



Washington Insider

M A G A Z I N E

Iran warns of devastating strikes on Middle East power plants

Bondi briefing on Epstein files ends in Democratic walkout on Capitol Hill

BY ADRIANA MONTES

11

UK Statement Highlights Iran Aggression and American Forces Evacuation from Gulf Bases

BY DANIELLE CAMPBELL

18

BlackRock Imposes Withdrawal Limits on \$26 Billion Private Credit Fund

BY LIAM FLYNN

34



OUR TEAM



Washington Insider



Danielle Campbell



Athena Nagel



Henry Nicholas



Kathy Malouf



Mandilee Hecht



Seb Jenkins



ZACH SCHRADER



ERIC GAHAGAN



Christina Levandowski



TRENT R. NELSON

ABOUT US

Transatlantic Today delighted to present the Washington Insider Magazine, a product that we present to our readers in Washington DC and beyond. Our magazine publishes unique and independent coverage on transatlantic relations with a Washington perspective. Transatlantic Today covers policymaking, politics and business related to the transatlantic relationship.

Our magazine strives to be become a key news analysis source for news on politics and policymakers in the US with particular focus on DC. Our coverage is designed with nonpartisan journalism and real-time tools create, inform and engage a those seeking timely and concise news.

We believe in providing our audience with indepen-

dent journalism throughout expert writers, analysts and journalists. Our culture is distinguished by unwavering grit, honesty, and a focus on innovation.

Our work is designed by relentless grit, integrity and a prioritization of urgent and newsworthy topics.

In both of our website and and this magazine we cover topics about Diplomacy, Security, Defence, Counter Terrorism, foreign policy and international affairs. Indeed our reporting, OPeds, interviews with various stakeholders provide unique insights and analysis as well as the tools to arm you with the intel you need to make informed decisions.

Here I wish to commend.

Editorial Team

Table of Contents

04

Capitol Hill Politics

16

Middle East

28

Business & Finance

38

Security & Defense

49

Europe



CAPITOL HILL CHIEF OF STAFF RECALLS TEEN CAR CRASH THAT SHAPED PUBLIC SERVICE LIFE



IRAN WARNS OF DEVASTATING STRIKES ON MIDDLE EAST POWER PLANTS



US STATE DEPARTMENT APPROVES \$16.5 BILLION ARMS PACKAGE TO GULF STATES AMID IRAN TENSIONS

DHS funding talks stall as Capitol Hill faces growing pressure

BY JAN FRAZIER



Julia Demaree Nixinson/AP

The latest effort to reopen the Department of Homeland Security stalled on Capitol Hill as Senate Republicans and Democrats failed to secure a deal before a looming recess deadline. Lawmakers from both parties held private talks amid growing frustration, while the shutdown continued to disrupt airports and leave thousands of TSA and other DHS employees unpaid.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune said the talks were “going in circles”, and Republican negotiator Senator Katie Britt said a deal had to be reached within the week. The impasse came as Democrats rejected the latest Republican proposal and both chambers faced pressure to stay in Washington to keep negotiations alive.

Senate negotiations under strain

The central dispute remained over how to fund DHS and whether any deal should include changes to immigration enforcement. CNN reported that Senate Republican leaders had believed they had found a compromise to reopen DHS by the weekend, but the plan collapsed after it failed to win support in both parties. Democrats formally rejected the latest funding proposal and continued pressing for changes to Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Customs and Border Protection policies.

Private meetings on the Senate floor reflected the urgency of the talks. CNN reported that Senator Britt met with Democratic

centrists in an effort to salvage the negotiations, while a bipartisan group of senators also held discussions with White House border czar Tom Homan as part of the broader push to break the deadlock. Reuters also reported that senators were seeking a way forward as part of an effort to end the shutdown, with Republican leaders later signalling progress toward a broader agreement.

Recess deadline raises stakes

The shutdown pressure increased because Congress was approaching a two-week recess for Easter and Passover. CNN said Republican leaders were trying to resolve the dispute before lawmakers left

Washington, and Thune suggested the Senate might stay in session through the weekend if no agreement was reached. Reuters and AP both reported that lawmakers were warning recess plans could be disrupted if the shutdown was still unresolved.

The political tension on Capitol Hill was compounded by the practical effects of the funding lapse. Reuters reported that about 50,000 airport security officers were working without pay, and that the standoff had pushed more than 100 airport leaders to urge Congress to act. CNN reported that the shutdown had already led to major travel disruption and hours-long security lines at airports nationwide.

Trump's role in the talks

President Donald Trump emerged as a central figure in the negotiations. CNN reported that the talks could still unravel quickly if Trump intervened at a critical moment, while Politico earlier reported that the White House had revised its DHS offer and added immigration enforcement concessions in response to Democratic demands. Reuters later reported that Trump directed DHS to pay TSA officers as the shutdown dragged on.

Reuters and CNN also reported that Republican proposals were linked to a broader immigration and elections strategy, adding another layer to the negotiations. According to CNN, Republicans were considering a two-track approach: reopen DHS first and then pursue separate

immigration legislation later.

House and Senate divide

The shutdown also exposed divisions within the Republican Party. CNN reported that the House and Senate had approved conflicting DHS funding proposals and had not settled on a common path before recess. On March 27, CNN reported that House Republicans rejected a bipartisan Senate deal and instead backed a different bill that would have fully funded DHS for eight weeks, deepening the stalemate.

Reuters reported on April 2 that Senate and House Republican leaders eventually announced a deal to end the DHS shutdown, indicating that the earlier deadlock had not yet been resolved when the first round of talks stalled. Reuters also said Senate Republicans were aiming to pass a Homeland Security bill to end the shutdown, reflecting continued movement after the March impasse. Together, the reports showed a rapid series of negotiations, reversals and renewed efforts to reach agreement.

Airports and federal workers affected

The shutdown's impact on airport operations remained one of the most visible consequences of the funding lapse. Reuters reported that TSA staffing problems had created security risks, while CNN described long airport queues and travel disruption across the country. Reuters also

reported that more than 450 TSA officers had quit since the funding standoff began, underscoring the strain on the workforce.

Federal workers at DHS were also left in limbo. CNN said thousands of TSA agents and other DHS employees were not receiving pay during the 41-day standoff, adding to pressure on lawmakers to strike a deal. AP described the situation as a month-long shutdown struggle that had become a test of whether bipartisan talks could hold under political pressure.

Background to the standoff

The shutdown began after Congress failed to approve funding for DHS by the deadline, with disputes centring on immigration enforcement and related policy demands. AP reported that a bipartisan group of senators had tried to open a new channel of negotiations with the White House, while CNN and Politico said Republican leaders had been trying to build a path to passage without losing support in either chamber.

By late March and early April, the talks had become a moving target, with one proposal after another being considered, rejected or revised. Reuters said the eventual deal announced in early April showed that the impasse had not ended the push for a solution, even after the March stalemate had deepened.

IU Bloomington Political Science Junior Secures Congressional Internship on Capitol Hill

BY ATHENA NAGEL



Pydisetti in front of the capitol building with her D.C. roommates

Shraavya Pydisetti, a junior at Indiana University Bloomington majoring in political science and finance, is interning full-time in the office of U.S. Representative Beth Van Duyne (R-TX) during the spring semester from January to May. The internship provides her with direct exposure to congressional operations, including constituent services and legislative tasks. Pydisetti applied through the official congressional internship website and secured the position representing her home district in Dallas, Texas.

Shraavya Pydisetti, a double major in Political Science from the College of Arts and Sciences and Finance from the Kelley School of Business, began her internship on Capitol Hill in

January 2026. She hails from Dallas, Texas, the district represented by U.S. Rep. Beth Van Duyne. Her responsibilities encompass taking constituent calls, addressing community concerns, drafting meeting memos, attending hearings, assisting with appropriations, providing vote recommendations, giving Capitol tours, and supporting legislative work.

The internship offers Pydisetti practical involvement in how constituent services intersect with policymaking processes. She described the role as providing firsthand exposure to the daily operations of a congressional office.

Pydisetti's Academic and Campus Leadership Background

Pydisetti's interest in politics originated from early involvement in community service and youth leadership programmes. At Indiana University Bloomington, she selected the institution for its supportive environment towards her goals. She credited the College of Arts and Sciences with fostering a sense of belonging through connections to organisations, mentors, and student communities.

A notable course for her was Political Science Professor Dina Spechler's "Comparative Foreign Policy" (POLS-Y363), which examined political systems and global relationships' influence on decision-making. This coursework broadened her perspective on policy impacts beyond the United States.

On campus, Pydisetti holds the position of president at Summit Impact Trust, an ethical investment organisation utilising finance for social impact. She has served in Indiana University Student Government and the Indiana Memorial Union Board. Additionally, she acts as Vice President of Hindu Yuva and Registration Chair of Bloomington ki Badtameezi, maintaining cultural community ties.



Application Process and Internship Selection

Pydisetti applied for the internship via the official Congressional internship website. Her selection for Rep. Van Duyne's office aligned with her Dallas origins, as Van Duyne represents Texas's 24th congressional district. The position commenced in January and extends through May 2026. Prior experiences include a Congressional Youth Advisory Council internship with U.S. Congress District 24 under Beth Van Duyne from October 2022 to August 2023. She also worked as a Youth Development Professional intern at Boys & Girls Clubs of America from August 2023 to January 2024.

Daily Responsibilities in Congressional Office

Daily tasks involve handling constituent calls and resolving community issues. Pydisetti drafts memos for meetings,

attends congressional hearings, and aids in appropriations processes. Further duties include vote recommendations, conducting Capitol tours, and legislative assistance.

These activities demonstrate the linkage between public concerns and policy formulation. The role requires managing fast-paced congressional workflows.

Mentorship and Professional Skill Development

Pydisetti highlighted the mentorship from Rep. Van Duyne's staff as a key benefit. Close collaboration with the team has clarified professional policy environments' pace and standards. She expressed appreciation for the staff surrounding Rep. Van Duyne. Skills gained include research, writing, professional communication, and time management. The quick tempo of congressional duties has honed her organisation and attention to detail.

Career Aspirations Shaped by Internship

The internship has reinforced Pydisetti's interest in combining finance and public policy, particularly economic policy at national or international levels. Observations of legislation's influence on financial decisions have aligned with her dual majors. She aims for roles at the policy-finance intersection post-graduation.

Pydisetti linked her LinkedIn profile to an incoming 2026 summer analyst role at JP Morgan Chase alongside the congressional internship. Her experiences emphasise stepping beyond comfort zones.

Indiana University Support for Washington Opportunities

Indiana University Bloomington promotes internships like Pydisetti's through programmes such as the IU Internship in Politics, Opportunity, Leadership, Social Entrepreneurship (IU POLS DC). This semester-long mentored programme in Washington, D.C., offers credit, coursework, and housing for students across disciplines.

The Political Science department provides guidance on D.C. opportunities, including career readiness courses prior to internships. IU students reside in Capitol Hill townhouses, facilitating networking and exploration.

News of Pydisetti's internship appeared across IU platforms, including the College of Arts and Sciences site, Kelley School of Business news, and social media channels like LinkedIn, X, and Facebook. The story, published on 25 March 2026 by IU News, detailed her journey from Bloomington.

Rep. Beth Van Duyne, a Republican from Texas, continues service in the U.S. House during President Donald Trump's administration following his 2024 reelection.

Teen Mariachi Musicians from McAllen High School Released from ICE Detention After Public Backlash

BY HENRY NICHOLAS



Joaquín Castro via X

Two teenage brothers from McAllen High School's championship mariachi band, Caleb Gámez-Cuéllar, 14, and Antonio Gámez-Cuéllar, 18, have been released from separate Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention facilities in South Texas along

with their parents and younger brother. The family, detained on 25 February after the parents' routine immigration check-in, walked free on Monday following intervention by US lawmakers and significant public backlash. Their release reunites the family of five, who

had entered the US illegally near Brownsville in 2023.

The brothers, members of the acclaimed Mariachi Oro ensemble, had performed on Capitol Hill and at the White House during a Washington trip last summer. Antonio Gámez-Cuéllar exited the El Valle

Detention Center in Raymondville alongside Republican US Representative Monica De La Cruz from Edinburg. Meanwhile, Caleb, along with parents Emma Guadalupe Cuéllar Lopez, 38, and Luis Antonio Gámez Martínez, 40, and their 12-year-old son Joshua, were released from the South Texas Family Residential Center in Dilley.

Detention Circumstances and Family Background

ICE apprehended the parents on 25 February 2026 during a routine check-in with immigration authorities. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) stated that Emma Guadalupe Cuéllar Lopez and Luis Antonio Gámez Martínez had entered the US illegally in 2023 near Brownsville, Texas. The children, including the mariachi musicians, were detained alongside their parents, sparking immediate concern in their McAllen community.

Caleb Gámez-Cuéllar, 14, and Antonio Gámez-Cuéllar, 18, are standout performers in McAllen High School's Mariachi Oro, a championship-winning group recognised nationally. Less than a year earlier, the brothers had travelled to Washington DC over the summer, performing for lawmakers and visiting the White House. Their detention less than eight months later drew attention due to their prior Capitol Hill recognition. Joshua Gámez-Cuéllar, 12, was held with his parents and

younger brother Caleb at the family residential centre in Dilley, Texas, designated for minors with guardians. Antonio, as an 18-year-old, was separated into the adult facility at El Valle Detention Center in Raymondville. The family remained in custody for nearly two weeks before release proceedings began.

Lawmaker Interventions Secure Release

Democratic US Representative Joaquin Castro from Texas led a delegation of lawmakers who advocated for the family's freedom. Castro, who had met the brothers during their Capitol Hill visit last year, coordinated efforts since learning of the detention over a week prior. On Monday, he waited outside the Dilley facility with other lawmakers for several hours during processing.

After release, the family emerged wearing maroon and navy sweatshirts and grey sweatpants. They boarded a bus briefly with the lawmakers, who provided boxed sandwiches. A vehicle operated by a member of Castro's team then transported them towards Alice, Texas, to reunite with Antonio. Castro announced the release on social media, stating, "The Gámez-Cuéllar family has been released. We are currently taking them to reunite with their son Antonio."

Republican Representative Monica De La Cruz accompanied Antonio Gámez-Cuéllar upon his

exit from Raymondville. She spoke alongside him at a news conference outside the detention centre. De La Cruz had taken steps to secure his release after regional outrage over the family's detention grew.

Public Backlash and Community Response

News of the detention spread rapidly through McAllen and the national mariachi community, prompting widespread outrage. Local leaders and state figures criticised DHS practices, particularly those resulting in children entering federal custody. The case resonated amid broader discussions on the Trump administration's immigration enforcement affecting minors.

The family's prior achievements amplified the response. Mariachi Oro's reputation as a celebrated high school ensemble, with performances on Capitol Hill, highlighted the contrast between their recognition and subsequent detention. Community members in South Texas expressed support, contributing to pressure on authorities.

Relatives and supporters gathered outside facilities during the release. The public outcry, combined with congressional involvement, accelerated the process. CNN reported contacting DHS for further details on the case, reflecting ongoing media scrutiny.



Details of Detention Facilities and Processing

The South Texas Family Residential Center in Dilley housed Caleb, Joshua, and their parents. This facility accommodates families, keeping children with guardians. Antonio's placement at El Valle Detention Center in Raymondville followed standard separation for adults. During initial apprehension near the border, the family reported being offered financial incentives to self-deport. Luis Antonio Gámez recounted his response: "We refuse to accept that dirty money." This detail emerged as they met lawmakers post-release, providing context on early encounters with authorities. Processing for release involved several hours. Lawmakers remained in the parking lot at Dilley, ensuring coordination. The family's departure marked the end of nearly two weeks in custody, with no immediate details on next steps provided by officials.

Prior Recognition and Mariachi Achievements

McAllen High School's mariachi programme holds acclaim, producing award-winning performers. Caleb and Antonio participated in the Washington performances last summer, invited as part of the championship ensemble. Representative Castro recalled meeting them during that visit, underscoring their talent. The brothers' skills contributed to Mariachi Oro's success, including national showcases. Their story drew parallels to other cases, such as 5-year-old Liam Ramos, detained in Minneapolis and later released to a facility. However, the Gámez-Cuéllar case centred on the teenagers' musical accomplishments. CBS News Texas covered the release, noting the programme's prestige. The Independent reported the timeline from summer performances to detention, eight months apart. Texas Tribune detailed Antonio's walkout with De La Cruz, capturing the moment visually.

Official Statements and DHS Position

DHS confirmed the parents' 2023 illegal entry near Brownsville, per statements to CNN. ICE took the family into custody on 25 February during the check-in. No further official comments on release conditions appeared in reports from major outlets.

Castro's social media post confirmed the Dilley releases and transport

plans. De La Cruz's involvement received mention in multiple accounts, though specific statements from her focused on securing freedom. DHS had not responded to CNN's additional inquiries at time of reporting. The New York Times noted Democratic lawmakers' role and national outrage. Yahoo highlighted the family's composition, including the younger sibling. Coverage across outlets remained consistent on facts of detention, release, and backstory.



Broader Context of Family Detention

The incident occurred amid ongoing immigration enforcement in South Texas. Facilities like Dilley and Raymondville handle family and adult cases respectively. Public and political response emphasised the children's involvement, particularly the musicians' profiles.

McAllen, in the Rio Grande Valley, hosts vibrant mariachi traditions. The high school's programme exemplifies regional cultural strength. Release reunited the family, with Antonio joining from his separate site.

Bondi briefing on Epstein files ends in Democratic walkout on Capitol Hill

By Adriana Montes



Nathan Howard/Reuters

House Democrats walked out of a closed-door Capitol Hill briefing with Attorney General Pam Bondi and Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche after Bondi declined to commit to testifying under oath in connection with the Jeffrey Epstein files. The meeting, held with the House Oversight Committee, ended after less than an hour as Democrats said the session did not provide substantive answers. Republicans continued the briefing after the Democratic members left, while committee leaders defended the process and Bondi repeated that she would “follow the law.”

Capitol Hill briefing Democratic members of the House Oversight Committee exited the private session on Wednesday after pressing Bondi on whether she would honour the committee’s subpoena and appear for sworn testimony next month. Representative Robert Garcia of California, the committee’s top Democrat, said Bondi did not commit to the subpoena and described the session as a “fake hearing”. According to reporting from multiple outlets, Bondi and Blanche went to Capitol Hill to brief lawmakers on the Justice Department’s handling of

documents connected to Epstein’s sex trafficking investigation. Democrats said the meeting did not answer their questions and that Bondi did not give an opening statement or agree to testify under oath.

