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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-

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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.

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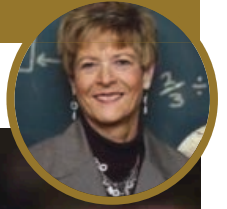


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Trump Faces Capitol Hill Setbacks After Campaign Trail Gains

BY JAN FRAZIER



Washington (Washington Insider Magazine) May 22, 2026 - President Donald Trump's influence on the campaign trail has not translated into smooth passage on Capitol Hill, where

Republicans have faced setbacks on redistricting, a proposed Justice Department fund and a House vote on Iran war powers. The disputes have exposed limits to his grip on

Congress even as he remains a dominant force in Republican politics.

Trump's campaign trail strength meets congressional resistance

President Donald Trump has consolidated his standing with Republican primary voters, but recent developments in Washington show that political strength at the ballot box has not automatically produced legislative wins. NBC News reported that a wave of redistricting initiatives across the South triggered a series of last-minute voting changes and left election officials scrambling to manage the consequences.

Those redistricting moves became part of a broader mid-decade battle over congressional maps, with the latest NBC reporting saying Republicans are positioned to gain up to 16 House seats this fall, compared with six for Democrats, after 10 states enacted new congressional maps. The same report said the map changes were shaped in part by court decisions and by efforts in Republican-led states to eliminate more Democratic districts.

Redistricting fight across southern states

The redistricting push has faced setbacks in several states. In Alabama, the Supreme Court allowed the state to use its preferred congressional map for the midterms, after a federal court had previously blocked the map over its effect on Black voters. In Virginia, the state Supreme Court stopped implementation of a new map that had been approved by voters in a special election and was designed to favour Democrats.

Al Jazeera reported that Trump’s push to redraw congressional maps in southern states encountered obstacles in Alabama and South Carolina, including judicial intervention and resistance from state lawmakers. NBC News also reported that Democrats in California and Virginia have moved to pursue their own redistricting strategies in response.

House vote on Iran war powers

Another setback came in the House on 3 June, when lawmakers backed a measure aimed at curbing Trump’s war powers on Iran. Reuters reported that the vote marked a blow to Trump and came after the Senate had already advanced a related War Powers Resolution in May. Politico reported that the House vote followed an earlier delay, when Republican leaders postponed the measure because defections and absences made defeat likely. The House resolution was described as largely symbolic, but it added to the week’s political difficulties for the administration.

Opposition to Justice Department fund

Trump’s nearly \$1.8 billion “weaponization” fund has also run into resistance. Reuters reported that the plan was put on hold after fierce opposition from Republicans, with federal judges in Virginia and Florida temporarily halting it until 12 June and

calling for further review.

Reuters previously reported that some Senate Republicans demanded restrictions on the compensation fund and criticised it as a “slush fund”, while other lawmakers linked the dispute to the broader immigration funding bill. NPR also reported that concerns over the fund helped stall a separate immigration package in Congress.

What lawmakers are considering next

Republican leaders are now confronting a narrower set of options as they try to move Trump’s agenda forward. Hartford Funds reported that Congress entered 2026 looking to reassert its authority after a year in which the executive branch expanded its role through executive actions, while debates over Affordable Care Act subsidies and the risk of a government shutdown are expected to consume political attention early in the year. The same report said Republicans are considering another reconciliation bill focused on affordability, though expectations remain modest, and noted that President Trump favours abolishing the filibuster even though that is not on the table. NBC News said the redistricting battles are expected to continue as the midterms approach, with legal and political fights still unfolding in several states.

Capitol Hill Hearing: Hegseth, Caine Answer Questions on Iran Conflict Costs

BY ATHENA NAGEL



Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General Dan Caine testified before Capitol Hill committees on Tuesday regarding the Trump administration's Iran war strategy and the \$1.5 trillion defense budget request. President Trump described Tehran's ceasefire proposal as "unbelievably weak" and "garbage," stating the ceasefire is "on life support" amid negotiation deadlock. Lawmakers from both parties questioned the conflict's escalating \$29 billion cost, lack of congressional approval, and the 60-day war's end game while Hegseth defended the

president's decision to Prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

Defense Secretary Hegseth Faces Bipartisan Questioning on Iran War Strategy

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth faced tough questions Tuesday from Republican and Democratic lawmakers about the Trump administration's end game for the Iran war, the cost of the conflict, and its lack of congressional authorization. The hearing took place before the House Armed Services Committee, with Hegseth appearing alongside Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman

General Dan Caine to address growing congressional scrutiny over the 10-week military conflict.

Senator Patty Murray, a Democrat from Washington, pressed Hegseth during a Senate Appropriations subcommittee meeting on the estimated expenses associated with the Iran conflict. Murray expressed skepticism about the Pentagon's cost projections, stating the updated assessment appeared "rather evidently" underestimated.

Senate Appropriations Committee Probes War Cost Estimates

During the Senate

Appropriations subcommittee meeting on Tuesday, Senator Murray highlighted that the acting comptroller indicated damage to U.S. installations was excluded from the \$29 billion total. In a prior session with the House Appropriations committee, Jules Hurst, who oversees the Pentagon's budget, revealed that the financial implications of the war had escalated to \$29 billion. Murray pointed out, "Your acting comptroller indicated that damages to U.S. installations were excluded from that total. It's evident that significant harm has been inflicted on American military resources". She inquired about the extent of the damage inflicted on U.S. facilities, but Hegseth did not disclose a specific amount. In response to concerns about the war's financial burden, Hegseth remarked, "I would just note that -- and I believe it's a crucial consideration given the president's initiatives -- what is the price of Iran acquiring a nuclear weapon? The willingness of this president to make a historic and bold decision to address that reality does entail costs, and we acknowledge that".

President Trump Dismisses Tehran's Ceasefire Proposal as Weak

President Donald Trump warned that the US-Iran ceasefire is now "on life support" due to a negotiation deadlock, calling Tehran's latest proposal

"garbage". Speaking about the ceasefire terms, Trump said, "It is unbelievably weak, I would say. I would call it the weakest right now," after reading Tehran's proposal.

The president emphasized that he does not consider the financial circumstances of Americans during his negotiations with Iran aimed at concluding the conflict. When a journalist inquired on Tuesday how much the economic difficulties faced by Americans influence his decision-making in these discussions, Trump responded, "Not even a little bit". He emphasized that his primary concern in discussions with Iran is that they must not acquire a nuclear weapon. Trump's comments come as the United States and Israel launched an attack on Iran on February 28, prompting Tehran to block access to the Gulf of Hormuz, through which a significant portion of the world's oil and liquefied gas is transported. This development has driven oil prices, particularly gasoline, to rise sharply.

Republicans Express Concern Over Conflict Duration and Congressional Approval

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth is facing a new round of questioning from lawmakers over the Iran war Tuesday, including some Republicans who have expressed concerns over the length of the conflict

and its lack of congressional approval. The bipartisan frustration emerged during back-to-back Capitol Hill hearings where lawmakers questioned the direction and cost of the Iran war.

The Atlantic published the full message exchange among the president's national security aides right before the launch of a military campaign in Yemen, revealing that several top national security officials in the Trump administration texted war plans for upcoming military strikes to a group chat that included the editor-in-chief for The Atlantic. The messages were written on the non-secure, commercial app Signal, and the issue dominated a hearing. The Atlantic has released the entire Signal chat among Trump senior national security officials, which shows that Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth provided the exact times of warplane launches and when bombs would drop.

Defense Budget Request Targets Record \$1.5 Trillion Spending Level

On Tuesday, Hegseth and Caine appeared to testify on Trump's 2027 budget request to increase defense spending to \$1.5 trillion – the largest defense budget in U.S. history. The two were expected to face questions on the budget proposal during the House Armed Services Committee hearing.

The budget request

comes as the Iran war reaches the critical 60-day mark, with lawmakers questioning strategy, costs, and military operations amid growing scrutiny. Defense Secretary Hegseth and Joint Chiefs Chairman Dan Caine testified before the House Armed Services Committee in Washington, D.C. as the conflict continued.

Economic Impact of Iran War Hits American Consumers Through Gasoline Prices

The Iran war has hit home as gasoline prices fuel significant U.S. inflation jump, with recent data from the Labor Department indicating that gasoline prices have surged more than 28% compared to the same time last year. The AAA motor club reported that the average price for a gallon of regular gasoline exceeded \$4.50 on Tuesday, reflecting a rise of approximately 44% from the prior year.

The consumer price index reported by the Labor Department rose by 3.8% from 2025, marking the highest increase in three years, and an uptick from the 2.3% year-over-year rise in March. Month-over-month, prices in April increased by 0.6% from March, with gasoline prices climbing by 5.4%, as outlined in the data released on Tuesday.

This monthly increase was a decrease from a 0.9% rise in overall prices from February to March, coinciding with the initial economic impact of the war. In Washington, AP

reports that U.S. consumer prices have significantly increased once again, driven by the ongoing 10-week conflict with Iran, which has led to elevated gasoline prices and additional financial strain for consumers.

When excluding the fluctuating costs of food and energy, core consumer prices rose by 0.4% last month compared to March, and by 3.2% from 2025. These figures are relatively subdued and suggest that the recent surge in energy prices has not yet broadly affected the prices of other goods. Grocery prices saw a 0.7% increase from March to April, primarily due to rising meat prices after a slight decline in the previous month.

Senate Armed Services Committee Hearing Scheduled for accompanhar Testimony

Watch live coverage was provided as Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Dan Caine testified at a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing. The two were expected to face questions on the Iran conflict and defense strategy during the Senate session.

The Senate hearing followed the House Armed Services Committee testimony, with both officials appearing before Congress to address the administration's military strategy and budget priorities. PBS NewsHour provided live coverage of the hearings, which

drew significant attention from lawmakers and media outlets concerned about the war's trajectory.

No Congressional Authorization for Iran Military Action Despite 60-Day Conflict

The Iran war has continued for 60 days without congressional authorization, raising constitutional questions about the scope of presidential war powers. Lawmakers from both parties have questioned the legal basis for the extended military engagement, with some Republicans joining Democrats in expressing concern over the lack of formal congressional approval.

The conflict escalated when the United States and Israel launched an attack on Iran on February 28, 2026, prompting Tehran to block access to the Gulf of Hormuz. The blockade has disrupted global energy supplies and contributed to the sharp increase in gasoline prices that has affected American consumers.

Pete Hegseth and Dan Caine's testimony covered multiple aspects of the Iran war, including military strategy, operational costs, casualty figures, and the administration's diplomatic efforts to reach a ceasefire agreement. The officials faced persistent questioning about the war's end game and whether military action alone could prevent Iran from developing nuclear capabilities.

Republicans Eye Governor Races to Escape Capitol Hill Dysfunction Ahead of Midterms

By Eric Gahagan



More than 40 lawmakers have announced they will not seek reelection ahead of 2026 midterms, with record numbers of House Republicans pursuing governorships. Top GOP

governor urged Republicans including Reps. Byron Donalds and Andy Biggs to run on affordability. Congress passed only 150 bills in 118th Congress, the least productive in U.S.

history.)

GOP Lawmakers Increasingly Turn to State Elections Instead of Congressional Reelection

A growing number of Republican members of Congress are abandoning their seats to pursue governorships as frustration mounts over legislative dysfunction on Capitol Hill, according to multiple credible news organisations reporting on the 2026 midterm cycle.

More than 40 lawmakers have already announced they will not seek reelection ahead of the 2026 midterms, representing a record pace compared to recent election cycles, with additional announcements expected after lawmakers return home for holiday periods.

In an exclusive USA TODAY interview, the nation's top GOP governor urged Republican candidates, including Reps. Byron Donalds and Andy Biggs, to run for governor and campaign on affordability issues.

Legislative Gridlock Drives Decision to Leave Congress

The 118th Congress that ended after the 2024 elections was the least productive in U.S. history in terms of passing legislation, passing just 150 bills into law over two years. This legislative paralysis has become a primary driver behind lawmakers' decisions to leave Washington.

A common rationale among departing lawmakers has been the dysfunction within the Capitol hampering their ability to get things done. Partisan squabbles and limited areas of compromise continue to derail attempts

to solve the country's issues. Since returning from their extended leave from Washington during the shutdown, the House has been mired in resolutions targeting each other for censure in what have mostly been partisan rebukes of members on the other side of the aisle. These fights highlight the divisive and polarized environment that has taken over much of the country's political system.

Republicans Dominate Retirement Announcements

A greater number of Republicans (27) have expressed their intent to depart from Washington compared to Democrats (10), according to NPR's congressional retirement tracker.

Among Republicans, four announced retirements include Senators Mitch McConnell, Thom Tillis, and Joni Ernst, along with Representative Don Bacon. Don Bacon, a moderate Nebraska Republican, told Axios he considered resigning over a peace plan offered to Ukraine that favored Russia's demands.

The latest retirement announcement came from Rep. Troy Nehls, R-Texas, who said over the weekend he will not be seeking reelection, joining a growing group of House members from both parties seeking the exits. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, R-Ga., announced she would resign her seat before her term ends after a falling out with President

Donald Trump.

Governorships Attract Congressional Republicans in Record Numbers

More House Republicans are leaving Congress to run for governor than in decades amid frustration over what they describe as a toxic environment on Capitol Hill, CNN reported.

Of the lawmakers not seeking reelection, 11 are aiming to become their state's governor, 10 are attempting to transition from the House to the Senate, and one, Republican Rep. Chip Roy, is vying for the role of attorney general in his state.

Republicans are running for governor in record numbers as they seek to accomplish more at their state level rather than remain stuck in Washington gridlock.

Bipartisan Discontent Over Congressional Dysfunction

The feelings about Congress are bipartisan, with several prominent Democrats opting for retirement instead of reelection. Among them is Maine Rep. Jared Golden, who announced he would not run again for his GOP-leaning seat due to dysfunction and threats of political violence.

"After 11 years as a legislator, I have grown tired of the increasing incivility and plain nastiness that are now common from some elements of our American community—behavior that, too often, our political

leaders exhibit themselves," Golden wrote in the Bangor Daily News. "Additionally, recent incidents of political violence have made me reassess the frequent threats against me and my family".

You don't run for the exits unless you know trouble is brewing, and House Republicans face significant challenges ahead.

Legislative Process Has Changed Significantly

Instead of taking up bills on individual issues one at a time, it has become increasingly common for party leadership to attach unrelated provisions onto must-pass bills or through the reconciliation process that allows majorities to bypass the Senate's 60-vote filibuster as it has gotten more difficult to win bipartisan support on most legislation.

Lawmakers are still passing major pieces of legislation through packages that touch on multiple issues such as in Republicans' "big, beautiful bill" or the American Rescue Plan during the Biden administration. Some of the challenges getting legislation signed into law can be attributed to the slim majorities the parties have held in recent years, but time for debate and amendment votes on legislation frequently runs into blockades, holds and other interruptions that have derailed limited floor time available to pass new laws.

Budget Processes Remain Broken

Congress has also struggled to complete many of its core functions like keeping the government open with budget processes that have become routinely behind schedule that has forced them to accept temporary stopgaps to keep services running and last-minute mammoth packages with little input from rank-and-file that have added to frustrations. Republican leaders declared they would postpone voting on the immigration enforcement proposal until after their Memorial Day recess beginning the week of June 1, following what appeared to be a contentious meeting with acting Attorney General Todd Blanche to discuss the fund.

Senate Republicans unexpectedly departed Washington without casting their votes on a proposed \$70 billion bill aimed at funding immigration enforcement agencies.

Redistricting Could Worsen Competitive Seat Decline

This year's mid-decade redistricting battle playing out across states could exacerbate the issue as fewer House seats are competitive and incentivize candidates to tilt to their party's extremes rather than the center to come out on top of the primary in general elections slanted toward either party.

Meanwhile, Texas' newly drawn map, which seeks to reduce the number of Democratic representatives by five, has

prompted 78-year Texas Democratic lawmaker Lloydgett to announce his retirement rather than face a contentious primary battle against progressive Rep. Greg Casar.

Expert Analysis on Congressional Decline

"We see people who are more traditional legislators leaving every election cycle, and we're seeing the culmination of that right now with a House that can't really legislate. It would be hard to be someone who's committed to public service for being in that chamber right now," said David McLennan, a political science professor and director of the Meredith poll.

"We do see some people who have done their time and just decide to get out, it's natural process of public service. But I think this is more the inability of Congress to get much done, the complete partisanship that is enveloping Congress, and just the prospects of a difficult election year for Republicans," McLennan said.

All the issues added together have led many lawmakers, including committee chairs and other dealmakers willing to work across the aisle, to leave Congress.

Midterm Election Concerns Mount for Republicans

Republicans are concerned about their fate in next year's midterm elections that have

historically favoured the party out of power in Washington. This year's elections gave Democrats wins as voters revolted against the current administration and Trump's slumping approval ratings are fueling concerns about things to come in November.

Congressional Republicans have yet to break the record for most retirements in a single year, but some say it's only a matter of time before widespread frustration with the current state of Washington produces even more departures.

Immigration Funding Bill Highlights Party Fractures

Republicans' recent stumbles on an immigration funding bill are raising questions about other parts of their legislative agenda, according to the Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

A growing bipartisan discontent is emerging regarding President Donald Trump's \$18 billion Anti-Weaponization Fund for his supporters, with some opponents labeling it a "MAGA slush fund". The Trump administration established the \$1.8 billion Anti-Weaponization Fund to assist Americans experiencing domestic political persecution.

However, there are significant concerns regarding accountability and who will ultimately benefit from these funds. The \$1.7 billion settlement fund introduced by the Justice Department this

week raised further concerns, leading to efforts to restrict taxpayer funds that some feared could be directed to Trump supporters who engaged in violence against law enforcement during the January 6, 2021, Capitol attack.

These amendments aim to either completely block the fund or prohibit payments to Trump supporters who harmed law enforcement during the Capitol riot.

House GOP Leadership Faces Challenges

House GOP circus embarrasses senior party leaders as the country and the world wait for Republicans to pick a speaker, CNN Politics reported.

Republicans leave D.C. earlier than planned amid increasing squabbles with Trump, CBC News reported. It was a tumultuous day on Capitol Hill on Thursday as Senate Republicans abruptly left Washington without voting on legislation that includes money the Trump administration wants for an improved immigration enforcement program.

Affordability Emerges as Key Campaign Issue

The top GOP governor emphasised that Republicans should run on affordability when campaigning for governorship positions. This messaging strategy reflects voter concerns about economic issues that transcends

Washington dysfunction.

Amid dysfunction in Congress, some Republicans hope to ditch Washington for governorships, USA TODAY's Washington bureau reported.

Political Violence Threats Influence Decisions

Recent incidents of political violence have made lawmakers reassess frequent threats against them and their families, contributing to retirement decisions. Safety concerns have become an additional factor alongside legislative frustration for lawmakers considering their next steps.

Some lawmakers are stepping away from public service entirely amid dysfunction in Washington and bitter partisanship that has hampered their ability to pass bills and threatened their safety.

