

NBC's *Today*

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7:00:51 a.m. [TEASE]

18 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: French Toast]

CRAIG MELVIN: French toast. President Biden hosting the leader of France in his first star-studded White House state dinner.

PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN: More than anything else, France has been our first friend.

MELVIN: Just ahead, inside the pomp and circumstance as Washington looks to shore up relations with a key ally.

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7:06:50 a.m.

2 minutes and 51 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Biden Hosts Macron at First State Dinner]

SHEINELLE JONES: Now to that evening of dinner and diplomacy at the White House. President Biden hosting France's Emmanuel Macron during the first state dinner of his presidency. The ultimate goal? Strengthening ties with a key U.S. ally. NBC's chief White House correspondent Kristen Welker with more. Kristen, good morning.

KRISTEN WELKER: Hey, Sheinelle, good morning to you. American and French cultures came together here at the White House overnight for that first state dinner in three years due to COVID. On the menu, they had butter-poached Maine lobster and also high stakes diplomacy with the leaders looking to strengthen ties, as you said, and also address some of the simmering tensions between them. Overnight, the French connection on display at the White House. President Biden hosting France's President Macron for the first state dinner of his presidency.

PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN: Tonight we celebrate the enduring alliance between France and the United States.

WELKER: A bipartisan black tie affair bringing to the some of the biggest names in Washington and Hollywood from the Republican and Democratic leaders of the House to Jennifer Garner, John Legend, and Jon Batiste. But underlying the American-themed dinner menu, high stakes diplomacy amid global tensions. Among the biggest issues, Russia's war in Ukraine. Both leaders making it clear they stand with Ukraine, but while Macron says he will once again meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin in an attempt to bring the war to an end, President Biden insists any meeting must come with conditions.

BIDEN: I'm prepared to speak with Mr. Putin if, in fact, there is an interest in him deciding he's looking for a way to end the war. He hasn't done that yet.

WELKER: Macron has also criticized the President's signature legislative achievement: the Inflation Reduction Act saying it could eliminate European jobs. President Biden not backing down.

BIDEN: I make no apologies.

WELKER: Also present among the pomp and pageantry of the night, Washington's political tensions. Hunter Biden, who is under federal investigation, was in attendance alongside House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy who has vowed to scrutinize the President's son. McCarthy brushing off questions about being at the same dinner. All of it wrapping up a day spent chewing over critical issues in an attempt to strengthen ties with America's oldest ally. And just going back to Ukraine, all of this comes as President Biden is asking Congress for more than \$37 billion in Ukraine emergency aid. That move is opposed by some Republicans. Now, overnight former Republican President George W. Bush urging America to continue standing up against put, adding. "if the United States turns our back on Zelenskyy, the whole world will." Sheinelle?

JONES: Alright, Kristen, thank you.