Subpoena fight over sworn testimony

The House Oversight Committee voted earlier this month to subpoena Bondi, with five Republicans joining Democrats in support of the move, according to reports. The subpoena sought Bondi’s appearance for sworn testimony on April 14 about the department’s handling of the

Democrats leave closed-door

Epstein documents.

Garcia said Bondi refused to affirm that she would comply with the subpoena, while Florida Representative Maxwell Frost said Democrats repeatedly asked whether she would come and testify under oath. Frost said she refused to give a commitment and that the exchange became repetitive, with no clear progress.

Tensions inside the room

Reporting from the session described a sharp exchange between Democrats and Committee Chairman James Comer of Kentucky. When Democrats questioned the purpose of the briefing, Comer challenged them over whether they wanted information or were trying to embarrass the attorney general.

Democratic Representative Summer Lee reportedly said the meeting had become “a hearing without the cameras”. The room grew more tense before Democrats left, saying the process had been disrespected. Representative Tim Burchett, a Republican, said the walkout was staged.

Bondi's response after the meeting

After the briefing ended, Bondi reiterated that she would comply with the law but did not directly commit to the subpoena, according to the reports. Comer later told reporters that he saw no reason for Bondi to undergo a

deposition and said some members who had supported the subpoena were left frustrated by the Democrats' response.

The Justice Department has faced criticism over its release of files and records tied to the Epstein investigation, with lawmakers from both parties seeking more clarity on how the matter has been handled. The closed-door session was intended to reduce tensions, but instead became another flashpoint in the dispute over transparency and testimony.

Oversight committee pressure continues

The Epstein files remain a politically sensitive issue on Capitol Hill, where lawmakers have continued to demand further disclosures from the Justice Department. The Oversight Committee's subpoena, combined with the day's walkout, signalled that the dispute over how and when Bondi should answer questions remains unresolved.

For now, the central points of contention are unchanged: whether Bondi will appear under oath, what the Justice Department will release next, and how the committee will proceed with its inquiry. Republican members continued the meeting after the Democrats left, but the disagreement over the subpoena dominated the day's coverage.

Background to the dispute

The briefing came amid broader criticism of the Justice Department's handling of the Epstein matter, including concerns raised by lawmakers over document releases and the pace of disclosure. Bondi and Blanche's visit to Capitol Hill was meant to reassure members, but the session instead turned into a public sign of division within the committee and between the parties.

The controversy has centred on the Justice Department's management of records tied to Epstein's federal sex trafficking investigation, with lawmakers pushing for more detail and sworn testimony. Wednesday's walkout underscored that those demands remain unresolved despite the department's effort to brief members privately.

What happens next

Reports say Bondi is expected to face further pressure over the subpoena and the committee's request for sworn testimony. The Oversight Committee has already set an April 14 date for her appearance, though Bondi has not publicly committed beyond saying she would follow the law.

The dispute now moves back to Capitol Hill, where lawmakers are likely to continue arguing over the scope of the inquiry and the Justice Department's obligations. The walkout marked the latest escalation in a long-running fight over the Epstein files and the government's handling of the case.

Capitol Hill Chief of Staff Recalls Teen Car Crash That Shaped Public Service Life

By Danielle Campbell



Getty Images/Fox News

A senior Republican aide on Capitol Hill has publicly recounted a near-fatal car crash he suffered at age 16, describing its aftermath as a defining episode that steered him toward a career in Washington. Alex Vargo, 34, chief of staff to Representative Addison McDowell of North Carolina, told Fox News Digital that the accident severed half of one hand and required eight hours of emergency surgery, followed by months of painful rehabilitation. He said the experience reshaped his sense of purpose, leading

him to enter politics as part of what he described as “the battle of ideas.” Vargo has worked in Congress since 2014, rising from an intern to chief of staff and now plays a central role in McDowell’s office and policy-drafting work.

Teen car crash nearly ended life

Alex Vargo, now chief of staff to Representative Addison McDowell (R-North Carolina), was 16 years old when his vehicle slid off the road in a sudden snowfall in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He was driving

home down a hill four days before his 17th birthday when the sports-utility vehicle lost traction, left the roadway, and collided with a hillside, rolling over and then imploding inward, according to his account.

The impact left him with severe injuries, including the partial severing of his left hand, which required approximately eight hours of emergency surgery to reattach. Medical crews transported him to a hospital, where he underwent reconstructive procedures and began what he later characterized as “months of

painful therapy” to relearn basic tasks such as typing and dribbling a basketball. Vargo has marked the anniversary of the crash for several years on social media, noting that he “almost died” and “nearly lost part of my hand” in the incident.

Road to recovery and rehabilitation

After the initial surgery, Vargo spent weeks in hospital care and then transitioned into an extended physical-therapy regimen aimed at restoring function in his hand. He described the exercises as “painful” and demanding, requiring repeated repetitions of everyday motions to regain dexterity and strength. Over time, he regained enough control to type efficiently and resume activities he had previously taken for granted,

such as playing basketball, though he has acknowledged that the injury left lasting physical reminders.

In interviews, Vargo has said the slow, incremental progress of his recovery helped him develop a sense of discipline and resilience that he later carried into his professional life. He has also cited the experience as a factor in his appreciation for emergency-care personnel and for the broader medical-treatment system, even as he later became critical of its financial structure

Decision to pursue politics

Vargo has stated that the crash and its aftermath sharpened his sense of purpose and contributed to his decision to enter public life. After completing rehabilitation and finishing high school, he

pursued higher education and later moved into politics, initially working as an intern on Capitol Hill in 2014. He described his shift toward politics as a move into “the battle of ideas,” a phrase he used to frame his attraction to conservative policy debates and legislative work.

Vargo’s early Capitol Hill roles included time in the office of Senator Ted Budd of North Carolina, then a member of the House of Representatives, before he later joined the staff of Representative Addison McDowell. He has remained in congressional work since 2014, steadily advancing through staff positions before assuming the role of chief of staff for McDowell, a position that places him at the centre of the lawmaker’s legislative agenda and external communications.

Policy focus shaped by personal experience

In remarks to Fox News Digital, Vargo said the accident opened his eyes to both the quality of American healthcare and to what he characterised as the complexity and distortions in how it is financed. He described American medical care as “awesome” in terms of clinical capability, but also pointed to the financial side of the system as “messy” and difficult to navigate for patients and families. That perception has influenced his interest in healthcare-finance and affordability issues as part of his



Al Drago/Getty Images

policy work on the Hill.

Vargo has also linked his personal experiences with adversity to broader narratives about national resilience. He has said the United States, like individuals who endure serious setbacks, is defined not by its crises but by how it recovers from them, referencing the Civil War, pandemics and other historical trials as examples. He has framed his own story and that of his boss, McDowell, whose brother died from a fentanyl overdose, as emblematic of a wider pattern of hardship and renewal in American life.

Role in Representative McDowell's office

As chief of staff to Representative Addison McDowell, Vargo oversees the congressman's day-to-day operations, including staff management, scheduling, and coordination of legislative strategy. He is mentioned in internal and external accounts as a leading adviser on policy development and communications for McDowell, who represents North Carolina's 7th congressional district as a Republican.

Biographical summaries of Vargo note that he began in Congress as an intern and has since worked for several Republican members, acquiring experience in legislative drafting, committee proceedings, and constituent services. His trajectory from intern to chief of staff is often cited, in both media profiles and

personal reflections, as an example of internal advancement within the Capitol Hill staffing ecosystem.

Broader context of Capitol Hill staff narratives

Vargo's decision to speak publicly about his teenage crash comes amid a broader pattern on Capitol Hill in which staff members increasingly share personal stories of medical emergencies, family loss, or near-fatal incidents as part of broader political or policy narratives. Some Hill staff and lawmakers have used such accounts to underline their commitment to issues such as mental-health services, substance-abuse treatment, accident-prevention measures, or healthcare-cost reform.

Vargo's account is framed in interviews as a story of second chances and resilience rather than as a call for specific new legislation. He has said that surviving the crash left him with a sense of obligation to "make good on" the opportunity to continue living, a sentiment he has linked to his dedication to public-service work.



Public and political reactions

Public-facing coverage of Vargo's story has largely treated it as a human-interest narrative

about overcoming adversity, rather than as a partisan political statement. Conservative-oriented outlets have highlighted his framing of the experience in terms of national resilience and individual responsibility, while also underscoring his role in McDowell's office.

Friends and colleagues in Washington have commented on social media about his recovery and subsequent career, describing him as focused and driven, with one associate noting that Vargo's work ethic and personal background are widely regarded as integral to his standing on the Hill.

Continuing impact on Vargo's career

More than 18 years after the crash, Vargo continues to identify the event as a turning point in his life. He has marked the anniversary of the accident on social media, using the date to reflect on survival, gratitude, and the responsibilities he feels toward his work on Capitol Hill.

In his current role, he remains involved in shaping McDowell's legislative agenda and policy positions, drawing on his background in congressional staff work and his personal experience with medical emergencies. His account of the teenage crash is cited in media profiles as a key element of his biography, illustrating how severe personal adversity can intersect with long-term career choices in the political arena.

American Troops Evacuate Middle East Bases Amid Iranian Air Strikes Escalation

By Jan Frazier



Iranian air strikes have compelled US troops to withdraw from several key military bases across the Middle East. Personnel have relocated to nearby hotels and office buildings as bases in Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE become untenable. Analyst reports confirm over 100 targeted sites, with satellite imagery delays hindering full damage assessments.

The withdrawal marks a significant repositioning of American forces in the region amid heightened tensions with Iran. Reports from The New York Times indicate that 13 US bases have faced repeated assaults, rendering many nearly unlivable. Troops from Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, the largest US installation in the Middle East, and Bahrain's Fifth Fleet headquarters have been among those pulled back.

Iranian Strikes Target Dozens of US and Regional Military Sites Preliminary analysis by defence analyst Fabian Hinz has identified 104 American and allied military sites struck by Iranian forces. Ali Al Salem Air

Base in Kuwait sustained the highest number of attacks, totalling 23 geolocated strikes. Arifjan in Kuwait and Camp Buehring followed with 17 and six strikes respectively.

The New York Times reported that commercial satellite imagery firms have delayed releases by at least two weeks, complicating evaluations of destruction extent. US personnel now operate from adjacent civilian structures, raising concerns for soldier and local civilian safety. Qatar's government confirmed departures from Al Udeid, where hundreds of troops were withdrawn as tensions intensified. Earlier incidents preceded the broader evacuations. In February 2026, The New York Times cited anonymous Pentagon sources on pullbacks from Al Udeid and Bahrain due to Iranian warnings that US bases would become legitimate targets. Fox News confirmed in January that some personnel left bases across the Middle East amid Iranian

protests and President Donald Trump's intervention threats.

Specific Bases Affected and Strike Patterns Emerge

The impacted installations span Gulf states hosting US forces. Kuwait's Ali Al Salem emerged as the most heavily hit, with strikes documented through geolocation. Arifjan, a major logistics hub, recorded 17 attacks, while Camp Buehring in northern Kuwait saw six.

In Qatar, Al Udeid Air Base – accommodating over 10,000 personnel typically – saw hundreds depart, per Times of India reports citing New York Times data. Bahrain, base for the US Navy's Fifth Fleet, also repositioned staff. Saudi Arabia and UAE sites contributed to the 13 bases described as unlivable by The New York Times.

Islamic Resistance in Iraq claimed in March a 24-hour truce allowed US and NATO evacuation from Victoria Base Complex near Baghdad International Airport. The group stated Washington requested the pause for safe exit toward Turkey. Ain al-Assad Air Base in Anbar had seen prior withdrawals.

NATO confirmed pulling its Iraq mission, with a French source telling AFP the non-combat force relocated temporarily due to the war. Iraqi security sources described it as precautionary

amid regional developments.

Timeline of Withdrawals and Preceding Events

Withdrawals accelerated since late 2025 amid rising attacks on coalition sites. Fox News reported in January 2026 that personnel left bases as Iranian protests grew, with Trump threatening intervention. Qatar affirmed Al Udeid departures at that time.

By February, Times of India noted hundreds evacuated Al Udeid and Bahrain, viewed as precautionary against escalation. Tehran's warnings followed US positioning, per reports.

March saw intensified claims from Iraqi militias. Islamic Resistance in Iraq issued a 24-hour deadline for Victoria Base exit, mediated via Iraqi government. Withdrawals from Ain al-Assad and others followed repeated drone and missile strikes.

The Telegraph highlighted in March the forced nature of evacuations post-Iranian assaults. Yahoo News detailed troops shifting to hotels, underscoring operational challenges. By late March, NATO's Iraq pullout aligned with US moves.

Statements from Involved Parties and Mediators

Iranian state media framed strikes as responses to US presence. Tehran warned bases would be targets if attacked, per February New York Times citations. No official Iranian comment on specific strike tallies appeared in reviewed reports.

US officials spoke anonymously to outlets. Pentagon sources told The New York Times of precautionary repositioning without confirming full

withdrawals. Fox News cited a US official on base departures without quantifying numbers. Qatar's government verified Al Udeid staff reductions to Fox News and Times of India. Iraqi militias, via spokesmen like Abu Mah al-Jaafrey of Al-Ya Alam Brigades, claimed truces at US request. Baghdad sources described NATO moves as temporary.

Analyst Fabian Hinz provided geolocated data to Yahoo and The New York Times, tallying strikes without attributing motives. French military sources confirmed NATO relocations to AFP.

Regional Context and Continued US Presence

Despite evacuations, US forces remain in Iraq, Syria, and other Gulf states. Reports emphasise repositioning over complete exit. Al Udeid retains significant personnel post-drawdown, per Qatar statements.

Attacks link to broader Iran-US frictions, including militia actions. Islamic Resistance in Iraq tied strikes to coalition sites since late 2025. Victoria Base claims followed drone and missile barrages.

Satellite delays limit visual confirmations, but geolocation verifies patterns. Hinz's examination covered American and regional targets, focusing on Gulf concentrations.

Iraq mediated reported truces, with militias claiming airport evacuations. NATO's mission shift affected non-combat roles only.

Operational Challenges in Relocated Facilities

Troops now use hotels and

offices near struck bases. This shift introduces security variances from fortified sites. Local civilian proximity heightens risks, as noted in Yahoo reports.

Al Udeid's scale – America's largest Mideast base – underscores impact. Bahrain's Fifth Fleet supports naval operations regionally. Kuwait sites handle logistics critical to deployments.

Withdrawals followed threats and strikes, not preemptive orders alone. Iran's warnings preceded February moves; militia deadlines marked March.

No reports indicate halted operations, only venue changes. US presence persists across affected nations.

Broader Implications for Gulf Deployments

Gulf states host 13 listed bases, per The New York Times. Kuwait absorbed most strikes, reflecting its frontline role. Qatar and Bahrain anchor air and sea capabilities.

Evacuations coincide with NATO adjustments in Iraq. French confirmation specified temporary status. US accelerated drawdowns since 2025 attacks.

Reports draw from Pentagon anonymity, government statements, and analyst mappings. No independent strike verifications beyond geolocation exist publicly.

The developments follow Iran's regional warnings and militia escalations. Continued presence underscores ongoing commitments despite relocations.

UK Statement Highlights Iran Aggression and American Forces Evacuation from Gulf Bases

By Danielle Campbell



UK foreign minister Yvette Cooper. Photo: file

London (Washington Insider Magazine) – 17 March 2026 – The UK Foreign Secretary delivered a statement to Parliament on the ongoing Middle East conflict, detailing Iranian missile and drone attacks across 13 countries. US forces have withdrawn hundreds of troops from key bases including Al Udeid in Qatar and Bahrain amid heightened tensions with Iran. The UK emphasises diplomatic efforts to prevent wider war while supporting regional allies and protecting British citizens. The Foreign Secretary addressed the House of Commons on 17 March 2026, providing an update on the rapidly evolving situation in the Middle East. Iran has launched over 900 missiles

and more than 3,000 drones targeting partners of the UK where British citizens reside, work, or visit. US and Israeli strikes on Iranian targets continue, accompanied by attacks from Iranian proxy groups and escalation in Lebanon.

This follows reports of American troops being forced to withdraw from major bases in the region. Hundreds of personnel were pulled from Al Udeid Air Base, the largest US military installation in the Middle East located in Qatar, as well as from Bahrain, home to the US Navy's Fifth Fleet. Remaining US forces stay deployed in Iraq, Syria, and other Gulf states, with the moves described as

precautionary.

Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper outlines Iranian aggression across the region.



Iran initiated the current phase of hostilities by firing missiles and drones into multiple countries allied with the UK. The attacks have spanned 13 nations, placing hundreds of thousands of British citizens at risk in areas they visit, work, or live. The Foreign Secretary noted discussions with counterparts from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the US, Israel, key European allies, and other regional partners over the past week.

In meetings across the Gulf, the UK expressed support and solidarity. The Foreign Secretary met with representatives from all six GCC nations, stressing the need for swift resolution to the crisis. Additional defence assets were pre-deployed to the region by the Defence Secretary prior to the conflict's escalation, with increased support provided since.

The UK position prioritises protecting households facing cost-of-living pressures, safeguarding people in the region, and defending allies under attack. The Prime Minister stated the UK will avoid a wider war and retain control over its foreign policy based on national interests and values.

US Troop Withdrawals from Key Middle East Bases

Reports confirm the US has withdrawn personnel from strategic locations as tensions with Iran intensify. At Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, hundreds of troops departed following warnings from Tehran that US bases would become legitimate targets in response to any American strikes. Personnel were also removed from Bahrain, headquarters of the US Navy's Fifth Fleet.

A US official described the repositioning as a precaution amid rising regional risks. Iranian statements have heightened concerns over potential broader escalation and unpredictable outcomes. Diplomatic sources indicated some personnel at Al Udeid were advised to leave by Wednesday evening in one account.

While these withdrawals occurred, US forces maintain presence in Iraq, Syria, and additional Gulf states. The moves coincide with a deadly crackdown on protests inside Iran and renewed threats of US intervention.

