historical message.

The strength of the American model lies in its adaptability, openness and discipline: it is a protocol refined through practice and opened to the public (Smiljanov, 2016; French, 2010).

The following schema gathers the differences and the meeting-points:

Dimension	British (royal)	American (presidential)
Source of authority	Hereditary Crown; centuries of continuity; protocol rooted in tradition and heraldry	Elected President — head of state and of government; a republican protocol enriched by military ceremonial
Governing institutions	The Royal Household: Lord Chamberlain, Marshal of the Diplomatic Corps, Master of the Household; the Earl Marshal for great occasions	Office of the Chief of Protocol (State Department, since 1928); the White House; the Military District of Washington
Ceremonial idiom	Carriages, the Household Cavalry, Beating Retreat, a Red Arrows flypast (Windsor, 2025)	A South Lawn arrival, a 21-gun salute, fife and drum, a pass in review, an F-35 flypast (Washington, 2026)
Precedence and honours	A codified order of precedence; orders of chivalry; the Sovereign above all	A presidential order of precedence; “Hail to the Chief”; a 21-gun salute for heads of state
Dress	Morning dress, white tie with decorations, tiaras; exacting codes	Chiefly business-formal; white tie reserved for the grandest dinners — a republican restraint
Symbols and music	“God Save the King”; the Royal Standard; heraldry	“The Star-Spangled Banner” and “Hail to the Chief”; the Presidential Seal
Gifts	Heraldic and historic (the Resolute Desk plans)	Documents and Americana (the 1785 John Adams letter)
Commemoration	The Cenotaph; Remembrance	Arlington; the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier

10. Reciprocity in numbers: the visits of the King and of President Trump

A comparison of the number of state visits reveals the asymmetry that protocol seeks to redress. As reigning monarch, Charles III made his first state visit to the United States in

2026. As Prince of Wales he had visited the United States nineteen times, beginning in 1970 (Buckingham Palace; Veranda, 2026). His mother, Queen Elizabeth II, made four state visits — in 1957, 1976, 1991 and 2007 — while King George VI was the first reigning British monarch to visit the United States, in 1939.

On the other side, President Donald Trump made two state visits to the United Kingdom — in 2019 to Queen Elizabeth II and in 2025 to King Charles at Windsor — and so remained the only American president to have received two British state visits (Fox News, 2026; The White House, 2026).

The figures disclose two things. First, state visits by a British monarch to the United States are exceedingly rare — only a handful in more than eight decades — so that each carries the weight of a historic event. Second, the 2026 visit is the reciprocal return of Windsor 2025; with it the balance of courtesy between the two nations is restored. A monarch will, as a rule, make such a visit but once in a reign, whereas a president may be invited again — which accounts for the numerical asymmetry.

Person and capacity	State visits	Period / years
King Charles III (as monarch) → USA	1	2026
Charles as Prince of Wales → USA (working and private)	19	1970–2018
Queen Elizabeth II → USA	4	1957, 1976, 1991, 2007
King George VI → USA (first reigning monarch)	1	1939
President Donald Trump → United Kingdom	2	2019, 2025

11. A comparative view: President Trump’s ceremonial attention to four leaders

A useful way to gauge the weight of the King’s state visit is to set it beside the ceremonial attention President Trump accorded other prominent leaders within the same term. The degree of honour rendered is a measurable category of protocol: it ranges from a full state reception to a working meeting on neutral ground. What is described here is the ceremonial level, not the political importance of the relationship.

11.1. A model: the Ceremonial Attention Scale (WPA-CAS)

To systematise this category, an original analytical instrument developed within the World Protocol Academy is proposed here — the Ceremonial Attention Scale (WPA-CAS). It is intended not for this case alone but as a transferable tool for future protocol analyses and

as part of the WPA methodology. It is an ordinal scale of five tiers measuring the degree of honour a head of state confers upon a guest, on the basis of five criteria: venue (home soil versus neutral), military honours, hospitality, symbolic additions, and format and duration. In this version the scale is ordinal and descriptive; a future quantitative extension could score each dimension (present, partial, absent) and let the sum determine the tier — a direction set out in Chapter 13.

