

His Majesty and Our Travesty

By Maureen Dowd , The New York Times, May 2, 2026

The last time Charles came here for a state visit, nobody seemed to notice.[...]

But in Washington this past week, Charles came into his own. Forty years after Diana's Cinderella turn, Charles got to be Cinderella.

In a country rife with No Kings protests, this king was a tonic. He presented himself with elegance, intelligence and wit — everything that has been wanting in Washington during the Trump era. He arrived at a propitious moment to remind the autocrat in the White House why Britain's rebellious colony ran away: to escape the tyranny of an oppressive king.

“Out of the fires of a bitter and bloody Revolutionary War, the triumph of the father of this country, George Washington, and his fellow founders was to forge a democracy founded upon the rights to liberty and the rule of law,” Charles said at the state dinner.

In his pointed speech to Congress, he reminded the lawmakers that our Constitution, based on Magna Carta, provides checks on a tyrant's power.

The king deftly schooled Donald, and Donald took it because he has always been awed by the British royal family. The president was thrilled when a British newspaper did a genealogy that found he may be a distant cousin of Charles. (Then again, so are the Bushes.) Trump even dropped the tariffs on Scottish whisky to please the king.

Charles gently reminded the president, who has been blasting NATO for not helping bail him out of the Iran quicksand, that America's allies stepped up after 9/11. Britain battled in Afghanistan beside us, and tried to rebuild it with us, for 20 years.

“Our people have fought and fallen together in defense of the values we cherish,” Charles said. The message to Trump was obvious: Don't berate us for not backing your misadventure in Iran, after we went all in on America's misbegotten occupation of Afghanistan and war in Iraq.

Gently mocking the territorial Trump at the state dinner, Charles noted that he is already the king of Canada — no need for another. He also teased: “Now I know you have big plans for the moon, Mr. President, but I've checked the papers and I rather suspect it is already part of the Commonwealth, I'm afraid!”

He quoted Shakespeare's “Henry V” to prompt the bellicose president to seek peace: “my speech entreats, that I may know ... why gentle Peace should not ... bless us with her former qualities.” It was lovely to hear the King's English, devoid of the vengeance, blasphemy and vulgarity common in our leader's language.

The king put a salve on a blistered partnership. Trump has trashed Prime Minister Keir Starmer as “cowardly” and a “loser” for not helping with Iran. Britain's ambassador, Christian Turner, didn't help with his leaked comment that the “special relationship” America has now is with Israel.

On his last state visit, Charles was in the shade of Diana's radiance. On this one, he radiated an élan of his own — a class act, shining next to the boorish Trump. At long last, Charles was in no one's shadow. At 77, he has done what he always yearned to do: make his mark on the world.