UK Defensive Support and Regional Diplomacy

The UK supported defensive actions after Iran targeted other regional countries, endangering partners and citizens. In Saudi Arabia, British Army personnel assist in operating air defences against drones. Talks covered additional defence measures deployed before the conflict began.

Recent diplomatic engagements include conversations with the Lebanese Prime Minister and Israeli Foreign Minister, as well as the US, France, and other European and Gulf partners. The Foreign Secretary highlighted Iran's capabilities as massively degraded but confirmed the ongoing threat from its weapons and proxies.

The longer the conflict persists, the greater the danger and economic pressures at home. UK efforts focus on ending the war quickly through urgent diplomacy to avert further escalation.

Developments Involving Lebanon and Hezbollah

The statement condemned attacks by Lebanese Hezbollah, who fired hundreds of rockets at northern Israel. These actions, instigated by the Iranian regime, must cease immediately, according to the Foreign Secretary. Hezbollah, a proscribed terrorist group, is drawing Lebanon into unwanted conflict. The UK supports Lebanon's sovereignty and welcomes the Lebanese Government's ban on Hezbollah's military activities. Continued assistance goes to the Lebanese Armed Forces as Lebanon's sole legitimate defender. Concerns remain over civilian impacts from Israeli operations.

A potential diplomatic opportunity exists amid the risks, requiring all support to seize it.

Broader Context of US-Israel-Iran Confrontation

US and Israeli strikes across Iran persist, as noted in the parliamentary update. Iranian proxy activities and troubling developments in Lebanon contribute to the escalation. BBC Parliament covered the House of Commons session where Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper updated MPs on the US/Israeli war with Iran.

An X post from FCDOGovUK on 17 March linked to the full statement. TheyWorkForYou recorded debates indicating the UK's distinct approach from the US and Israel, guided by principles.

Iran's regional actions have prompted defensive responses, including UK contributions. The conflict underscores persistent threats from the regime.

Timeline of Key Events in Conflict

- Iran fires over 900 missiles and 3,000 drones across 13 countries.
- US begins withdrawing troops from Al Udeid Air Base and Bahrain.
- UK Foreign Secretary holds talks with GCC, US, Israel, and European allies.
- Hezbollah launches rockets at northern Israel; Lebanon bans group's military activities.
- Statement delivered to Parliament on 17 March 2026.

These events form the core of reported developments from credible outlets. No further escalations beyond these facts were detailed in the sources.

Iran warns of devastating strikes on Middle East power plants

By Kathy Malouf



Photograph: Anadolu/Getty Images

Iran has warned it will “irreversibly” destroy critical energy and water infrastructure across the Middle East if the United States and Israel carry out threats to attack Iran’s own power plants. In televised remarks and official statements, Iranian leaders have declared energy networks, desalination plants and other key facilities in the region as legitimate targets should Tehran’s electrical infrastructure be struck. The United States, meanwhile, has reiterated that President Donald Trump is prepared to destroy major Iranian power facilities if Iran does not fully reopen the Strait of Hormuz within days. The exchange has intensified an already high-tension standoff between Iran, the United States

and Israel, with both sides now threatening facilities that millions of civilians across the region depend on for electricity, water and communications.

Iran’s threat to regional infrastructure

Iran’s top civilian and military authorities have publicly framed regional energy and water systems as potential targets in retaliation for any attack on Iranian power plants. In statements relayed through state-linked media, the Khatam al-Anbiya Central Headquarters, which oversees Iran’s military operations, said it would target “all energy, information technology, and desalination

infrastructure” associated with both the United States and Israel in the Middle East.

Iran’s parliament speaker, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, amplified the warning on social media, declaring that essential infrastructure in the region, including energy and desalination plants, would be “irreversibly destroyed” if Iran’s own power facilities were attacked. Iranian officials have not provided a precise list of facilities they would strike, but have described the targets as “critical infrastructure” that supports military and economic operations for the US-Israel alliance.

Trump’s ultimatum on power plants

The Iranian threats follow a public ultimatum from US President Donald Trump. In a series of remarks, Trump has declared that he will order the destruction of one of Iran's major power facilities if Tehran does not fully reopen the Strait of Hormuz within 48 hours. The US president has not specified which power plant would be hit, but US officials have indicated that the target would be among Iran's largest gas-fired thermal plants or other key electrical facilities.

US Ambassador to the United Nations Mike Walt has defended the threat, telling international media that Iran's Revolutionary Guard controls large parts of the country's infrastructure and that much of this network also supports military operations. Walt stated that Trump "is serious" about acting unless Iran complies, and that any strike would be carried out without prior public warning.

Closure of the Strait of Hormuz

Iran has tied the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz directly to the fate of its power grid. The Khatam al-Anbiya command has warned that if Trump's threats are executed and Iranian power plants are destroyed, the Strait will be "entirely sealed" and will not reopen until the damaged facilities are repaired. The waterway, through which roughly one fifth of the world's seaborne oil passes, is already partially closed, with Iranian naval and Revolutionary Guard units enforcing

a blockade on foreign shipping. The closure has disrupted global energy markets and raised concerns among Gulf-based oil producers and importing nations that prolonged disruption could sharply affect prices and deliveries. International shipping companies have rerouted many vessels away from the Strait, while US and allied officials have discussed options for convoying or escorting commercial traffic should the chokepoint remain constricted.

Military escalation in the region

Iran's warnings come amid a wider military confrontation with Israel and the United States. In the past four weeks, Iran has launched missile attacks targeting southern Israeli cities, injuring multiple civilians and drawing condemnation from Western governments. Tehran has also used long-range missiles for the first time in this phase of the conflict, signalling an expanded arsenal and willingness to strike farther into Israel.

The United States and Israel, in turn, have carried out a series of large-scale strikes on Iranian military and nuclear sites, including facilities linked to Iran's ballistic missile programme and uranium enrichment activities. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has described the campaign as a last-resort effort to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, while US officials have said that the goal of degrading Iran's military capabilities has been "largely achieved."



The prospect of direct attacks on power plants and desalination facilities has drawn sharp concern from international human rights organisations. Amnesty International has warned that assaults on systems providing essential services such as electricity, heating and water could violate international humanitarian law and, in certain circumstances, could amount to war crimes because of the expected "widespread, foreseeable, and catastrophic civilian impact."

Desalination plants are particularly critical in several Gulf states, where they supply a large share of the population's drinking water. Energy networks also underpin hospitals, communications, wastewater treatment and other vital services. Any large-scale disruption of these systems would risk severe shortages and public-health crises, especially i

densely populated coastal areas.

Iran's targeting of Israeli and US sites

Iranian officials have narrowed the scope of their retaliation in some statements, emphasizing that Israeli power stations, energy networks and communications infrastructure would be hit in the event of a US attack on Iranian plants. The Khatam al-Anbiya command has linked such facilities to Israel's military-industrial base and described them as fair targets if Iran's own infrastructure is damaged.

An Iranian official quoted in regional media has advised residents of Israel and nearby areas to stockpile water and keep mobile devices charged, in anticipation of disruptions to water supply and communications networks. The same source has warned that cyber and missile attacks could combine to disable or degrade key nodes in these systems, complicating restoration efforts.



Responses from the US and allies

The United States has reiterated that it views Iran's use of its civilian infrastructure for military purposes as justification for striking power plants. Walt told a UN briefing that Washington considers Iran's Revolutionary Guard-linked networks legitimate military targets and that the Trump administration reserves the right to act without further negotiation.

European allies have expressed alarm about the escalation but have not committed to direct military intervention. Several European governments have urged the United States and Iran to return to negotiations, warning that attacks on energy and water infrastructure would endanger regional stability and global trade. Gulf Cooperation Council members, meanwhile, have privately pressed the United States for stronger security guarantees while publicly calling for de-escalation.

Geopolitical context and past strikes

The current standoff builds on earlier military confrontations between Iran and Israel. In June 2025, Israel launched a 12-day air campaign, codenamed Operation Rising Lion, targeting Iran's Natanz enrichment facility, parts of its ballistic missile infrastructure and selected nuclear scientists. The United States joined that conflict days later, striking the Fordow, Natanz and Isfahan nuclear sites, which Iran claimed were not

seriously damaged.

The 2026 conflict began in late February with surprise airstrikes by Israel and the United States on dozens of Iranian military targets, including command centres and missile batteries. Iranian forces have since launched waves of drones and ballistic missiles at Israel and US bases in the region, contributing to a cycle of tit-for-tat attacks that has now spilled into the realm of energy and water infrastructure threats.

Uncertainty over escalation thresholds

As of April 2026, the Trump administration has not publicly confirmed that it has selected a specific Iranian power plant for attack, although US officials have repeated that the threat remains "on the table." Iranian authorities, in turn, have declined to specify which regional facilities they would target, speaking instead in broad terms about "critical infrastructure" in US- and Israeli-linked networks.

Diplomatic channels remain open, with several third-party states attempting to mediate between Tehran and Washington. However, officials on both sides have warned that the situation could deteriorate rapidly if either side perceives the other as moving toward striking essential energy or water systems. The risk of inadvertent escalation is widely regarded as high, given the dual-use nature of much of the infrastructure in question and the potential for cascading failures across regional grids and water-supply networks.

Iran warns of devastating strikes on Middle East power plants

By Kathy Malouf



Photographer: David Paul Morris/Bloomberg

The United Arab Emirates has formally reaffirmed its pledge to deploy a \$1.4 trillion investment framework in the United States over the next decade, even as hostilities with Iran continue to strain regional security and economic conditions. Citing strong sovereign-wealth reserves and resilient public finances, UAE officials have told American business groups that the size and timing of the planned investments will not be scaled back. The move is being read as a signal that Abu Dhabi intends to deepen its economic integration with Washington at a time of heightened geopolitical uncertainty for Gulf states.

The commitment originally stems from a White House-announced,

10-year framework struck last year between President Donald Trump and senior Emirati officials, under which the UAE pledged roughly \$1.4 trillion in cumulative investments in the United States. The framework targets a broad range of sectors, including artificial intelligence, semiconductors, energy infrastructure and American manufacturing, with the stated aim of substantially expanding the UAE's existing footprint in the US economy. At the time of the 2025 announcement, the White House described the figure as one of the largest foreign-investment commitments in recent US history, though it did not outline a detailed yearly breakdown of how the total would be reached.

Since then, a limited but still significant set of specific deals and joint ventures have been announced—particularly in chipmaking, data-centre infrastructure and AI-related ventures—giving concrete shape to parts of the broader framework. In parallel, US officials have highlighted the UAE's role as a major source of capital for advanced-technology projects, including facilities that support domestic supply-chain resilience and critical-technology development. The \$1.4 trillion figure is understood to encompass a decade-long pipeline of projects rather than a single, lump-sum outlay, allowing the UAE to sequence investments according to market conditions and sectoral priorities.

Diplomatic reassurance amid regional conflict

The UAE's decision to publicly re-emphasise the pledge comes amid a wider war involving Iran and several regional actors, including the United States, which has intensified security and economic pressures across the Gulf. In a letter dated 17 March 2026 to the US-UAE Business Council, UAE Ambassador Yousef Al Otaiba stated that the investment framework announced last year would continue "without disruption" and that plans to accelerate deployment and funding would remain on track. Al Otaiba sought to address concerns among US-based investors that the conflict could prompt Gulf states to slow or redirect foreign-direct-investment flows owing to lower energy revenues and higher defence-related expenditures. In his communication, the ambassador outlined that the UAE has spent years building sovereign-wealth reserves exceeding \$2 trillion, strengthening supply-chain resilience and investing in missile-defence and civil-infrastructure protection as part of its strategic planning. He noted that despite Iranian attacks on Emirati territory, including strikes aimed at ports and airports, critical infrastructure has been restored and international trade links have remained largely intact. Iran is reported to have launched nearly 2,000 missiles and drones at the UAE, with Emirati and

allied forces intercepting more than 93 per cent of them, according to figures cited by the ambassador.

Government and advisory-level messaging

Alongside the ambassador's letter, senior Emirati policymakers have publicly underscored the continuity of the investment framework. Anwar Gargash, a top adviser to President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed, has stated that Iran's targeting of Gulf countries has been a miscalculation that will only push the region closer to the United States, rather than deterring further economic cooperation. Reem Al Hashimy, the UAE's Minister of State for International Cooperation, has described Tehran's attacks as "unhinged" and argued that they have reinforced the case for closer ties with Washington on both security and economic fronts.

These statements appear designed, in part, to reassure US partners that the UAE can still meet long-term financial commitments despite the extraordinary costs of war-related damage and defence mobilisation. Officials have also pointed to the diversified nature of the Emirates' economy, which relies on a mix of energy exports, trade-hub activity, tourism and financial-services income, as a buffer against volatility in any single revenue stream. By linking the pledge to strategic-resilience investments already made over the past decade, Emirati

representatives aim to present the \$1.4 trillion framework as a continuation of established policy, not a new gamble.

Scope, sectors and implementation

Under the 2025-announced framework, Emirati capital is expected to flow into several priority sectors in the United States, in line with Washington's interest in bolstering domestic capabilities in advanced technologies and critical industries. Artificial intelligence infrastructure, including data-centre development and AI-driven logistics systems, has been singled out as a focal area, reflecting the UAE's broader strategy of positioning itself as a regional hub for AI and digital trade. The framework also includes commitments related to semiconductor manufacturing and advanced-energy projects, both of which are central to US-centred efforts to secure resilient supply chains.

US officials who briefed media outlets last year described the UAE pledge as a way to "significantly enhance" existing Emirati investments in the American economy, rather than merely maintaining the status quo. However, the White House has not released a detailed schedule of expected yearly disbursements or a fixed list of individual projects that must materialise under the framework. Instead, the commitment has been framed as a flexible, multi-year pipeline that allows the UAE to adjust the pace and

composition of investments according to evolving security, economic and regulatory conditions.

Market and investor reactions

The reaffirmation of the pledge has been welcomed by US-based business groups that have long advocated closer ties with Emirati investors. The US-UAE Business Council, which received the ambassador's letter, has characterised the communication as a vote of confidence in American markets at a time when uncertainty around regional conflicts could otherwise prompt capital to retreat from risk-exposed sectors. Some US-based analysts have noted that the statement may help reassure firms operating in sectors such as technology, logistics and energy that long-term Gulf-sourced capital will remain available even if the conflict with Iran drags on.

At the same time, there has been cautious scrutiny of how the \$1.4 trillion figure will be populated over time, given that some of the associated deals have already been disclosed separately and may be folded into the broader framework. Commentators have pointed out that, while the headline amount is large, implementation will depend on prevailing interest-rate environments, regulatory review processes, and the ability of both Emirati and US entities to execute complex cross-border projects. Nevertheless, the fact that the UAE has chosen to re-state the pledge during an active regional

war has been interpreted by several outlets as a deliberate signal of political and financial commitment.

Broader strategic implications

The UAE's decision to stand by the \$1.4 trillion investment framework occurs against a backdrop of intensifying US-Gulf security and economic coordination. US-Iran hostilities that began in the preceding month have prompted Washington to lean more heavily on regional partners such as the UAE and other Gulf Cooperation Council states to help sustain pressure on Tehran while also safeguarding regional trade routes. In parallel, American officials have sought to align Emirati financial interests with US-led industrial and technological-sovereignty initiatives, including efforts to expand domestic manufacturing and reduce reliance on adversarial supply chains.

For Abu Dhabi, the reaffirmed pledge may also serve to insulate its economic relationship with Washington from the political fallout of any escalatory phase in the conflict. By emphasising long-term investment commitments, Emirati officials appear to be signalling that the UAE does not intend to decouple from US markets or retract its integration into broader Western-centred economic structures, even as the security environment deteriorates. Some observers have noted that this approach mirrors earlier post-9/11 patterns in which

Gulf states sought to demonstrate loyalty and economic reliability to the United States in times of regional tension.

Present status and outlook

As of late March 2026, there is no indication that the UAE has formally amended the size or timeframe of its \$1.4 trillion investment framework in the United States. Officials have instead reiterated that the commitments announced under the 2025 agreement will continue to be implemented, with an emphasis on maintaining the pace of project approvals and capital deployment. The ambassador's letter to the US-UAE Business Council is the most recent public statement explicitly linking the framework to the ongoing war context, underscoring that the UAE views the investment agenda as compatible with its broader security-and-economic strategy. In the absence of a detailed project-level roadmap, the practical fulfilment of the pledge will likely be measured over time through the accumulation of individual deals, joint ventures and infrastructure projects announced by both Emirati and US entities. For now, the headline reaffirmation underscores that, from the UAE's perspective, the \$1.4 trillion investment framework remains intact, even as the country navigates an unprecedented security and economic test in the wider Gulf region.

US Senator Lindsey Graham Threatens Saudi Arabia Over Iran War Participation

By Kathy Malouf



Photograph: Elizabeth Frantz/Reuters

Graham further asked, "Should America do a defense agreement with a country like the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia that is unwilling to join a fight of mutual interest?" His comments highlight tensions in US-Gulf relations during the conflict.

Graham's Criticism of Saudi Military Stance

Graham accused Saudi Arabia of providing only marginal support while Americans die and the US spends billions combating Iran. "Americans are dying and the U.S. is spending billions to dislodge the terrorist Iranian regime that threatens the region," he stated. "Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia seems to be issuing statements and doing things in the background that are marginally helpful, but unwilling to participate in military operations to end the reign of terror coming out of Iran." The senator's post confirms earlier reports that Riyadh has denied US access to its bases for offensive operations against Iran. US Central Command reported that a seventh American soldier died from wounds sustained in an Iranian strike on a US base in Saudi Arabia on 1 March 2026. Saudi Arabia has faced sustained Iranian missile and drone attacks, including one on the US embassy in Riyadh that caused damage. The US issued warnings to its

citizens in the kingdom and partially evacuated the embassy. Despite downing hundreds of Iranian projectiles, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states have refrained from direct retaliation and called for de-escalation.

Context of US-Israel War on Iran

The conflict escalated with a surprise US-Israeli assault on Iran on 28 February 2026. Graham has been a key advocate for the campaign, pushing for regime change in Tehran. Reports indicate he first proposed strikes to President Trump shortly after the 2024 election during a golf outing.

Graham made multiple visits to Israel and communicated with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, informing him of impending US actions. He also advised Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on engaging the Trump administration. Alongside retired General Jack Keane and former Bush speechwriter Marc Thiessen, Graham lobbied the White House for months.