Tier	Definition	Key criteria
Tier V	Full state reception	Home soil; full military ceremony (21-gun salute, both anthems, troop review), state banquet, often a legislative address; multi-day format
Tier IV	High ceremonial reception	Significant honours (red carpet, guard of honour, possible flypast) or hospitality, but without the full apparatus of a state visit
Tier III	Official working visit	A bilateral on home soil with modest honours (handshake, photograph, working lunch); limited ceremonial
Tier II	Working meeting on neutral ground	A bilateral on the margins or in a third country; minimal or no host ceremonial honours
Tier I	Indirect contact / no reception	No direct head-of-state reception; contact through representatives or lower channels

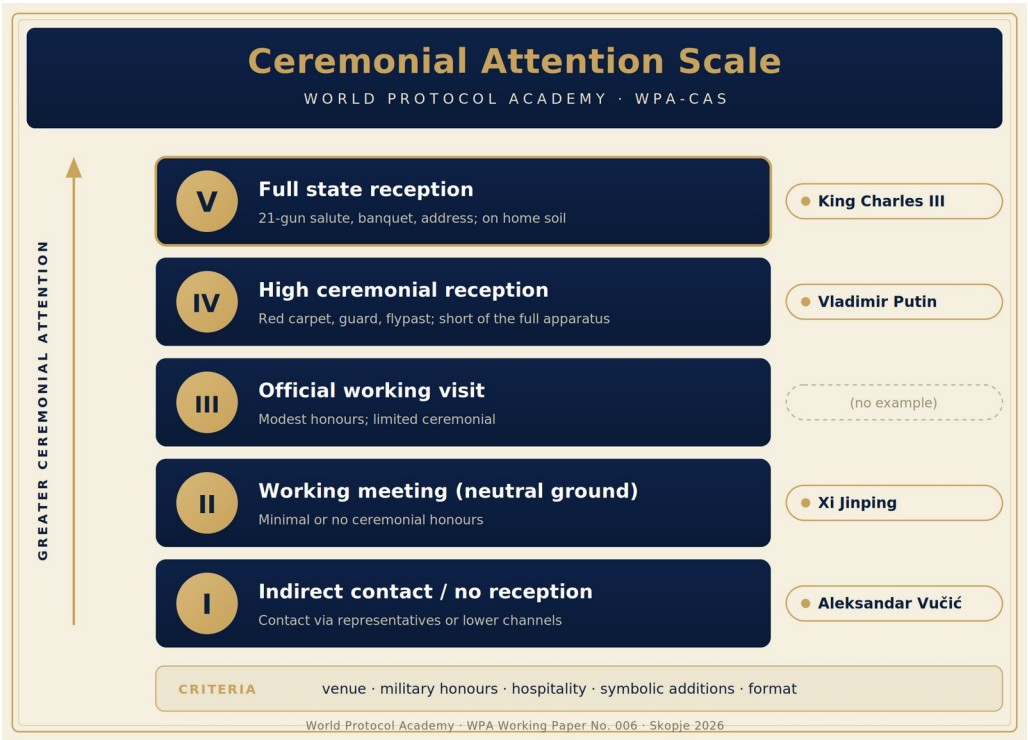


Figure 1. The Ceremonial Attention Scale (WPA-CAS) applied to the four leaders.

11.2. Application: four leaders

King Charles III received a full state reception on American soil — the highest level possible, set out earlier in this paper (*The White House, 2026*). Vladimir Putin, at the Anchorage summit of 15 August 2025, was met with a red carpet on a military base, a guard of honour, a flypast by a B-2 bomber escorted by fighters and a shared ride in the presidential limousine; yet the meeting remained below the threshold of a state visit — without a state banquet, the planned luncheon having been cancelled, and without an address (The Washington Post, 2025; Time, 2025). Xi Jinping met Trump on 30 October 2025 at an airport in Busan, on the margins of the APEC summit and on neutral ground, in a working bilateral of some hundred minutes, without state ceremonial honours (Al Jazeera, 2025; Brookings, 2025). Aleksandar Vučić, in the current term, has had no direct state reception at the White House; contact has run mainly through Donald Trump Jr. in Belgrade and through business ties, while the formal Oval Office reception dates from 2020 (Reuters, 2025).