Congressional Republicans have yet to break the record for most retirements in a single year, but widespread frustration with Washington's current state suggests more departures may come. More announcements are possible once lawmakers head home for the end-of-year holidays.

The trend of traditional legislators leaving continues to accelerate as Congress struggles to function effectively. With Republicans holding slim majorities and bipartisan cooperation remaining scarce, the exodus from Capitol Hill appears likely to continue through the 2026 election cycle.

Pam Bondi Testifies Before House On Epstein Files Redaction Errors

By Danielle Campbell



Former Attorney General Pam Bondi testified in a closed-door House Oversight Committee session on 29 May 2026, defending her department's handling of Jeffrey Epstein documents while attributing redaction errors to her successor Todd Blanche. Democratic lawmakers stated Bondi delegated Epstein investigation oversight to Blanche, who was deputy attorney general when she departed in April. Bondi acknowledged redaction mistakes that outsourced approximately 100 survivors, according to a federal lawsuit. Committee Chair Representative James Comer announced six additional interviews including one with Bill Gates.

Former Attorney General Faces House Oversight Questioning Over Epstein Document Release

WASHINGTON – Former

Attorney General Pam Bondi appeared before the House Oversight Committee on Friday, 29 May 2026, in a closed-door transcribed session to answer questions about the Department of Justice's management of Jeffrey Epstein-related documents.

The federal government's approach to releasing Epstein documents came under renewed scrutiny on Capitol Hill as Bondi faced inquiries from House lawmakers regarding her tenure overseeing the justice department. Bondi, who was removed from her position as attorney general last month, reaffirmed her involvement with information concerning Jeffrey Epstein during the deposition.

Bondi Attributes Redaction Errors To Successor Todd Blanche

During her testimony, Bondi told members of Congress that

her successor Todd Blanche was responsible for the chaotic release of millions of documents connected to Jeffrey Epstein, according to Democratic lawmakers. Bondi stated she delegated oversight of the so-called Epstein files and federal government investigations into the deceased sex offender to her former deputy.

"She continues to push all of the investigation and the blame on Acting AG Todd Blanche," said Robert Garcia, the committee's top Democrat, in remarks to reporters on Friday. "It was Todd Blanche, the current acting AG, that was leading the Epstein investigation, and quite frankly, all of the mistakes that we saw – the redactions, not protecting survivors – she continues to push that back onto the acting AG Todd Blanche, who by the way was Donald Trump's personal

lawyer".

In her prepared opening remarks to the committee, Bondi reiterated points she has previously made in public hearings, stating that Todd Blanche was in charge of reviewing the Epstein documents. Blanche was the deputy attorney general at that time and took over the Justice Department after Bondi's departure in April.

Admission Of Redaction Mistakes That Exposed Survivors

Bondi admitted in her prepared remarks to the committee that "there were redaction errors" during the release of the Epstein files. Those errors "outed" roughly 100 survivors, according to a federal lawsuit.

The technical specifics of Bondi's testimony remain unclear, as she participated in a closed-door transcribed session with lawmakers. The Republican-led House Oversight Committee will publish a transcript at a future date, having previously done so for other interviews such as with Secretary Howard Lutnick.

Epstein Files Release Under Scrutiny Following Department Of Justice Disclosure

Information regarding communications and relationships with Epstein was part of over three million documents that were made public earlier this year by the

Justice Department. The federal government's handling of these documents has faced ongoing examination from congressional oversight bodies.

Bondi maintained a steadfast stance when confronted by lawmakers regarding the Department of Justice's management of Epstein's case file disclosures during her earlier testimony to Congress, despite being removed from her position as attorney general last month.

Committee Chair Announces Additional Interviews Including Bill Gates

Representative James Comer, the leading Republican on the committee, mentioned that there will be six additional interviews scheduled as part of the ongoing investigation. One of these additional interviews will involve Bill Gates.

The Microsoft co-founder is the latest high-profile figure to agree to testify before the committee investigating Epstein's wrongdoing. Information about Gates' communications and his relationship with Epstein was included in the documents released by the Justice Department.

Epstein Survivors Pressed Committee Chair For Bondi Interview Under Oath

Several survivors of Epstein's abuse appeared outside the committee proceedings

pressuring Representative Comer to interview Bondi under oath and ask about the release of files. Bondi was testifying before House representatives on Friday as part of an inquiry into the government's oversight of investigations concerning Jeffrey Epstein.

It remains uncertain whether Bondi will encounter further inquiries about her handling of the documents, keeping in mind that she is no longer in the position of attorney general.

Previous Congressional Hearing Featured Fiery Exchange Over Epstein Documents

This testimony follows a heated congressional hearing on 11 February 2026, where U.S. Attorney General Bondi stood by the Justice Department's management of documents related to deceased sex offender Jeffrey Epstein amid a torrent of challenging inquiries from lawmakers. During that earlier hearing, lawmakers accused Bondi's justice department of making improper redactions to Epstein files as she fired back at the accusations.

The closed-door deposition on 29 May 2026 represents another chapter in Congress's ongoing examination of how the Trump administration handled the release of Epstein case files. This long-awaited appearance brings fresh scrutiny of the department's management of the sensitive documents.

AU on Capitol Hill Day Connects Students Alumni With Congressional Staffing Opportunities

By Danielle Campbell



(American University hosted its inaugural AU on the Hill Day on May 20 at the Rayburn House Office Building, bringing together 100 alumni and

student interns working as congressional staffers. The event highlighted AU's network of more than 300 alumni on Capitol Hill and six current

House members. University President Jonathan R. Alger announced a pledge for announced a pledge for

university-funded internships starting sophomore year, with 87 percent of students already completing internships.)

American University Launches Inaugural Capitol Hill Career Event

Washington — American University hosted its first AU on the Hill Day on May 20 at the Rayburn House Office Building, marking a formal celebration of the university's longstanding connection to Capitol Hill and congressional careers. Approximately 100 alumni and students working as congressional staffers and interns attended the event, which was organized by AU's Office of Community and Government Relations.

The gathering featured pastries and coffee as attendees networked with lawmakers and senior congressional staff. Alumni working on the Hill and current student interns shared career advice and business cards throughout the morning reception, demonstrating AU's established pipeline into government and public service. More than 30,000 AU alumni currently work in the federal government, including over 300 on Capitol Hill. Six current members of the House of Representatives are AU graduates, representing the university's significant presence in Congress.

Congressional Leaders Reflect on AU Public Service Pathways

Representative Stacey Plaskett (D-VI at large), WCL/JD '94, and Representative James McGovern (D-MA), CAS/BA '81, SPA/MPA '84, delivered remarks at the event. Both lawmakers reflected on how American University shaped their paths to leadership in public service. Plaskett, now in her sixth term representing the at-large congressional district of the U.S. Virgin Islands, recounted her experience as a night student at the American University Washington College of Law. She balanced a full-time job and raised three young children while earning her degree.

She described AU's collaborative culture, noting that classmates created briefing books to help her keep up with coursework after the birth of her third child. Plaskett identified Raskin, her former constitutional law professor now serving as her colleague in Congress, as part of the broader AU network that shaped her leadership approach.

"I don't see myself as a politician," Plaskett said. "My life—my professional life—has been in public service, and I just happen to have a job in public service that requires people to elect me".

Plaskett noted that her congressional office frequently hosts interns and encouraged current AU students to apply for opportunities.

McGovern, a double Eagle graduate, said his interest in politics crystallized shortly after

arriving at AU when he secured a paid, three-year internship in the office of Senator George McGovern (D-SD).

"It was an incredible experience for me, and it instilled in me a sense of purpose with regard to public service," McGovern said, adding that he was inspired by colleagues who viewed government service as "an honorable profession".

University President Announces Expanded Internship Funding Initiative

AU President Jonathan R. Alger delivered opening remarks emphasizing the vital role higher education plays in preserving democracy and shaping future civic leaders. He stated that AU is committed to ensuring students graduate with both a strong academic foundation and practical skills, hands-on experience, and professional networks required to succeed.

As part of this commitment, AU has pledged to provide students the opportunity for a university-funded internship or research experience beginning in their sophomore year.

"Already, 87 percent of our students do internships . . . but I'm a perfectionist," Alger said. "I'd like it to be 100 percent, so all students across the board will have the opportunity to participate".

Alger explained that the initiative aims to level the playing field, ensuring hands-on learning experiences remain accessible

to all students regardless of their financial ability to accept unpaid internships.

He also highlighted plans to expand alumni mentorship through a new program launching next year. The program will pair alumni with participating students, initially focusing on sophomores and transfer students.

Alumni Credit AU Internships For Launching Congressional Careers

Shannon "Shan" McDermott, SPA/BA '18, director of operations and scheduling for Representative Lizzie Fletcher (D-TX), attended the event and credited AU's focus on internships with helping launch her career.

"My senior-year internship is what got me my first job out of college," McDermott said, "and that first job is what got me my current job".

McDermott noted that many of her closest friends chose to stay in Washington after graduation. Approximately 40 percent of AU graduates remain in the DC area after collecting their diplomas.

"Everywhere I walk in DC, I'm saying hi to people I met as an orientation leader, or who had a radio show before me at WVAU," McDermott said. "Those smiles, quick hellos . . . can lead to strong, genuine professional connections later on".

Six Current House Members Represent American University Alumni Network

The congressional presence of AU graduates in the House includes six current members alongside Plaskett and McGovern. Representative Julia Brownley (D-CA), Kogod/MBA '79, represents one of the university's alumni in Congress. Representative Sarah McBride (D-DE), SPA/BA '13, serves as another AU graduate in the House. Representative Jamie Raskin (D-MD), HON '21, '25, and WCL professor emeritus, also represents the university.

Representative Haley Stevens (D-MI), SPA/BA '05, CAS/MA '07, completes the list of current House members who are AU alumni.

This strong congressional presence reflects both AU's physical proximity to Capitol Hill—just a Metro ride away from Congress—and its enduring appeal to students eager to immerse themselves in politics, policymaking, and public service from their arrival on campus.

McGovern Emphasizes History Education And Collective Action For Change

McGovern said he chose to study history as an undergraduate, a decision he considers one of the best he ever made.

"I still remember with great affection the history professors who taught me about history in every part of the world," McGovern said. "But one of the things they instilled in me is that if you want to be a good leader, you have to have a sense of

history, so you don't make the same stupid mistakes over and over and over again".

McGovern recalled that his AU professors ultimately urged him to run for Congress, reminding him that "there are worse things in life than losing. Not trying, not giving it your best, is worse than that".

He remembered a history professor who ended every class with the same reminder: "The world will not get better on its own".

"At the time, I didn't know what he meant," McGovern admitted. "I do now".

Reflecting on his nearly 30 years in Washington, McGovern emphasized that lasting change only happens when "like-minded people come together and make things happen, make the change for the better".

Looking at the crowd of students, McGovern noted that AU students now interning on Capitol Hill are following the same pipeline that brought him to Congress decades ago. He described the path as defined just as much by shared mission as by career opportunity.

"DC—and AU—is a place full of passionate people that all care about something," McDermott added. "I bring that passion and care for serving constituents every day".

The event concluded with students and alumni exchanging contact information and continuing conversations about career pathways into congressional offices and public service roles.

EU Broadens Iran Sanctions Regime To Target Middle East Navigation Disruptions

By Jan Frazier



The Council of the European Union adopted a decision on 22 May 2026 amending its existing Iran sanctions framework to target individuals and entities involved in Iran's actions impeding lawful transit passage and freedom of navigation, particularly in the Strait of Hormuz. The amended legal framework enables the EU to impose travel bans and asset freezes on listed persons, with Council Decision (CFSP) 2026/1157 and Council Regulation (EU) 2026/1164 entering into force on 27 May 2026. EU foreign ministers reached the underlying political agreement on 21 April 2026 during the Foreign Affairs Council meeting in Luxembourg.

EU Tightens Sanctions Framework Over Strait Of Hormuz Navigation Threats Council Amends Iran Sanctions To Target Navigation Violations

The Council of the European Union expanded the scope of its sanctions framework against Iran on 22 May 2026 to include individuals and entities involved in actions threatening freedom of navigation in the Middle East, with particular focus on the Strait of Hormuz. The Council stated that Iran's actions against vessels travelling through the Strait of Hormuz are contrary to international law and infringe established rights of transit passage and innocent passage through international straits. The amended framework now enables the EU

to introduce further restrictive measures in response to Iran's actions undermining freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz. Rather than creating a separate sanctions regime, the bloc broadened the existing framework established in July 2023, which originally addressed Iran's military support for Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

Restrictive Measures Include Travel Bans And Asset Freezes

Under the amended framework, the EU can impose travel restrictions preventing listed individuals and entities from entering or transiting through EU territory, as well as freezing their assets. The restrictive measures available under the expanded framework consist of travel restrictions prohibiting listed individuals and entities from entering or transiting EU territory and asset freezes.

EU citizens and companies are forbidden from making funds, financial assets or economic resources available to listed individuals and entities. In addition, EU citizens and companies are prohibited from providing any funds, financial assets, or economic resources to the individuals and entities listed under the new criteria.

No specific names have yet been added to the list under the new criteria, and the Council said designations would follow at a later stage. The Council of the European Union decided to expand the scope of the

legal framework of the European sanctions imposed on Iran to target those involved in Iran's actions impeding lawful transit passage and freedom of navigation.

Political Agreement Reached At April Foreign Affairs Council

EU foreign ministers reached a political agreement on 21 April 2026 to expand the legal framework for sanctions against Iran, allowing the EU to impose restrictive measures on those who violate the right to freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz. The decision implements the political agreement reached by EU foreign ministers at the Foreign Affairs Council meeting on 21 April 2026.

EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Kaja Kallas announced the political agreement at a press conference following the Council of Ministers meeting in Luxembourg. "Today we also reached the political agreement to widen our sanctions regime to also target those responsible for breaches to freedom of navigation," Kallas announced. Kaja Kallas had signalled the move earlier in the week, stating that "Tehran's hardliner grip on the world's most important energy shipping lane is untenable". Kallas added that the bloc was looking to strengthen Operation ASPIDES, the EU naval mission contributing to freedom of navigation in the

region, as a possible contribution to the "Coalition of the Willing" backed by France and the UK.

Previous Sanctions Framework Originally Targeted Russia Support

The sanctions framework was originally established on 20 July 2023 by the Council in light of Iran's military support for Russia's aggression against Ukraine. This framework was expanded on 14 May 2024 due to Iran's military support for armed groups in the Middle East and the Red Sea region, and for the drone and missile attacks launched by Iran against Israel in April 2024.

The framework was subsequently extended in 2024 to cover Iranian backing for armed groups in the Middle East and the Red Sea region, as well as Tehran's drone and missile strikes against Israel. The broader EU sanctions package against Iran, covering Tehran's support for Russia and for armed groups in the Middle East and Red Sea, was extended in March until 27 July 2026.

UN Security Council Resolution Addresses Maritime Security

In its conclusions of 19 March 2026, the European Council called for the full implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 2817 (2026), recalling the need to ensure maritime security and respect for freedom of navigation. The Council condemned any actions that threaten navigation or impede the entry into or exit from the Strait of Hormuz.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres stated that navigational rights and freedoms through the Strait of Hormuz must be respected as affirmed by Council resolution 2817 (2026). Freedom of navigation is a fundamental principle of international law, including under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

A draft UN Security Council resolution on the Strait of Hormuz calls on Iran to immediately cease attacks and threats against merchant and commercial vessels. The draft resolution also calls for the removal of sea mines, an end to illegal tolls and co-operation with UN efforts to establish a humanitarian corridor in the Strait.

France And UK Joint Statement Condemns Iranian Actions

The leaders of the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and other nations issued a joint statement condemning in the strongest terms recent attacks by Iran on unarmed commercial vessels in the Gulf. The statement condemned attacks on civilian infrastructure including oil and gas installations, and the de facto closure of the Strait of Hormuz by Iranian forces.

The joint statement expressed deep concern about the escalating conflict and called on Iran to cease immediately its threats, laying of mines, drone and missile attacks and

other attempts to block the Strait to commercial shipping. The statement called for Iran to comply with UN Security Council Resolution 2817.

Consistent with UNSC Resolution 2817, the Signatories emphasised that such interference with international shipping and the disruption of global energy supply chains constitute a threat to international peace and security. The statement called for an immediate comprehensive moratorium on attacks on civilian infrastructure, including oil and gas installations.

High Representative Issued Statement On US-Iran Ceasefire

On 9 April 2026, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy issued a statement on behalf of the European Union regarding the ceasefire agreed upon by the United States and Iran. The statement urged all parties concerned to ensure freedom of navigation and safe passage through the Strait of Hormuz, in accordance with international law, as set forth in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Iranian Ambassador Amir-Saeid Iravani told reporters in New York that "the only viable solution in the Strait of Hormuz is a permanent end" to the tensions, according to video coverage of Iran's position on the Strait of Hormuz draft resolution.

Britain Launches Advanced Weapon System In Middle East

By Danielle Campbell



The UK Ministry of Defence confirmed the Royal Air Force has deployed the Advanced Precision Kill Weapon System (APKWS) to Middle East operations. RAF Typhoon fighter jets from 9 Squadron now carry the laser-guided system to counter drone threats at a fraction of current missile costs. The rapid deployment followed less than two months of testing to protect British citizens, interests, and regional partners from drone attacks.

RAF Typhoon Jets Now Carry Advanced Precision Kill Weapon System

The British Ministry of Defence announced on Saturday that the Advanced Precision Kill Weapon System has been

fitted to RAF Typhoon fighter jets operating in the Middle East region. The system enables aircraft to destroy drone targets precisely while costing significantly less than missiles currently in use.

Sorties are now being flown by 9 Squadron RAF Typhoon fighter jets equipped with the new system as part of missions to defend British people, interests, and partners from threats. The deployment marks the system's transition from trials to active operational use in the Middle East.

Laser Targeting Converts Unguided Rockets Into Precision Weapons

The APKWS uses a laser targeting system which turns

Precision Kill

unguided missiles into low-cost precision weapons able to take down enemy drones and other threats. This laser-targeting technology converts unguided rockets into precision-guided munitions capable of engaging drones and other airborne threats.

The system offers a sustainable way to counter the high volume of relatively cheap attack drones being used in the region. By providing a lower-cost alternative to traditional missiles, the APKWS addresses the economic challenge of using expensive interceptors against inexpensive drone threats.

Rapid Testing Programme Moves System Into Active Service

The Advanced Precision Kill Weapon System has been rushed into service, moving from trials to active deployment in less than two months. This accelerated timeline follows a rapid testing programme that validated the system's operational capability.

The quick transition from testing to deployment reflects the urgent operational requirement for effective counter-drone capabilities in the Middle East. The Ministry of Defence confirmed the system is now operational with sorties

actively being flown.

Protection For British Citizens And Regional Partners Enhanced

British citizens and regional partners will be better protected against drone attacks as a result of the deployment. The UK Ministry of Defence stated the move aims at strengthening protection against drone attacks targeting "UK forces, citizens and regional partners".