Iran has responded with strikes on US bases in Saudi Arabia and other regional targets. The attacks have killed at least seven Americans, with the latest fatality reported on 8 March 2026.

Saudi Arabia's Position Amid Attacks

US Senator Lindsey Graham, a close ally of President Donald Trump, has threatened Saudi Arabia with consequences if the kingdom refuses to join the US-Israeli military campaign against Iran. Graham criticised Riyadh for not deploying its military against what he called the "barbaric and terrorist Iranian regime." The remarks come amid ongoing Iranian attacks on Saudi territory, including a strike that killed a seventh American soldier.

Senator Lindsey Graham made the statements on Monday, 8 March 2026, via a post on X, formerly known as Twitter. He questioned the value of a US defence agreement with Saudi Arabia given the kingdom's stance. "It is my understanding the Kingdom refuses to use their capable military as a part of an effort to end the barbaric and terrorist Iranian regime who has terrorized the region and killed 7 Americans," Graham wrote.

Riyadh has opposed the US-Israeli war from the outset. The kingdom has focused on defence, intercepting Iranian drones and rockets, rather than offensive operations. Saudi leaders have sought diplomatic channels to end the crisis.

The US embassy evacuation in Riyadh underscores the intensity of Iranian attacks on the kingdom. Washington has warned citizens to leave due to the security situation.

Graham's threats extend to other Gulf countries, warning of consequences if they fail to support the effort. His remarks represent a sharp escalation in pressure on allies perceived as reluctant.

Graham's Role in Pushing for Conflict

As a prominent Republican senator, Graham wields influence in the Trump administration on foreign policy. His advocacy for strikes on Iran dates back to late 2024. The Wall Street Journal reported that Graham's efforts included direct persuasion of the president and coordination with Israeli officials.

Graham's post on X drew widespread attention, with coverage from outlets including Middle East Eye, The New Arab, and The Guardian. The senator's comments have sparked debate on US commitments to Gulf allies. US Central Command's update on the seventh American casualty provides stark evidence of the conflict's toll on US forces stationed in Saudi Arabia.

Regional Implications of Graham's Statements

Saudi Arabia's refusal to join offensive actions complicates longstanding US-Saudi security ties. Graham explicitly linked the kingdom's stance to future defence agreements.

The kingdom has endured economic strain from the attacks but prioritised restraint. Gulf states have coordinated to intercept Iranian projectiles without escalating to full war.

President Trump's administration initiated the strikes following Graham's counsel, marking a significant shift in US policy towards Iran.

Background on US-Iran Tensions

The US-Israeli operation targets Iran's leadership and military capabilities. Iranian responses have included direct strikes on Saudi soil, affecting US assets.

Graham described Iran as a regime that has "terrorized the region," citing the deaths of seven Americans as justification for broader allied involvement.

Reports confirm Saudi bases remain off-limits for US offensive launches, a decision Riyadh maintained despite pressure.

Coverage Across Credible Outlets

Multiple reputable news organisations reported Graham's X post verbatim. Middle East Eye noted the confirmation of base access denials. The New Arab detailed Saudi attacks and

embassy damage.

The Guardian highlighted Graham's role in urging Trump to strike Iran post-2024 election. Turkiye Today described the threats as a "direct" warning with potential repercussions.

WION broadcast coverage questioning US-Saudi defence pacts amid the senator's remarks.

Timeline of Key Events

- Post-2024 Election: Graham proposes Iran strikes to Trump during golf.
- February 2026: US-Israel launches surprise assault on Iran on 28 February.
- 1 March 2026: Iranian strike on US base in Saudi Arabia wounds soldier who later dies.
- Early March 2026: Iranian missiles hit US embassy in Riyadh.
- 8 March 2026: Graham posts threats on X; seventh US soldier death reported.

This sequence underscores the rapid escalation and Graham's intervention timing.

Statements from Involved Parties

Graham's full X thread lambasted Gulf inaction: "Should America do a defense agreement with a country like the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia that is unwilling to join a fight of mutual interest?" No immediate Saudi response was reported.

US Central Command confirmed the casualty figures without commenting on base access.

EU Approves 90% Emissions Cut by 2040 Amid Global Climate Policy Shifts

By Mandilee Hecht



FT montage/Getty Images

European Union countries have approved a 90 per cent greenhouse gas emissions reduction target by 2040. Colombia announced plans to host the First International Conference for the Phase-Out of Fossil Fuels in April 2026. The COP30 Presidency released an executive report outlining roadmaps for fossil fuel transitions and halting deforestation by 2030. China plans to cut carbon dioxide emissions per unit of GDP by 3.8 per cent in 2026.

EU Secures 2040 Climate Target Approval

European Union countries gave final approval to a new climate target on 5 March 2026. The target calls for a 90 per cent

reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2040 compared to 1990 levels. This decision presses ahead with the bloc's climate agenda despite political resistance.

The approval came from EU member states during a meeting on Thursday, 5 March 2026. Kate Abnett reported the development for Reuters. EU environment ministers endorsed the legally binding goal earlier, with the European Parliament having approved it previously.

This target builds on the EU's existing commitments under the European Green Deal. It aligns with the bloc's aim to reach climate neutrality by 2050. The decision requires all EU countries to implement national measures to meet the

collective goal.

Colombia Announces Landmark Fossil Fuels Conference

Colombia announced its plan to host the First International Conference for the Phase-Out of Fossil Fuels during the United Nations General Assembly in New York City. The announcement occurred on 22 September 2025. The conference is scheduled for April 2026.

The event will provide a global platform for countries to cooperate on strategies to phase out oil, gas, and coal extraction. It complements and reinforces the Paris Agreement. The conference aligns with the International Court of Justice

Advisory Opinion on states' legal obligations to protect the climate.

Further details will be unveiled at COP30 in Belém. A high-level ministerial meeting will outline the conference's contours. Participating nations will issue a joint political declaration on just and equitable transitions away from fossil fuels.

COP30 Presidency Releases Executive Report

The COP30 Presidency released its Executive Report on 19 March 2026. The report covers the United Nations Climate Change Conference held in Belém last November. It resulted in 56 decisions adopted by consensus from nearly every country. The report outlines key political, normative, and implementation outcomes. It includes commitments to guide future work on global climate action. The Presidency committed to developing roadmaps for strategic areas.

One roadmap focuses on transitioning away from fossil fuels in a just, orderly, and equitable manner. Another addresses halting and reversing deforestation and forest degradation by 2030. These roadmaps compile evidence and support international dialogue. COP30 strengthened the Global Climate Action Agenda. It launched the Global Implementation Accelerator to mobilise governments, the private sector, cities, and civil society. These initiatives aim to accelerate national climate

commitments and adaptation plans.

China's 2026 Carbon Intensity Reduction Plan

China plans to cut carbon dioxide emissions per unit of GDP by around 3.8 per cent in 2026. This target forms part of its current five-year plan. The plan seeks a 17 per cent reduction in carbon intensity during the period.

Official documents released on 5 March 2026 confirmed the target. Colleen Howe reported the details for Reuters. This represents an acceleration from the 2020-2025 period.

The measure targets emissions relative to economic output. It supports China's broader efforts to peak carbon emissions before 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality by 2060. Implementation will involve policies across energy, industry, and transportation sectors.

Broader Global Climate Developments

Earlier climate talks, such as COP26 in Glasgow, included commitments from 151 countries on new nationally determined contributions by 2030. These aim to slash emissions in line with limiting temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius. Analysis indicated potential to limit warming to 1.8 or 1.9 degrees Celsius with net-zero pledges.

COP26 featured high-level announcements, including

India's net-zero by 2070 pledge and the Global Methane Pledge by 109 countries to cut emissions 30 per cent by 2030. Over 141 countries pledged to halt forest loss by 2030, backed by \$18 billion in funding.

The Glasgow Climate Pact called for phasing down unabated coal power and phasing out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies. This marked the first explicit reference to fossil fuels in COP decision text. Negotiators also emphasised non-CO2 gases like methane and the role of nature in emissions reduction.

Recent Environmental Policy Updates

China expects severe flooding and drought in 2026, as reported on 31 March 2026. The United States exempted Gulf of Mexico drillers from endangered species rules on the same date. These developments highlight ongoing environmental challenges.

The COP30 outcomes reaffirm international cooperation's role in climate change efforts. The conference served as a milestone in a broader process involving governments, businesses, and civil society. Implementation remains a focus for 2026.

Global climate panels continue to produce reports amid procedural challenges and funding concerns. Trump's administration proposed cuts to climate and environmental programmes, affecting agencies like the EPA and NOAA. These budget plans were noted in early April 2026.

US Business Equipment Borrowings Rise More Than 14% in February, ELFA Reports

By Mandilee Hecht



REUTERS/Eduardo Munoz

Washington - U.S. companies borrowed 14.2% more to finance equipment purchases in February 2026 compared to February 2025, according to the Equipment Leasing and Finance Association (ELFA).

The Washington-based ELFA reported this increase based on a survey of 25 members, including major players like Bank of America, Caterpillar, Dell Technologies, Siemens AG, Canon, and Volvo AB.

This rise reflects heightened activity among independent

providers in the equipment finance sector, which exceeds \$1 trillion in volume.

U.S. businesses increased their borrowings for equipment acquisitions by 14.2% in February 2026 from the previous year, the Equipment Leasing and Finance Association announced on March 30, 2026. The ELFA, a trade organization monitoring economic trends in the equipment finance industry, compiles its monthly data from surveys of 25 key members.

These members represent a

broad cross-section of the sector, including financing arms of prominent companies such as Bank of America, Caterpillar's financial services division, Dell Technologies, Siemens AG, Canon, and Volvo AB.

The report highlights that the surge was primarily driven by independent providers within the industry.

ELFA tracks activity in an equipment finance market valued at over \$1 trillion

annually, providing insights into borrowing trends for machinery, vehicles, and other business assets.

Reuters first published the findings, which were echoed across financial news outlets on March 30, 2026.

ELFA Survey Methodology and Participants

The ELFA's Monthly Confidence Index and lending volume reports draw from data submitted by 25 organisations representing substantial portions of the U.S. equipment finance market.

Participants include traditional banks like Bank of America and specialised financing units from manufacturers such as Caterpillar, Dell Technologies, Siemens AG, Canon, and Volvo AB.

This survey-based approach allows ELFA to capture real-time shifts in borrowing volumes for equipment like construction machinery, IT hardware, medical devices, and transportation assets.

The association, headquartered in Washington, D.C., has monitored these trends for years, offering benchmarks for the industry's health.

In February 2026, the collective data showed a clear year-on-year increase of 14.2% in new loans, leases, and lines of credit secured for equipment.

No specific breakdown of borrowing by equipment type or region was detailed in the initial release, but the overall figure underscores renewed financing

activity.

Context from Prior ELFA Reports

For comparison, ELFA's report for February 2025 showed a decline in equipment borrowings, with U.S. companies borrowing 7.4% less than in February 2024.

That earlier figure totalled \$9.7 billion in new financing, down slightly from \$9.8 billion the year before, with credit approvals holding steady at 75%.

ELFA President and CEO Leigh Lytle noted at the time that demand had returned to healthy levels following historic financing activity at banks.

The shift to growth in February 2026 marks a reversal from that contraction, signalling potential recovery or expansion in capital spending.

ELFA's consistent methodology enables direct year-on-year comparisons, as the same pool of 25 members contributes data each month.

Credit performance and approval rates were not specified in the latest February 2026 release.

Broader Equipment Financing Landscape

The equipment finance sector encompasses loans, leases, and credit lines for assets critical to business operations across industries.

ELFA's data serves as a key indicator for economists tracking

investment in productive capacity amid economic fluctuations.

The 14.2% rise in February 2026 follows patterns of variability, with borrowings contracting in early 2025 before rebounding.

News of the increase spread quickly via Reuters' wire service, appearing on platforms including X (formerly Twitter) and Facebook on March 30, 2026.

U.S. News & World Report also covered the ELFA announcement, confirming the 14.2% year-over-year growth.

This data point arrives as businesses navigate interest rate environments and plan capital expenditures into 2026.

Implications for Industry Monitoring

ELFA releases these figures monthly to provide timely snapshots of financing activity.

The February 2026 uptick, driven by independents, suggests confidence among non-bank lenders in extending credit.

Survey respondents represent financing for diverse sectors, from manufacturing to technology and logistics.

In related asset finance news, UK reports from March 2026 noted a 6% growth in new business over twelve months to January, though focused on different metrics.

ELFA's U.S.-centric data remains the primary source for this specific borrowing trend.

The organisation continues to survey the same core group, ensuring continuity in trend analysis.

Stock Markets Plunge After Trump's Iran Ultimatum Drives Oil Higher and Gold Lower

By John Ruehl



Kyle Mazza/NurPhoto/Alamy

London (Washington Insider Magazine) March 23, 2026 – Global stock markets in Asia and Europe slumped following US President Donald Trump's ultimatum on Iran. Oil prices climbed towards record highs amid supply disruption fears in the Strait of Hormuz, while gold prices fell as investors anticipated inflation from higher energy costs. Goldman Sachs forecasts Brent crude averaging \$85 per barrel this year, up from \$77.

Stock markets experienced sharp declines after President Trump issued a stern warning to Iran. Asian and European indices fell as investors braced for escalating tensions in the Middle East. The ultimatum came amid ongoing disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz, a critical oil shipping route. President

Trump's statement heightened geopolitical risks. Brent crude, the global benchmark, rose 1.2% on Monday to \$113.34 per barrel, though below the month's record peak of \$199 per barrel. This surge followed earlier volatility tied to the Iran crisis.

Oil Prices Climb Amid Strait Disruptions

Oil markets reacted swiftly to the developments. Goldman Sachs revised its Brent crude forecast upwards to \$85 per barrel for the year, citing expected supply constraints. In the UK, gas prices for the next month increased by 3.1% to 155 pence per therm, nearly double pre-crisis levels. These rises reflect broader energy market pressures from the Iran situation.

Earlier events contributed to the volatility. Brent crude topped \$70 per barrel in late January after Trump's threats of military action against Iran, gaining over three percent before easing.

By mid-March, Brent reached \$110–\$120 per barrel range due to Middle East security issues hampering shipping. Oil prices jumped over 30% since the conflict's start in some reports. On March 22, oil plunged after Trump announced talks with Iran, holding off strikes on

power plants. This led to a rebound in shares alongside the crude drop.

Gold Retreats on Inflation Fears

Gold prices dropped amid expectations of higher interest rates. The spot price fell 5% to \$4,160 per ounce on Monday, as rising inflation from energy costs made the non-yielding asset less appealing.

Investors shifted away from gold when rates rise, preferring yield-bearing options. This dynamic played out as oil-driven inflation loomed.

Historical peaks marked the metal's volatility. Gold hit \$5,595.47 per ounce in late January after initial safe-haven buying, with silver reaching \$120.44.

In January 2026, gold touched a record \$5,608 per ounce before stabilising near \$5,000 by March. Silver briefly exceeded \$120 per ounce during the surge.

On March 9, spot gold gained 1.8% to \$5,240 per ounce after Trump's comments eased Middle East war fears and lowered oil prices. US gold futures rose 2.7%, while silver climbed 2% toward \$90.

Exchange-traded funds saw a 30-tonne outflow last week prior, the biggest in over two years, as war onset pressured prices.

Stock Markets Face Broad Declines

European and US indices gained on March 22 after Trump's de-escalation signal via Truth Social. However, the subsequent ultimatum reversed those gains. Asian markets led the latest slump, followed by Europe. Investors worried over oil supply risks and inflation impacts on growth.

President Trump's rhetoric has swung markets repeatedly. His March 23 ultimatum triggered the plunge, building on prior threats.

In late January, threats of strikes on Iran spurred oil gains while gold retreated from highs. Trump's warning referenced prior US actions against Iranian targets.

He demanded Iran negotiate its nuclear programme, which Western nations view as aimed at atomic weapons development.

Trump's Statements Shape Volatility

President Trump used Truth Social and speeches to influence markets. On March 22, he noted US-Iran talks to resolve Middle East tensions, calming oil and boosting stocks temporarily.

In a Monday news conference before March 9 gains, he signalled an imminent end to the conflict: "It's going to be ended soon." This dropped oil and aided gold.

The latest ultimatum shifted sentiment.

On March 23, stocks plunged as oil rose on perceived strike risks. January threats warned: "The next attack will be far worse! Don't make that happen again," tying to June strikes on Iranian targets.

In January, Trump announced 25% tariffs on nations trading with Iran, intensifying geopolitical anxiety.

Broader Market Reactions

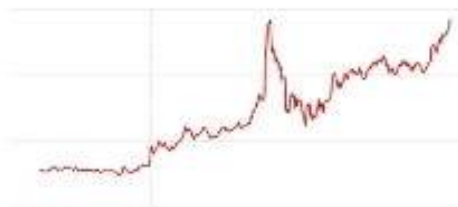
Precious metals showed sharp swings. Gold and silver pared losses on March 24 after Trump paused strikes on Iranian energy facilities for five days.

Silver recovered from over 10% drops, while copper rebounded on de-escalation hopes.

Central banks signalled rate hikes to combat stagflation risks from oil surges, capping gold earlier.

Jason Tuvey of Capital Economics noted strikes could spike oil, boost global inflation, and slow rate cuts by major banks.

UK gas price doubling underscores household impacts. Goldman Sachs highlighted Strait disruptions as key to higher averages.



Background on Iran Tensions

The crisis entered its second week by early March, driving initial gold drops before rebounds.

Trump's international moves include capturing Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and suggesting Greenland acquisition.

Middle East war concerns peaked, with oil over 30% higher at points.

Fed rate expectations shifted with energy prices. Investors anticipated holds or hikes pre-Trump calming remarks.

Gold held lower early in the week amid these pressures.

By March 20, tariffs and Fed tensions fueled commodity surges, with dollar stability questioned.

Brent's path from \$70 to \$113+ reflects the arc, with peaks at \$199 intra-month.

Energy Cost Implications

Higher oil threatens inflation worldwide. Goldman Sachs raised forecasts accordingly.

UK therm prices at 155 pence signal doubled costs.

Global benchmarks like Brent guide pricing. Disruptions sustain upward pressure.

Prior to crisis, estimates sat at \$77; now \$85 yearly average expected.

Trump's pause on March 24 offered brief relief, but ultimatum renewed fears.