The following schema maps the four leaders onto the WPA-CAS:

Leader	Type and venue of reception	Ceremonial honours	Degree of attention
King Charles III	State visit (4 days) · the White House, USA, April 2026	21-gun salute, both anthems, troop review, flypast, state banquet, address to Congress	Tier V — the highest

Leader	Type and venue of reception	Ceremonial honours	Degree of attention
Vladimir Putin	Summit · military base, Alaska (USA), 15 Aug 2025	Red carpet, guard of honour, military flypast, shared limousine; no banquet (the luncheon cancelled)	Tier IV — high (below state-visit threshold)
Xi Jinping	Working bilateral · airport, Busan (neutral ground), 30 Oct 2025	No state ceremonial honours	Tier II — working
Aleksandar Vučić	No direct reception in the current term · contact via Trump Jr., Belgrade 2025	Indirect contact and business ties (a formal Oval Office reception in 2020)	Tier I — indirect

Mapped onto the WPA-CAS, the picture reveals a clear gradation. The full state reception is reserved for an ally and reciprocal partner; Putin’s ceremonial welcome, striking as it was, remained below the threshold of a state visit and was widely remarked upon for precisely that reason; the meeting with Xi was held on neutral ground between two great powers, a protocol equality of its own kind; and the relationship with Vučić remains at a lower, chiefly informal level. Protocol thus mirrors the nature of the relationship — alliance, great-power rivalry, or the asymmetry between a large and a small state — yet the choice of ceremonial is itself a message (Nye, 2004).

12. Findings

The analysis yields several principal findings. First, the visit is a textbook case of state protocol: each of its elements — reciprocity, the invitation, military honours, precedence, the exchange of gifts and commemoration — carries a precise meaning. Second, the ceremonial functions as soft power and produces measurable outcomes, including the removal of a tariff in the guest’s honour. Third, the comparison of the British and American traditions reveals two pre-eminent systems that, at the highest level, speak a common language. Fourth, applied through the WPA-CAS model, the degree of ceremonial attention proves a measurable category that mirrors the nature of the relationship between states.

13. Limitations and further research

The paper has several limitations that at the same time open avenues for further work. First, the source base rests chiefly on near-real-time reporting and official statements; cross-checked against one another though they are, they do not replace the archival record, which will only become available in time. Second, the proposed WPA-CAS model is ordinal and

descriptive — it ranks the tiers but assigns no weights to the individual criteria; a future version might introduce a weighted index and test it against a larger sample of visits. Third, the comparative section covers four leaders chosen for the diversity of the relationships; a broader comparison, with more hosts and guests, would strengthen external validity. Further research might apply the model historically — for instance to Queen Elizabeth II's four state visits to the United States — and comparatively, across different host states.

14. Conclusion

The state visit of King Charles III to the United States in April 2026 is a textbook example of state protocol in action and, at the same time, of ceremonial diplomacy as soft power. Behind the political headlines, its true construction was ceremonial: a carefully composed sequence of welcomes, honours, exchanges and commemorations, each with a precise function, which nonetheless produced tangible diplomatic and commercial returns. The comparison of the British and American traditions revealed two pre-eminent systems resting on different foundations yet speaking, at the highest level, a common language; and the count of mutual visits confirmed the symmetry of courtesy that protocol requires. In this domain, form is not the ornament of content but its very vehicle. The WPA-CAS model introduced here is an original analytical contribution of the World Protocol Academy, transferable to future cases of protocol. Negotiation is optional. Protocol is absolute.

References

References follow the spirit of APA (7th ed.), with bilingual elements in keeping with the standard of the WPA Institute.

A. Authorial works and monographs (Smiljanov)

Smiljanov, S. (2018). *Establishing a Unified State Protocol at the Level of the Republic of Macedonia* (1st ed.). Skopje: World Protocol Academy.

Smiljanov, S. (2020). *Handbook on Organising Conferences*. Skopje: World Protocol Academy.

Smiljanov, S. (2021). *Diplomacy, Protocol and Security*. Skopje: World Protocol Academy.