The deployment specifically supports missions to defend British people, interests, and partners from threats in the Middle East region. Regional partners in the Gulf states will benefit from the enhanced counter-drone capability.

9 Squadron Conducts Operational Sorties With New Anti-Drone Capability

9 Squadron RAF Typhoon fighter jets are now flying sorties with the APKWS fitted to their aircraft. The squadron's operational missions in the Middle East include defending against drone threats using the new low-cost system.

The Typhoon fighter jets operate in the Gulf region as part of UK defence operations. These aircraft now carry the precision-guided anti-drone capability as standard equipment for their missions.

Cost Effectiveness Addresses Economic Challenge Of Drone Defence

The new system allows RAF Typhoon jets to destroy

targets at a fraction of the price of missiles currently used. This cost advantage addresses the strategic challenge of defending against large numbers of inexpensive attack drones.

Traditional missile systems cost significantly more than the APKWS when engaging drone targets. The economic sustainability of the new system enables continued operations against high-volume drone threats without exhausting defence budgets.

Ministry Of Defence Confirms Operational Deployment Status

The UK Ministry of Defence issued a statement on Saturday confirming the system's deployment status. The Ministry stated that the APKWS has been fitted to RAF Typhoon fighter jets operating in the region.

Official confirmation noted the system is now deployed on operations in the Middle East with active sorties being flown. The Ministry described the deployment as part of ongoing missions to protect British interests and partners.

Middle East Operations Focus On Counter-Drone Defence Missions

UK operations in the Middle East include defending against drone threats targeting British forces and civilian personnel. The region has seen increased use of attack drones requiring enhanced counter-measures.

The deployment supports

UK defence efforts in the Gulf states where drone attacks pose operational risks. Counter-drone capability remains a priority for protecting personnel and assets in the region.

Advanced Precision Kill Weapon System Technical Specifications

The APKWS represents a laser-guided weapon system designed for precision engagement of airborne threats. The system transforms unguided rockets into precision-guided munitions through laser targeting technology.

Technical specifications include the ability to engage enemy drones and other airborne threats with precision accuracy. The weapon system maintains the mobility and flexibility of the Typhoon fighter jet platform while adding dedicated counter-drone capability.

Royal Air Force Integrates New Capability Into Existing Fleet

The Royal Air Force has integrated the APKWS into its existing Typhoon fighter jet fleet operating in the Middle East. This integration allows current aircraft to perform counter-drone missions without requiring new platform development.

The RAF's 9 Squadron now operates with the enhanced anti-drone capability as part of its standard mission equipment. Integration of the system into existing aircraft reduces deployment time and programme costs.

HMS Dragon Heads to Middle East as UK Plans Defensive Mission

By Danielle Campbell



The Royal Navy is sending HMS Dragon to the Middle East for a possible role in an international shipping protection mission in the Strait of Hormuz. The Ministry of Defence says the deployment is strictly defensive and independent, while Sir Keir Starmer says the operation would begin only after fighting in the region ends. The move comes as tensions over the waterway continue and both the US and Iran accuse each other of attacks.

HMS Dragon to pre-position in region

The Royal Navy has ordered HMS Dragon, one of its six Type 45 destroyers, to pre-position in the Middle East ahead of a possible mission in the Strait of Hormuz. The Ministry of Defence said the ship could contribute immediately if required for a future defensive mission. The deployment was announced on Saturday, according to the BBC report.

HMS Dragon is one of Britain's most advanced warships and is built for anti-aircraft and anti-missile warfare. It will be the first Royal Navy ship sent to the Middle East since the start of the Iran war in late February. The vessel follows the French aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle, which transited the Suez Canal earlier this week.

Strait of Hormuz security mission

The proposed operation is intended to safeguard

commercial shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, a crucial route for global energy supplies. About 20% of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas passes through the waterway. Disruption or blockage of the strait has pushed prices higher globally, according to the BBC report.

Sir Keir Starmer and French President Emmanuel Macron have been championing the multinational mission. Starmer has said the shipping mission would only go ahead once fighting in the region ends. The Ministry of Defence described the operation as "strictly defensive and independent".

Last month, 51 countries met to discuss how to protect commercial shipping in the strait. After the talks, Starmer said dozens of countries had offered to contribute assets to the joint operation with France.

UK position on wider conflict

The UK government has said it does not want to be drawn into the conflict. Starmer has previously said Britain would not support a US blockade of Iranian ports, which remains in place. The BBC report says a ceasefire has been in place between the US and Iran since April, although no lasting solution has been reached.

The Ministry of Defence said the deployment forms part of "prudent planning" and gives the government more options for a future defensive mission. It also

said Cyprus remains well defended, with significant capabilities already deployed to the region since January.

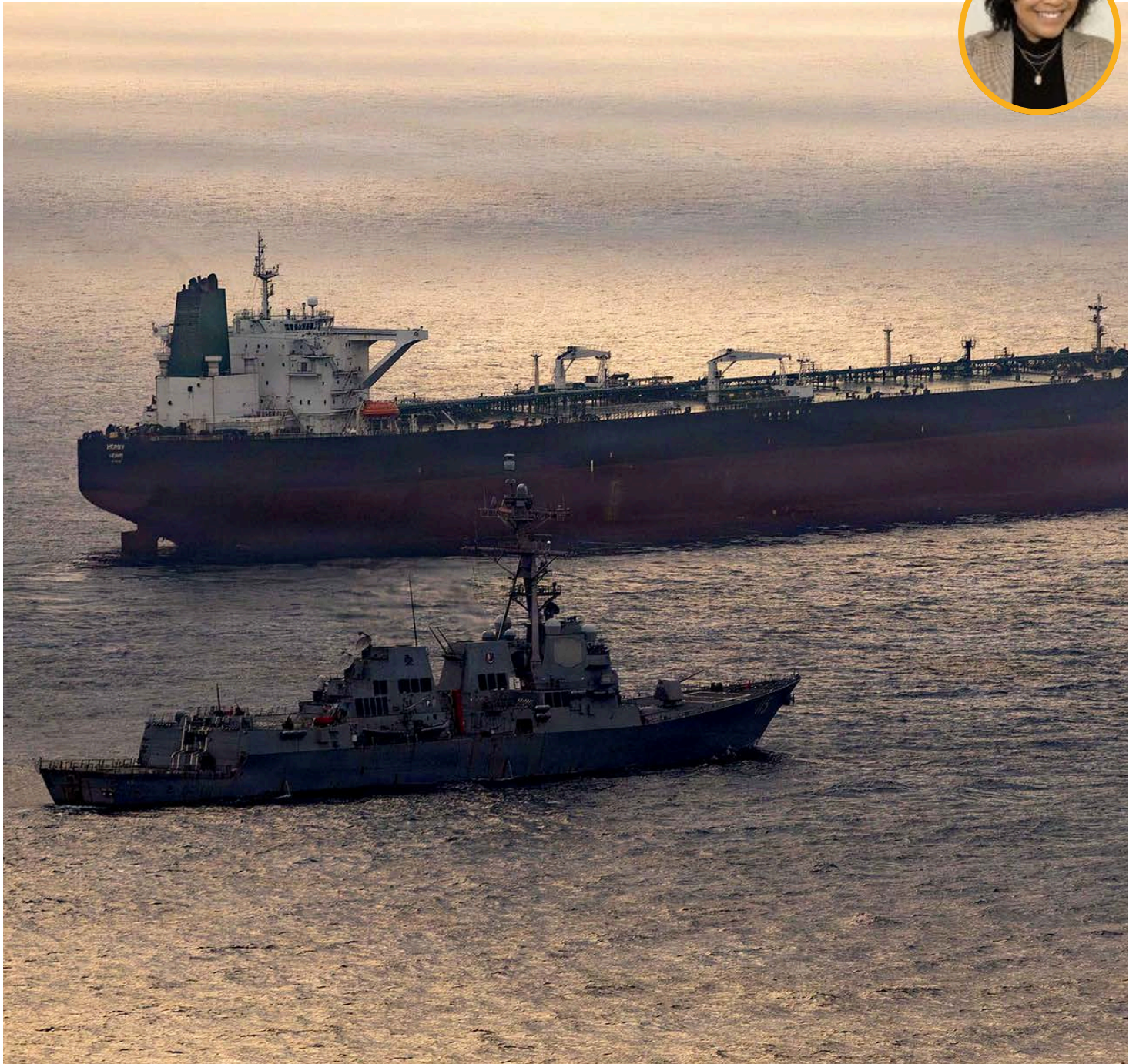
Cyprus defence and previous issues

HMS Dragon had recently been operating in the eastern Mediterranean as part of the UK's defensive work there. Its main task was to help defend British air bases in Cyprus after RAF Akrotiri was hit by an Iranian-made drone in March. The ship was also docked shortly after arriving in Cyprus because of what the Ministry of Defence described as a minor technical issue.

The BBC report said the government was at the time accused of not responding quickly enough to the conflict in the Middle East. The latest deployment now places HMS Dragon in a position to join any future maritime protection effort if required.

Revolutionary Guards Threaten US Middle East Sites After Tanker Strike

By Danielle Campbell



Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps issued a stern threat Saturday to target U.S. military sites across the Middle East should Iranian tankers face

further attacks. The warning follows Friday's U.S. fighter jet strike that disabled two Iranian-flagged tankers in the Gulf of Oman, which Washington said

violated its naval blockade. Tehran has yet to respond to Washington's latest peace proposal as tensions escalate in the region.

Iran Revolutionary Guards Threaten US Sites If Tankers Attacked

Revolutionary Guards Issue Direct Warning Against Future Tanker Attacks

Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) declared on Saturday that any aggression against Iranian tankers and commercial vessels will trigger significant retaliation against U.S. facilities throughout the Middle East region, according to Iranian state media reports.

The Revolutionary Guards stated explicitly: "Any attack on Iranian tankers and commercial vessels will result in a heavy attack on one of the American centres in the region and enemy ships". This statement came one day after U.S. military forces conducted strikes against two Iranian-flagged tankers in the Gulf of Oman.

The IRGC warning specifically referenced "U.S. locations in the Middle East" as potential targets should Iranian shipping face additional aggression. The threat represents a direct escalation in rhetoric between Tehran and Washington amid ongoing naval tensions in strategic waterways critical to global oil transport.

US Fighter Jet Disabled Two Iranian Tankers Friday

On Friday, a U.S. fighter jet engaged and disabled two Iranian-flagged tankers in the Gulf of Oman. Washington accused the vessels of violating its established blockade on

Iranian ports.

The U.S. military action marked the first direct military engagement against Iranian naval vessels in this escalating dispute over maritime shipping rights and blockade enforcement. The disabled tankers were Iranian-flagged commercial vessels operating in international waters of the Gulf of Oman.

American officials stated the tankers were challenging Washington's naval blockade of Iran's ports, which was implemented to restrict Iranian oil exports and economic activity. The U.S. fighter jet fired upon the vessels, rendering them unable to continue operations.

Washington Awaits Tehran Response to Latest Peace Proposal

The Revolutionary Guards' threat emerged as the United States awaited Tehran's response to Washington's most recent negotiation stance and peace proposal. President Donald Trump has been awaiting Iran's official reply to the latest diplomatic overture.

President Trump has threatened additional military action if Iran does not agree to the peace proposal put forward by the Washington administration. The diplomatic timeline remains uncertain as Tehran has not yet provided an official response to the American negotiating position.

The standoff represents a

critical juncture in U.S.-Iran relations, with both military action and diplomatic negotiations occurring simultaneously. Washington's latest proposal represents the administration's most recent attempt to resolve tensions through diplomatic channels rather than continued military engagement.

Gulf of Oman Becomes Flashpoint for US-Iran Naval Tensions

The Gulf of Oman has emerged as the central flashpoint for escalating naval tensions between the United States and Iran. This strategic waterway handles significant portions of global oil transportation and remains critical to international energy security.

Friday's incident occurred when the U.S. fighter jet engaged the Iranian tankers within Gulf of Oman waters. The location is particularly sensitive as it serves as a chokepoint for oil tankers traveling from Persian Gulf production facilities to international markets.

The Iranian Revolutionary Guards' threat specifically warned against further attacks on vessels operating in this strategic maritime corridor. Any escalation in the Gulf of Oman could have widespread implications for global energy supplies and regional stability.

Regional US Military Facilities Potentially Targeted Under IRGC Threat

The Revolutionary Guards' warning specifically referenced American military centers and facilities throughout the Middle East region as potential targets. The threat language indicated that "American centres in the region" would face heavy attacks if Iranian shipping continues to face aggression.

U.S. military installations across the Middle East could potentially fall within the scope of the IRGC threat, though specific facilities were not identified in the Revolutionary Guards' statement. The warning suggested retaliation would target both fixed installations and enemy vessels operating in the region.

The IRGC statement emphasized that retaliation would be "significant" and "heavy" in nature, indicating substantial military response rather than limited strikes. This language suggests the Revolutionary Guards are prepared for escalated military engagement beyond the current level of confrontation.

Iranian Media Reports Quote Revolutionary Guards Official Statement

Iranian state media reported the Revolutionary Guards' threat on Saturday, providing the first official public statement from Tehran regarding the tanker incident. The media reports quoted the Revolutionary Guards' official declaration verbatim.

The Iranian media coverage emphasized the direct nature of the threat and its connection to Friday's U.S. military action against Iranian tankers. State media outlets reported the warning as an official position of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps rather than individual commentary.

Multiple Iranian media sources published consistent reporting on the Revolutionary Guards' statement, confirming the accuracy of the threat's content and timing. The coordinated media coverage indicates official coordination within Iranian government communications regarding the incident.

International Community Monitors Escalating Maritime Dispute

The escalating dispute between the United States and Iran over maritime shipping rights has drawn international attention to the Gulf of Oman situation. Global observers are monitoring whether diplomacy or military action will prevail as the primary mechanism for resolving the crisis.

The blockade enforcement and subsequent tanker strikes represent a significant escalation in longstanding tensions between Washington and Tehran over maritime navigation rights. International shipping interests remain concerned about potential disruptions to commercial vessel traffic through the strategic waterway.

The timing of the Revolutionary Guards' threat, coinciding with pending diplomatic responses, creates uncertainty about the immediate future of U.S.-Iran relations. Regional stability depends heavily on whether both sides return to diplomatic channels or continue military posturing.

Historical Context of US-Iran Naval Confrontations

Naval confrontations between the United States and Iran in the Persian Gulf and surrounding waters have occurred periodically over recent decades. The current dispute represents the latest iteration of tensions over maritime navigation rights and blockade enforcement in the region.

The Gulf of Oman has historically been a contested area for naval operations involving both American and Iranian forces. Previous incidents involving Iranian vessels and U.S. military forces have occurred in these waters, though Friday's engagement marked an escalation to direct disabling of Iranian tankers.

The Revolutionary Guards Corps has maintained responsibility for Iran's maritime security operations and has previously issued warnings regarding foreign naval presence in Iranian-adjacent waters. The current threat follows historical patterns of Iranian defensive posturing regarding perceived threats to national shipping interests.

Trainline Says Middle East Tensions Weigh on European Rail Bookings

By Danielle Campbell



Trainline reported higher annual profit and revenue for the year ended 28 February 2026, but said geopolitical tensions in the Middle East were affecting inbound travel to Europe and may pressure sales in the year ahead. The rail and coach ticketing platform said operating profit rose 43% to £122 million, while revenue increased 2% to £453 million. Trainline also forecast flat to slightly lower revenue for 2026-27, citing weaker demand from international travellers.

Trainline warns of travel demand pressure

Trainline said geopolitical tensions in the Middle East were weighing on inbound air traffic into Europe and affecting rail ticket sales to international visitors. The company said it expected revenue for the next financial year to come in between

£440 million and £455 million. That outlook compares with reported revenue of £452.7 million in the year to 28 February 2026, according to a separate market report.

Leadership and strategy updates

Trainline said departing chief executive Jody Ford described the year as one of delivery, with net ticket and revenue growth and continued double-digit profitability gains. Ford also said the company was working closely with the government ahead of the creation of Great British Railways retail in the UK. Reuters reported that the firm framed this work as part of its effort to secure a fair and open regulatory environment.

The company's results came against the backdrop of broader industry changes in UK rail retail and ongoing international

demand shifts. Trainline's comments suggested that its domestic and European business remained resilient, even as it warned about softer foreign travel sales. The results were released alongside forecasts that indicate growth may slow in the coming financial year.

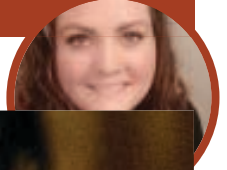
Market reaction and broader context

A market report said Trainline shares fell after the company flagged the impact of the Iran-related conflict and UK policy measures on future sales. The same report said the company expected sales of between £6.2 billion and £6.45 billion in the coming year, while adjusted core earnings rose 11% to £177 million. Those figures echoed the company's message that profitability improved even as the outlook for revenue became less certain.

The Guardian report said Trainline's warning centred on the effect of geopolitical tensions on international travel into Europe. Reuters similarly reported that inbound rail ticket sales were being affected by reduced foreign travel demand. The company's annual results therefore combined stronger profit growth with a more subdued revenue forecast for 2026-27.

President Trump Discloses Over 3600 Stock Trades Worth Up To \$750 Million In Q1 2026

By Mandilee Hecht



President Donald Trump disclosed more than 3,600 stock trades in the first quarter of 2026, with total transaction values ranging from \$220 million to \$750 million according to filings released by the U.S. Office of Government Ethics. The disclosures reveal

extensive trading in technology and AI-related companies including Nvidia, Microsoft, Amazon, Meta, Apple, and Oracle, with individual purchases between \$1 million and \$5 million and significant sales of Microsoft, Amazon, and Meta securities valued between \$5 million and \$25 million. The filings do not specify whether Trump personally directed the trades, and the Trump Organization states that independent financial advisors manage the president's investment accounts through fully discretionary arrangements.

Trump Ethics Filing Shows Hundreds Of Millions In Tech Stock Transactions

President Donald Trump revealed a series of financial dealings totaling at least \$220 million earlier this year involving the securities of prominent U.S. corporations, based on two newly released financial disclosure statements from the U.S. Office of Government Ethics published on Thursday.

These reports encompass the initial quarter of 2026 and present transaction values in general ranges rather than precise figures, indicating an overall value between \$220 million and approximately \$750 million.

The transactions, which became public on Thursday, are valued at between \$220 million and \$750 million cumulatively, according to Reuters.

Detailed Breakdown Of Transaction Numbers And Timing

Trump's filings with the U.S. Office of Government Ethics show more than 3,700 transactions, with the total amount for each listed as a range rather than an exact figure.

During the first quarter of 2026, President Trump executed a total of 3,642 stock transactions, as revealed in a 113-page disclosure form (OGE Form 278-T) made public this week.

On average, this amounts to approximately 60 trades per trading session, marking a departure from a lengthy tradition of blind-trust arrangements that have been in place since the era of Lyndon B. Johnson.