Silver's record and gold's peaks show safe-haven flows before shifts.

This sequence of events, drawn from reports across BBC, The Guardian, Mining.com, Moneycontrol, and others, traces the market impacts of Trump's Iran-related statements in early 2026.

BlackRock Imposes Withdrawal Limits on \$26 Billion Private Credit Fund Amid Redemption Surge

BY LIAM FLYNN



REUTERS/Brendan McDermid

New York – BlackRock has restricted withdrawals from its \$26 billion HPS Corporate Lending Fund after receiving \$1.2 billion in redemption requests in the first quarter of 2026, equivalent to 9.3% of the fund's net asset value. The firm distributed \$620 million, the maximum allowed under its 5% quarterly redemption cap, leaving some requests unmet for the first time since the fund's inception. This move coincides with broader pressures in the \$2 trillion private credit industry, where rival firms face similar redemption challenges. BlackRock announced the

restrictions on Friday, 6 March 2026. The world's largest asset manager informed investors that the fund hit its 5% quarterly redemption threshold. Shares of BlackRock fell sharply that day, dropping 6.7% on the New York Stock Exchange amid a wider market selloff linked to weaker-than-expected U.S. jobs data and rising geopolitical tensions. The HPS Corporate Lending Fund, a business development company (BDC), invests in loans to mid-sized businesses. BlackRock acquired it in 2024 as part of a \$12 billion investment into private credit

through HPS Investment Partners. BDCs typically draw capital from retail investors to fund illiquid loans, creating challenges during mass withdrawal periods.

Redemption Requests Trigger Historic Cap

Investors submitted redemption requests totalling \$1.2 billion in the first quarter. This figure represented approximately 9.3% of the fund's net asset value. BlackRock disbursed \$620 million, adhering strictly to the 5% cap designed to prevent a

"structural mismatch between investor capital and the anticipated liquidity of the credit loans" in which the fund invests. The cap activated for the first time since the fund launched. Fund managers invoked the limit to avoid forced asset sales, which could harm remaining investors given the illiquid nature of private credit holdings. Morningstar analyst Warren noted that restricting redemptions helps managers avoid selling assets at depressed prices, preserving returns for those who stay invested. BlackRock's shares declined 4.6% to 6.7% in trading following the announcement, depending on the session. The drop occurred during a broader market downturn.

Industry-Wide Pressures Emerge in Private Credit

Rival Blackstone raised its usual 5% redemption limit to 7% earlier that week on an \$82 billion private credit fund. The firm and its employees injected \$400 million to cover all requests. Blackstone President Jon Gray stated last week that institutional investors continue to commit capital to private credit.

Blue Owl Technology Finance Corp replaced client withdrawals at one of its funds with guaranteed future payouts. This approach addressed redemption pressures without immediate liquidity strains.

The private credit sector, valued

at \$2 trillion, faces increased scrutiny. Investors have reassessed risks amid volatile financial conditions. Last year, some firms encountered exposures from bankruptcies, including a U.S. parts supplier and a subprime auto lender. Canadian Bank of Canada Governor Tiff Macklem stated that the sector requires more stringent regulatory oversight. Retail investor participation in private credit funds has grown. Alternative asset managers increasingly rely on wealthy individuals to fuel expansion.

BlackRock's Strategic Expansion into Private Credit

BlackRock acquired the HPS Corporate Lending Fund alongside HPS Investment Partners in 2024. The \$12 billion deal formed a cornerstone of its private credit strategy. The fund targets loans to mid-sized companies, assets that lack easy liquidation options.

BDCs like HLEND gather funds primarily from retail sources. This structure supports lending to businesses but exposes funds to redemption waves. The 5% quarterly cap exists to align investor withdrawals with loan liquidity profiles.

Blackstone's recent actions highlight similar dynamics. The firm adjusted limits and provided internal capital to maintain stability. Such measures underscore growing stress across the ecosystem.

Market Context and Stock Impact

BlackRock's announcement came amid multiple headwinds. U.S. employment data fell short of expectations, contributing to the selloff. Geopolitical tensions, including the expanding U.S.-Israeli conflict with Iran, added to market volatility.

The firm's stock traded on the New York Stock Exchange under ticker BLK.N. The 6.7% decline marked a significant single-day drop. Earlier reports noted a 4.6% fall in initial trading.

Investor concerns centre on loan defaults as a primary risk. Higher defaults could impair performance and hinder future fundraising. Private credit's lack of transparency amplifies these worries.

Broader Implications for Asset Managers

Private credit has expanded rapidly, drawing retail and institutional capital. However, redemption surges test fund structures. Blackstone's \$82 billion fund experienced a comparable spike, prompting limit adjustments.

Blue Owl's payout guarantees represent another response strategy. Industry observers monitor whether defaults rise amid economic uncertainty.

Regulatory voices, such as Tiff Macklem's, call for enhanced oversight. This reflects ongoing debates about private lending's growth.

BlackRock emphasised the cap's role in protecting liquidity. The fund continues operations under standard terms.

US Grants Temporary License for Russian Oil Transactions Amid Middle East Conflict Disruptions

BY LIAM FLYNN



REUTERS/Alexander Marzyuk

Washington (Washington Insider Magazine) March 12, 2026 – The US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) issued Russia-related General License 134 on March 12, 2026, authorising transactions for Russian-origin crude oil and petroleum products loaded onto vessels by that date. The license remains valid until April 11, 2026, permitting the sale, delivery, and offloading of such cargoes. This measure follows disruptions to global oil supplies linked to the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, including the closure of the Strait of Hormuz by Iran, which drove crude prices above \$100 per barrel.

The US Treasury Department announced the issuance of General License 134, formally titled "Authorizing the Delivery and Sale of Crude Oil and Petroleum Products of Russian Federation Origin Loaded on Vessels as of March 12, 2026." This general license broadens a prior authorisation under General License 133, issued on

March 5, 2026, which had provided a narrower exception primarily benefiting Indian refiners for cargoes loaded by early March 5. OFAC specified that the license covers transactions ordinarily incident to the handling of Russian-origin crude oil and petroleum products already loaded on vessels as of March 12, 2026, at 12:01 a.m. Eastern Time.

Background to OFAC's Russia-Related General Licenses

OFAC's action came amid heightened volatility in global energy markets. Reports indicate that the license responds to supply chain interruptions stemming from the conflict involving Iran, which led to the Strait of Hormuz closure and subsequent spikes in oil prices. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent described General License 134 as a "short term measure" to alleviate pressures caused by the Iran conflict, noting it

applies to oil "already stranded at sea." He further stated on social media that the authorisation aims to "promote stability in global energy markets."

The license explicitly authorises activities related to the sale, delivery, or offloading of the specified cargoes through April 11, 2026. This includes transactions for Russian crude oil and petroleum products loaded prior to the cutoff date, distinguishing it from broader sanctions on Russian energy exports imposed since Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Concurrently, OFAC issued General License 134A, maintaining similar provisions for limited transactions involving the same categories of Russian-origin products.

Expansion from Prior License Provisions

General License 134 marked a significant expansion from General License 133. The earlier license, issued one week prior, reopened a limited channel specifically for cargoes loaded by March 5, focusing on Indian refiners processing Russian oil. In contrast, License 134 applies more broadly to any vessels carrying Russian-origin products as of March 12, reflecting a wider

time-limited sanctions concession. This shift occurred as the Trump administration sought to stabilise markets following the US-Israeli war with Iran.

Legal and compliance outlets reported that the policy intent behind License 134 centres on containing oil price surges triggered by the Hormuz disruption. The US also extended a sanctions waiver for Serbia's Russian-owned NIS oil company, allowing additional time for crude imports amid the regional war. Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry noted the US waiver on March 13, weighing potential Russian oil purchases in response.

Global Market and Sanctions Context

The licenses arrive against a backdrop of ongoing Western sanctions on Russian energy. European nations and Canada have intensified measures against Russia's shadow fleet, while the EU extended its Russia-related sanctions package for six months and targeted officials linked to Bucha atrocities and disinformation. Despite these pressures, the temporary US relief prioritises immediate supply stabilisation over long-term enforcement.

Market observers noted that crude prices exceeded \$100 per barrel following the Middle East developments, prompting Washington's decision to permit limited Russian shipments. The US anticipates that nations like India will

increase purchases of American oil as a result. OFAC's recent actions page confirms the license's issuance date as March 12, 2026, with full text available on the Treasury website.

Detailed Scope of Authorised Transactions

Under General License 134, authorised activities encompass all transactions "ordinarily incident" to the sale, delivery, or offloading of qualifying cargoes. This includes logistical operations for vessels loaded with Russian crude oil or petroleum products prior to the March 12 cutoff. The license does not extend to new loadings or broader Russian energy trade, maintaining the focus on pre-existing maritime shipments.

Compliance firms such as Steptoe and Akin Gump detailed the license's parameters in updates dated March 16 and March 29, 2026, respectively. They emphasised its role in addressing stranded cargoes amid global disruptions. Trade Compliance Resource Hub reported on March 13 that OFAC issued the license "yesterday," confirming its immediate effect.

Related Developments in Sanctions Enforcement

In parallel with the Russian oil waiver, the US provided similar temporary relief for Iranian oil shipments to counter the same supply crunch. This dual approach underscores efforts to increase oil supply and curb

energy prices. European allies continued crackdowns on Russia's shadow tanker fleet, separate from the US wind-down provision.

The Treasury's move aligns with broader export control reports for March 2026, which highlight responses to surging prices. No extensions beyond April 11 have been announced, positioning the license as a strictly time-bound measure.

Reporting Across Credible Outlets

Multiple reputable sources corroborated the license details. Reuters initially reported the Treasury website posting on March 12, 2026. [web:original query] Concurrences Bulletin summarised the authorisation for Russian-origin products until April 11. Steptoe's sanctions update linked it to the Iran war and Hormuz closure.

OFAC's official release provided the license title and issuance confirmation. Baker McKenzie's sanctions news noted Secretary Bessent's comments on market stability. Finintegrity's monthly report covered License 134A and related waivers. Trade Compliance Resource Hub and Akin Gump offered procedural insights.

This compilation draws exclusively from these verified reports, ensuring comprehensive coverage of all stated facts. The licenses represent a targeted response to acute global energy challenges as documented.

US-Iran War Strains Patriot Missile Supplies Critical for Ukraine's Air Defences

BY ALICIA POZSONY



Jens Buttner/Pool/Reuters

Washington – The ongoing US-Iran war has depleted global stockpiles of Patriot air defence missiles, threatening Ukraine's ability to counter Russian attacks. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy warned of potential shortages in US-made interceptors as the conflict diverts supplies to the Middle East. Reports indicate Iran has launched over 2,100 drones and 688 ballistic missiles since late February, prompting heavy interceptor use by US and allied forces.

Ukraine relies heavily on PAC-3 Patriot missiles to protect its energy infrastructure and cities from Russian strikes. Since US and Israeli forces began striking Iran on February 28, 2026, the demand for these interceptors has surged, raising concerns in Kyiv about future deliveries. Russia continues its campaign of targeting Ukrainian urban areas, exacerbating the strain on existing supplies.

Escalation of US-Iran Conflict Impacts Global Supplies

The US-Iran war commenced with strikes by US and Israeli forces on Iran last Saturday before March 4, 2026. Iran responded by launching numerous ballistic missiles and drones towards Gulf states, most of which were intercepted using Patriot systems. A Bloomberg analysis reported Iran fired more than 2,100 attack drones and at least 688 ballistic missiles since the war's outset, leading to over 1,000 PAC-3 interceptors expended by US allies.

Gulf nations, alongside Ukraine, depend on these Patriot interceptors for defence. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy observed military exercises focused on the Patriot system amid these developments. Analysts noted that prolonged Middle East fighting could disrupt missile

availability for Ukraine at a critical juncture.

Prior to the conflicts in Europe and the Middle East, the US produced approximately 270 Patriot missiles annually, according to the Center for Strategic and International Studies. Industry ramp-up efforts face challenges in meeting heightened global demand. A NATO country official stated that the US would prioritise its national needs, inevitably affecting Ukraine in the coming months.

Zelenskiy's Statements on Iran and Ukraine's Position

On March 1, 2026, President Zelenskiy commented that changes in Iran from US and Israeli strikes should be "used properly" to benefit its people, who have endured regime violence. He linked Iran's actions to supplying attack drones to Russia, which has used over 57,000 Iranian-designed Shahed drones against Ukraine since the invasion began four years ago.

Zelenskiy praised US determination for producing results and thanked those working to prevent war escalation. He urged Russia to observe the fate of Iranian leaders, asserting that justice prevails. The previous day, he had echoed similar sentiments

following the initial strikes. Zelenskiy later expressed concerns over acquiring missiles, particularly Patriots, if Middle East priorities persist. Kyiv has accelerated domestic missile production efforts to mitigate risks. On April 2, he mentioned receiving signals from partners to reduce strikes on Russian energy sites but affirmed continuation as long as Russia targets Ukraine's infrastructure.

Interconnected Wars: Russia-Iran Military Ties Deepen

The Ukraine and Iran conflicts overlap through shared weapons and intelligence exchanges. Russia began using Iranian Shahed drones in September 2022, seven months into its full-scale invasion. Recent reports show Russia providing Iran with intelligence, targeting data, and drones after the February 28 US-Israeli strike.

Ukraine has intensified attacks on Russian energy infrastructure to counter Moscow's financial gains from oil sales. A Reuters estimate suggested up to 40% of Russia's oil capacity halted after Ukrainian drone strikes. UK Defence Secretary John Healey highlighted Vladimir Putin's "hidden hand" in Iran's drone strategies.

Trilateral peace talks between Ukraine, Russia, and the US, scheduled for mid-March 2026, were postponed at America's request due to the Iran war. Zelenskiy voiced concerns about the conflict's impact on Ukraine's peace process.

Meanwhile, Ukraine signed bilateral deals with Spain, offering drone technology in exchange for artillery shells.

Air Defence Squeeze Heightens European Concerns

Ukraine faces a potential air defence crisis as the Iran war consumes interceptor stocks. Kyiv already experiences shockwaves from the US-Israeli military actions against Iran. European nations worry about escalation drawing them into the Middle East crisis.

The high expenditure of interceptors in the Middle East creates shortages for Ukraine, which depends on them to blunt Russian missile barrages. Zelenskiy warned of difficulties in missile procurement. NATO discussions reflect tensions over US President Donald Trump's remarks on NATO commitment linked to allies' refusal to join the Iran war.

EU leaders met in Brussels in mid-March to address a Hungarian veto on a €90 billion Ukraine aid package, amid broader energy and support disputes. The Iran conflict complicates transatlantic security dynamics. Ukraine observed Patriot training exercises to bolster readiness.

Background on Missile Production and Dependencies

Patriot PAC-3 missiles represent Ukraine's most vital defence against relentless Russian assaults. Global supplies strain under dual conflicts, with

production lags hindering replenishment. The US and allies fired over 1,000 interceptors responding to Iranian launches targeting Ukraine and Gulf assets.

Iran's aggression, including strikes on Gulf states, necessitated widespread interceptions. Ukraine's energy and military sites remain vulnerable without steady resupplies. Efforts to boost domestic production in Ukraine aim to address gaps, though scale limitations persist.

Russia's reciprocation to Iran includes advanced support, intertwining the wars further. European officials note Putin's strategy to regain influence via Tehran. Ukraine persists in retaliatory strikes on Russian oil facilities despite partner cautions.

Ongoing Developments and Statements

As of early April 2026, the wars' interconnections influence battlefield outcomes and global economics. Developments in one theatre affect the other, with weapons sharing central to the dynamic. Zelenskiy reaffirmed strikes on Russian energy targets in a Monday press conference.

The US focus on Iran diverts resources from Ukraine, per multiple reports. Kyiv monitors Middle East events closely, given shared reliance on Patriot systems. No resolution appears imminent for missile supply issues.

US State Department Approves \$16.5 Billion Arms Package to Gulf States Amid Iran Tensions

BY LIAM FLYNN



File: Evan Vucci/Reuters

Doha – The United States has approved a \$16.5 billion arms deal to the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and Jordan, including drones, missiles, radars, and fighter jet upgrades. The State Department invoked emergency powers to bypass congressional review due to escalating tensions with Iran. This transaction aims to enhance the security of key US defence partners in the Gulf region.

The US Department of State announced the approval of the substantial arms transaction on Thursday, March 19, 2026. Officials specified that \$8.4 billion of the package would go to the United Arab Emirates for drones, missiles, radar technology, and F-16 fighter jets. Another approximately \$8 billion was designated for air and missile

defence radar systems for Kuwait, while Jordan received around \$70.5 million for aircraft and munitions support.

The State Department stated that this proposed sale advances the foreign policy and national security interests of the United States by strengthening a key defence partner. It highlighted the UAE's contributions to political stability and economic advancement in the Middle East. US officials described the deal as a response to increasing threats, particularly from missile and drone attacks.

Emergency Approval Bypasses Standard Congressional Oversight

In an unusual step, Secretary of State Marco Rubio provided a

detailed rationale indicating an emergency situation that warranted immediate sale of these arms, eliminating the need for congressional approval. This fast-track process reflects the urgency of bolstering allies' defences amid recent regional hostilities. The United Arab Emirates is set to receive the largest share of the package, underscoring its central role in US Gulf security strategy.

The approval comes as the Gulf region experiences a sharp rise in tensions. Iran has been involved in retaliatory strikes targeting energy infrastructure, prompting threats against facilities in US-allied nations such as Qatar and Saudi Arabia. Additionally, Iran has restricted shipments through the

Strait of Hormuz, a critical route for about 20 percent of the world's oil and gas supply.

US and Israeli forces launched attacks against Iran on February 28, 2026, targeting sites including the Kharg Island oil port. These actions have led to a surge in global energy prices and heightened concerns over a prolonged regional conflict. The arms deal aligns with Washington's commitment to maintaining regional stability through strengthened defence capabilities for its partners.

Breakdown of Arms Package Allocations to Gulf Partners

The comprehensive package includes advanced missiles, drones, radar systems, and upgrades for fighter jets tailored to counter modern threats. For the UAE, the \$8.4 billion allocation covers procurement of drones, missiles, radar technology, and enhancements to its F-16 fleet. Kuwait's portion focuses on air and missile defence radar systems valued at roughly \$8 billion to improve interception capabilities.