Smiljanov, S. (2021). *The Role of Protocol and Defence Diplomacy in Securing the Republic of Macedonia* (doctoral dissertation). Ss. Cyril and Methodius University, Skopje. HDL: [20.500.12188/13176](https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12188/13176).

Smiljanov, S. (2023). *The Digital Era: Transformation, Security, Protocol, Diplomacy, Etiquette*. Skopje: World Protocol Academy.

- Smiljanov, S. (2021). Official Apostolic Visit of Pope Francis to the Republic of North Macedonia. *Religious Dialogue and Cooperation*, 2(2), 179–188. DOI: [10.47054/rdc212179s](https://doi.org/10.47054/rdc212179s).
- Smiljanov, S. (2022). The Influence of the Protocol Through the Prism of Policy. *Security Horizons*, III(7), 201–208.
- Smiljanov, S. (2022/2023). The Aspects of the Diplomatic Protocol Through the Prism of the Russo-Ukrainian Conflict. *Conference Proceedings*, 317–324.
- Smiljanov, S. (2023). Protocol and Personal Security. *Security Dialogues*, 14(1), 213–223.
- Smiljanov, S. (2026). Digital Protocol in the Age of Artificial Intelligence. *Proceedings of IMCSM26, XXII(1)*, 144–150. Belgrade.

B. WPA Working Papers (Zenodo)

- Smiljanov, S. (2026). *Dress Code in Diplomatic, Business and Military Protocol*. WPA Working Paper No. 001. Skopje: World Protocol Academy. Zenodo, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 (DOI forthcoming).
- Smiljanov, S. (2026). *Plan B in Protocol: Doctrinal Foundations*. WPA Working Paper No. 002. Skopje: World Protocol Academy. Zenodo, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 (DOI forthcoming).
- Smiljanov, S. (2026). *Wrong Flag Display as a Protocol Breach*. WPA Working Paper No. 003. Skopje: World Protocol Academy. Zenodo (forthcoming).
- Smiljanov, S. (2026). WPA Working Papers No. 004 and No. 005 (in preparation). Skopje: World Protocol Academy. Zenodo.

C. Theoretical and scholarly sources

- Bagehot, W. (1867). *The English Constitution*. London: Chapman & Hall.
- Berridge, G. R. (2015). *Diplomacy: Theory and Practice* (5th ed.). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Cannadine, D. (1983). The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the 'Invention of Tradition', c. 1820–1977. In E. Hobsbawm & T. Ranger (Eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (pp. 101–164). Cambridge University Press.
- Cohen, R. (1987). *Theatre of Power: The Art of Diplomatic Signalling*. Longman.
- Constantinou, C. M. (1996). *On the Way to Diplomacy*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Debrett's. (2016). *Debrett's Handbook*. London: Debrett's.
- French, M. M. (2010). *United States Protocol: The Guide to Official Diplomatic Etiquette* (foreword by W. J. Clinton). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. ISBN 978-1-4422-0319-8.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Anchor Books.
- Hobsbawm, E., & Ranger, T. (Eds.). (1983). *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge University Press.

- Jönsson, C., & Hall, M. (2005). *Essence of Diplomacy*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kertzer, D. I. (1988). *Ritual, Politics, and Power*. Yale University Press.
- Mattingly, G. (1955). *Renaissance Diplomacy*. Houghton Mifflin.
- Neumann, I. B. (2012). *At Home with the Diplomats: Inside a European Foreign Ministry*. Cornell University Press.
- Nye, J. S. (2004). *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. PublicAffairs.
- Nye, J. S. (2008). Public Diplomacy and Soft Power. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 616(1), 94–109.
- Satow, E. (1979). *Satow's Guide to Diplomatic Practice* (5th ed., Lord Gore-Booth, Ed.). Longman.
- Wood, J. R., & Serres, J. (1970). *Diplomatic Ceremonial and Protocol: Principles, Procedures and Practices*. Columbia University Press.