The filing, submitted on Thursday to the US Office of Government Ethics through two OGE Form 278-T reports, disclosed more than 3,600 transactions executed between January and the end of March 2026.

During the period from January to March, there were over 2,300 purchases recorded.

Additionally, the report noted nearly 1,300 sales during the same quarter.

Major Technology Companies Featured In Purchase Transactions

The investments included securities associated with firms like Meta, Oracle, Broadcom, Bank of America, and Goldman Sachs, along with transactions in municipal bonds.

Notable acquisitions, each valued between \$1 million and \$5 million, featured S&P 500

Index, Nvidia, and Apple Inc.

Trump bought between \$1 million and \$5 million in securities from companies including ServiceNow, Nvidia, Adobe, Microsoft, Oracle, Broadcom, Motorola, Amazon, Texas Instruments and Dell.

The filings highlight that Trump's most substantial purchases and sales were largely concentrated in the technology sector.

Within the dozen transactions between \$1 million and \$5 million during the initial quarter of 2026, Trump invested in securities from companies including ServiceNow, Adobe, Microsoft, Broadcom, Motorola, Amazon, Texas Instruments, and Dell.

Individual purchases of Nvidia, Microsoft, Broadcom, Amazon, Apple and others ranged from \$1 million to \$5 million in disclosed value.

Buy orders of AMD, Intel, Goldman Sachs, Alphabet, Airbnb, DoorDash, Micron, Bloom Energy and others ranged from \$500,000 to \$1 million in disclosed value.

Significant Sales Of Microsoft Amazon And Meta Securities

Significant divestitures ranged from \$5 million to \$25 million per transaction, involving companies such as Microsoft, Amazon, and Meta.

He also reported sales of between \$5 million and \$25 million for Microsoft, Amazon and Meta securities.

On February 10, he divested between \$5 million and \$25 million in shares of Microsoft, Amazon, and Meta,

as documented.

The nearly 1,300 sales in the quarter included transactions involving Microsoft, Amazon and Meta worth between \$5 million and \$25 million, the filing showed. Trump reported hundreds of stock sales ranging from \$15,000 to up to \$25 million.

Uncertainty About Security Types And Trading Direction

The filings do not consistently specify the type of security involved, leaving it unclear whether they pertained to stocks or corporate bonds.

The filings do not make clear which accounts or personnel handled the trades.

The filings do not specify whether Trump directed the trades.

The filings did not clarify whether Trump personally directed any of these trades.

Some transactions were labeled as "unsolicited," although the meaning of this designation remains ambiguous.

Trump Organization Statement On Independent Account Management

The Trump Organization asserts that the president's investment accounts are managed independently by third-party financial entities, without his involvement.

A Trump Organization spokesperson told Popular Information that all trades were managed by an independent outside financial advisor through "fully discretionary accounts".

The Trump Organization clarified that President Trump's investment holdings are maintained in exclusively discretionary accounts managed by third-party financial entities with sole and exclusive authority over all investment decisions.

They emphasized that neither Trump, his family, nor the Trump Organization has any role in selecting or approving specific investments, nor do they receive advance notice or provide input regarding trading activities.

Congressional Efforts To Ban Stock Trading By Public Officials

There is currently a live bipartisan push in the US Congress to pass a stock trading ban for public officials, and several proposals are at different stages of the legislative process.

The most prominent effort is the "Restore Trust in Congress Act", a bipartisan bill introduced in the US Congress by Republican Representative Chip Roy and Democratic Representative Seth Magaziner in September 2025.

The legislation would ban members of the US Congress, their spouses and dependent children from owning or trading individual stocks and other covered investments.

A companion Senate version was introduced in January 2026 by Republican Senator Ashley Moody and Democratic Senator Kirsten Gillibrand.

According to the bill's sponsors, the US Congress version has attracted more than 120 co-sponsors.

There is also a separate debate over whether any ban should extend beyond the US Congress to include the president and vice president.

In the Senate, a version of the ETHICS Act also advanced through committee in 2025 and would prohibit stock trading by members of Congress, the president and the vice president.

Previous Disclosure Pattern Since Return To White House

Since his return to the White House last year, Trump has consistently disclosed financial transactions through a number of public ethics filings, which have documented trades in both municipal debt and securities from major corporations.

Since his return to the White House last year, Trump has consistently reported financial transactions through a series of public ethics disclosures, indicating trades in both municipal debt and securities from major corporations.

US presidents are not banned from trading financial markets but must disclose personal trades.

No charges were made or proven acts of insider trading have been outlined but the revelation still draws ethics scrutiny and a push for trading restrictions.

The current filings only necessitated Trump to report transactions involving securities valued above \$1,000.

Trump was required by law to report all transactions within 45 days.

He missed that deadline for many trades.

His penalty: \$200.

Donald Trump's personal assets and business empire are actively run and managed by his sons Donald Trump Jr. and Eric Trump, but some entries also indicate broker involvement.

Many of the equities listed in the report are from companies subject to close regulation by the Trump administration.

The filings revealed trades featuring purchases from companies like Meta, Proctor & Gamble, Boeing, and Adobe.

Timing Of Trades Coincided With Company Announcements And Policy Developments

Notably, the timing of some of Trump's trades coincided with announcements from the companies whose stocks he was either purchasing or selling.

For example, one week following Trump's acquisition of Nvidia stock valued between \$1 million and \$5 million on February 10, Nvidia disclosed a significant chip agreement with Meta.

Furthermore, prior to the Commerce Department's official approval for the sale of certain Nvidia chips to China, Trump acquired \$500,000 to \$1 million of Nvidia shares.

On March 11, Trump toured a Thermo Fisher Scientific manufacturing facility in Reading, Ohio, praised the company and its CEO at length, and explicitly encouraged other pharmaceutical companies to do business with it.

The same day, the disclosure

showed, Trump purchased between \$15,000 and \$50,000 of Thermo Fisher stock — a transaction marked "UNSOLICITED," indicating it was initiated by Trump rather than recommended by a financial advisor.

That afternoon, at a separate event in Kentucky, Trump praised Apple CEO Tim Cook and the company's domestic manufacturing commitments.

The same day, Trump purchased between \$250,000 and \$500,000 of Apple stock, also marked "UNSOLICITED".

His Apple purchases for the month of March totaled between \$2 million and \$7.2 million.

Market Performance And Profitability Of Held Securities

According to the report, and assuming the holdings have remained relatively the same since the end of March, Trump is 20% or more in profit on almost all of the names indicated.

In particular, Trump is over 100% in profit on AMD, Intel, Iridium Communications, Bloom Energy, Intuitive Machines, Marvell Technology, Penguin Solutions, SanDisk, Seagate, Vishay Intertechnology and other stocks.

Based on the dates of the transactions it is also apparent that Trump heavily bought the price dip in March caused by the start of the Iran war.

The S&P 500 dropped over 8% and bottomed at the end of the month, subsequently rising around 19% to record highs.

The documents reveal extensive

exposure to some of Wall Street's biggest names, particularly in technology and specifically AI.

Trump's portfolio is heavily skewed toward large-cap tech, artificial intelligence, and major U.S. government contractors.

Trading Volume Compared To Congressional Members

Trump traded more stock in 3 months than all 535 members of Congress did in a year.

This week, President Trump filed disclosures revealing more than 3,700 transactions — valued between \$220 million and \$750 million — in just the first three months of 2026.

Republican and Democratic lawmakers disagree on whether officials should be required to fully divest existing holdings or simply stop purchasing new stocks.

There is also disagreement over whether spouses and family members should be covered, and whether restrictions should apply to the president.

Several proposals have advanced through committee or gained enough support to potentially reach the House floor, but no comprehensive ban has yet become law.

Despite unusually broad public support for tighter trading restrictions, the issue remains politically contentious.

A discharge petition launched by Republican Representative Anna Paulina Luna aims to force the legislation onto the House floor even without leadership approval.

UK Launches Largest Business Delegation to US for Greater Together LA Expo

By Henry Nicholas



Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport Lisa Nandy and Minister for Economic Transformation Blair McDougall led a record 250+ UK business and cultural leaders to Los Angeles for the Greater Together LA expo. The five-day event, running May 18–22, 2026, aims to drive transatlantic economic

growth through partnerships in finance, technology, and culture. King Charles sent a message to delegates marking the largest UK trade mission to the United States. The GREAT Britain & Northern Ireland Campaign organises the expo with major corporate sponsors from leading financial and tech

organisations.

Historic UK Trade Mission Arrives in Los Angeles for Major Economic Expo

Los Angeles received the largest ever British business delegation on Monday, 18 May 2026, as Secretary of State for

Culture, Media and Sport Lisa Nandy and Minister for Economic Transformation Blair McDougall led more than 250 business and cultural leaders to the Greater Together LA expo.

The delegation comprises executives from the UK's financial services, technology, and cultural sectors, marking the most significant UK trade and investment mission to the United States to date. The expo runs from 18 May to 22 May 2026 in Los Angeles, California.

His Majesty King Charles sent a heartfelt message to the delegates departing for Los Angeles, recognising the significance of the mission. The event is part of the UK's GREAT Britain & Northern Ireland Campaign, following King Charles's address to Congress earlier this year.

Government Officials Lead Record-Breaking Trade Delegation

Secretary Lisa Nandy, who was appointed Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on 5 July 2024, has served as Member of Parliament for Wigan since 2010. She leads the delegation alongside Blair McDougall, Minister for Economic Transformation, whose remit includes driving economic growth through international partnerships.

The UK Government previously announced in April 2026 that Secretary of State for Business and Trade Peter Kyle would also lead delegations to

Greater Together LA in May, highlighting cross-governmental commitment to the initiative.

The 250-plus delegates include CEOs, executives, artists, and musicians representing British industry and culture. Their arrival marks a significant escalation in UK-US trade engagement under the current Labour government.

Greater Together LA Expo Focuses on Transatlantic Economic Partnerships

Greater Together LA will showcase how US-UK partnerships can continue to drive economic growth and shape the collective future of both nations. The expo is designed to promote trade, investment, and collaboration between British and American organisations across multiple sectors.

The event emphasises partnerships in three core areas: financial services, technology, and cultural industries. These sectors represent key strengths of the UK economy and areas where transatlantic cooperation has historically generated significant economic value.

The British Consulate General in Los Angeles confirmed the expo's dates and scope, noting that over 250 leaders from the UK's financial, technology, and cultural sectors are travelling to LA specifically to promote growth and enhance transatlantic partnerships.

Major Corporate Sponsors

Support UK Government Trade Initiative

The GREAT Britain & Northern Ireland Campaign is hosting the expo in partnership with world-leading financial, technology, and cultural organisations. These corporate sponsors represent major players in their respective industries and demonstrate private sector commitment to strengthening UK-US economic ties.

The involvement of major corporate sponsors distinguishes Greater Together LA from previous trade missions, combining government leadership with significant private sector investment and participation.

The campaign's approach integrates public and private resources to maximise the impact of the trade mission, creating opportunities for British businesses to establish or expand relationships with American counterparts.

Timeline and Logistics of the Five-Day Expo

The Greater Together LA expo commenced on Monday, 18 May 2026, and continues through Friday, 22 May 2026. The five-day duration allows for comprehensive programming including business meetings, networking events, panel discussions, and cultural showcases.

Delegates departed for Los Angeles over the weekend preceding the official opening,

with the formal launch occurring on Monday morning. The timing aligns with broader UK government efforts to strengthen economic relationships with key international partners during 2026.

The Los Angeles location was selected for its status as a major global hub for entertainment, technology, and international trade, providing accessible infrastructure for a large international delegation.

Context of UK-US Trade Relations Under Current Government

The trade mission represents the Labour government's approach to international economic engagement following their appointment in July 2024. Secretary Nandy's leadership of the cultural and economic portfolio reflects the government's integration of cultural diplomacy with trade policy.

King Charles's address to Congress earlier in 2026 set the diplomatic context for enhanced UK-US cooperation, with the Greater Together LA expo serving as a concrete implementation of that bilateral commitment.

The mission's scale—described repeatedly in official communications as the "largest ever" UK business delegation to the United States—signals prioritisation of the transatlantic relationship in current UK foreign economic

policy.

Sector Representation Among Delegates

The delegation's composition reflects the UK economy's diverse strengths, with representation from financial services, technology companies, and cultural industries. This multi-sector approach aims to maximise the range of partnership opportunities available during the expo.

Financial services delegates include representatives from London's financial district, the UK's primary global financial centre. Technology sector participants represent British innovation in software, artificial intelligence, and digital services. Cultural industry delegates include artists, musicians, and executives from the UK's creative sectors, which contribute significantly to the British economy and maintain strong transatlantic connections.

Official Government Communications on Mission Objectives

Official GOV.UK communications state that the delegation's purpose is to "drive economic growth at a major expo". The language emphasises economic outcomes rather than political or diplomatic objectives, reflecting the business-focused nature of the mission.

The Government's press release

describes the expo as a platform for showcasing successful US-UK partnerships and identifying new opportunities for collaboration. This framing positions the event as both a celebration of existing cooperation and a forward-looking investment in future relationships.

All official communications maintain factual, neutral language regarding the mission's scope and objectives, avoiding speculation about specific outcomes or agreements.

Geographic and Institutional Framework

The British Consulate General in Los Angeles serves as the local institutional partner for the expo, coordinating logistics and providing support for the delegation. The Consulate's involvement ensures continuity between the UK government's central objectives and on-the-ground implementation in the United States.

Los Angeles represents the westernmost major US city with significant international business infrastructure, positioning it strategically for engagements with Pacific Rim markets in addition to domestic American opportunities.

The GREAT Britain & Northern Ireland Campaign, which organises the expo, operates under the UK Government's international promotion framework, coordinating trade, investment, and cultural diplomacy initiatives globally.

US Banks Rush to Patch Cyber Holes After Anthropic Mythos Discovery

BY KATHY MALOUF



US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent convened leaders from major American banks and Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell in Washington to address urgent cybersecurity risks posed by Anthropic's unreleased AI model, Claude Mythos. The model has identified thousands of software vulnerabilities, some dating back 27 years, none previously known to developers. Banks

with limited access to Mythos are now rapidly patching security holes to protect customer data and prevent potential cyber attacks.

Anthropic Mythos AI Reveals Thousands Of Unknown Software Vulnerabilities

Anthropic, the US-based artificial intelligence firm, disclosed that its Claude Mythos

model has detected thousands of security vulnerabilities in widely used software applications. The company stated that Mythos has demonstrated capabilities exceeding "all but the most skilled humans" in identifying and exploiting software weaknesses. The model has uncovered vulnerabilities dating back as far as 27 years, with none previously recognised by original developers

or technology watchdogs. Anthropic has not publicly released Claude Mythos and is currently limiting access to a select group of businesses, including Amazon, Apple and Microsoft.

US Treasury Convenes Major Bank Leaders For Cybersecurity Emergency Meeting

Scott Bessent, the US Treasury Secretary, called an emergency meeting at Treasury headquarters in Washington this week, bringing together prominent leaders from major American banks. Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell attended the meeting alongside executives from leading financial institutions.

The meeting was convened specifically to address cybersecurity threats associated with Anthropic's latest AI model. Regulators sought to ensure large banks understood the risks posed by Claude Mythos and similar systems capable of identifying and exploiting software vulnerabilities.

Banks Accelerate Security Patching Following Anthropic Model Access

Large lenders with limited access to the Claude Mythos model are finding thousands of security holes in their systems and rushing to plug them. These financial institutions are actively scanning their infrastructure for vulnerabilities identified by the AI and implementing immediate security

patches.

The central concern is that Claude Mythos can not only identify software vulnerabilities but also scan complex systems and, in some cases, generate working cyber attacks.

Banks have been instructed to strengthen cybersecurity systems, protect customer data and report suspicious activity immediately.

Cybersecurity Experts Warn Threat Landscape Has Fundamentally Changed

The arrival of Anthropic's Mythos has jolted banks, software giants and governments into reckoning with a new era of cyber attacks. Experts warn that the cybersecurity threat posed by such AI models was already emerging, but Mythos has accelerated the timeline significantly.

Anthropic noted in a blog post published earlier this month that AI models have now outperformed "all but the most skilled humans" in detecting and exploiting software vulnerabilities. This capability represents a fundamental shift in the cybersecurity landscape, according to industry observers.

Fears Emerge About Hackers Leveraging AI For Password Cracking

Security concerns extend beyond the immediate vulnerabilities discovered by Mythos. There are growing fears that malicious actors could

potentially leverage such AI tools to decipher passwords or compromise encryption designed to safeguard data.

The model's ability to identify and exploit vulnerabilities faster than human security teams creates new risks for financial institutions handling sensitive customer information. Banks are particularly concerned about the potential for automated cyber attacks targeting their digital infrastructure.

Regulatory Response Includes UK And US Oversight Coordination

US and UK regulators have met with banks to discuss Anthropic AI cyber risks, showing transatlantic coordination on the issue. The meeting aimed to ensure large banks understood possible risks associated with Anthropic's Mythos model and similar systems that could be weaponised for cyber attacks.

This regulatory response reflects broader concerns among financial authorities about the implications of advanced AI for financial sector security. Both American and British banking supervisors are monitoring the situation closely as institutions implement security upgrades.

Anthropic Limits Model Distribution To Select Technology Companies

In response to the security implications of Claude Mythos, Anthropic has opted to limit distribution of the new model to

a select group of businesses. Current access has been granted to major technology companies including Amazon, Apple and Microsoft.

The company has not made Claude Mythos publicly available and continues to restrict access while assessing security implications. This controlled distribution approach contrasts with typical AI model releases that provide broader access to developers and researchers.

Long-Standing Vulnerabilities Remain Undetected For Decades

Some of the vulnerabilities identified by Mythos date back 27 years, highlighting how long-standing security flaws can persist in software systems. None of these vulnerabilities were believed to have been recognised by their original developers or technology watchdogs prior to being flagged by the AI model.

This discovery raises questions about the effectiveness of traditional software security testing methods and the extent of undetected vulnerabilities in critical infrastructure. Financial institutions are now reviewing historical systems that may contain these long-standing flaws.

Federal Reserve Chair Participates In Treasury Cybersecurity Briefing

Jerome Powell, the chair of the

Federal Reserve, was among the attenders at the meeting in Washington convened by Treasury Secretary Bessent. Powell’s participation signals the Federal Reserve’s recognition of the cybersecurity threat posed by advanced AI models to the financial system. The presence of the central bank chairman alongside Treasury officials demonstrates coordinated federal response to the emerging cybersecurity challenge. Federal regulators are working to ensure financial institutions maintain adequate cybersecurity defences against AI-enabled threats.

Banking Industry Faces Increased Cybersecurity Investment Requirements

The revelations from Anthropic’s Mythos are forcing banks to increase cybersecurity investment significantly. Financial institutions must now allocate resources to identify and patch thousands of vulnerabilities that traditional security measures had failed to detect.