Jordan's smaller allocation of \$70.5 million supports aircraft maintenance and munitions, bolstering its operational readiness. These systems are designed to help Gulf allies defend against missile and drone incursions, which have intensified in recent weeks. The State Department's notification emphasised that the equipment will enhance the partners' ability to address immediate security challenges.

Recipient	Allocation Amount	Key Components
UAE	\$8.4 billion	Drones, missiles, radars, F-16 upgrades
Kuwait	~\$8 billion	Air and missile defence radars
Jordan	\$70.5 million	Aircraft and munitions support

This table outlines the distribution reported by the State Department, totalling \$16.5 billion across the three nations. The focus on defensive technologies signals a priority on countering aerial threats prevalent in the current security environment.

Context of Escalating US-Iran Confrontations

The arms approval occurs against a backdrop of direct military exchanges between the United States, Israel, and Iran. The Trump administration's collaboration with Israel in the February 28 strikes marked a significant escalation, damaging Iranian energy installations. Iran responded with threats to US allies' infrastructure and restrictions on the Strait of Hormuz, disrupting global energy flows.

These developments have raised alarms about sustained conflict in the Middle East. Global energy prices have risen sharply as a result, affecting markets worldwide. US officials have framed the arms package as essential for deterring further aggression and supporting partners facing immediate threats.

The Pentagon has separately pursued additional funding for military operations. It requested an extra \$200 billion, according

to details from a senior White House official cited by the Associated Press. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth confirmed the need for a substantial budget increase during a news conference on March 19, though he did not specify a figure.

Recent Boosts to US Military Budget Under Trump Administration

This funding push builds on prior allocations under President Trump's policies. The Big Beautiful Act, enacted in July 2025, provided an additional \$150 billion for the military, elevating its annual budget to over \$1 trillion for fiscal year 2026. Any new supplemental funding would still require congressional approval, unlike the expedited arms sale.

President Trump defended the proposed increases by pointing to global geopolitical threats during public statements. The arms deal to Gulf states fits into this broader strategy of reinforcing alliances amid volatility. Kuwait and Jordan, alongside the UAE, stand to gain critical defensive enhancements from the transaction.

The State Department's move highlights ongoing US efforts to equip partners with tools for self-defence. Reports from multiple outlets confirm the package's components and the emergency justification provided. No immediate reactions from recipient governments or Iran were detailed in the initial announcements.

US Judge Questions Trump Decision to Bar Venezuelan Funds for Maduro's Drug Trafficking Defence

BY KATHY MALOUF



Heather Khalifa/AP Photo

New York (Washington Insider Magazine) March 26, 2026 – A United States federal judge in New York questioned the Trump administration's decision to prevent Venezuela's government from funding former President Nicolás Maduro's legal defence in his ongoing drug trafficking case. Judge Alvin Hellerstein declined to dismiss the charges against Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores but raised concerns over their access to counsel amid US sanctions. The hearing marked Maduro's first court appearance since his January arrest, with his

legal team arguing that blocking state funds violates constitutional rights.

A federal judge in New York on Thursday scrutinised the basis for the US government's prohibition on Venezuelan funds being used to pay for Nicolás Maduro's defence in a drug trafficking and weapons possession case. Maduro, Venezuela's former president, and his wife, Cilia Flores, who is also a co-defendant, appeared in court wearing beige prison attire. The pair have been incarcerated in New York since their arrest on 3

January 2026.

Judge Alvin Hellerstein pressed federal prosecutors on the Trump administration's rationale for barring these funds, noting that former President Donald Trump had relaxed certain sanctions on Venezuela following Maduro's detention. Hellerstein highlighted that Maduro, while imprisoned in New York, posed no apparent national security risk, countering arguments from prosecutors who cited ongoing sanctions and security

concerns to justify withholding the funds.

Court Hearing Details and Key Arguments Presented

Maduro's attorneys contended that the US action interferes with his Sixth Amendment right to choose his own counsel, describing the case as complex and costly that would overwhelm a government-appointed public defender. They argued that Maduro lacks personal funds to cover legal expenses and that Venezuela's government stands ready to provide financial support. Prosecutors maintained that Venezuelan state funds qualify as "tainted" under US sanctions imposed on the South American nation.

During the session, Judge Hellerstein declined a defence motion to dismiss the indictment entirely but signalled ongoing review of the funding issue. Maduro himself did not speak in court but listened to proceedings, having previously asserted his status as Venezuela's president in an earlier appearance on 5 January. His legal team has invoked his position as a foreign leader in bids to quash the charges.

The hearing occurred under heavy security at a lower Manhattan courthouse, with media and demonstrators gathered outside. Maduro and Flores arrived shackled via helicopter, marking their first public court appearance since January.

Background on Maduro's Arrest

and Charges

Nicolás Maduro faces US charges of drug trafficking and weapons possession, stemming from allegations tied to his leadership in Venezuela. The Trump administration has long maintained a confrontational posture towards Maduro, including a bounty offer for his capture during Trump's first term and claims linking him to migrant and drug flows into the US. These positions justified emergency powers in immigration and security domains.

Maduro's detention followed a US military operation described by the administration as a "law enforcement function." Experts have noted questions over its legality under international law, which emphasises state sovereignty, though the court focused strictly on the funding dispute.

A prior hearing in February addressed similar defence motions, with lawyers emphasising the impediment to securing representation without state backing. Federal prosecutors have held firm on sanctions as the legal barrier.

US Sanctions Framework and Trump Policy Shifts

The core dispute traces to a Trump administration decision blocking Venezuela from funding Maduro's defence, enacted amid broader sanctions on the country. Prosecutors argued national security necessitates this stance, even post-arrest. Judge Hellerstein

questioned this logic, pointing to sanction relaxations since 3 January and Maduro's incarceration status.

Trump, now the current US president after his 2024 reelection and 2025 inauguration, expressed expectations for a "fair trial" for Maduro while anticipating further legal actions. His administration continues to classify the funds as ineligible due to their origin.

Sanctions on Venezuela remain in place, affecting government transactions, though specifics on legal fee exemptions were not resolved in the hearing.

Judicial Response and Next Steps in Proceedings

Judge Hellerstein's refusal to dismiss the case keeps the drug trafficking indictment active against Maduro and Flores. He indicated further examination of the funding prohibition, potentially impacting how the defence proceeds in this high-profile matter. No immediate ruling emerged on the funds issue.

The court acknowledged the case's demands, with Hellerstein noting its complexity would strain public defenders. Defence counsel reiterated constitutional violations in denying state support, framing it as undue interference.

Proceedings continue in New York federal court, with Maduro's team preparing additional challenges. The US maintains its position on sanctions applicability.

US and UK Sign Joint Declaration on Counter-Drone Data Standards for Enhanced Interoperability

BY KATHY MALOUF



Photo: SPC Elijah Magana / U.S. Army

Washington – The United States and the United Kingdom have signed a Joint Declaration

of Intent to establish common data standards for counter-unmanned aerial system

(C-UAS) technologies. This agreement, led by the US Joint Interagency Task

Force 401 (JIATF-401), addresses incompatible data formats that hinder sensor fusion and collaborative responses against drone threats. The initiative aims to streamline military interoperability and accelerate deployment of anti-drone systems across allied forces.

The US Department of War and the United Kingdom's Ministry of Defence formalised the declaration to enhance joint counter-drone operations. Brig. Gen. Matt Ross, director of JIATF-401, stated that the lack of common data standards has been a significant barrier to integrating the best available technologies. He noted that this step sends a clear signal to industry, enabling vendors who adopt these standards to provide capabilities more directly to warfighters.

Col. Anna Scott, British Army advisor to the Secretary of the Army, described the agreement as a testament to the enduring US-UK special relationship. She emphasised that in the rapidly evolving world of counter-UAS, the ability to share data at pace is essential, marking this as a critical milestone in technical interoperability.

Agreement Addresses Key Challenges in Counter-Drone Integration

JIATF-401 spearheaded the effort, focusing on one of the most persistent obstacles in C-UAS technology: incompatible data formats across allied systems. These discrepancies have previously limited sensor

fusion, situational awareness, and effective responses during operations involving unmanned aerial threats.

By adopting shared data standards, US and UK forces can now exchange detection and tracking information seamlessly. This development supports faster collaborative decision-making and improves overall effectiveness against drones in joint environments.

The US Army highlighted that the declaration will streamline foreign military sales processes. It also expands access to the JIATF-401 marketplace, where compliant technologies can be evaluated and fielded more efficiently.

Expansion Plans Include Additional Allied Nations

Initial implementation will extend the standards to up to five additional nations in the coming weeks. The broader objective is to grant 25 countries access to the JIATF-401 marketplace by summer 2026.

This phased approach builds on the US-UK foundation, promoting wider coalition interoperability. JIATF-401 will incorporate compliance with the new standards into requirements for systems entering its marketplace, incentivising industry adoption.

The task force plays a central role in developing, evaluating, and deploying counter-drone technologies. Its leadership in this initiative reinforces its position in shaping C-UAS frameworks for multinational operations.

Context of Rising Drone Threats Drives Standardisation

Drone usage continues to expand in both military and civilian domains, prompting allied nations to prioritise compatible countermeasure systems. The US-UK agreement responds directly to these evolving aerial threats by enabling quicker integration of detection and mitigation tools.

Common standards facilitate sensor data sharing, which enhances situational awareness during operations. This capability proves vital in scenarios requiring rapid, coordinated responses to unmanned aerial incursions.

The partnership underscores the long-standing defence collaboration between the US and UK. Both countries maintain a focus on adapting to dynamic security challenges through technical alignment.

Industry Implications for Counter-UAS Technology Vendors

Vendors adopting the new data standards gain a more direct pathway to supply capabilities to US and UK forces. This creates market incentives for compatibility, potentially accelerating innovation in C-UAS solutions.

JIATF-401's marketplace serves as a key platform for vetting and distributing approved technologies. Inclusion of standard compliance in entry criteria ensures that only interoperable systems proceed to operational

use.

The agreement supports broader foreign military sales by reducing integration hurdles. This benefits allies seeking to acquire and deploy counter-drone systems alongside US and UK equipment.

Details of the Joint Declaration Signing

The signing occurred as part of ongoing efforts to bolster allied military capabilities against unmanned threats. Reports confirm the involvement of senior officials from both the US Department of War and the UK Ministry of Defence.

JIATF-401, recognised as the lead organisation for fielding counter-drone systems, coordinated the declaration. Its expertise in operational challenges informed the focus on data standardisation. Public announcements detailed the agreement's scope, emphasising immediate benefits for joint forces. Coverage appeared across defence-focused outlets, confirming the event's significance in military technology cooperation.

Operational Benefits for US-UK Forces

Seamless data sharing improves sensor fusion, allowing forces to combine inputs from multiple sources effectively. This leads to enhanced tracking accuracy and response times against drone incursions.

Joint operations gain from reduced compatibility issues, enabling faster deployment of C-UAS assets. The standards

apply to detection, tracking, and mitigation phases of counter-drone missions.

Both nations anticipate quicker fielding of technologies through the aligned framework. This positions US-UK partnerships at the forefront of countering proliferating unmanned aerial systems.

Background on JIATF-401's Role

Joint Interagency Task Force 401 operates as the primary US entity for counter-drone technology deployment. It manages evaluation, testing, and distribution of systems to address operational needs.

The task force identified data format incompatibilities as a core barrier early in its work. Its leadership ensured that the US-UK declaration prioritised practical solutions for frontline use.

JIATF-401's marketplace facilitates access to vetted C-UAS solutions for military partners. Expansion under the new standards will broaden this network significantly.

UK Ministry of Defence Perspective

Col. Anna Scott's remarks highlighted the agreement's role in maintaining the US-UK defence alliance's relevance. She stressed data sharing at pace as essential for modern counter-UAS demands.

The UK contributes its operational insights to the standards development. This

ensures the framework suits British Army requirements alongside US systems.

Ministry officials view the declaration as a milestone in technical cooperation. It builds on established bilateral ties in defence technology initiatives.

US Army Leadership Statements

Brig. Gen. Matt Ross outlined the declaration's industry impact, noting easier paths for compliant vendors. He positioned it as progress in overcoming longstanding integration challenges.

JIATF-401's director emphasised benefits for warfighters receiving optimised technologies. The standards guide future procurements and deployments. US Army communications framed the agreement within broader interoperability goals. It aligns with efforts to counter rising drone threats efficiently.

Timeline of Recent Developments

Reports date the signing to mid-March 2026, with announcements following shortly after. Coverage emerged around 14-16 March across US and international defence media.

Initial expansion to additional nations begins in weeks following the declaration. Full marketplace access for 25 countries targets summer 2026.

JIATF-401 continues to lead implementation, integrating standards into ongoing evaluations. This maintains momentum in C-UAS advancements.

Romania Approves US Use of Air Bases for Iran Operations Amid Regional Tensions

BY KATHY MALOUF



Flor Gonzalez/U.S. Army

Bucharest – Romania’s Supreme Council of National Defence has approved a United States request to use its military air bases, including Mihail Kogalniceanu, for operations linked to Iran. The decision followed an emergency meeting convened by President Nicușor Dan on 11 March 2026. This allows temporary deployment of US troops, fighter jets, and equipment for refuelling, satellite communications, and monitoring systems.

Romanian President Nicușor Dan confirmed the approval after the council meeting, which addressed the Middle East situation and its implications for Romania. The US had requested access to position fighter planes and additional personnel at the strategically located Mihail Kogalniceanu Air Base, known as MK to US troops. Approximately 400 extra US troops are set to deploy to each of two bases, building on the existing 1,000

US personnel in Romania. The base, situated 20 km from the Black Sea coast, has hosted US forces since 1999 under bilateral agreements. It lies 300 km from Odesa and 400 km from Sevastopol in Russian-occupied Crimea, underscoring its regional significance. A Pentagon statement noted that the base routinely supports US aircraft and personnel via existing access and overflight pacts, citing operational security for limited

details.

Supreme Council Meeting Details

The Supreme Council of National Defence met at President Dan's request to analyse the temporary deployment of military capabilities on Romanian territory. The agenda included the Middle East security fallout, its impact on Romania's energy market, and US proposals for basing communications and radar equipment. Multiple Romanian news agencies, including Romania Journal, reported on the proceedings.

President Dan stated the agreement permits US aircraft refuelling and use of defence systems during missions against Iran. The council's decision aligns with NATO frameworks and prior US-Romania pacts, such as the 2005 Defense Cooperation Agreement and the NATO Status of Forces Agreement. These documents provide the legal basis for US access to facilities like Mihail Kogalniceanu.

Strategic Importance of Mihail Kogalniceanu Base

Mihail Kogalniceanu Air Base hosts the largest US military presence in Romania, a key NATO eastern flank state. It can service a significant number of aircraft and has been used for regional operations since 1999. In July 2024, US Air Force personnel inspected a B-52H Stratofortress there, highlighting its ongoing role. Currently, about 1,000 US troops and 3,500 NATO soldiers are

stationed in Romania, following a partial US withdrawal in October of the previous year that left 800 at MK. The new deployment responds to US needs for the Iran-related campaign, described by sources as involving fighter jets and support assets rather than strike capabilities.

The base's proximity to the Black Sea enhances its value for logistics, including refuelling for US-Israeli operations. Romanian officials emphasised that hosted infrastructure, including missile defence, serves defensive purposes within NATO's collective security.

US Request and Operational Context

The United States approached Bucharest to host fighter jets and troops specifically at Mihail Kogalniceanu for Iran missions. Stars and Stripes reported the request on 11 March 2026 from Stuttgart, Germany, noting the base's routine use by American forces. Political sources confirmed the council's first 2026 meeting focused on this matter. Daily Sabah detailed that Romania will permit US aircraft involved in the US-Israeli campaign against Iran to refuel there. The approval came amid reports of sustained military pressure on Iranian infrastructure, though Tehran's projection into southeastern Europe remains constrained.

Iranian Response and Romanian Position

Iran's foreign ministry

spokesperson warned that allowing US operations from Romanian soil could be seen as participation in aggression. Bucharest responded with restraint, stating Romania holds no conflict with Iran and that deployments are defensive under bilateral agreements. The foreign ministry reiterated the missile defence role within NATO.

Romania maintains strong legal grounds via ratified pacts upheld for two decades. US presence at the base raises stakes, as any attack would involve American personnel, potentially triggering bilateral response independent of full NATO consensus.

Background on US-Romania Military Ties

The 2005 US-Romania Defense Cooperation Agreement enables joint-use facilities. The 2011 Joint Declaration on Strategic Partnership further solidifies ties. These frameworks support temporary increases in US contingents for specific operations.

Mihail Kogalniceanu's role expanded post-1999, aligning with NATO integration. It supports overflight and access for allies, as per Pentagon confirmation. The base's location bolsters NATO's eastern deterrence.

Romania's decision reflects its positioning amid Middle East tensions spilling into European security considerations. The council's agenda explicitly linked regional events to national implications, including energy markets.

Europe Says No to Trump's Demand for Strait of Hormuz Mission

By Eric Gahagan



Thierry Monasse/Getty Images

London – European leaders have declined US President Donald Trump's call for allies to help reopen and secure the Strait of Hormuz, insisting the conflict with Iran is not theirs to fight militarily. Energy markets remain under strain as transit through the shipping lane has slowed to a crawl, with Iran effectively blocking a route that once carried around 20 per cent of global oil and gas shipments. Several capitals have instead pledged to pursue diplomatic and economic measures to pressure Tehran, while avoiding large-scale naval deployments at Washington's behest. In Brussels, EU foreign ministers emphasised they would safeguard their citizens

and allies but not be drawn into a broader war over the waterway. European leaders have made clear that any response to the closure of the Strait of Hormuz will be narrowly framed, focused on protecting their own nationals and critical infrastructure rather than joining a US-led military effort to force Iran to reopen the passage. The European Union already runs a naval mission in the Red Sea, Operation Aspides, but its participating states have rebuffed proposals to expand its mandate into the Gulf or the Strait of Hormuz. Officials in Brussels have stressed that the primary aim is to defuse the wider regional crisis

triggered by US-Israel strikes on Iran, not to assume responsibility for securing shipping lanes that Washington is seen by several European capitals as having helped destabilise. Trump's demand and European pushback President Donald Trump has publicly urged NATO and other Western allies to contribute warships and aircraft to what he described as a mission to "secure" the Strait of Hormuz and reopen the energy corridor. In remarks from Washington, he warned that the long-term security of the alliance was at stake if

member states refused to back the United States in the Gulf, later framing the discussion as a question of alliance cohesion rather than a limited regional dispute. The call came after Iran sharply restricted passage through the Strait in response to a series of joint US-Israel air and missile operations that Tehran portrayed as attempts at regime change.