D. Official and primary sources — United States

- The White House. (2026, 25 April). Statement on the forthcoming State Visit of King Charles III and Queen Camilla. [whitehouse.gov](https://www.whitehouse.gov).
- The White House. (2026, 29 April). Statement on the State Visit — “250 Years of Shared Heritage”. [whitehouse.gov](https://www.whitehouse.gov).
- Office of the First Lady (The White House). (2026, 28 April). State Dinner details: menu, programme, décor and guest list.
- Office of the Chief of Protocol, U.S. Department of State. (2026). Coordination of the State Visit (Ambassador Monica Crowley).
- Office of the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives. (2026, 1 April). Joint letter inviting King Charles III to address a Joint Meeting of Congress (Johnson, Thune, Schumer, Jeffries).

E. Official and primary sources — United Kingdom

- Buckingham Palace / The Royal Household ([royal.uk](https://www.royal.uk)). (2026, 31 March). Statement on the State Visit to the United States, “on the advice of His Majesty’s Government”.
- Buckingham Palace / The Royal Household. (2026, 26 April). Confirmation that the State Visit will proceed as planned, with adjusted security arrangements.
- Buckingham Palace / The Royal Household. (2026, 28 April). Text of the King’s toast at the state dinner (released by the Palace).
- Buckingham Palace / The Royal Household. (2026, 28 April). Statement following the King’s address to Congress.
- Government of the United Kingdom ([gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk)) / Prime Minister’s Office. (2025–2026). The visit proceeds on the advice of His Majesty’s Government; the King’s invitation conveyed through the Prime Minister (February 2025).

F. Media sources

CNN. (2026, 28–30 April). Live coverage of the state visit. [cnn.com](https://www.cnn.com).

Fox News. (2026, April). King Charles meets Trump; address to Congress; farewell. [foxnews.com](https://www.foxnews.com).

CBS News. (2026, 29 April). King Charles toasts the U.S.–U.K. alliance. [cbsnews.com](https://www.cbsnews.com).

ABC News. (2026, 29 April). King Charles III gives toast at White House state dinner. [abcnews.com](https://www.abcnews.com).

Military Times. (2026, 28 April). Trump showcases US military in King Charles visit. [militarytimes.com](https://www.militarytimes.com).

Time. (2026). Everything We Know About King Charles' State Visit. [time.com](https://www.time.com).

Veranda. (2026). Buckingham Palace Confirms King Charles's State Visit to the U.S. [veranda.com](https://www.veranda.com).

The Independent. (2026). King Charles invited to address US Congress. [independent.co.uk](https://www.independent.co.uk).

Al Jazeera. (2026, 27 April). King Charles US visit: itinerary and Congress address. [aljazeera.com](https://www.aljazeera.com).

Deutsche Welle. (2026). Britain seeks to win over Trump with the help of King Charles. [dw.com](https://www.dw.com).

MKD.MK. (2025; 2026). Invitation to a second visit; removal of the whisky tariff. [mkd.mk](https://www.mkd.mk).

Macedonian media reports (Nezavisen, Telma, Plusinfo, Vecer), April 2026.

G. Sources for the comparative view (Chapter 11)

The Washington Post. (2025, 16 August). Trump–Putin's Alaska summit began with a red carpet. [washingtonpost.com](https://www.washingtonpost.com).

Time. (2025, 16 August). Putin Got Three Major Wins From Trump in Anchorage. [time.com](https://www.time.com).

Al Jazeera. (2025, 30 October). Trump–Xi meeting in Busan: key takeaways. [aljazeera.com](https://www.aljazeera.com).

Brookings. (2025, 5 November). What happened when Trump met Xi? [brookings.edu](https://www.brookings.edu).

Reuters. (2025, 11 March). Donald Trump Jr meets Serbia's President Vučić in Belgrade. [reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com).

The White House. (2020, 4 September). Remarks by President Trump, President Vučić and Prime Minister Hoti in a trilateral meeting. trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov.

Appendix • Glossary of protocol terms

A brief glossary of the principal terms of protocol, intended for students and non-specialist readers.

