

[Transcript] The News Agents / Will Macron block Rishi's small boats plan?

This is a Global Player original podcast.
Labour are borrowing from the Gary Lineker playbook.
They are a party...
..they are a party of goal hangers
and the occasional left-wing striker.
Hanging around the goal mouth poised to seize any opportunities
and to take an easy shot,
but that only works if the ball is in the right half.
This country doesn't need goal hangers, it needs centre forwards.
It needs people that put in the hard work, take tough decisions,
grip a problem and work out how to solve it
and create those opportunities, and that is what we are doing.
And it needs a team captain who knows his own mind,
has a plan and what colour his football shirt is.
Labour might be up at half time,
but the second half is yet to be played.
You know, I'd really love to think that Penny Mordent,
the leader of the house, was just riffing
and kind of sporting metaphors,
with just coming into her brain as she spoke.
But I have a horrible, horrible feeling.
That was written.
That was a carefully scripted attempt
to tie in the Labour Party to Gary Lineker
and keep the focus on a football commentator.
Yeah, and there's a very important reason
why she and others on the Conservative benches
might be doing that today.
Because we are hearing that tomorrow,
when the rubber hits the road with that meeting
between Rishi Sunak and Emmanuel Macron in Paris,
Macron might end the dreams of helping Rishi Sunak
stop the small boats.
So for now, they won't be talking about that.
They won't be talking about small boats.
They won't be talking about the ins and outs of their policy
or whether it breaks international law.
They'll be talking about Lineker
because they want you to be doing that too.
Welcome to the News Agents.
The News Agents.
It's John.
It's Emily.
And we are in a shiveringly cold News Agents HQ

[Transcript] The News Agents / Will Macron block Rishi's small boats plan?

where Maitland has been persuaded to take off her gilet because it is so cold in here.

So she is shivering.

And we are going to talk about what on earth is going on.

We're going to talk about the bigger policy, the huge issue of migrants, asylum seekers, government policy, the global crisis.

But you would think that everything, everything revolves around Gary Lineker and his single tweet.

He tried to get out of his house today.

He was surrounded by reporters.

Morning, Gary.

Yes.

Very good morning to you.

Morning, morning.

Do you regret the tweet, Gary?

Do you regret the tweet, Gary?

No.

Hi there. Have you heard from the BBC, Gary?

I'm always talking to the BBC.

What does the Director-General say to you?

Yeah.

What's he said?

He said, well, we have a chat, we chat often.

Anything about the tweet, Gary?

Do you regret sending the tweet at all?

No.

He's done by what you said.

Sorry?

He's done by what you said in your tweet.

Thank you.

That's what they call a doorstep in our industry, which is where you try and get a comment from somebody kind of ad-libbed on their way from the door to their car or to their place of work.

Gary Lineker not giving an awful amount away there and pretty gracious as he passed by.

But what we're hearing from the Sun, who says that they have had a reporter who's spoken to a source at the BBC, is the whole thing's now resolved.

The BBC wants to move on in brackets.

They can't afford to lose Gary Lineker.

[Transcript] The News Agents / Will Macron block Rishi's small boats plan?

And Gary Lineker wants to move on in brackets.
He probably doesn't want to give up the day job.
And in the last few minutes, Gary Lineker has tweeted.
He's clearly keen to just draw a line under this whole thing.
He said, it's been an interesting couple of days.
Happy that this ridiculously out of proportion story
seems to be abating.
Very much looking forward to presenting
Match of the Day on Saturday.
Thanks again for your incredible support.
It's been overwhelming.
But for now, you see, the people that still want the story
to keep going and are still talking about it
will be conservatives on the front bench
who want to tie everything that was implicit
in that row to Labour.
And of course, tomorrow, Rishi Sunak goes to Paris.
It is a big, big deal.
It is an attempt to reset the relationship.
And what we've been hearing throughout the week
is that this could be the moment
when relationships are transformed
and policy might be transformed as well,
whereby the French government might agree to take
returning asylum seekers who've come across the channel
and landed on the beaches in Dover.
But is it as straightforward as that?
Because if you're hearing things from the French side,
it's nothing like as straightforward.
Yeah.
I mean, so far, we have been giving them money.
We've been giving them millions to tackle patrols,
to help bolster, if you like, French security,
security on their side of the channel
that would stop more of the boats coming through to us.
Clearly, something hasn't worked.
I mean, we keep on giving them sums of money.
I think we're up to about 250 million, 300 million.
The last trench was about 60 million in November.
But the thing that would make the difference
is if there is some kind of returns agreement
that both sides can accept.
That is not a returns agreement
like the ones we have with India and Pakistan and Serbia,