Large lenders are conducting comprehensive security audits of their systems using tools and insights gained from access to the Mythos model. This remediation effort represents a substantial operational burden for banks already managing complex regulatory compliance requirements.

Technology Sector Responds To AI-Driven Vulnerability

Discovery

The technology sector is responding to Anthropic’s disclosure by reassessing security testing methodologies and vulnerability disclosure practices. Companies with access to Mythos are sharing findings with software vendors to facilitate patch development. The revelation that AI can outperform human experts in vulnerability detection is prompting technology companies to reconsider their approach to software security. Some firms are exploring the use of AI tools defensively to identify vulnerabilities before malicious actors can exploit them.

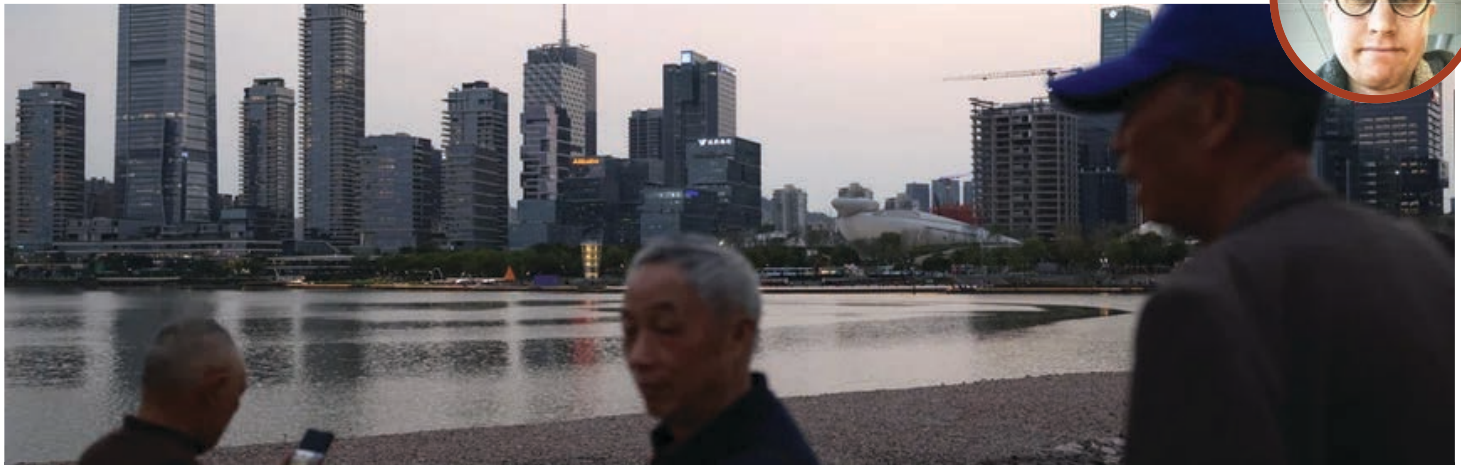
Cybersecurity Timeline Accelerates As Banks Face Immediate Threats

Banks have been told to strengthen cybersecurity systems immediately rather than following typical remediation timelines. The urgency stems from concerns that malicious actors could develop similar AI capabilities and launch attacks before institutions complete their security upgrades.

The accelerated timeline for security patching represents a significant operational challenge for financial institutions with legacy systems. Banks are prioritising critical vulnerabilities that could expose customer data or disrupt financial services.

China Directs Banks to Halt New Loans to Sanctioned Refiners

By Henry Nicholas



China's financial regulator has advised the nation's largest banks to temporarily suspend new loans to five oil refineries recently sanctioned by the United States over their ties to Iranian oil. The National Financial Regulatory Administration instructed banks to review their exposure to firms including Hengli Petrochemical (Dalian) Refinery while awaiting further guidance. Banks have been guided not to extend new yuan-denominated credit but also told not to call in existing loans. The move comes after the US imposed sanctions on the refineries for their involvement with Iranian oil exports.

China Regulatory Body Issues Loan Pause Directive for Sanctioned Refiners

The National Financial Regulatory Administration (NFRA) has formally advised China's biggest lending institutions to temporarily halt

new credit extensions to five refineries that faced US sanctions earlier this week. According to sources familiar with the matter who requested anonymity due to the confidential nature of the information, the regulator asked banks to assess their financial exposure and business dealings with the sanctioned firms while waiting for additional guidance.

The directive specifically targets new yuan-denominated credit, with banks instructed not to extend such loans to the sanctioned refineries. However, the regulator also clarified that banks should not demand repayment of existing loans to these companies.

Five Refineries Face US Sanctions Over Iranian Oil Connections

The five refineries targeted by both the US sanctions and China's loan pause include

Hengli Petrochemical (Dalian) Refinery, identified as one of China's largest private refineries. The United States imposed sanctions on these refineries due to their ties to Iranian oil, according to multiple credible news organisations reporting on the developments.

The sanctions represent a significant escalation in US efforts to curb Iranian oil exports through third-country processing facilities.

Banks Must Review Exposure While Awaiting Further Regulatory Guidance

Financial institutions across China have been instructed to conduct comprehensive reviews of their exposure to the five sanctioned refineries.

The NFRA's directive requires banks to examine their business dealings with firms including Hengli Petrochemical (Dalian) Refinery Co. while awaiting further guidance

from regulatory authorities.

Sources familiar with the matter indicated that banks are currently holding on existing loans rather than calling them in, while simultaneously blocking new credit extensions.

The temporary nature of the loan pause suggests regulators may issue additional guidance depending on how the situation develops.

Hengli Petrochemical Among Largest Private Refiners Targeted

Hengli Petrochemical (Dalian) Refinery stands out as one of China's largest private refiners among the five companies targeted by the sanctions.

The company's significant market position makes the loan pause particularly noteworthy for China's private refining sector.

As a major private refiner, Hengli Petrochemical's operations had previously included processing Iranian oil for export, which triggered the US sanctions.

Yuan-Denominated Credit Restricted While Existing Loans Remain Intact

The NFRA's directive specifically targets new yuan-denominated credit extensions to the sanctioned refineries.

Banks have received clear guidance not to extend new credit in Chinese currency to the five sanctioned firms.

However, regulatory instructions explicitly state that existing loans should not be called in or demands for repayment

made.

This approach allows banks to maintain current business relationships while preventing new financial exposure to sanctioned entities.

US Sanctions Target Iranian Oil Export Network Through Chinese Refiners

The United States' sanctions on the five Chinese refineries stem from their involvement in processing and exporting Iranian oil.

US officials have increasingly targeted third-country refineries that process Iranian crude as part of broader efforts to restrict Iran's oil export revenues.

The sanctions represent part of a wider US strategy to eliminate Iranian oil from global markets through enforcement against processing facilities.

Financial Regulators Balance Sanctions Compliance With Banking Stability

China's financial regulator appears to be taking a measured approach that balances compliance concerns with banking sector stability.

By restricting only new loans while protecting existing loans from being called in, the NFRA avoids potential financial instability that could arise from sudden loan repayments.

The temporary nature of the directive, pending further guidance, suggests regulators are monitoring the situation before making permanent policy

decisions.

Private Refining Sector Faces Uncertainty Following Sanctions Announcement

China's private refining sector, represented prominently by Hengli Petrochemical, now faces uncertainty regarding future financing access.

The loan pause affects one of the largest private refiners in China, signaling potential broader impacts on the private refining industry.

Private refiners in China had previously operated with significant autonomy in sourcing crude oil from various international markets.

Regulatory Uncertainty Continues as Banks Await Additional NFRA Instructions

Banks across China remain in a holding position as they await further guidance from the National Financial Regulatory Administration.

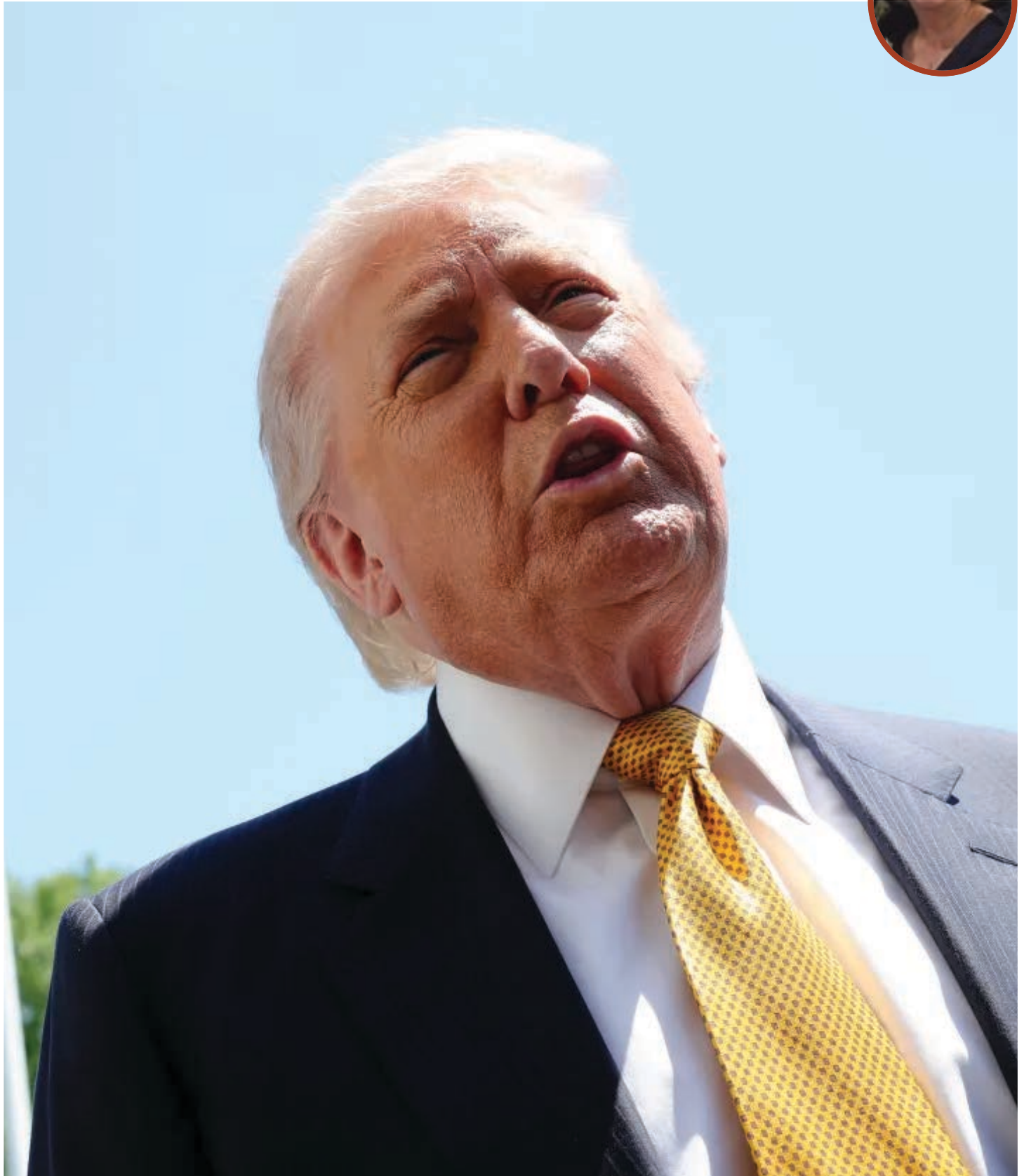
The sources familiar with the matter indicated that the current directive is temporary, with regulators expected to provide additional instructions.

Financial institutions are conducting exposure reviews while maintaining current loan relationships, creating a cautious but stable banking environment.

The regulatory uncertainty means banks must prepare for potential changes in lending policy depending on how US-China relations develop regarding Iranian oil sanctions.

Trump Drops IRS Tax Lawsuit in Exchange for \$1.8 Billion Ally Compensation Fund

BY KATHY MALOUF



President Donald Trump has agreed to drop his lawsuit against the Internal Revenue Service in exchange for a \$1.8 billion fund to compensate allies who allege they were unjustly targeted under the Biden administration. The settlement, signed by Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche, permanently bars the IRS from pursuing tax claims against Trump, his family, the Trump Organization, and affiliated entities for tax returns filed before the settlement date. Federal tax filings submitted by Trump and associated parties prior to this week are now safeguarded from possible IRS enforcement actions, including ongoing tax audits.

Trump IRS Lawsuit Settlement Creates \$1.8 Billion Compensation Fund

President Donald Trump agreed to drop his lawsuit against the IRS in exchange for a fund that can compensate allies who were targeted under the previous administration, according to a settlement document released on Tuesday. The \$1.8 billion agreement with the Justice Department was revealed in a new document that bears the signature of Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche.

Federal tax filings submitted by President Trump, his relatives, the Trump Organization, and associated trusts and affiliates prior to this week are safeguarded from possible enforcement actions by the Internal Revenue Service due to

the contentious settlement.

According to the document, the Justice Department has prohibited the federal government from initiating or pursuing "any and all claims" that the IRS could have raised, which includes "tax returns filed before" the settlement's effective date.

IRS Permanently Barred From Investigating Trump Family Tax Returns

The U.S. government will permanently drop tax claims against President Trump, according to a settlement document made public on Tuesday. In a remarkable exercise of executive authority, the government "forever barred and precluded" investigating or prosecuting Trump, his sons, and the current tax reviews of the Trump organization, according to a one-page document available on the Justice Department's website.

The protection encompasses Trump, his family, the Trump Organization, and "entities such as trusts, parent, sibling or affiliated companies, as well as subsidiaries". It also includes any ongoing tax audits involving Trump and others named in the addendum that the IRS was conducting at the time the settlement was finalized.

The settlement pertains only to ongoing audits and does not cover any future examinations, the Justice Department clarified in response to inquiries about the expanded settlement.

Democrats Criticise Trump Settlement as Taxpayer-Funded Slush Fund

Democrats have strongly criticised the settlement arrangement. "Trump is 'dropping' his bogus lawsuit against the IRS in exchange for a slush fund, courtesy of your tax dollars, that he can use to pay off his allies," Democratic critics stated.

According to ABC News, which cited sources familiar with the developments, talks of a settlement between Trump and the IRS could involve a compensation fund aimed at aiding Trump's allies who allege they have been unjustly targeted by the Biden administration. Though the specific terms of any settlement remain undetermined, reports suggest it could include a fund for victim compensation, as well as a commission designed to issue monetary awards, akin to a truth-and-reconciliation process. Democrats.org stated that "Trump initially attempted to extort \$10 billion from taxpayers through his frivolous lawsuit against the IRS". The organisation added that "Today, Donald Trump's Department of Justice covertly signed a broadly worded addendum stating that the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) is 'forever barred and precluded' from pursuing 'examinations' of past tax returns filed by Trump, his family, and his companies".

Historical Context of Trump Tax Returns and Previous Audits

The settlement comes against a backdrop of years of controversy surrounding Trump's tax returns. In September 2020, just before the November presidential election, The New York Times published a comprehensive investigation into Trump's tax returns. The investigation disclosed that Trump paid merely \$750 in federal income taxes for the year he secured the presidency in 2016 and had not paid any taxes in 10 of the previous 15 years.

In December 2022, the Democratic-controlled House Ways and Means Committee voted 24-16 in open session to release information related to Trump's tax returns from 2015-2020. The committee met for several hours behind closed doors before voting to make public some documents related to former President Trump's tax returns—a move Trump has long fought.

The committee found there was no ongoing audit of Trump's tax returns during his presidency until the committee requested them, despite an IRS requirement that tax returns filed by a sitting president or vice president are subject to audit. The committee had requested six years' worth of Trump's returns as part of what it said was an investigation into IRS audit practices of presidents and vice presidents.

The six years of returns, including those of eight affiliated businesses; committee reports, a report from the Joint

Committee on Taxation and IRS audit reports, were expected to be released following redaction of personal information.

Trump Organization Tax Protection Extended to Affiliated Entities

The settlement's protection extends beyond Trump personally to include his relatives and business entities. Federal tax filings submitted by President Trump, his relatives, the Trump Organization, and associated trusts and affiliates prior to this week are safeguarded from possible enforcement actions by the IRS.

The document explicitly states that protection encompasses entities such as trusts, parent, sibling or affiliated companies, as well as subsidiaries. This comprehensive protection means that any ongoing tax audits involving Trump and others named in the addendum that the IRS was conducting at the time the settlement was finalized are now protected.

Justice Department Clarifies Settlement Scope Regarding Future Tax Examinations

The Justice Department provided clarification regarding the scope of the settlement. The settlement pertains only to ongoing audits and does not cover any future examinations, the Justice Department clarified in response to inquiries about the expanded settlement.

This distinction is significant as it means that while past tax returns and current audits are protected, the IRS retains authority to examine Trump's tax filings for periods after the settlement's effective date. The one-page document available on the Justice Department's website outlines the specific parameters of what the government has agreed to forego.

Background on Trump Account Tax Cut Programs Under Current Administration

The settlement announcement comes during a period when President Trump's tax cut programs are being implemented. As of March 8, 2026, nearly 63.5 million tax returns have been processed—45 percent of the anticipated total number of tax returns by April 15—with an average refund over \$3,700.

Nearly 45 percent of tax returns—over 27.5 million—claimed at least one of President Trump's new tax cuts on Schedule 1-A. Over 3.5 million returns have claimed No Tax on Tips, over 15.5 million returns have claimed No Tax on Overtime, and over 9.2 million returns have claimed the Enhanced Deduction for Seniors. Additionally, nearly 3.5 million Trump Accounts have been opened, with over 800,000 qualifying for the \$1,000 pilot program.

US Pauses Participation In Historic Canada Defence Board Dating To World War II

BY ALICIA POZSONY



The United States announced it is pausing participation in the Permanent Joint Board on Defence, an 86-year-old Canada-US continental defence advisory body created during World War II. US Under Secretary of Defense Elbridge Colby stated Washington is reassessing the forum's benefits after accusing Canada of failing to make credible progress on defence commitments. Prime Minister Mark Carney responded that Canada will maintain defence coordination with the US while diversifying partnerships with NATO allies and Ukraine. The board has not convened since 2024 despite being scheduled to meet biannually.

US Pauses Participation In Historic Canada Defence Board Dating To World War II

Washington – The Pentagon has suspended its involvement in a longstanding bilateral defence consultation

mechanism with Canada, marking a significant disruption in North American security cooperation that dates back to 1940.

Pentagon Announces Pause On Permanent Joint Board On Defence

On Monday, Elbridge Colby, the US Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, announced through a post on X that the Department of Defense would pause participation in the Permanent Joint Board on Defence to "reassess how this forum benefits shared North American defense". Colby stated that "Unfortunately, Canada has failed to make credible progress on its defense commitments".

The announcement described the board as the principal strategic forum for Canada-US defense cooperation.

The Permanent Joint Board on Defence was established in August 1940 following an agreement between US President Franklin

Roosevelt and Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King at Ogdensburg, New York. The body was created just months before the United States entered World War II and has served as an advisory entity for bilateral defense cooperation ever since.

