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The Impact of the Crisis in the Strait of Hormuz on Transatlantic Cohesion

Since 14 March 2026, Donald Trump has been urging European NATO allies to engage in efforts to restore freedom of navigation through the Strait of Hormuz. The coercive tone employed by the President of the United States in his appeal to NATO member states, coupled with the unequivocal rejection of his proposal by European leaders, constitutes yet another manifestation of tensions adversely affecting transatlantic unity.

The blockade of the Strait of Hormuz and U.S. pressure on allies. The lingering Israeli-American campaign against Iran is increasingly impacting the security of Europe and U.S. allies within NATO ([IEŚ Commentaries 1542](#), [IEŚ Commentaries 1544](#)). The very launch of Operation *Epic Fury* itself compelled European partners to position themselves vis-à-vis this intervention ([IEŚ Commentaries 1542](#), [IEŚ Commentaries 1541](#), [IEŚ Commentaries 1560](#)). However, soon after, European states faced a further dilemma when President Trump articulated expectations regarding their involvement in ensuring the freedom of navigation through the Strait of Hormuz. The Iranian blockade of this strategic choke point prompted the U.S. President, on 14 March 2026, to express hope that “China, France, Japan, South Korea, the United Kingdom, and others affected by this artificially induced restriction” would deploy naval forces the region¹. A day later, in an interview with the *Financial Times*, he stated that he expected military engagement from unspecified NATO countries, including the deployment of minesweepers, special operations forces, and other capabilities². In formulating this request, Trump employed a rhetorical strategy amounting to a form of coercion, warning that “If there's no response or if it's a negative response [...] it will be very bad for the future of NATO.” While such language is consistent with his earlier communications – often resembling business negotiations more than diplomatic discourse – it further undermines transatlantic cohesion. The chaotic and inconsistent nature of Trump’s messaging exacerbates uncertainty in U.S.–European relations. Indeed, on 16 March 2026, he stated that his appeal to certain allies had merely been a test of their responsiveness and readiness to assist the United States³.

U.S. allies in the Middle East, as well as locations hosting American troops and diplomats, remain targets of Iranian aerial attacks, including those involving drones. This has already led Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia to seek assistance from Ukraine, which, as a result of its ongoing defensive war against Russia, has developed expertise in countering such threats ([IEŚ Commentaries 1560](#)). From the perspective of battlefield realities, Trump’s request for support is therefore not surprising. Strategically and politically, however, it is significant that within less than three weeks of launching Operation *Epic Fury*, the U.S. administration fundamentally altered its narrative toward European allies. Initially, Washington emphasized reducing reliance on European support in deterrence efforts across traditional Eurasian theatres, including the Middle East and the Indo-Pacific and encouraged European partners to assume greater responsibility for their own defence⁴. It has

¹ A post by Donald Trump on the Truth Social platform, 14.03.2026, <https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/116227904143399817>

² Donald Trump warns Nato faces ‘very bad future’ if allies fail to help US in Iran, *Financial Times*, 15.03.2026, <https://www.ft.com/content/1ca6d121-760b-4ec5-b6ad-514fdaa94873>

³ RSB, FULL SPEECH: President Trump Gives Updates on the Trump – Kennedy Center – 03/16/26, Youtube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y3LRWs5dWms>

⁴ See, for example, the remarks delivered by Pete Hegseth at the Shangri-La Dialogue, where he expressed criticism of the French proposal to engage in the Indo-Pacific. N. Robertson, Europeans map out Pacific aims as some in US want them to stay home, *DefenceNews*, 03.06.2025, <https://www.defensenews.com/pentagon/2025/06/03/europeans-map-out-pacific-aims-as-some-in-us-want-them-to-stay-home/>

now shifted to requesting European engagement in the Middle East. This evolution highlights both the structural challenges faced by the United States in the context of the Iranian conflict and the broader constraints on its global power projection.

