

**US foreign policy****Trump threatened to stop weapons for Ukraine unless Europe joined Hormuz coalition**

Nato's top official urged key alliance members to offer help to US to reopen key waterway



US President Donald Trump meets his Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelenskyy at the White House last October © Tom Brenner/AFP/Getty Images

**Laura Dubois** and **Henry Foy** in Brussels, **Amy Mackinnon** in Washington and **George Parker** in London

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Donald Trump threatened to stop supplying weapons for Ukraine in order to pressure European allies to join a “coalition of the willing” to reopen the Strait of Hormuz, according to people briefed on the discussions.

The strait has been in effect closed by Iran after the US and Israel [attacked](#) the Islamic republic in late February, choking a route through which a fifth of the world’s oil typically passes.

The US president demanded Nato navies help him reopen the narrow waterway last month, but was rebuffed by European capitals which said it would be impossible while the conflict was ongoing, with several also pointing out that this was “not our war”.

Three officials familiar with the discussions said that Trump responded by threatening to stop supplies to Purl, Nato's weapons procurement initiative for Ukraine funded by European countries.

As a result, and at the urging of Nato secretary-general Mark Rutte, a group of countries including key alliance members France, Germany and the UK issued a hastily agreed statement on March 19 which said: "We express our readiness to contribute to appropriate efforts to ensure safe passage through the Strait [of Hormuz]."

One of the officials briefed on the discussions said: "It was Rutte who insisted on the joint statement because Trump had threatened to withdraw from Purl and from Ukraine in general.

"The statement was then quickly put together, and other countries joined in afterwards because there was not enough time to invite everyone to sign up straight away."

Rutte was involved in multiple calls with Trump and US secretary of state Marco Rubio in the two days before the statement was issued, two officials said.

Another official said that Rutte, in a call with France, Germany and the UK, explained that Trump was "rather hysterical" at the Europeans' refusal to help protect the Strait of Hormuz.

British officials insisted that the UK and the US were discussing on a "military to military basis" options for securing the strait before March 19, but did not deny that Washington had threatened to withdraw support for Ukraine if Nato countries did not step up.

Deputy White House press secretary Anna Kelly said: "President Trump has made his disappointment with Nato and other allies clear, and as the president emphasised, 'the United States will remember'."

Trump has repeatedly voiced his disappointment with European allies for not doing more to assist the US war against Iran, while casting the conflict in Ukraine as a problem for Europe.

"We're there to protect Nato, to protect them from Russia. But they're not there to protect us. It's ridiculous," he said during a cabinet meeting last week.

Trump told Reuters that he planned to state in an evening address to the American public on Wednesday evening that he would “absolutely” consider withdrawing from Nato.

A Nato official said the alliance did not comment on the content of Rutte’s calls with other leaders, and directed the FT to a public statement made by him on March 19.

In response to a question about Trump’s irritation at Nato allies over the Strait of Hormuz, Rutte said: “I am confident that allies, as always, will do everything in support of our shared interests.”

More countries have signed the joint statement since it was released on March 19.

UK Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer on Wednesday said that he would [host talks](#) this week between the 35 signatories on forming a coalition to reopen the Strait of Hormuz “after the fighting has stopped”.

US-Israeli operations against Iran have intensified global competition for Pac-3 interceptor missiles fired by Patriot air defence systems, and used by Gulf nations to defend against Iranian attacks. The interceptors are also a vital part of Ukraine’s defence against Russian missiles.

Rubio said on Friday that US military supplies to Ukraine through the Purl mechanism have not been impacted by the war in the Middle East. “Nothing yet has been diverted,” he added.

But Rubio did not rule out that the US might in the future seek to reroute weapons earmarked for Ukraine to replenish American stockpiles expended in the war against Iran.

“If we need something for America and it’s American, we’re going to keep it for America first,” he said.

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