Canada Has Not Met Since 2024 Despite Biannual Meeting Schedule

The board convenes only once or twice annually, though recently even that frequency has diminished. According to Prime Minister Carney's office, the last meeting occurred at the end of 2024, despite the board being scheduled to meet biannually.

The 86-year-old advisory body has historically functioned as a platform for regional security discussions between military leaders from both nations. It is not the sole mechanism for collaboration between the armed forces of the two nations, nor is it necessarily the most significant.

Prime Minister Carney Responds To Washington Decision

Prime Minister Mark Carney displayed no indication of hesitation regarding the United States' sudden decision when addressing the matter Tuesday in Quebec. "I wouldn't exaggerate the importance of

this," Carney remarked at the announcement.

Carney acknowledged the board's "long heritage" but emphasized that "we have many aspects of very close defence co-operation with the United States ... There's lots of co-operation we will continue to do so".

The Prime Minister stated that Canada will persist in coordinating with the US while also "diversifying our defense cooperation" with other NATO allies and Ukraine in light of the Pentagon's pause. "We will also be cooperating with other partners and diversifying our defence cooperation," Carney said.

US Accuses Canada Of Failing Defense Commitments

The pause is directly linked to tensions over Canada's defense spending and policy shifts under Prime Minister Mark Carney, including statements about reducing reliance on US defence. Earlier this year, Carney announced at the World Economic Forum that Ottawa would cut its reliance on US defence spending, adding that "the era of sending 70 cents of every dollar to the US for defence is over".

Colby's announcement indicated that divisive rhetoric from Canadian officials contributed to the Pentagon's decision. The US Under Secretary characterized Canada as not fulfilling its defense responsibilities.

Trump Administration Takes Action On Defense Spending

Concerns

The decision comes under President Donald Trump's administration, which has emphasised defense spending commitments from NATO allies. The Trump administration decided to suspend its involvement in the Permanent Joint Board on Defence over defense spending concerns.

Canada's stepped-up defense spending has been described as positive for the country's relationship with NATO partners. In discussions regarding trade and security, Canada's spending on defence has been identified as key.

Historic Bilateral Security Partnership Faces New Challenges

Virtually every aspect of Canada's military is predicated on a series of decades-old agreements with the United States. The two nations later agreed in September 1957 to create the North American Air Defense Command (NORAD), headquartered in Colorado Springs, Colorado, as a bi-national defense organization.

The US suspension of participation represents the latest disruption of ties between the two neighbours. The partnership originated during World War II when Roosevelt and King met at Ogdensburg and agreed to create the Permanent Joint Board on Defence.

Warning Signs Appeared Earlier This Year

This decision follows an earlier speech by Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney at the World Economic Forum this year, where he outlined Canada's position on defence spending. In April 2026, reports emerged that Canada would end the "70 cents to US" defence spending model. The announcement by a senior Pentagon official about the US pausing the board to "reassess how this forum benefits shared North American defense" carries significant implications for bilateral security cooperation.

Continued Coordination Expected Despite Board Pause

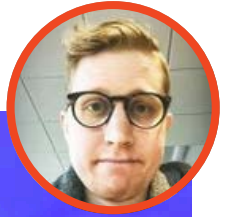
Despite the pause, Canada will maintain collaboration with the United States on extensive defence matters. The Prime Minister emphasized that the collaboration between Canada and the US is extensive and will persist.

The Department of War (DoW) is pausing the Permanent Joint Board on Defense specifically to reassess how this forum benefits shared North American defense, not to terminate the relationship entirely.

This development occurs as Canada seeks to broaden its defense partnerships while maintaining its historic security relationship with its southern neighbour. The board's future remains under review as Washington assesses the forum's value to continental security objectives.

Pentagon Chief Says US Ready Restart Strikes Iran If No Deal Reached

By Henry Nicholas



US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth announced at the Shangri-La Dialogue that the United States is prepared to resume military strikes against Iran if no diplomatic agreement is reached. Hegseth confirmed US stockpiles are sufficient for renewed operations both in Iran and globally. President Donald Trump will make a final determination on a proposed 60-day truce extension following a secure White House meeting. Negotiators from Washington and Tehran continue working to resolve major differences blocking a permanent accord.

US Defense Secretary Announces Military Readiness At Singapore Defence Summit

SINGAPORE – The United States remains prepared to resume military strikes against Iran if a diplomatic agreement cannot be reached, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said on Saturday at the Shangri-La Dialogue, Asia's premier forum for defence leaders, militaries and diplomats.

"Our ability to recommence if necessary...we are more than capable," Hegseth said in Singapore. "Our stockpiles are more than suited for that, both there and around the globe, so we're in a very good place," he added.

Hegseth emphasised that the United States has not abandoned the Asia-Pacific region despite ongoing

engagement regarding Iran.

Trump To Make Final Determination On Iran Deal Proposal

On Friday, President Donald Trump said he would meet in a secure White House room to make a "final determination" on a proposal to end the Iran conflict, which would extend an early-April truce for another 60 days. This extension would provide negotiators time to forge a permanent end to the conflict.

White House officials stated after the meeting that Trump would only approve an agreement satisfying US red lines, including ensuring Iran can never acquire a nuclear weapon. The president has requested edits to the US-Iran deal aimed at bringing an end to fighting that began earlier this year, US media reported.

The changes relate to the Strait of Hormuz and the removal of highly enriched uranium, CBS News reported. The latest iteration of the deal includes a 60-day cessation of violence, a call to reopen the Strait of Hormuz and a framework to reopen negotiations on Iran's nuclear program.

Conflict Has Killed Thousands And Disrupted Global Energy Markets

The war launched by the US and Israel on 28 February has killed

thousands of people, mainly in Iran and Lebanon, and caused global economic pain by pushing up energy prices. The conflict resulted from Iran's effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz.

US officials said the two countries had agreed on a framework – known as a memorandum of understanding – pending the approval of Trump and Iran's leadership. Vice President JD Vance said Thursday that he felt "pretty good" about the prospects for a deal but acknowledged that major technical and political issues remain unresolved.

Baghaei said discussions were continuing but "a final understanding has not been reached". Sunday's reports of changes mark the third round of edits that the president has made to the US proposal, according to CBS News.

Hegseth Urges Asian Allies Increase Defence Spending Against China

Hegseth on Saturday urged Asian allies to ramp up military spending to counter China's growing power and prevent its dominance in the region, warning of "rightful alarm" over its rapid military buildup.

"There is rightful alarm regarding China's historic military buildup and the expansion of its military activities in the region and beyond," he said. "A Pacific dominated by any hegemon

would unravel the regional balance of power," Hegseth said. "No state, including China, can impose its hegemony and hold the security or prosperity of our nation and our allies in question".

The Pentagon chief said President Donald Trump was "patient" and wants to make a "great deal" that ensures Iran does not get a nuclear weapon. "We can do two things at one time," Hegseth said. "We're super-charging our defence industrial base so that we're building 2X, 3X, 4X the munitions very soon to ensure that all of our (operations) plans are properly funded throughout the world".

No Freeloading Era Of US Subsidising Wealthy Nations Defence Over

Hegseth echoed President Donald Trump's long-standing demand that allies shoulder more of their own defence costs. Trump has pointedly said European and NATO partners should reduce reliance on Washington.

"The era of the United States subsidising the defence of wealthy nations is over," Hegseth said. "We need partners, not protectorates," he added. "We don't have a strong alliance unless everyone has skin in the game. No freeloading".

The US anticipates that its Asian partners

will elevate their defence spending to 3.5% of GDP, aligning with its own commitment of \$1.5 trillion towards military investment, according to the Pentagon chief. Hegseth praised contributions from allies including South Korea, the Philippines, Australia, Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand, and said Japan was taking concrete steps to bolster its defences. "Tokyo and Washington must each pull our weight to strengthen the US-Japan alliance," he said.

US Taiwan Arms Sales Policy Remains Unchanged Despite Beijing Engagement

Hegseth indicated that any decisions regarding future arms sales to Taiwan would rest with President Trump, suggesting no alteration in Washington's longstanding policy despite recent engagements with Beijing.

"Decisions will be made by the president and the secretary of state based on the nature of that relationship," Hegseth noted. "There has been no change in our status" regarding US-Taiwan arms transactions.

During the Shangri-La Dialogue, a significant annual defence summit in Singapore, Defense Secretary Hegseth urged Asian allies to enhance their military expenditures to address what he described as China's "historic military expansion". Notably, he refrained from referencing Taiwan in his remarks on Saturday.

Iran Must Renounce Nuclear Weapons And Reopen Strait Of Hormuz

US demands include that Iran must permanently renounce nuclear weapons, reopen the Strait of Hormuz to unrestricted shipping without tolls, and remove or destroy any remaining naval mines.

A senior US official and source briefed on the matter told Axios that Iran's counterproposal does not contain a commitment "about suspending uranium enrichment or handing over its existing stockpile of highly enriched uranium (HEU)". US demands have been and continue to be that Iran must give its HEU to the United States.

The Trump Administration believes Iran's proposal is "insufficient," the US official added. Should diplomacy progress, the deal reportedly involves potential sanctions relief to Iran that could allow it to access billions of dollars in frozen assets.

Iran continues to formalise and institutionalise its claimed control over transit through the Strait of Hormuz in contravention of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Iran has incorrectly asserted that this is "legal" under UNCLOS because the Strait of Hormuz is within Iran's territorial waters.

US Defense Chief Discusses Security Ties With Iraq PM-Designate Al-Zaidi

BY KATHY MALOUF



Iraqi Prime Minister-designate Ali Falih al-Zaidi held a phone call with U.S. Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth, reaffirming bilateral security cooperation under the 2008 Strategic Framework Agreement. Both sides emphasized reactivating joint military training programs to enhance Iraqi Armed Forces capabilities. The call followed President Donald Trump's congratulatory message and invitation for al-Zaidi to visit Washington after forming his government. The exchange signals early alignment between incoming Iraqi leadership and Washington on key security priorities amid regional tensions.

Key Developments in U.S.-Iraq Security Dialogue

Iraq's Prime Minister-designate Ali Falih al-Zaidi and U.S. Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth conducted a phone call on Wednesday, May 6, 2026, focusing on bilateral security cooperation and the revival of military training programs. According to a statement published on X from al-Zaidi's office, Hegseth congratulated the Iraqi leader on being tasked with forming a new government.

The two officials discussed bilateral

relations between Iraq and the United States across various fields, with particular emphasis on security cooperation. Both parties affirmed the special nature of the relationship between the two nations and stressed the importance of strengthening cooperation in training to enhance the capabilities and operational efficiency of the Iraqi Armed Forces.

Strategic Framework Agreement Governs Bilateral Defense Relations

The conversation took place under the framework of the 2008 Strategic Framework Agreement, which governs the presence and activities of American troops in Iraq. This agreement has served as the cornerstone of U.S.-Iraq relations, outlining collaboration in defense, economic, and political fields.

The Strategic Framework Agreement established the basis for continued U.S. military presence in Iraq, primarily focused on training, advising, and supporting Iraqi forces in counterterrorism operations. The agreement represents a longstanding partnership that both sides described as having special characteristics requiring continued investment and development.

On September 27, 2024, Baghdad and Washington announced a two-phase agreement to end the mission of the U.S.-led

anti-ISIS coalition inside Iraq. The first phase, completed in January 2025, ended the coalition's military mission, withdrew troops, handed over bases, and shifted to bilateral security partnerships focused on supporting Iraqi forces. The second phase was scheduled to continue until September 2025, with coalition operations in Syria to be conducted from a yet-to-be-determined platform inside Iraq.

Trump Administration Signals Support for Iraqi Leadership Transition

The phone call between al-Zaidi and Hegseth came days after U.S. President Donald Trump congratulated al-Zaidi and invited him to Washington once Iraq's next government is formed. President Trump extended a formal invitation to visit Washington following the formation of the government, according to a statement from the prime minister media office.

During their telephone call on April 30, 2026, Trump and al-Zaidi discussed ways to develop and strengthen bilateral relations between the United States and Iraq in various fields. They also agreed to cooperate to consolidate stability in the region, with Trump emphasizing the importance of maintaining close ties with Baghdad.

In a message on Truth Social, Trump congratulated Ali al-Zaidi and expressed hopes for success

as he endeavors to create a new government free from terrorism that can pave the way for a brighter future for Iraq. The post emphasized anticipation of a robust, dynamic, and highly effective new relationship between Iraq and the United States, describing it as the commencement of an extraordinary new chapter in the nations' history featuring prosperity, stability, and success.

Political Context Following 2025 Parliamentary Elections

Al-Zaidi, a political newcomer and businessman nominated in late April 2026, has been tasked with forming a government within a constitutionally mandated timeframe following months of political deadlock after the 2025 parliamentary elections. Five months after legislative elections, Iraqi President Nizar Amidi nominated businessman al-Zaidi as prime minister-designate on Monday, giving him the task of putting a cabinet together in the next 30 days amid fierce political wrangling.

Al-Zaidi serves as the head of Alanoob Bank and emerged as a leading candidate in the final rounds of talks thanks to his economic expertise and connections in business and investment. His appointment was widely seen as a compromise candidate backed by Iraq's powerful Coordination Framework alliance, amid both domestic divisions and external pressures.

The call comes at a critical

juncture for Iraq as the country navigates a complex political transition alongside escalating regional tensions linked to ongoing conflict involving Iran and U.S.-aligned forces. As al-Zaidi works to form his cabinet, the direction of Iraq's foreign policy, particularly its approach to the United States and neighboring Iran, will be closely watched.

Regional Security Challenges Impact Bilateral Cooperation

Security cooperation remains the cornerstone of U.S.-Iraq relations, particularly since the 2008 Strategic Framework Agreement. In recent years, this cooperation has faced mounting challenges due to intensified tensions from repeated attacks by Iran-backed militias on U.S. interests in Iraq, as well as retaliatory American strikes targeting those groups.

These dynamics have placed Baghdad in a delicate position, balancing its partnership with Washington against internal political factions aligned with Tehran. The renewed emphasis on training and capacity-building in al-Zaidi's statement suggests an effort to recalibrate the relationship toward institutional military development rather than direct combat engagement.

The exchange between al-Zaidi and Hegseth signals early alignment between the incoming Iraqi leadership and Washington on key security priorities, even as broader regional uncertainties persist. The revival of structured

military cooperation could play a central role in shaping both Iraq's internal stability and its position within an increasingly volatile regional landscape.

Military Training Programs Central to Future Cooperation

The statement from al-Zaidi's office underscored the need to reactivate joint training programs aimed at enhancing the capabilities and operational efficiency of the Iraqi armed forces. Both sides highlighted training as a specific area where cooperation requires strengthening, with emphasis on building institutional capacity within Iraq's military establishment.

The focus on training represents a shift from previous coalition-based operations toward bilateral partnership arrangements that emphasize Iraqi sovereignty and self-reliance. This approach aligns with the transition announced in September 2024 from coalition missions to bilateral security partnerships focused on supporting Iraqi forces.

Washington has moved quickly to signal support for al-Zaidi's leadership, with President Trump previously expressing strong backing and emphasizing the importance of maintaining close ties with Baghdad. The early engagement between U.S. defense officials and Iraq's incoming prime minister-designate demonstrates the priority both governments place on maintaining security cooperation during political transitions.

Davie Defense Secures \$3.5 Billion Contract For Five Arctic Security Cutters

BY KATHY MALOUF



The U.S. Coast Guard has finalized a \$3.5 billion contract with Davie Defense Inc. to construct and deliver five Arctic Security Cutters, completing the Trump administration's directive for 11 total cutters. Two vessels will be built at Helsinki Shipyard in Finland, while three will be constructed at Gulf Copper facilities in Galveston and Port Arthur, Texas. The first cutter is scheduled for delivery in 2028, with the contract running through February 2035.

Davie Defense Finalizes Historic Icebreaker Contract With Coast Guard

U.S. shipbuilder Davie Defense Inc. announced on Wednesday that it has finalized its contract with the U.S. Coast Guard to build and deliver

five Arctic Security Cutters. The contract, first announced in mid-February 2026, brings the total number of cutters being manufactured to 11 to meet President Donald Trump's executive orders to expand the icebreaker fleet.

Davie Defense, the U.S. arm of the UK-owned maritime group Inoce, is set to construct three of the ships at the company's Gulf Copper facilities in Galveston and Port Arthur, Texas. The other two vessels will be built at the company's affiliate shipyard in Helsinki, Finland. The first cutter is set to be delivered to the Guard in 2028, with the contract running through February 2035. "Today's news marks a major milestone in the ASC program and reinforces Davie Defense's role in delivering next-generation

cutters to strengthen U.S. Arctic readiness and maritime security," said Philip Burns-O'Brien, Chief Executive Officer of Davie Defense. "We are proud to work alongside the Coast Guard to advance this strategic program and strengthen America's icebreaking capability".

Contract Details And Construction Timeline

According to SAM.gov, the Firm Fixed Price contract for these five ships totals \$3.5 billion, equating to \$700 million per vessel. The contract maintains the previously announced delivery schedule for all five vessels.

The first Arctic Security Cutters are expected to be built in Finland at Helsinki Shipyard before production shifts to Texas. Davie Defense acquired Gulf

Copper's Texas shipbuilding assets in 2025 as part of a broader strategy to establish what executives have described as an "American Icebreaker Factory" on the Gulf Coast.

A groundbreaking ceremony tied to redevelopment of the Gulf Copper facilities is scheduled for June 1, 2026, and is expected to include up to \$1 billion in additional investment into U.S. shipbuilding infrastructure. The program supports the onshoring of Arctic shipbuilding expertise to the U.S. while strengthening long-term industrial capability and workforce development on the Texas Gulf Coast.

"These vessels will strengthen the U.S. Coast Guard's capability in one of the world's most strategically important regions," said James Davies, co-founder of the Inoceca Group. "The Arctic is increasingly strategic to global security and economic resilience, and these vessels will provide the U.S. Coast Guard with critical capability in a region where reliability and operational readiness are non-negotiable".

Congressional Questions About Finnish Shipyard Usage

During an April 28 House subcommittee hearing on the Coast Guard's fiscal 2027 budget, Rep. John Garamendi, D-Calif., questioned the use of Finland's shipyard in building the latest cutters. The congressman asked whether this approach contradicted the April 2025 Shipbuilding and Harbor Infrastructure for

Prosperity and Security (SHIPS) for America Act aimed at revitalising U.S. maritime industry.

Adm. Kevin E. Lunday, commandant of the Coast Guard, responded that the contract was well within the signed 2024 ICE Pact — a trilateral agreement between the United States, Canada and Finland to combine collective knowledge, resources and expertise to produce Arctic and polar icebreakers.

"We needed to begin by leveraging the overseas capability and proven shipbuilding in Finland so we could onshore more work back into the U.S. and rebuild our defense industrial base, and that's exactly what we're doing, sir," Lunday noted.