[Transcript] The News Agents / Will Macron block Rishi's small boats plan?

which, you know, are miles away.
They're much further away.
They're not direct routes here.
The manual macro helps Rishi out.
With that, then Rishi Sunak feels
he has got a major cap in his feather
because he can turn around to the country and say,
you see, I promise that I'd reset relations with the EU.
I promise that I'd stop small boats
and here it all is in one policy.
There's a lot hanging on this,
but the mood music so far is not great.
Well, on your point on Atmospheric's mood music,
whatever you want to call it,
I mean, there is something that has changed
to put it kind of in old-fashioned terms.
They like the cut of each other's jib.
Right.
Do Macron and Sunak.
They're kind of rather similar technocrats,
clever, Goldman Sachs, bankers,
sort of that sort of background.
They're both well-dressed.
I think that's what we're not saying that,
but it does work, doesn't it?
And small.
Whereas Macron couldn't stand Boris Johnson.
And we all knew what happened with Liz Truss
when she said France...
Friend or foe.
Friend or foe.
Look, let's speak now to Sophie Pedder
who is the Europe editor,
France editor for the Economist magazine
and is in Paris now.
And Sophie, they are coming to Paris, aren't they?
But wasn't there a plan that the meeting
should take place somewhere else?
There was.
It was originally proposed by the Elysees
that the summit would take place in northern France.
I mean, the symbolism, sort of echoes of war
and reconciliation,
and they rather liked that idea.

[Transcript] The News Agents / Will Macron block Rishi's small boats plan?

But the British government said they'd rather come to Paris.
So Paris, it's going to be tomorrow.
And the Elysees Palace, more specifically.
Yes, not just Paris,
but the big, real, glamorous centre
of sort of French power,
which is the Elysees Palace, right?
He wants to be seen to be accepted.
And the Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré,
which is where the Elysees Palace is on,
is just a couple of hundred yards
from the British Embassy residence,
which is also pretty damn fabulous.
So I can imagine that the accommodation...
The photo ops will be looking great
and the accommodation will be comfy.
Exactly, exactly.
What about substance?
What we were just talking about.
I mean, Rishi Sunak clearly wants to get some kind of deal
whereby the people who arrive in Dover
on small boats can be sent back.
Is that going to happen?
Well, look, I mean, I think there are various things here.
The first one is, from the French point of view,
this summit isn't all about small boats.
And I get the impression that the UK thinks
that that's the main subject.
It is a summit that is supposed to look at a range of things,
and it will.
These could be cooperation over Ukraine,
other defence cooperation, nuclear energy.
There is sort of a range of subjects
that are actually officially on the agenda.
So I think the French do not want to make
this entire summit about small boats.
Having said that, it's obviously what Rishi Sunak
is coming to Paris to talk about.
But I think it's a question of expectations.
The French will never accept right now
the idea of a readmission agreement
that would send all migrants that made it over the channel
back to French soil systematically.
It just won't fly in France at all.

[Transcript] The News Agents / Will Macron block Rishi's small boats plan?

What they will be prepared to do is talk about putting more French policemen on the beaches, that kind of reinforcing the deal that's already there, financed by the UK, by the way, with a bit more money, a more regular, you know, yearly deal that they didn't have to keep being negotiated. That's the sort of thing they're prepared to talk about. But a systematic deal to readmit all people who make it across the channel, the French just won't accept that. So Sophie, let's unpick that, because what we're talking about here is returns agreements. And Rishi Sunak spelled out yesterday for us that there are countries that we have returns agreements with, like India, like Pakistan, like Serbia, but the obvious neighbour is France. Now, are you saying that if Rishi Sunak turns to Emmanuel Macron and says, will you be prepared to take asylum seekers or migrants crossing in France? The answer will be no? That is how I read the situation at the moment. And I think from the French point of view, although they understand that there is a particular geographic closeness between the UK and France, this is an EU-UK situation. It's something that the UK needs to negotiate with the EU. And as happened all the way through the Brexit talks, this was never something that France talked about to the UK bilaterally. And I think that the way the French would approach this is to say that the same would go for any sort of readmission request from the UK. So it's much more likely that they're going to get some better cooperation deal in terms of patrolling, embedded British policemen in French patrols, that kind of thing, but not a readmission agreement now. And I want to unpick that answer because I think that's fascinating. This is a Franco-British summit, but it's not going to have the power to come to huge agreement on the return of migrants because France would say that's not of French matter, that is an EU matter.