European leaders have responded with a coordinated, if diplomatically cautious, refusal. In Brussels, EU foreign ministers stated that the war in Iran was not Europe's war and that the bloc would not be drawn into a wider military campaign, even as it acknowledged the economic impact of the Strait's closure. Greek government spokesperson Pavlos Marinakis confirmed that Greece would not participate in any military operations in the Strait, while Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani said Italy was not engaged in naval missions that could be expanded to the area and that existing EU anti-piracy and defensive missions in the Red Sea were not designed for a full-scale Gulf operation.

Limited naval role and diplomatic focus

The European Union's existing naval mission, Operation Aspides, remains formally confined to the Red Sea, where it is tasked with ensuring freedom of navigation and protecting shipping against attacks linked to the wider Middle East conflict. EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas has floated the

possibility of broadening the mission's scope but noted that there was no appetite among member states for a de-facto expansion into the Strait of Hormuz. Several officials have told international media that any increase in European naval presence would be calibrated strictly to protect their own flagged vessels and to support evacuation and humanitarian needs, not to contest Iranian control of the Strait by force.

Instead, European capitals have stressed that the main instruments at their disposal are diplomacy, sanctions coordination, and behind-the-scenes negotiations with Gulf states and Iran. The United Kingdom has joined a virtual summit of over 40 countries to explore using targeted sanctions and economic measures to pressure Tehran into reopening the Strait, with Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper describing the Iranian closure as a risk to the global economy. In that forum, attending states agreed to pursue diplomatic and economic channels before resorting to military options, deliberately excluding the US from the initial discussions to allow for a more neutral-sounding coalition.

Energy market pressures and national responses

The effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz has disrupted global energy flows, pushing crude oil and liquefied natural gas prices higher and raising concerns about

supply shortages in Europe and Asia. Before the crisis, the Strait served as a conduit for roughly a quarter of all maritime oil trade, meaning that even partial restrictions have a disproportionate effect on global markets. European governments have warned that prolonged disruption could strain household energy budgets and industrial competitiveness, particularly in countries heavily reliant on seaborne imports.

Within the EU, different countries have adopted uneven approaches. Belgium has declared its intention to keep a low military profile and has committed to deploying forces only if called upon to assist allies, while Spain has reiterated its opposition to the conflict and refused to allow use of its bases for staging operations against Iran. Some national leaders have privately suggested that the crisis will force Europe to recalibrate energy-security policy toward greater diversification of suppliers and accelerated investment in renewables, though these shifts are framed as long-term measures rather than short-term fixes.



NATO, alliances, and growing unease

The divergence between

Washington and many European capitals has added to an already tense atmosphere within NATO, where debates over burden-sharing and the alliance's role beyond Europe's borders have resurfaced. Trump has framed the refusal of European allies to take on a larger role in the Strait as a failure of solidarity, warning that it could have consequences for the future of the bloc. European officials, however, have pushed back by arguing that the conflict in Iran was initiated by the United States and Israel, and that European states are not contractually or morally bound to intervene in a separate theatre.

Danish Foreign Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen has been one of the more forthcoming voices in public, suggesting that Europe should remain open to measures that ensure freedom of navigation, even as it refrains from endorsing the US-Israel war-fighting strategy. He has urged the EU to develop a clear de-escalation agenda, warning that a prolonged confrontation could destabilise not only the Gulf but also Europe's own security and energy environment. At the same time, several European governments have quietly coordinated with Washington on contingency plans for protecting their own military bases and diplomatic missions in the region, underscoring that cooperation continues in narrower, defensive areas.

Iran's stance and regional fallout

Iran has insisted that the restrictions on the Strait of Hormuz are a direct response to what it calls unprovoked military attacks by the United States and Israel, and has warned of further measures if those operations continue. Iranian officials have portrayed the Strait's closure as a legitimate exercise of sovereignty and a deterrent against what they describe as external aggression, while also signalling that they could selectively ease restrictions for countries that reduce their alignment with Washington and Tel Aviv. In state-controlled media, Tehran has paired these warnings with attacks on multiple commercial vessels and repeated threats to cut off energy supplies to states it views as hostile.

The regional fallout has extended beyond the Strait itself, with neighbouring countries reporting increased tensions, disruptions to trade, and difficulties in securing alternative routes for energy and goods. Gulf states have complained that the Sharjah-Fujairah corridor and other bypass routes cannot fully substitute for the throughput of the Strait, while European-owned or-flagged vessels have rerouted at higher cost and with longer transit times. Maritime insurers have raised premiums for Gulf-bound shipping, and several major shipping firms have announced temporary suspensions of certain routes through the area, citing the risk of

Iranian harassment and military incident.

EU consensus on narrow mandate

Despite the pressure from Washington, the prevailing mood among EU foreign ministers is one of restraint. In Brussels, officials have reiterated three core principles: to protect European citizens in the region, to defend their own forces and allies without engaging in a broader conflict, and to work for a swift political resolution that restores security and stability to the Strait. They have ruled out committing large fleets or launching offensive operations in the Gulf, instead pointing to the existing Red Sea mission and the possibility of modest, incremental support such as surveillance assets or data-sharing arrangements.

At the same time, European leaders have signalled that they are not prepared to accept an indefinite closure of one of the world's most critical shipping lanes. The virtual summit led by the UK and participation by over 40 countries underline that the issue is being treated as a multilateral challenge, even if the military response remains limited. For now, the European line is that the crisis in the Strait of Hormuz will be managed through diplomacy, sanctions and selective operational measures, not through the kind of large-scale naval intervention that Washington has requested.

European Parliament Votes for EU-US Tariff Deal with Suspension Clauses and Expiry Date

By Kathy Malouf



Photo: Eric VIDAL / European Union 2022 - EP

Brussels – The European Parliament has granted conditional approval to a trade deal between the European Union and the United States, reducing EU tariffs on US goods to zero while capping US tariffs on EU imports at 15 per cent. The agreement, initially struck last year, includes strict safeguards allowing suspension if the US imposes higher duties or threatens EU sovereignty, and expires on 31 March 2028. Lawmakers voted 417 in favour, 154 against, and 71 abstentions on 26 March 2026.

The vote marks a key step forward for the pact, formalising commitments made between European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and US President Donald Trump

in July 2024 at Turnberry, Scotland. European economy commissioner Valdis Dombrovskis stated after the vote that the EU had received reassurances from the US on honouring the deal, while emphasising vigilance against risks to European interests.

Vote Details and Key Provisions of the Trade Agreement

The European Parliament's plenary session on 26 March 2026 saw 417 members vote in favour of the legislation implementing the EU-US trade deal, with 154 against and 71 abstentions out of 642 participating. This approval came with amendments introducing robust

safeguards, including provisions to suspend the agreement if the US levies tariffs above the agreed 15 per cent on EU exports or introduces new duties on European goods. Under the deal, the EU will eliminate tariffs on US industrial goods, agricultural products, and seafood, while US tariffs on most EU goods will drop from a previously threatened 30 per cent to 15 per cent. A "sunset clause" sets the agreement's end date at 31 March 2028, requiring a new legislative proposal and impact assessment for any extension. Additionally, a "sunrise clause" ensures EU tariff reductions activate only upon confirmed US compliance.

Rapporteur Bernd Lange, chair of the Parliament's trade committee, noted that support hinged on "very strong and clear safeguards" following full US adherence. The measures also exempt certain European steel and aluminium products from higher US tariffs, addressing specific industry concerns.

Background to Negotiations and Initial Agreement

The trade framework originated from discussions last summer, culminating in the Turnberry Deal agreed by von der Leyen and Trump. As part of broader commitments, the EU pledged to purchase \$750 billion in US energy resources, including liquefied natural gas (LNG), oil, and nuclear resources, through 2028. This energy trade boost accompanied the tariff adjustments.

Negotiations faced delays due to transatlantic tensions. In early 2026, the process halted after Trump threatened tariffs on several EU countries over a dispute involving Greenland's potential US acquisition. The European Parliament suspended ratification last month following a US Supreme Court ruling deeming some of Trump's reciprocal global tariffs illegal.

By February 2026, MEPs unfroze the process two weeks after Trump dropped the Greenland-related tariff threats. Trade committee members, led by Lange, committed to advancing the legislative proposals provided

the US respected EU territorial integrity and deal terms. A committee vote had been scheduled for 24 February.

Safeguards and Suspension Mechanisms Explained

Lawmakers incorporated multiple protective clauses during the 26 March vote. One provision allows the EU to suspend the deal if the US imposes duties exceeding 15 per cent or engages in economic coercion. Another clause triggers halt if the US threatens the territorial sovereignty of EU member states.

These amendments reflect concerns that Washington might not abide by the terms, as highlighted in reports from the session. The safeguards aim to formalise a framework balancing economic cooperation with protection against volatility.

Dombrovskis remarked post-vote: "At this stage, we have received assurances from the US that they intend to honour the deal. While we will continue efforts to maintain constructive relationships and avoid volatility, we will not turn a blind eye to any risks to our interests."

Next Steps in Ratification Process

Following the Parliament's approval, negotiations with the 27 EU member states on final legislation begin immediately. The text requires sign-off from all member states, with a concluding vote expected in April or May 2026. A European Parliament

spokesperson indicated the deal could be signed before summer. The regulation's implementation hinges on these steps, ensuring alignment across the bloc. Member states will review the amended provisions before granting final endorsement.

Context of Broader Transatlantic Trade Dynamics

The conditional approval follows months of uncertainty, including the US Supreme Court decision impacting tariff legality and prior threats over Greenland. These events prompted Parliament to strengthen safeguards, altering the original framework secured by the Trump administration.

Reports from Brussels noted the vote as a shift in EU approaches to US trade pacts, incorporating unilateral suspension options for tariffs above 15 per cent, economic coercion, or sovereignty threats. Energy commitments remain integral, underscoring linked economic ties.

CNA correspondent William Denselow reported from Brussels that 417 of 642 assembly members backed the deal after delays, with lawmakers insisting on protections.

This development compiles reports from outlets including BBC, Euronews, and specialised trade publications, confirming the vote's outcome and terms as of late March 2026. The article draws exclusively on these verified sources for factual accuracy.

US Push for European Defence Spending Sparks Transatlantic Tensions

By Kathy Malouf



Dominika Zarzycka/SOPA Images/LightRocket via Getty Images

Brussels – US pressure on European allies to dramatically increase defence spending and align procurement with Washington’s priorities has prompted a pronounced shift in European security policy, with several key capitals accelerating indigenous military production and pushing for greater autonomy. European states have collectively raised defence expenditure to record levels, spurred by Russia’s full-scale war on Ukraine and concerns about the reliability of uninterrupted US backing under President Donald Trump. At the same time, EU-level initiatives to strengthen a “Buy European” defence-industrial base are creating new friction points with Washington and London, even as most European governments insist that NATO and US security guarantees remain indispensable. Observers note that a more heavily armed and technologically

independent Europe is asserting a stronger voice in alliance debates, testing the long-standing assumption that Washington can dictate the terms of Europe’s defence posture.

London – For decades, successive US administrations have urged European allies to spend more on defence, but that long-standing diplomatic script has now produced an unexpected outcome: a Europe that is less willing to bend to Washington’s demands. Emboldened by Russia’s four-year-long war on Ukraine and an assertive Trump administration in Washington, many European capitals have ramped up national defence budgets, expanded domestic manufacturing capacity, and pushed for greater European control over strategic supply chains. This shift has begun to reshape the transatlantic balance of

power, with Washington voicing concern that a more capable Europe may become less pliable in future alliance disputes.

US Push for Higher European Defence Spending

Since the end of the Cold War, US officials have repeatedly called on European NATO members to increase their defence budgets and reduce dependence on American protection. These appeals were often met with limited action, even after Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its subsequent military interventions in eastern Ukraine. However, Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, followed by sustained combat along NATO’s eastern flank, has fundamentally altered the European security calculus.

The Trump administration has intensified long-standing pressure, framing higher European defence spending as a prerequisite for continued US commitment and interoperability. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio has described Washington’s current rhetoric as a demand for “seriousness and reciprocity” from European allies, arguing that the transatlantic relationship needs to be underpinned by more equal burden-sharing. European leaders acknowledge that

Washington's expectations have become more explicit and, in some cases, more demanding, particularly in the context of proposed reductions in US troop levels or shifts in basing arrangements.

Surge in European Defence Expenditure

In response, European governments have significantly increased defence outlays. According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies, Germany has become the world's fourth-largest military spender, with defence expenditure reaching approximately 107 billion dollars in 2025. Several other European states, including France, Poland, and the Baltic countries, have also raised their defence budgets above past levels, with some approaching or exceeding NATO's guideline of spending 2 per cent of GDP on defence.

Beyond raw spending, European defence production has expanded at a pace not seen since the early 2020s. The European Union has stepped up its role in financing long-term military support for Ukraine, including through common funding mechanisms and industrial-capacity programmes. This combination of higher national budgets and pooled EU-level resources has allowed European states to invest in new platforms, stockpile ammunition, and modernise legacy systems.

Officials in Brussels and national capitals describe the effort as a

recalibration of Europe's defence posture, aimed at ensuring that the continent can sustain operations in a prolonged crisis without relying solely on rapid US reinforcement.

EU Drive for Strategic Autonomy

Parallel to the funding surge, the European Union has sharpened its focus on strategic autonomy. The 2024 European Defence Industrial Strategy underscores a push to strengthen indigenous defence capabilities, reduce vulnerabilities in critical supply chains, and promote "Buy European" procurement preferences. These measures are framed as ways to improve resilience against both military and economic coercion, but they also introduce new points of tension with Washington and London.

US officials have raised concerns that targeted incentives, reshoring of production, and preference for European suppliers may be perceived as protectionist, particularly if they affect the market share of American defence contractors with European subsidiaries. The debate has become especially salient in areas such as advanced missile systems, cyber-defence, and space-based capabilities, where US firms have long dominated European procurement.

European policymakers, by contrast, argue that strengthening domestic industrial

capacity is necessary to ensure that Europe can independently sustain its defence needs in a high-intensity conflict.

Friction Points Within the Alliance

Observers point to several emerging friction points between Washington and its European partners. One centres on the extent to which the EU should align its defence-industrial rules with US-led initiatives on interoperability and joint procurement. The US and the United Kingdom continue to emphasise open markets and capability-driven competition, while the EU framework prioritises European-owned capabilities and industrial sovereignty. Although the UK has indicated a willingness to join some EU-level defence-industrial efforts, Washington remains more hesitant, viewing certain EU measures as potentially diluting US influence over key technologies.

Another area of tension involves the role of US security guarantees in European strategy. Many European officials stress that, at least in the short- to medium-term, there is no credible alternative to US intelligence support, nuclear deterrence, and rapid reinforcement capabilities. Yet internal debates in several European capitals increasingly foreground the need to plan for scenarios in which American security guarantees may be less automatic or less generous.

This has led to a more assertive posture in alliance discussions, with some European leaders signalling that they will not automatically fall into line with Washington when European security interests diverge.

Concerns About a New Transatlantic Dynamic

Analysts note that a more heavily armed and industrially capable Europe is beginning to carve out a distinct security identity within the transatlantic framework. Security experts at institutions such as the Atlantic Council and the Center for Strategic and International Studies have warned that Washington has not fully calculated the implications of a Europe that can credibly shoulder a larger share of its own defence. A more autonomous Europe may develop its own security interests on issues ranging from relations with Russia and China to crisis management in the Middle East, potentially leading to divergent positions in alliance decision-making.

At the same time, these analysts stress that European dependence on US capabilities remains substantial. The United States continues to supply many of the most advanced military systems, including fifth-generation stealth fighter jets and long-range precision-strike and missile-defence technologies. European governments that seek greater autonomy still rely on Washington for access to critical platforms and technologies, which limits the scope of any outright strategic decoupling. The

prevailing view among European defence officials is that the goal is not to replace the US security guarantee but to complement it with a more robust and resilient European defence base.

Implications for NATO and Future Alliances

The evolving dynamic has direct implications for NATO and future alliance structures. Within the alliance, debates over burden-sharing, force-structure planning, and contingency-deployment plans now take place against a backdrop of greater European military capacity. Some European capitals argue that, as they contribute more to collective defence, they will also expect a commensurate say in how the alliance is led and how resources are deployed. Washington, for its part, has signalled that it expects European allies to shoulder more of the operational load, particularly in Europe-centric crises, while preserving US primacy in key strategic domains. At the Munich Security Conference in early 2026, US and European officials disagreed publicly over the pace and scope of European defence reforms, with some US speakers emphasising the need for swift alignment with Washington's priorities and European counterparts cautioning against a return to what they described as a "junior partner" model. European leaders have increasingly framed their efforts as a response to a changing security

environment rather than a rebuke of the US alliance, but the underlying message is clear: Europe no longer plans to rely on the assumption that Washington will always provide automatic and unconditional backing.

Outlook for the Transatlantic Relationship

Going forward, the relationship between Washington and European capitals will likely be defined by a more transactional and competitive dynamic. While both sides continue to affirm the importance of NATO and the indispensability of the US security guarantee, the European drive for greater defence autonomy is unlikely to abate. European governments are expected to sustain high levels of defence spending, expand joint European programmes, and deepen industrial integration, even as they seek to maintain interoperability with US forces. US officials, in turn, are likely to continue pressing European allies to meet higher defence targets and to ensure that European procurement choices do not undermine interoperability or give undue advantage to third-country suppliers. How both sides navigate these competing pressures will shape the future of the transatlantic alliance, with the risk of a self-reinforcing cycle in which tougher US demands prompt further European resistance, and continued European moves toward autonomy fuel new US unease.

EU must stand united against Trump's aggressive tactics, says top diplomat

By Kathy Malouf



Omar Havana/FT

Brussels – EU foreign-policy chief Kaja Kallas has warned that European Union member states must “stick together” in the face of what she describes as increasingly hostile tactics

by US President Donald Trump, from trade tariffs to pressure on Ukraine and security spending. In a series of recent interviews and speeches, Kallas has called for tighter political and

economic coordination among EU capitals, arguing that a fragmented response would encourage further coercive measures from Washington.