"Finalising this contract represents decisive action to guarantee American security in the Arctic," Lunday said in a statement. "The Arctic Security Cutters will deliver the essential capability to uphold U.S. sovereignty against adversaries' aggressive economic and military actions in the Arctic. These cutters will ensure the Coast Guard's ability to control, secure, and defend our northern border and maritime approaches".

Current Icebreaker Fleet And Arctic Missions

The Coast Guard is currently operating with a lone heavy polar icebreaker, the USCGC Polar Star, and two medium polar icebreakers, the USCGC Healy and the USCGC Storis. The Storis

just returned to homeport on Monday after a 36-day deployment to the Arctic and is the first icebreaker to join the fleet in more than two decades.

USCGC Polar Star, an icebreaker commissioned in 1976, is now 49 years old and nearly two decades past her designed service life. She remains the only American ship capable of punching through the thick ice surrounding McMurdo Station in Antarctica, a mission she has performed faithfully for 28 consecutive years during Operation Deep Freeze.

USCGC Healy has spent a quarter century conducting Arctic research and patrol, identifying underwater volcanoes and mapping the seafloor while monitoring the increasing presence of Russian and Chinese vessels in polar waters. In December 2024, USCGC Storis became the first polar icebreaker added to the fleet in 25 years, offering immediate relief.

Coast Guard assessments have previously stated the service requires at least nine Arctic Security Cutters to maintain year-round Arctic operations. The five cutters to be delivered by Davie Defense will represent a new class of Arctic icebreakers "designed to conduct U.S. Coast Guard missions in the world's most challenging maritime environments".

Arctic Security Cutter Program Background

The announcement comes as the service eyes far-flung frozen Arctic and Antarctic

missions as a result of the region's increasing geopolitical importance. The Arctic Security Cutter program emerged from the trilateral ICE Pact framework signed between the United States, Canada and Finland in 2024 to accelerate Western icebreaker production in response to expanding Russian and Chinese Arctic activities.

Davie's vessels represent one of two primary designs being used across the 11-ship program. The company's cutter design is based on a proven Helsinki Shipyard platform with seven previous variants already in service globally. Separate ASC contracts awarded to Bollinger Shipyards and Finland's Rauma Marine Constructions are based on Canada's Multi-Purpose Icebreaker design developed with Aker Arctic Technology. Bollinger Shipyards, Lockport, La., holds a \$2.14 billion contract to construct four ASCs at its Houma, La., shipyard, with first delivery expected in 2029. Finnish shipyard Rauma Marine Constructions holds a contract for two additional cutters to be built in Finland, with first delivery in 2028.

Funding And Department Of Homeland Security Investments

According to DHS, the Coast Guard is utilizing the \$25 billion provided by the fiscal 2025 budget reconciliation and has already ordered over \$13 billion in new fleet assets and capabilities. The spending bill signed on July 4, 2025 has

delivered nearly \$9 billion for icebreaker construction to the Coast Guard, the single largest polar investment in service history.

This year's spending bill allocates \$4.3 billion for three Polar Security Cutters, massive 460-foot heavy icebreakers capable of smashing through ice 21 feet thick. The first of these, USCGC Polar Sentinel (WMSP-21), is expected to enter service around 2030. Another \$3.5 billion will fund the Arctic Security Cutter program.

With increasing Russian and Chinese naval incursions, DHS is ramping up its facilities and its fleet to facilitate a greater maritime presence in the North. The agency announced last May that it had approved the construction of the service's first polar security cutter in nearly 50 years, as well as invested \$323 million in renovations for its Seattle-based icebreaker facilities and upgrades to shore facilities at Juneau, Alaska.

Geopolitical Context And Arctic Security Concerns

The Arctic Security Cutter program has become one of the centerpieces of the Trump administration's push to rapidly expand U.S. polar capabilities as Russia and China increase their Arctic presence. Russia currently operates more than 40 icebreakers, continuing to militarise its Arctic coastline. China, despite possessing no Arctic territory,

has declared itself a "near-Arctic state" and deployed its own coast guard vessels alongside Russian patrols near Alaska. And a changing climate is unlocking shipping lanes and resources that will demand American presence and enforcement. The ASC fleet is expected to support missions ranging from Arctic sovereignty patrols and maritime security to search and rescue, scientific operations, and protection of critical shipping routes and natural resources in the rapidly changing polar region.

The ASC program will provide the Coast Guard with a modern icebreaking fleet to assure national security, maritime safety and Arctic access. Announced in May 2026, the Coast Guard's Force Design 2028 initiative has designated polar capability a cornerstone of service transformation. FD28 explicitly calls for delivering "icebreakers needed to provide assured U.S. access and presence to the polar regions" while streamlining acquisitions to accelerate timelines that have historically lagged.

The latest contract announcement further solidifies Texas as an emerging center for U.S. icebreaker construction, even as the Coast Guard continues struggling with delays and cost overruns tied to the separate Polar Security Cutter program being built by Bollinger. Two more final contracts will be announced soon, the Coast Guard said in a statement, likely for these two yards.

Pentagon Official Says Canada Falling Short on Defense Spending as F-35 Review Continues

By Henry Nicholas



The United States has suspended participation in the Permanent Joint Board on Defence with Canada, citing Ottawa's failure to present a concrete plan for meeting NATO's 3.5 per cent GDP

defense spending target by 2035. A Pentagon official identified delays and lack of transparency in Canada's F-35 fighter jet procurement review as key concerns. The suspension does not affect NORAD

operations, which remain critical to continental defense. Prime Minister Mark Carney's government has reached NATO's 2 per cent target but has not outlined how it will achieve the enhanced 2035 commitment.

Pentagon Official States Canada Falling Short on Defense Spending and F-35 Review Delays

US Suspends Permanent Joint Board on Defence Participation Over Canadian Military Commitments

The United States has officially halted its participation in biannual defense discussions with Canada, expressing growing concerns that Ottawa is not making sufficient progress to establish itself as a credible security ally. A Pentagon official announced Thursday that the decision follows Canada's failure to increase defense spending appropriately and complete its review of F-35 fighter jet acquisition plans.

On May 18, 2026, the Pentagon revealed it was "pausing" engagement in the Permanent Joint Board on Defence (PJBD), a key advisory group focused on continental defense that has operated since 1940. U.S. Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Elbridge Colby announced the suspension on X, stating that Canada has not demonstrated "credible progress" regarding its defense obligations.

NATO Spending Target Gap Draws Pentagon Criticism

The Pentagon is requesting that Canada clarify its strategy for achieving NATO's new military expenditure targets before resuming collaborative defense planning efforts.

Senior U.S. defense officials

provided additional context on Thursday, indicating that Prime Minister Mark Carney's government has yet to present a plan fulfilling NATO's new objectives established during a leaders' summit in The Hague last summer.

"Canada has not yet detailed a strategy to achieve NATO's updated defense spending goals," stated a senior official who requested anonymity during a background briefing with predominantly Canadian reporters. "A plan supported by financial investments that would put Canada on track to allocate 3.5 per cent towards core defense by 2035 would be a solid starting point".

The absence of a plan to spend 3.5 per cent of Canada's gross domestic product on the military, plus an additional 1.5 per cent of GDP on defense infrastructure, appears to be the primary reason for the recent halt. Canada, along with most other NATO allies, accepted former President Donald Trump's request last year to aim for a 2035 target of raising direct military expenditures to 3.5 per cent of GDP, with an additional 1.5 per cent allocated for infrastructure and industrial spending supporting defense and national security.

F-35 Fighter Jet Procurement Review Faces Scrutiny

The Pentagon official confirmed that the Canadian government's delays and lack of transparency around its ongoing

F-35 review exemplify "the prioritization of politics over our shared obligation to defend North America". The official specifically criticized Canada's review of the F-35 program during the Thursday briefing.

In March 2025, Ottawa revealed it was reconsidering the acquisition of numerous fighter jets after President Trump initiated a trade conflict with Canada and threatened to annex the country, proposing it become the "51st state". Over a year later, Canada remains in the review phase and has not indicated when it will reach a decision.

The Pentagon official confirmed that the absence of a decision regarding the comprehensive acquisition of American-built F-35 fighter jets is another significant source of frustration for U.S. defense officials. The lack of transparency concerning Canada's ongoing F-35 review was cited as one example of insufficient progress on defense commitments.

NORAD Operations Remain Unaffected by Suspension

The Pentagon official confirmed that the suspension of the PJBD would not affect NORAD operations, which are deemed critical to the northern United States and Canadian homelands. Prime Minister Carney has minimized the significance of the suspension, emphasizing ongoing cooperation through NORAD.

The Permanent Joint Board on Defence is a consultative group on North American

continental security that was founded in 1940. The board has served as a key advisory mechanism for continental defense cooperation between the two nations for more than 80 years.

Canada Reached NATO 2 Per Cent Target in March 2026

At a news conference in Halifax in March 2026, Prime Minister Mark Carney announced that Canada has officially reached NATO's defence spending target of 2 per cent of GDP. This marks the first time since the late 1980s, during the final stages of the Cold War, that Canada has achieved this target.

The Liberal administration met this objective by injecting an additional \$9.3 billion into the budget of the Department of National Defence in June 2025, elevating total defense spending to slightly over \$61 billion. According to the annual report from NATO's secretary general released Thursday, Canada reached the politically important milestone of fulfilling NATO's defense spending requirement. However, despite this considerable investment, the NATO report indicated that Canada barely crossed the threshold, achieving an estimated exactly 2 per cent of GDP. This marks the first time since the late 1980s, during the final stages of the Cold War, that Canada has achieved this target.

The Liberal administration met this objective by injecting an additional \$9.3 billion into the

budget of the Department of National Defence in June 2025, elevating total defense spending to slightly over \$61 billion. According to the annual report from NATO's secretary general released Thursday, Canada reached the politically important milestone of fulfilling NATO's defense spending requirement. However, despite this considerable investment, the NATO report indicated that Canada barely crossed the threshold, achieving an estimated exactly 2 per cent of GDP. Canada was at the bottom of the alliance's ranking, sharing the spot with Belgium, Albania, Spain and Portugal—all at exactly 2 per cent. The \$63 billion that Canada is reporting encompasses various government expenses, including Veterans Affairs benefits and Canadian Coast Guard operations, which may not directly impact military effectiveness.

Pentagon Demands Concrete Spending Plan Before Resuming Talks

The Pentagon is reportedly demanding that Canada present a clear and detailed plan to increase its military spending in line with NATO targets before full bilateral defense cooperation resumes between the two countries. U.S. defence officials say freezing the joint Canada-U.S. defence board was based on Canada's failure to share a plan on spending 3.5 per cent of GDP on defence by 2035.

Senior officials from the

Pentagon pointed out that the absence of a decision regarding fighter jet acquisition is a significant source of frustration during the Thursday briefing.

The official stated that Mr. Carney's measures thus far are insufficient for meeting the enhanced NATO commitments.

U.S. defense authorities have clarified that the suspension stems from Canada's inability to present a strategy for allocating 3.5 per cent of its GDP towards defense by the year 2035. Additionally, concerns were raised regarding delays and insufficient transparency related to Canada's acquisition of F-35 fighter aircraft.

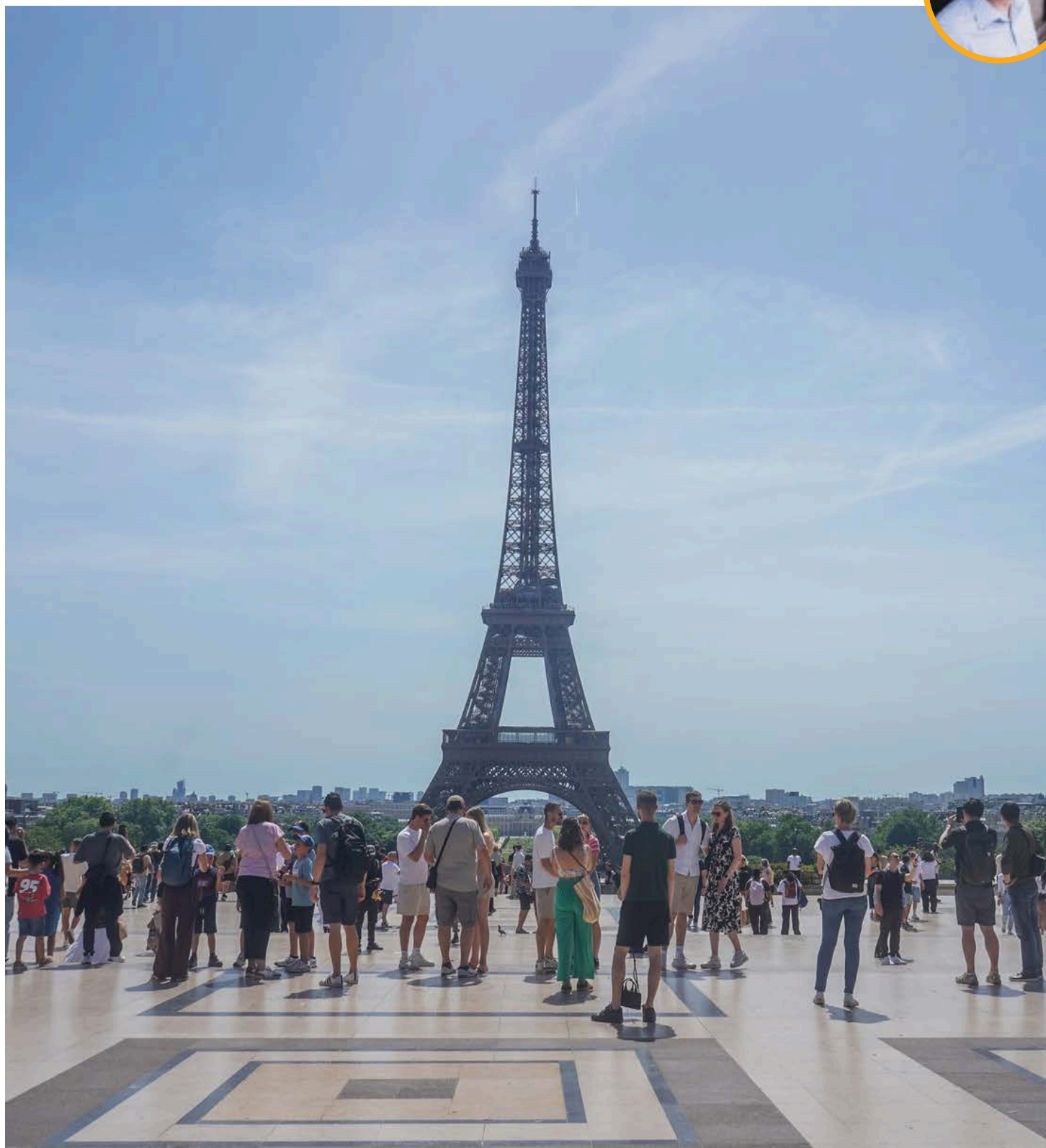
Canadian Government Expresses Willingness for Continued Dialogue

In response to the Pentagon's announcement, Canada expressed its willingness to engage in productive dialogue aimed at enhancing collective security measures. The Trump administration is stepping away from the longstanding committee focused on Canada-U.S. defense collaborations, asserting that Canada has not fulfilled its defense spending obligations.

The Pentagon has declared it is halting its participation in the joint defense board with Canada, citing Canada's insufficient progress on its commitments. On Monday, Under Secretary Elbridge Colby revealed that the Pentagon is "pausing" its involvement in the Permanent Joint Board on Defence.

France and Spain Swelter in Early Heatwave as May Records Fall

By Eric Gahagan



London (Washington Insider Magazine) May 25, 2026 - France, Spain and the UK are experiencing an early-summer heatwave that has broken multiple May temperature records across western Europe. More than 350 weather stations in France recorded their highest-ever May temperatures, while London's Kew Gardens set a new UK May record at 34.8°C. Spain is also facing unusually high temperatures, with forecasts pointing to 38°C to 40°C in parts of the country later in the week.

France Records Unprecedented May Heat

France's national weather service said late on Monday that 352 weather stations, mainly in western France, had recorded new monthly highs. The highest temperature reported was 37.1°C near Hossegor in the Landes department in the southwest.

Le Parisien reported that the national average temperature, based on readings from 30 weather stations across the country, reached 24.4°C on Monday, surpassing the previous record of 23.7°C set in 1944, although that figure had not yet been confirmed by Météo France.

The heat has affected large parts of the country, with the record readings concentrated mainly in western areas. The scale of the temperature rise places this event among the most

significant early-season heat episodes reported in France this year.

United Kingdom Sets May Record

The UK Met Office said the May record was broken when temperatures reached 34.8°C at Kew Gardens in London. That reading marked the highest temperature ever recorded in the UK for the month of May. The British record formed part of the same broader heatwave affecting western Europe, with temperatures rising sharply over a short period across several countries.

Spain Braces For Higher Temperatures

Spain is also seeing temperatures far above seasonal norms, with the weather event expected to continue for several more days. Forecasts indicated that parts of southern Spain could reach 38°C at the weekend, roughly 5°C to 10°C above average. Rubén del Campo of Spain's state meteorological office Aemet said the hot spell would continue through the week and that temperatures could rise further on Thursday and Friday, reaching at least 34°C across much of the country.

Between Wednesday and Friday, highs of 36°C to 38°C were expected in the Guadalquivir and Ebro valleys, with some areas possibly reaching 40°C.

Wider European Heatwave

The current heatwave has affected several countries across western Europe, with record or near-record temperatures reported in France and the UK and extreme heat forecast to persist in Spain. The Guardian report said the weather event was expected to continue for several more days. Separately, other reports covering the same period noted that Portugal also recorded a new hottest May day, underscoring the scale of the early-season heat across the region.

Regional Impact And Forecast

Weather officials in the affected countries have indicated that high temperatures may continue into the end of the week. In Spain, the forecast suggests a prolonged period of extreme heat rather than a brief spike.

In France, the record temperatures were reported primarily in western areas, while the UK's new May benchmark was measured in London. Taken together, the readings show a broad belt of unusually intense spring heat across western Europe.

Council of Europe Adopts Chişinău Declaration Clarifying ECHR Migration Rules

By Mandilee Hecht



All 46 member states of the Council of Europe have adopted the non-binding Chişinău Declaration, a political statement clarifying how the European Convention on Human Rights applies to immigration and asylum law. The declaration, agreed upon on 15 May 2026 in Moldova's capital, endorses cooperation with third countries including "return hubs" while reaffirming states' sovereign right to control borders. The UK Government welcomed the move as helping ensure serious criminals cannot exploit courts to frustrate deportation, while human rights organisations warn it could weaken migrant protections and create a two-tier human rights system.

European Ministers Adopt New

Migration Rights Interpretation European ministers embraced the new interpretation during the annual meeting of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers in Chişinău, Republic of Moldova. The declaration qualifies rights under Article 3, pertaining to protection against torture and inhuman or degrading treatment, and Article 8, covering the right to private and family life.

Council of Europe Secretary General Alain Berset stated: "Crucially, we have been able to bring together countries across Europe, with different views and experiences, to agree a common position on how the system should work best, notably in the challenging context of migration.