[Transcript] The News Agents / Will Macron block Rishi's small boats plan?

I think that's right, but it doesn't mean you can't see other forms of cooperation that can be bilateral, and hence things like this deal that was reinforced last year to let the British police officers take part in embedded operations. I mean, this is already happening in northern France. It's really interesting, and it's clearly something that is valued by both sides, but it's not the same as going for a full-out readmissions agreement. Do you think there will be a conversation about how Rishi Sunak may have to change, tone down, water down the language of his small boats policy in order to make Macron come on side? I just don't think that's what's going to happen tomorrow, to be honest. The way I see it is you're going to have some very good atmospherics, as you put it earlier. There's going to be a lot of smiling, a lot of... The symbolism is important on both sides. I think they want to... that symbolism not just to be for domestic consumption in the UK and France, but also, you know, Russia is going to be watching. Russia is very carefully watching where there are potential rifts and divisions among Europeans, and the idea of having Sunak and Macron standing side-by-side, talking about their commitment to supporting Ukraine, I think is going to be really an important moment. So I think that this issue of small boats, from the French perspective, is just one matter, one issue on the table, and it's not going to be resolved, I don't think, tomorrow. It's really interesting, isn't it, because just in terms of the money involved, Britain has paid France, like, north of 230 million, in these incremental

[Transcript] The News Agents / Will Macron block Rishi's small boats plan?

sort of one-off payments, not a systemic thing, but a sort of, here, how can we be of help for your patrolling on the French side? I think the last one was in November, when the current Home Secretary, Savannah Bravman, agreed to pay around 60 million with her French, the Interior Minister, it would be to increase those patrols by 40%. Now, if this money is going to France but it's not working, or at least the small boats problem isn't being solved, what happens? I mean, what does that say? Well, I think what you'll probably see tomorrow, I mean, I, you know, haven't seen the declaration, so I don't know for sure, but my understanding is you're going to see strength and cooperation of the sort we were just discussing, that's to say, you know, more of these sort of joint efforts to break up smuggling rings to stop people getting to the coast in the first place. And, you know, I think that even the British Police Authorities who have been working here would agree that this has begun to have some effect, so putting more resources into that is a way of trying to sort of break up arrivals before they even get to the coast and break up the smuggling rings themselves. Sophie, this may sound like a really stupid question, and forgive me if it is. But has it made any difference the fact that Britain is no longer part of the European Union? You know, 20 years ago I was the BBC's Paris correspondent and I was spending most of my time in Calais and at a place called Songat chasing

[Transcript] The News Agents / Will Macron block Rishi's small boats plan?

people who were trying to get on to lorries to come across the channel. The problem has been there for 20 plus years. It just happens to be that in the last few years, we've been out of the EU. I mean, yes, and of course, and, you know, you'll remember that it was Marcosi who closed Songat at one point when he was president. I mean, of course, there's problems been going on for years and years. I don't think that the problem has been made worse or has it been eased either way by Brexit. What's changed is that until, this is why I think this summit is so important, until now, you know, the French and the British just weren't really talking to each other properly. I mean, don't forget this is the first time they're holding, the two governments are holding a summit since 2018 when they held it in Sandhurst in the UK. That was under Theresa May. The sort of Johnson years just meant there wasn't a proper dialogue with France. You know, there was just a trading of insults, but went both ways. You referred to them earlier. You know, sometimes it was funny, but most of the time it was just depressing. So the fact that the two countries can talk to each other that can have a sort of serious conversation, I think, is the way to then build on that in perhaps more kind of concrete ways in order to resolve the problem. But I think you have to get past that first stage before you can do anything more that build on that trust. You know, the trust being so utterly missing and absent in that relationship, the UK-French relationship. Very sadly, in my view, that it's just going to be important moment to start rebuilding again and then perhaps get to