Term	Definition
State visit	The highest ceremonial form of visit between heads of state, with the full military-ceremonial apparatus and the head of state as formal host.
Official visit	A visit with ceremonial, but of lesser intensity than a state visit; often at government level.
Working visit	A visit directed at talks, with minimal ceremonial.
Precedence	The established order of priority among officials and states, governing arrangement, seating and address.
Reciprocity	The principle of mutuality: an honour rendered is returned with an equal honour.
Credentials	The letters by which an ambassador is formally presented to the foreign head of state.
21-gun salute	The highest artillery honour, reserved for heads of state and reigning sovereigns.
Guard of honour	A military unit that renders ceremonial honour to a distinguished guest.
Pass in review	A parade in which units march past the guest and the host.
Flypast	An overflight by military aircraft as part of the ceremonial welcome.
State banquet	A formal official meal in honour of the guest, with a strict seating plan and an exchange of toasts.
Exchange of gifts	A codified act of mutual giving with symbolic meaning.
Commemorative protocol	Rites of homage (wreath-laying, a minute's silence) at places of remembrance.
Royal Standard	The flag denoting the presence of the sovereign.
Chief of Protocol	The official responsible for conducting state and diplomatic ceremonial.

Appendix · Timeline of the visit and the WPA-CAS

An overview of the four days through the protocol elements and the dimensions of the Ceremonial Attention Scale (WPA-CAS) activated.

Day	Location	Key protocol elements	WPA-CAS dimensions
1 (27 Apr)	White House	Soft arrival at the South Portico; tea; informal meeting	Hospitality

Day	Location	Key protocol elements	WPA-CAS dimensions
2 (28 Apr)	White House · Capitol	State arrival (21-gun salute, both anthems, review, F-35 flypast); bilateral; exchange of gifts; address to Congress; state dinner	Venue, military honours, hospitality, symbolic additions, format
3 (29 Apr)	New York	9/11 Memorial (laying of flowers); diplomacy of the people (Harlem)	Symbolic additions (commemoration)
4 (30 Apr)	White House · Arlington	Formal farewell; Arlington (21-gun salute, wreath, Taps); send-off from Joint Base Andrews	Military honours, symbolic additions, format

Appendix · Bilingual glossary (English–Macedonian)

Standardised translation equivalents of the key terms of protocol, for students, translators and diplomats.

English	Macedonian
Ceremonial Attention Scale	Скала на церемонијално внимание
State visit	Државна посета
State arrival ceremony	Церемонија на државен пречек
Order of precedence	Ред на протоколарно првенство
Reciprocity	Реципроцитет
Letters of credence	Акредитивни писма
21-gun salute	Салва од 21 топ
Guard of honour	Почесна гарда
Pass in review	Преглед во движење
Flypast	Воздушен (почесен) прелет
State banquet / state dinner	Државен банкет / државна вечера
Exchange of gifts	Размена на дарови
Commemorative protocol	Комеморативен протокол
Royal Standard	Кралски стег
Chief of Protocol	Шеф на протоколот
Soft power	Мека моќ
Special relationship	Специјален однос

Appendix · Deposit metadata

CITATION.cff

cff-version: 1.2.0
title: "The State Visit of King Charles III to the USA (2026):
An Anatomy of Ceremonial Diplomacy and Soft Power through the Prism of
Protocol"
authors:
- family-names: Smiljanov
given-names: Sande
orcid: "https://orcid.org/0009-0008-3219-394X"
affiliation: "World Protocol Academy, Skopje"
type: report
version: "1.3"
date-released: 2026-05-31
license: CC-BY-NC-ND-4.0

BibTeX

```
@techreport{smiljanov2026charlesvisit,  
  author      = {Smiljanov, Sande},  
  title       = {The State Visit of King Charles III to the USA (2026)},  
  institution = {World Protocol Academy},  
  series      = {Protocol Theory and Practice},  
  number      = {WPA Working Paper No. 006},  
  year        = {2026}, address = {Skopje},  
  note        = {ORCID: 0009-0008-3219-394X. CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.}  
}
```

WPA Working Paper No. 006 · v1.3

Status: preprint · WPA Working Paper · not yet peer-reviewed

© 2026 World Protocol Academy · CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 · WPA Working Paper · Preprint ·
Version v1.3 · DOI to be assigned by Zenodo upon publication