Trump justified his appeal by arguing that states benefiting from the free flow through the Strait of Hormuz should contribute to its policing. Whether fully deliberate or not, this argument may serve as further evidence that the United States is neither willing nor able to continue fulfilling the role of a “global policeman.” At the very least, it signals that the U.S. is encountering significant, unanticipated difficulties in the aftermath of its intervention in Iran. Despite severe conventional and political losses, the U.S. adversary continues to engage in retaliatory actions through asymmetric means. In his public statements, President Trump has attempted to downplay the significance of Iranian drones, mines, and short-range missiles used to obstruct the Strait, referring to them as “nuances.” Nevertheless, these measures effectively achieve their objective of destabilizing flows through this critical chokepoint.

A clear European refusal. European allies have already responded to Trump’s proposal—overwhelmingly in negative terms. German Chancellor Friedrich Merz emphasized that the intervention in Iran was not the result of a collective decision and therefore “the question of how Germany might contribute militarily is not under consideration,” adding unequivocally: “we will not do so.” German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius echoed this stance, stating: “this is not our war; we did not start it”⁵. Similarly, Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani suggested prioritizing diplomatic solutions. Spanish Defence Minister Margarita Robles stressed that “Spain will never accept ad hoc solutions,” insisting that the objective must be to end the war and avoid escalation⁶.

Meanwhile, France, Greece, and Italy have focused on deploying defensive systems around Cyprus and in the eastern Mediterranean. At the EU level, any extension of the mandates of EUNAVFOR Aspidos and EUNAVFOR Atalanta – currently tasked with securing maritime routes in the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa – to include the Strait of Hormuz has been ruled out. The United Kingdom – frequently singled out by Trump as a key partner and subjected to sustained pressure – has also refused military involvement. Even British policymakers, traditionally supportive of U.S. initiatives, have excluded direct military assistance, though they have not ruled out other forms of engagement. UK Energy Secretary Ed Miliband indicated that de-escalation would be the most effective means of reopening the Strait.

Conclusions. Operation *Epic Fury* has generated a series of challenges that significantly affect the credibility and international standing of the United States. Difficulties in achieving operational objectives and in neutralizing Iran’s capacity to destabilize the international environment have extended the consequences of the conflict into Europe across multiple dimensions⁷.

The demands articulated by the Trump administration toward NATO allies have a direct and detrimental impact on transatlantic cohesion. The U.S. President appears emboldened by his earlier “successes” in relations with NATO partners, including his ability to pressure them into increasing defence spending. He thus seems to be attempting to replicate these methods. However, this constitutes a misdiagnosis: the shift in European defence policy has not been driven solely by Trump’s persuasion, but rather by strategic calculation and the necessity of ensuring security in the face of the threat posed by Russia. European refusals to support U.S. operations against Iran signal clearly that European allies will not automatically align with American actions. This is particularly evident in light of the experience of the Iraq War, which divided Europe and was based on contested premises.

⁵ Ch. Hasselbach, N. Werkhäuser, Merz: vom Trump-Versteher wieder zum Trump-Kritiker, Deutsche Welle, 16.03.2026, <https://www.dw.com/de/merz-vom-trump-versteher-zum-trump-kritiker-iran-krieg-usa-nato-israel-%C3%B6l-bundeswehr/a-76382765>

⁶ Spain rules out participating in military operations in Strait of Hormuz, Reuters, 16.03.2026, <https://www.reuters.com/world/spain-rules-out-participating-military-operations-strait-hormuz-2026-03-16/>

⁷ In the initial phase, these developments primarily concerned energy and economic security, as well as aerial attacks targeting Cyprus (and, in the broader NATO context, also Turkey).

A potential prolongation of the conflict in Iran may also reduce attention devoted to the European theatre, including the security of NATO's eastern flank and the war in Ukraine. This carries particular significance in the context of the forthcoming NATO summit in Ankara. A potential impasse in Operation *Epic Fury* may naturally shift NATO's focus toward the Middle East—a development that Turkey, as the host of the upcoming summit, may actively promote.

The analysis reflects the situation as of 17 March 2026, 11:00 CET.