[Transcript] The News Agents / Will Macron block Rishi's small boats plan?

something a little bit more ambitious.
Sophie Pedder, thank you so much for being
with us. We will be watching closely
and I'm sure Lewis will be picking that up
tomorrow. Thanks Sophie, ever so much. Thank you.
Pleasure. And isn't it interesting, just hearing
from Sophie there where she spells out
that there hasn't been a meeting like
this since 2018. We have been
in a many dark ages
for five years and if you think
that this was the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson,
who got elected on that
promise of getting Brexit done
and left this five-year
whole where
nothing happened, where relationships were
broken, whereas you said
you know, sand was kicked in the eye
and things have got worse and I sort
of wonder how, I mean
I don't wonder how the current
administration thinks, because obviously
they were all part of the same party and the same
process and the same cabinet quite frankly
but it is extraordinary that we're only
now just starting to pick up
the pieces from Theresa May's last visit
in 2018. It is extraordinary.
Talking of turning
your attention away from their true
focus, we think it's
pretty important to be looking at Iran
right now, whose
nuclear capabilities
have soared past the point
of no return.
Nobody's been watching this because everyone's
eyes have been, rightly,
on Ukraine, on Russia, on China
at the moment, but it could
make for a seriously interesting,
dangerous development in our relations
with Iran.

[Transcript] The News Agents / Will Macron block Rishi's small boats plan?

That's what's come.
Welcome back. In journalism
stories come to you in all sorts of ways
sometimes in a brown envelope, sometimes
you just happen to be
at a breakfast where someone really interesting
is speaking and they say
something that is really
unexpected and I was with a senior
defence official earlier
this week and the talk, of course,
was about Ukraine and what was happening
there and the kind of horrifying
casualty toll and all the rest of it
but in the midst of that conversation
about global uncertainty were
some pretty shocking things
about the situation in
Iran and its
enrichment of uranium and
Iran's ability to produce
a nuclear weapon and what the consequences
of that could be. This particular person
said he thought that the new
Iran nuclear deal was in effect
dead. It had gone past that stage
and that Israel
and Saudi Arabia were
deeply worried and a kind of weird
alliance in their concern about
Iran and wasn't ruling out
the prospect that sometime
quite soon
Israel could
actually retaliate
and try to take out
the Iranian nuclear facilities
like we haven't got enough
instability in the world
as things stand
this could be something else
altogether. Yeah and it I guess goes
back to
a statistic, a measurement

[Transcript] The News Agents / Will Macron block Rishi's small boats plan?

which is that our officials
have been watching the Iranian threat
and they can actually
measure it and what
nuclear inspectors are saying now
is that uranium particles
have been enriched to about
90% purity and 90%
is if you like a trigger
it's a trigger number for many states
saying this is the point
at which Iran becomes capable
of its nuclear
potential and that's
why the West doesn't want to leave it
too late and I'll tell you something really
weird actually soaps which was about six or seven
years ago I was in Iran I was in
Isfahan the most beautiful historic
extraordinary city and
at night we went for a walk
and they took us to the sort of bridges
where the river has completely
run dry and it's run dry
because all the water that should
be going into the country
is being used for uranium enrichment
this was already six or seven years ago
and there's a moment where
when the farmers riot they start turning on the taps
and they let the water come back
into the river into the crops
into the general population
but the rest of the time this is why Iran's got
various drought problem is because it's all going into
uranium enrichment that is absolutely fascinating
isn't it well
the uranium enrichment goes on
a pace and whatever was
the agreement that was meant to stop that
got halted effectively when Donald Trump
said I don't want America to be part
of this anymore there have been attempts
to revive it but frankly now

[Transcript] The News Agents / Will Macron block Rishi's small boats plan?