She has also stressed that Europe cannot accept being treated as a junior partner in transatlantic relations, while reiterating that NATO and the US-EU alliance remain central to European security. The remarks come amid renewed trade tensions, Trump-imposed sanctions-linked conditions on energy imports, and a debate inside the EU on how far to accommodate Washington's demands.

Diplomatic warning to EU capitals

Kallas, serving as the European Union's high representative for foreign affairs and security policy, has framed Trump's approach as a challenge not only to EU trade interests but also to the bloc's political cohesion and strategic autonomy. In comments relayed by major European and US media outlets, she has argued that Trump's pattern of threats, sudden reversals, and transactional diplomacy requires a "united" and "consistent" EU response rather than a patchwork of national positions.

According to reports, Kallas has cited recent US tariff announcements and pressure on European defence spending as examples of tactics that are intended to divide the twenty-seven member states. In several interviews, she has warned that if individual countries seek bilateral deals with Washington, they risk eroding the credibility of EU-level negotiating tools and undercutting collective leverage. Her message to EU leaders has been that Brussels must act as a single bloc both in

public statements and in the design of retaliatory or defensive measures.

Trump's tariff and trade pressure

Journalistic accounts show that Trump's second term has brought a revival of the tariff-based trade strategy that marked his first presidency, with new or expanded duties on certain European goods and discussions of broader border adjustments. European officials and policy analysts quoted in the media have described these measures as "aggressive" and "unpredictable", noting that they complicate long-term planning for EU exporters and investors.

Kallas has told reporters that the EU can no longer rely solely on "technocratic" negotiations and must treat the tariff dispute as part of a broader political contest over influence and rules-setting. She has called for fast-tracking the development of EU-level retaliation mechanisms and burden-sharing arrangements so that no single member state bears a disproportionate share of the economic impact. At the same time, she has acknowledged that outright escalation would be costly for both sides and has urged the commission and member states to aim for calibrated responses that preserve space for diplomacy.

Ukraine and defence burden-sharing

A second strand of Kallas's recent messaging focuses on Ukraine and defence spending, where

Trump has placed explicit conditions on continued US support. In media interviews, she has reiterated that no NATO operation can function without American participation, but she has also pushed back against the idea that Europe should shoulder the entire burden of the war effort in Ukraine. Kallas has said that the EU has already implemented 19 packages of sanctions on Russia and cut its oil and gas imports from Moscow by around 80 per cent, figures that have been corroborated by European Commission communications. She has called on other partners, including the US, to mirror or exceed these measures so that the economic pressure on Moscow is more effective. At the same time, she has warned that Trump's suggestion that European allies "do what they want" with American weapons risked creating confusion about the division of responsibility in the transatlantic alliance.

Regarding defence, Kallas has acknowledged Trump's insistence that NATO members significantly increase spending, but she has framed this as a long-standing issue that the EU must address on its own terms. She has argued that higher defence budgets should be accompanied by clearer political guidance on how Europe wants to use its capabilities, rather than being treated as a one-off bargaining chip in US-EU talks. In her remarks, she has highlighted ongoing efforts to deepen EU defence cooperation and industrial integration,

while insisting that these projects must remain compatible with NATO structures. Pushback on coercive tactics

Kallas's critique of Trump's "hostile tactics" extends beyond tariffs and Ukraine to broader questions of how the US treats its allies. In interviews and policy forums, she has cited Trump's past threats over Greenland, sharp-tone public criticism of European leaders, and abrupt shifts in policy announcements as examples of behaviour that strain trust.

According to European-based commentators quoted alongside her remarks, her comments reflect a growing sense in Brussels that the EU must invest more in its own resilience and external-action tools if it is to maintain leverage in relations with Washington. This includes strengthening EU-level sanctions architecture, diversifying energy and technology suppliers, and reinforcing diplomatic coordination with partners in Asia and the Global South. Kallas has indicated that such steps are not aimed at decoupling from the US, but at ensuring that Europe is not exposed to unilateral coercion.

Internal cohesion and political unity

A recurring theme in Kallas's statements is that the EU's ability to respond to Trump depends on internal cohesion as much as on external strategy. She has warned that disagreements among member states over sanctions, defence spending targets, and

responses to US pressure risk being exploited by Washington to secure individual concessions.

In private and public settings, she has urged capitals to align their messaging and to coordinate positions in advance of major US-EU summits or crises. She has also called for the European Council and commission to clarify which areas can be handled at the EU level and which remain the preserve of national governments, arguing that ambiguity only weakens the bloc's negotiating position. At the same time, she has acknowledged that disagreements over energy, industry policy, and relations with Russia will remain difficult to reconcile, particularly in the context of a more assertive US administration.

Transatlantic relationship under strain

Kallas has maintained that the US-EU alliance remains indispensable for European security, even as she criticises Trump's methods. In interviews conducted around recent NATO and EU summits, she has emphasised that NATO's collective-defence guarantee and US military presence in Europe are central to stability on the continent. She has urged European leaders to avoid framing their response to Trump in purely adversarial terms, instead seeking to preserve working ties where possible.

At the same time, she has argued that the EU must move beyond the assumption that Washington can be counted on to safeguard

European interests without reciprocal commitments. She has pointed to the need for Europe to deepen cooperation with other like-minded partners, including in Asia and the Western Hemisphere, so that it is not structurally dependent on a single ally. This more diversified approach, she has said, would allow the EU to better manage volatility in US foreign-policy priorities while still preserving the core of the transatlantic relationship.

Looking ahead: EU-level strategy discussions

Policy-focused outlets based in Brussels report that Kallas's warnings have fed into a broader debate among EU institutions about what kind of "Trump-proof" strategy the bloc should adopt. Analysts and officials quoted in these pieces describe a shift under way from a posture of cautious accommodation towards a more assertive and politically explicit stance, though still seeking to avoid outright confrontation.

These discussions involve proposals for more robust EU-level retaliatory toolkits in trade, tighter coordination on sanctions and export controls, and greater investment in European defence and industrial capacity. Kallas has indicated that she will continue to press for such measures in the coming months, arguing that the EU must be ready to defend its interests even as it tries to maintain functional relations with the United States.

Europe falls behind as US dominates critical minerals race

By Kathy Malouf



Brussels – The European Union is struggling to keep pace with the United States as Washington deploys tens of billions of dollars in direct financing, stakes in mines, and strategic stockpiles to secure critical minerals. A joint transatlantic effort to reduce dependence on China is crystallising, but European officials privately warn it may entrench an unequal partnership in which Brussels pays more to guarantee supplies for American industry. Compared with the decade-long series of EU plans and road maps, US initiatives have rapidly produced concrete deals with countries including Ukraine and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, while European flagship projects remain stalled at the investment-decision stage.

US rolls out aggressive critical-minerals strategy

The United States has channelled an estimated 40 billion euros into critical-mineral-related projects since 2021, a figure that

analysts say is roughly eight times the funding committed by the European Union over the same period. This spending surge has been concentrated under the Trump administration, which has combined tax credits, price floors, grants, and loan guarantees with the use of the Defence Production Act to de-risk mining and processing ventures. In July 2025, the administration passed the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, which further expanded federal financing tools and created a strategic stockpile programme – dubbed the “Vault” project – to insulate manufacturers from supply shocks.

Washington has also reached bilateral agreements with resource-rich partners, including Ukraine and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, aimed at developing non-Chinese supply chains for minerals such as lithium, cobalt, and rare earths. Under these arrangements, the US government has taken equity stakes or secured long-term

off take rights in specific projects, such as the Thacker Pass lithium deposit in Nevada, where the Department of Energy issued a 2.26 billion-dollar loan in return for a 5 per cent ownership stake. Officials have framed these measures as a national-security imperative, with the National Defense Authorization Act barring defence contractors from using certain minerals sourced through entities of concern, effectively pushing supply chains away from China.

EU’s plans fail to match US momentum

In contrast, the European Union has relied heavily on regulatory frameworks, financing channelling, and recycled-content targets rather than direct state equity or large-scale guarantees. The EU Critical Raw Materials Act, adopted in 2023 and amended in subsequent years, sets targets for domestic production, recycling, and external sourcing, but industry executives and analysts say the bloc lacks the financial firepower to turn those targets into shovel-ready projects.

The European Investment Bank has pledged to double its financing for critical-raw-materials projects and aims to meet 25 per cent of the bloc’s demand through

recycling by 2030, yet these instruments are often described as complementary rather than substitute for sovereign risk-taking. Senior officials in Brussels acknowledge that many European projects – including lithium and rare-earth ventures in the Nordic region and southern Europe – have been postponed by private companies before reaching final investment decisions, largely because of insufficient public back-stopping. Interviews with mining executives and policy experts, as reported by business outlets, indicate that European investors shy away from the high-risk, long-payback profiles typical of critical-mineral projects, whereas US programmes have deliberately structured support to absorb portions of that risk. One sector-focused analysis notes that while the US has moved to a “security-driven and deal-based” approach, the EU’s mix of incentives and screening mechanisms remains comparatively fragmented and less decisive.

Joint EU-US initiative raises imbalance concerns

The European Commission drafted a memorandum of understanding with the United States on critical minerals, signalling a formal transatlantic partnership to jointly source materials vital for batteries, electric vehicles, wind turbines, and defence systems. Under the proposed framework, both sides would coordinate on downstream content requirements, investment screens,

and joint procurement strategies, aiming to reduce overall exposure to Chinese-centred supply chains. However, internal documents and interviews cited by policy-focused outlets suggest that Brussels worries the arrangement could end up requiring Europe to pay premium prices for minerals that are then used to supply American manufacturers and defence contractors. Some European officials have likened the dynamic to a “sub-supplier” role, where the EU bears much of the geopolitical and financial risk of sourcing raw materials while the US captures more of the high-value refining, manufacturing, and technology segments. This concern is amplified by the fact that the Trump administration has aggressively deployed the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States mechanism to block Chinese takeovers in sensitive sectors, while Europe’s equivalent screening tools remain nationally fragmented and uneven in practice. Analysts argue that tightening European investment-screening rules, particularly around processing and refining assets, could help rebalance the relationship but would require political consensus among 27 member states.

Greenland and Arctic ventures highlight power asymmetry

Greenland has become a focal point of the dispute, not least because of President Trump’s early-2026 comments about the

island’s strategic mineral endowment, which some commentators interpreted as a veiled annexation threat. The territory holds significant deposits of rare earths, uranium, and other minerals that feature on both US and EU watchlists, yet local politicians and civil-society groups have repeatedly rejected the idea of ceding sovereignty or allowing unconditional foreign control. Both Washington and Brussels have sought to position themselves as preferred partners for Greenlandic authorities, promising sustainable development and infrastructure support, but Danish-led governance constraints and environmental safeguards complicate rapid project approvals.

US companies and lenders have moved more quickly to strike preliminary agreements with Greenlandic stakeholders, including exploration licences and feasibility studies, while European utilities and auto manufacturers have been slower to commit large-scale capital. Observers note that if the EU does not match US-level financial and political support, Greenland could end up integrating more deeply into American-led supply chains, leaving Europe dependent on secondary markets for these materials. At the same time, environmental-impact assessments and consultation requirements continue to slow permitting across Nordic and Arctic regions, which analysts say disproportionately affects European developers already wary of regulatory uncertainty.

Corporate and market responses

European carmakers, battery producers, and industrial groups have stepped up their lobbying for stronger state backing, warning that without faster progress they will lose competitive ground to US-based rivals. Industry associations have cited cases where European companies have been outbid by US-funded firms for stakes in Australian and African mining assets, underlining the impact of Washington's expansive incentive toolkit. Some consortiums are now exploring joint ventures with African and Latin American governments, but these are still at an early stage and often hinge on whether Brussels or national governments are willing to provide guarantees or co-invest. On the capital-markets side, financial-sector analysts have flagged that European mining and processing projects are more likely to languish in the "pre-feasibility" phase than their US counterparts, where federal loan guarantees and price-support mechanisms have helped accelerate financing. A recent report by a Brussels-based think tank notes that while US programmes have generated clear "demand signals" for non-Chinese supply, the EU's approach remains more reliant on soft instruments such as standards and voluntary partnerships. That gap, the report suggests, is likely to widen unless the European Commission secures greater budget flexibility or convinces member states to pool

more sovereign risk toward strategic-mineral projects.

Regulatory and security-policy tools in play

Beyond direct financing, both Washington and Brussels are updating a suite of regulatory and security-policy tools to shape critical-minerals flows. The United States has reinforced "Buy America" provisions and tightened defence-procurement rules to exclude contractors whose supply chains rely on certain foreign-controlled entities, effectively steering demand toward domestic or allied sources. The EU, meanwhile, has proposed stricter rules on due-diligence and human-rights compliance for imported minerals, which could complicate sourcing from some third-country jurisdictions but are intended to align with the bloc's environmental and governance standards.

At the same time, European policymakers are debating whether to adopt more explicit "of-concern" entity lists similar to those used by the US, which would subject Chinese-linked firms to enhanced scrutiny or restrictions in critical-mineral sectors. Such measures would sit alongside the EU's existing foreign-direct-investment screening regime, which has been strengthened in recent years but still operates through national authorities rather than a centralised mechanism. Diplomatic sources indicate that coordination between EU capitals

and Washington is tightening on this front, yet disagreements persist over how much market distortion and geopolitical friction the transatlantic partnership should tolerate.

What lies ahead for Europe?

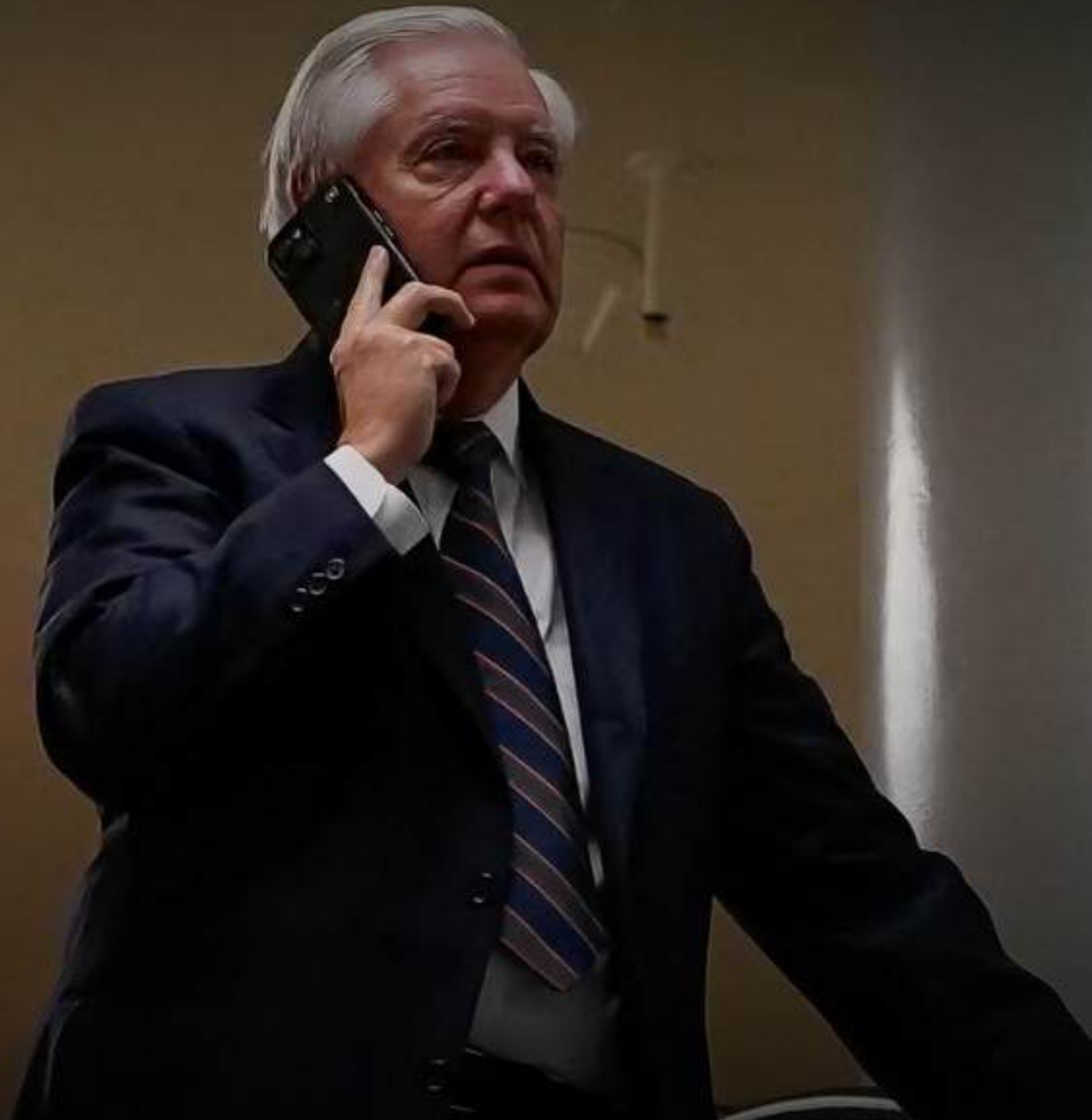
With the transatlantic critical-minerals framework nearing formalisation, the European Union faces a stark choice between intensifying its own financial and regulatory interventions or accepting a subordinate role in a US-centred system. Several policy studies urge Brussels to combine targeted grants and equity stakes with tighter screening of inbound investment in processing and refining, echoing the more assertive posture taken by Washington. However, member-state governments remain divided on the degree of state intervention and the sharing of fiscal risk, slowing the pace at which the bloc can match US-style initiatives.

As the global race for lithium, cobalt, rare earths, and other critical materials intensifies, the gap between Washington's aggressive deal-making and Brussels' more cautious, multilateral approach appears set to shape the trajectory of Europe's industrial and defence sectors for years to come. Whether European policymakers can close that gap without over-relying on US-led structures will likely determine the EU's ability to secure its own energy-transition and defence-technology ambitions.



Washington Insider

M A G A Z I N E



US SENATOR LINDSEY GRAHAM THREATENS SAUDI ARABIA OVER IRAN WAR PARTICIPATION

Scan Me Now

