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Government's Channel Crossing Deal Faces Fierce Criticism

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The government's recent agreement with France to tackle the small boats crisis has ignited fierce backlash from political opponents, who argue it will fail to curb illegal crossings of the Channel. Critics have branded the deal a "surrender agreement," claiming it lacks substance and could embolden people smugglers, leaving Britain's borders vulnerable.

The arrangement, promoted by the government as a means to "stop illegal crossings in their tracks," has been dismissed as ineffective by detractors. In a statement to Sunday Express readers, the government defended the deal, accusing Conservatives of "insulting the

French” and asserting their commitment to securing the nation’s borders. However, opponents contend the agreement offers no real deterrent and sidesteps the crisis’s root causes.

David Jones, a former Brexit minister now with Reform UK, slammed the deal as “vague and unenforceable.” In an interview with the Sunday Express, he said, “This so-called deal with Macron is just another photo-op masquerading as policy. It’s so weak it could encourage people traffickers. While the government racks up air miles, British communities bear the brunt of unchecked arrivals.” Jones warned that the deal’s ambiguity might worsen the situation.

The criticism comes as concerns grow over the government’s handling of illegal crossings, with 44,000 Channel crossings recorded since they took office. Shadow Home Secretary Chris Philp called it a “national security crisis,” accusing the government of weak negotiations. “The deal allows 94% of illegal arrivals to stay,” Philp told this publication. “It’s a green light to smugglers, signalling that if you come illegally, you’ll likely stay. The Conservatives would reinstate the Rwanda deterrent full removals, no loopholes.”

Former Conservative leader Sir Iain Duncan Smith called the deal a “bad joke.” In a recent interview, he stated, “World leaders see the government begging for concessions, offering the bare minimum in return. Britain’s global standing is being undermined.” He stressed the need for a strong deterrent, insisting potential arrivals must know they face immediate removal.

The government, however, remains resolute. Aiming at Reform UK’s Nigel Farage, they claimed, “Farage fears our success on border control. He thrives on disorder, but we’re focused on smashing smuggling gangs and securing our borders.” A Reform UK source dismissed this as “arrogant,” pointing to the government’s sinking approval ratings. Recent Opinium polling shows the government’s approval at -41%, among the lowest ever recorded, close to Boris Johnson’s -44% upon resigning.

Three former defence secretaries delivered damning verdicts. Dame Penny Mordaunt argued the deal “misunderstands the mindset of both arrivals and France,” predicting minimal impact. Sir Gavin Williamson accused the government of prioritising global summits over domestic needs, saying, “Every deal seems to benefit others more than the UK.” Sir Liam Fox criticised the lack of a clear foreign policy and failure to curb illegal crossings, calling the government “without courage or vision.”

Alan Mendoza of the Henry Jackson Society warned that the deal's structure, allowing one legal arrival for every illegal one, could increase crossings. "In the worst case, this could fuel the problem it aims to solve," he told this outlet. The government countered, insisting "strict security checks" will apply, with only those who haven't attempted illegal crossings eligible.

As the government prepares to meet with Germany's Chancellor Merz to discuss anti-smuggling measures, pressure is mounting. With Reform UK polling at 29% ahead of the government (22%) and the Conservatives (18%), the response to this crisis could shape its legacy. Critics maintain that the deal falls short of the decisive action needed to secure Britain's borders.

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