it seems past the point of no return
well let's just talk about
how serious this is
Sir Kim Dharak, Lord Dharak
he was Britain's national security
advisor all through the
negotiations on the catchily named
JCPOA
the joint comprehensive
plan of action for acronym
lovers otherwise known
as the Iran nuclear deal
Kim how worried should we be
we should be worried John
weapons grade uranium is
90% enriched
and an IAEA
report because they inspect the Iranian
nuclear facilities of
28th of February so only a few days ago
discovered
some 84% enriched
uranium in the Iranian
facilities
and the Iranians say this was
an accident that it was
an issue of a reconfiguring of their
centrifuges but there is
absolutely no reason
to be anywhere close
to that sort of figure
for enrichment unless there is
something going on about
enriching uranium way
past civilian needs
and you have something that is
frankly very worrying
is this the talk in security
circles here as to what happens
if
Iran starts moving on this
yes the people who are responsible
for relations with Iran
for non-proliferation issues

[Transcript] The News Agents / Will Macron block Rishi's small boats plan?

are and must be worried
about this but it's not
rising to the top of the news agenda
I don't think it will be
rising in the subjects
leaders talk about in the west when they talk to one another
but it is something
that can blow up very very quickly
because as I say there is no reason
to have uranium enriched to that level
unless you're up to something
so are we saying
that Iran could be weeks away
from having the capability
to make a nuclear weapon
I think we are saying that
if you believe there is to stock
then we're still somewhere away
if you think the Iranians might be hiding something
then it's much more dangerous
obviously I don't know which of those is
true but this must be
worrying worrying because
the Israelis have said
they will never allow Iran to get
to that point where they can
break out and develop a nuclear
weapon so does this mean that we
should be like the world
doesn't got enough instability at the moment
given what's happening in Ukraine
given the talk about China and
Taiwan that actually
it's possible that Israel could launch an attack
on Iran that's quite a job
what I would say is first of all
you're absolutely right that Israel has said
it will not allow Iran
to develop nuclear weapons
so inevitably
the news about what
the IA has discovered is bound
to prompt speculation
about the Israeli reaction

[Transcript] The News Agents / Will Macron block Rishi's small boats plan?

Kim what was it like
negotiating with the Iranians
I remember speaking to a very
senior US
intelligence defense expert
who had done a lot of this
and saying
he had never come across a group of people
at the top of a government
who were quite as untrustworthy
now that's obviously a very
pejorative thing to say but I just wonder
what your experience was
they are a unique bunch
they have a reputation
of not obeying
the very letter of the deals
they do
and that reputation I think carries evidence
for why they are like that
I wouldn't be quite as pejorative as your contact
about them and we certainly regarded
the deal we did back in 2015
the JCPOA not as a perfect deal
not as flawless
but as good a deal as you could do at the time
and we think it was a huge mistake
for the Trump administration
to pull America out of it
but yes they are difficult negotiating partners
yes they are
Kim Derek thank you so much
and coming up
how food shortages are apparently
affecting the UK
at least through Russian eyes
welcome back, before we go
we want to play you a clip of Russian television
last night
that was Olga Skabaeva
telling her Russian viewers
that Britain has got so short of food now
that we are killing the squirrels
in our garden

[Transcript] The News Agents / Will Macron block Rishi's small boats plan?

and cooking them
squirrel bogeyneal
squirrel a la chasseur
squirrel murier
what is your favourite squirrel dish
what is my favourite squirrel dish
squirrel ova
I'll tell you something honestly
when I was at university
there was a friend of my mum's
who had this extraordinary
she had this wonderful open house
literally an open door policy
where anyone could wander in
and if they were hungry they could sit down
and she would serve
and I was present for it
squirrel crumble
she shot the squirrels in her garden
they were starving
and she just made a
my key question is this
are we talking a sweet or savoury dish
exactly
it was a savoury dish
because why would you save your protein
for dessert
but you would have the squirrel
with this crumble topping
that went round more people
did you eat squirrel crumble
I think I tactically left
before dinner
but I think it's probably a post war
or a sort of post war generation
that says make not want not
lose not want to do it
it sounds like post starling grad
when you are absolutely at the midst of a siege
all you've got left is the squirrel
is the tail
we're not doing great things here
are we for sort of shutting down propaganda
we've taken the Russia propaganda store

[Transcript] The News Agents / Will Macron block Rishi's small boats plan?

and just gone with it
I think basically they got annoyed
because we showed Ukrainian supermarkets
full of food and vegetables last week
well listen if you're listening to this podcast
and you're having your dinner
bon appetit we'll see you tomorrow
this has been a global player original podcast and a Persephoneka production