Looking ahead, this will help to guide our own work as well as that of national authorities and domestic courts".

The declaration is not legally enforceable but exerts considerable pressure on courts to interpret the law more restrictively regarding asylum and immigration matters.

Sovereign Right To Control Borders Confirmed In Declaration

The Chişinău Declaration highlights that Council of Europe states possess a sovereign right to control entry and residence of foreign nationals, while reiterating that such powers must be exercised in compliance with Convention obligations. It notes that large migrant

arrivals present "a complex and evolving challenge" for states, which were "either unforeseen at the time the Convention was drafted or have evolved significantly since then".

The text states it is "important that States, including those that are exposed to mass arrivals, can pursue new approaches to address and potentially deter irregular migration". New approaches mentioned include processing asylum claims in a third country and the use of "return hubs" in third countries. Regarding irregular sea arrivals, the declaration notes they involve significant risks to life and that reducing unsafe maritime crossings may help reduce loss of life, though states must respond in compliance with Convention obligations.

Article 3 Prohibition On Torture Remains Absolute Says Declaration

Regarding Article 3 interpretation, the declaration restates that the prohibition on torture and inhuman or degrading treatment remains absolute. However, it emphasises that the threshold for such treatment should remain "high and constant". The declaration states that factors such as disparities in healthcare or socio-economic conditions in a receiving state will only engage Article 3 in exceptional cases. It further indicates that differences in healthcare quality between countries should only

exceptionally give rise to a real risk of ill-treatment, and that returning states are not required to eliminate such disparities.

The text specifies: "the assessment of the minimum level of severity of ill-treatment that constitutes inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment is relative and depends on all the circumstances of the case".

Domestic courts are encouraged to consider how multiple socio-economic and detention-related factors may cumulatively reach the Article 3 threshold, even where they would not do so individually.

Article 8 Family Rights Balanced Against National Security Interests

In relation to Article 8, the declaration confirms that deportation may lawfully interfere with the right to respect for private and family life, provided such interference is in accordance with the law, pursues a legitimate aim, and is necessary in a democratic society.

Legitimate aims include national security and public safety, prevention of disorder or crime, protection of health or morals, economic well-being of the country, and protection of others' rights and freedoms.

The declaration emphasises that a fair balance must be struck between individual rights and weighty public interests, noting that

national authorities are generally better placed to assess local needs and evidence, particularly in national security cases where they enjoy a wide margin of appreciation. Where domestic courts have carried out the balancing exercise in line with Strasbourg case law, the European Court of Human Rights should not substitute its own assessment without strong reasons.

UK Government Welcomes Declaration For Deportation Process

In a press release, the UK Government said the declaration would adopt a "more modern interpretation of the European Convention for Human Rights – which will help courts in the UK ensure that serious criminals are not able to avoid deportation".

The Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office added: "The declaration is expected to help courts interpret how the ECHR is applied, ensuring that serious criminals are not able to exploit the system to frustrate their deportation and extradition, and ensuring that family rights under Article 8 are properly balanced against the public interest – including the ability of countries to be able to deport foreign criminals and address national security threats".

Belgian Foreign Minister Maxime Prevot described the declaration as "a new political framework" that would help governments deport offenders while remaining faithful to

the spirit of the European Convention on Human Rights.

EU Migration Commissioner Magnus Brunner called it "an important step" toward a more coherent European migration policy, saying it reinforces a "fair and robust migration framework in Europe".

Human Rights Groups Fear Weakened Migrant Protections Under New Rules

Rights groups criticized the political declaration, saying it could loosen prohibitions on torture and weaken Europe's human rights protections for migrants.

Chiara Catelli, spokesperson for Brussels-based rights group PICUM, said: "Governments are effectively seeking to pressure an independent Court into weakening long-established human rights protections in order to facilitate deportations, with the risk of deporting people where they could face torture, inhuman or degrading treatment, or where they would stop receiving life-saving medical care".

Eve Geddie, director of Amnesty International's European Institutions Office, stated: "A two-tier human rights system based on migration status is an affront to the basic principle that human rights are universal". Judith Sunderland, senior associate director at Human Rights Watch, said: "This is a deliberate attack on the integrity of the European Court of Human Rights by

governments pushing for a politicized interpretation of the convention to justify harmful policies".

Adriana Tidona, migration researcher at Amnesty International, described the declaration as "a really dark day for Europe" and argued it risks creating a two-tier system where human rights protections apply differently to migrants and refugees than to other groups.

Legal Experts Say Declaration Carries No Binding Legal Force

Legal experts and rights advocates stress that the declaration does not change the law. Unlike the European Convention on Human Rights itself, the Chişinău Declaration is a political document carrying no binding legal force.

Sunderland stated: "No political attack or declaration can change the fact that the European Convention on Human Rights sets out clear human rights obligations and the court's jurisprudence is binding on member states".

Tidona similarly emphasized that courts cannot use the declaration to override the convention: "They can invoke it, but it wouldn't be decisive for them to achieve a more expansive interpretation of the convention".

Dr. Jean-Pierre Gauci from the British Institute of International and Comparative Law noted that

the declaration conveys a message to the ECHR and domestic courts to construe the convention aligning with political agendas of certain states, facilitating expulsion of foreign nationals even where they face genuine risk of harm upon return.

Nine EU Nations Previously Signed Letter Claiming Convention Prevented Expulsions

Last year, leaders of nine European Union countries – Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland – signed an open letter claiming the rights convention prevented them from expelling foreign criminals.

The nations argued that the court's interpretation of the convention in "cases concerning the expulsion of criminal foreign nationals" has protected the "wrong people" and placed too many limits on deciding who can be expelled.

Rights campaigners have said policies like return hubs are inhumane and compare them to deportation policies of United States President Donald Trump. The declaration comes amid a broader shift in European migration policy, with several governments calling for tougher deportation measures while countries including Italy have experimented with controversial arrangements to process or return migrants outside their borders

EU Becomes Party To First Legally Binding International Treaty On Artificial Intelligence Governance

By John Ruehl



The European Union has formally concluded its accession to the Council of Europe Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence, completing the ratification process on 21 April 2026. The European Parliament granted consent on 11 March 2026 with 455 votes in favour, 101 against, and 74 abstentions. The Council of Europe adopted Decision (UE) 2026/1080 approving the convention in the EU's name. This marks the first legally binding international treaty dedicated to AI governance, ensuring AI systems align with human rights, democracy, and the rule of law.

Historic First Legally Binding International Agreement On AI Governance Established

The European Union has officially become a party to the Council of Europe Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law, establishing the world's first legally binding international agreement on artificial intelligence governance.

The Council of the European Union adopted Decision (UE) 2026/1080 on 21 April 2026 in Luxembourg, formally approving the convention on behalf of the European Union. The decision entered into force on the same date, completing the EU's internal legal procedure for joining the treaty. European Parliament consent was granted on 11 March 2026 through a vote P10_TA(2026)0071, with 455 members voting in favour, 101 against, and 74 abstentions. This parliamentary approval represented a crucial step in the EU's accession process.

Věra Jourová, European Commission Vice-President for Values and Transparency, signed the convention on behalf of the European Union on 5 September 2024 during the informal conference of Council of Europe Ministers of Justice in Vilnius, Lithuania. The signature expressed the EU's intention to become a Party to the Convention.

Convention Establishes Global Baseline For Artificial Intelligence Standards

The Framework Convention applies to AI-related activities conducted by public authorities and by private entities operating on their behalf. Private sector actors are

responsible for addressing AI-related risks in accordance with the convention's objectives, either directly or through alternative means achieving comparable protection.

The convention addresses key areas including transparency in AI-generated content, rigorous risk management, documentation obligations for high-risk AI systems, and protection of human rights. It emphasises transparency, auditability, and effective oversight while reinforcing safeguards designed to protect fundamental rights, democracy, and the rule of law.

The treaty integrates existing EU policies on artificial intelligence into an internationally recognised framework to promote safe and rights-respecting deployment of AI within the EU and globally. Its objective is to ensure that AI systems adhere to stringent ethical standards throughout their entire lifecycle.

Activities within the lifecycle of AI systems related to protection of national security interests are excluded from the convention's scope. The convention includes exemptions for research and development, as well as for national security.

Implementation Through EU AI Act With Higher Protection

Standards

The convention will be implemented in the EU exclusively through Regulation (EU) 2024/1689, the EU AI Act, and other pertinent provisions of the Union acquis where applicable. The AI Act contains harmonised rules for the placing on the market, putting into service, and use of AI systems. Within the European Union, the AI Act and related legislation set a higher standard of protection than the convention's global baseline and harmonise the internal market. The convention's principles align seamlessly with EU law, including regulations concerning placement of AI systems on the market.

The convention is fully compatible with Union law in general and the EU AI Act in particular, which is the first comprehensive AI regulation globally. The EU AI Act, adopted on 13 June 2024, contains generally fully harmonised rules and was established based on Articles 16 and 114 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

The convention includes key concepts from the EU AI Act such as a risk-based approach, transparency along the value chain of AI systems and AI-generated content, detailed documentation obligations for high-risk AI systems, and risk management obligations with possibility to introduce bans for AI systems considered clear threats to

fundamental rights.

The convention complements EU data protection regulations (GDPR), which safeguard personal data through risk-based frameworks, and EU non-discrimination law addressing discrimination and emphasising data quality and bias mitigation in high-risk AI systems. It also complements sector-specific legislation on product safety, liability, and political advertising.

International Signatories Include UK Canada US And Ukraine

The convention is accessible to EU member states and global partners, including Council of Europe members, the EU, and other third countries. Since the subject falls within the exclusive competence of the European Union, only the European Union will become party to the Convention among EU-related entities.

Current signatories include the United Kingdom, Ukraine, Canada, Israel, and the United States of America, alongside the European Union. Additional signatories include Andorra, Georgia, Iceland, Norway, Republic of Moldova, San Marino, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Japan, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, Switzerland, and Uruguay.

The United Kingdom signed the Framework Convention on 5 September 2024 alongside the EU and other international partners. Canada signed on 11

February 2025, Japan on 11 February 2025, and the United States on 5 September 2024.

Armenia signed on 27 January 2026, Bosnia and Herzegovina on 9 December 2025, Liechtenstein on 27 February 2025, Switzerland on 27 March 2025, Ukraine on 15 May 2025, and Uruguay on 2 September 2025.

Parliamentary Co-Rapporteurs Highlight EU Commitment To Safe AI Development

Co-rapporteurs José Cepeda (S&D, ES) and Paulo Cunha (EPP, PT) underscored that conclusion of this framework signifies the EU's commitment to safe development and deployment of AI. They stated that by leading technological advancement with democratic and human-centred values at its core, the EU affirms AI must serve people, enhance open societies, and uphold a European model founded on human dignity, transparency, and accountability.

This approach supports stable and sustainable economic growth, a path that Parliament fully endorses, according to the co-rapporteurs. The convention addresses inherent risks AI poses to fundamental democratic values at an international level.

The Parliament's approval marked a key step toward the EU formally joining the international framework, signalling institutional support for the EU to become a party to

the treaty.

Conference Of Parties Will Play Fundamental Role In Implementation

The Conference of the Parties will play a fundamental role in effective implementation of the convention, including through formulating specific recommendations on its interpretation and application. The Conference of the Parties will also study possible modifications to the convention. The Council, upon Commission proposal, must adopt decisions establishing positions to be taken on behalf of the Union in the Conference of the Parties when this body must adopt acts with legal effects. This includes the Conference of the Parties' Internal Rules, which must be adopted by consensus within 12 months from the convention's entry into force.

During negotiation of the Internal Rules, the Union will seek to ensure allocation of 27 votes corresponding to its number of member states. If the Union receives 27 votes, the Commission must guarantee reinforced coordination with member states to express uniform positions and exercise voting rights on behalf of the Union.

The Commission will invite each member state to send a representative to accompany the Commission representation as part of the Union delegation at Conference of the Parties meetings. Reinforced

coordination is particularly pertinent given all member states are also Council of Europe members and the rapid evolution of AI.

EU Holds Exclusive External Competence For Convention Signature

The Union possesses exclusive external competence to sign the convention, meaning only the Union should become a party to the Convention. The personal and material scope of the convention and its material provisions largely overlap with Regulation (EU) 2024/1689, which is complemented by other pertinent Union acquis provisions.

Union law acts implementing fundamental rights enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union include non-discrimination legislation, particularly Council Directives 2000/43/EC and 2000/78/EC. Union acquis on personal data protection includes Regulations (EU) 2016/679 (GDPR) and (EU) 2022/2065 (Digital Services Act). The Digital Services Act aims to guarantee a safe, predictable, and trustworthy online environment respecting fundamental rights including freedom of expression and right to receive or communicate information. Regulation (EU) 2024/900 on transparency and targeting in political advertising also applies.

EU legislation on product safety and liability for damage

caused by defective products, including Council Directive 85/374/EEC, contributes to convention implementation.

Declarations Filed With Council of Europe Secretary General

The EU submitted two declarations to the Council of Europe Secretary General approved under Decision (UE) 2026/1080. The first declaration addresses scope regarding private actors under Article 3(1) (b) of the convention.

The EU declared it will apply principles and obligations from Chapters II to VI of the convention to private actor activities involving placing on the market, making available, and using AI systems in the EU through the AI Act. Other pertinent Union acquis provisions may also apply to these activities and contribute to convention implementation.

The second declaration addresses territorial scope under Article 32(1) of the convention. The EU declared the convention applies to territories where EU Treaties apply under Article 52 of the Treaty on European Union and conditions established in Article 355 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

The convention text was published in Official Journal L 2026/1081 on 13 May 2026. Decision (UE) 2026/1080 was published in Official Journal L 2026/1080 on 13 May 2026, spanning pages 1 to 4.

EU Oil Coordination Group Meets To Address Jet Fuel Supply Situation Amid Middle East Conflict

By Eric Gahagan



The European Commission's Oil Coordination Group met today with experts from EU member states, the International Energy Agency, NATO, and oil industry representatives to discuss oil security of supply in Europe as

the Middle East conflict continues. While no fuel shortages exist in the EU currently, regional supply constraints could emerge in coming weeks if the Strait of Hormuz blockage remains

unresolved, with jet fuel identified as the primary concern. The Group discussed the EU outlook and coordinated approach should the situation extend into

June, emphasizing that any emergency stock releases must be matched with fuel-saving measures. The Commission will maintain regular communication with EU countries, the IEA, and market participants while continuing to assess the Middle East situation's impact on Europe.

Oil Coordination Group Meeting Addresses European Supply Security

Today's Oil Coordination Group meeting gathered experts from the European Commission, EU countries, the International Energy Agency (IEA), NATO, and representatives from the oil industry to discuss the oil security of supply situation in Europe and how to best coordinate at EU level as the Middle East conflict continues. The meeting heard from the IEA about the latest IEA Oil market report, which notes that global oil stocks are depleting while imports from the Atlantic Basin have increased by more than expected, but still fall well short of losses from the Gulf.

No Current Shortages But Regional Constraints Possible

While there are no shortages of fuel in the EU at present, regional supply constraints could arise in the next weeks if the blockage of oil supplies via the Strait of Hormuz does not get resolved – with jet fuel being the primary concern.

The Group discussed the outlook for the EU and the EU's coordinated approach in case the situation continues into June. While EU emergency stocks can be released if needed, OCG experts underlined that if the situation persists, there will be the need to match any emergency stock releases with fuel-saving measures so that emergency stocks can be managed more efficiently and for a longer period.

IEA Reports Global Oil Stock Depletion

The meeting also heard from the IEA about the latest IEA Oil market report. It notes that global oil stocks are depleting, while imports from Atlantic Basin have increased by more than was expected, but still well short of losses from Gulf.

IEA Executive Director Fatih Birol previously warned that Europe has "maybe six weeks or so of jet fuel left" and cautioned that flight cancellations could occur soon if oil supplies remain disrupted due to the ongoing conflict.

According to Birol in an interview with the Associated Press, if the Strait of Hormuz does not reopen completely, "we will see the news of the [flights] from city to city be canceled as a result of lack of fuel".

EU Transport Commissioner Confirms No Actual Shortages

EU Transport Commissioner Apostolos Tzitzikostas stated on April 21 that there are no indications of "actual shortages" at this time, and widespread flight cancellations during the summer months are not anticipated.

"We are closely monitoring the situation regarding aviation fuel together with Member States and industry partners," Tzitzikostas said at a press conference following the informal meeting of EU transport ministers on the energy crisis. "I would however like to emphasise that Europe maintains emergency stocks. These stocks can be released if necessary. At this stage however the market is managing the pressure and there is no evidence of actual shortages". Tzitzikostas clarified that any cancellations announced so far by European airlines are linked to the high cost of jet fuel, not to supply shortages.

Europe Imports Significant Jet Fuel From Middle East

The EU currently imports between 30% to 40% of its jet fuel requirements, with about half of that coming from the Middle East. European aviation is particularly vulnerable to jet fuel shortages, heavily depending on imports from the Middle East which account for around 75 percent of its jet fuel supplies.

The Strait of Hormuz is a crucial route for approximately 20% of

the global oil and liquefied natural gas supply, which has sparked worries about worldwide availability. The blockade of the Strait of Hormuz by Iran has effectively halted jet fuel exports worldwide, with tanker traffic collapsing by 70–80%.

Europe is among the most exposed regions, with 25–30% of its jet fuel demand originating from the Persian Gulf. The EU is actively seeking alternative jet fuel supplies, especially from the United States.

Commission Presents Transport Sector Guidance

The Commission also presented guidance to the transport sector that was published last week clarifying issues such as regulatory flexibilities on slots and the Safety Information Bulletin from the European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) about the safe usage of Jet A aviation fuel in Europe.

EU policy coordination between the energy and transport areas, as well as the guidance to airline operators clarifying regulatory flexibilities on slots and fuel types, can support coordinated measures.

Airports Council Warns Of Systemic Shortage Risk

In an April 9 letter, the Airports Council International Europe cautioned that the European Union would face a "systemic jet fuel shortage" if the Strait of

Hormuz remains closed. The airports association warned that Europe would encounter fuel shortages "in a significant and systemic way" within three weeks if exports through the Strait of Hormuz do not resume. Amaar Khan, who leads European jet fuel pricing at Argus Media, expressed that even if Gulf supplies resume shortly, there could still be shortages as summer travel peaks approach. "While it's not guaranteed the likelihood of shortages in certain areas of Europe is increasing," he stated.

Oil Coordination Group Will Continue Regular Meetings

The Oil Coordination Group will continue to convene on a regular and frequent basis to ensure a coordinated response to any developments regarding jet fuels supplies in the EU.

The Commission will continue to assess the overall impact of the situation in the Middle East in Europe, support coordinated action as needed, and maintain regular communication with EU countries, the IEA and market participants.

Tzitzikostas announced that a new "fuel observatory" will be created to monitor jet fuel supplies. Additionally, the EU is evaluating whether a minimum stock obligation for jet fuel is necessary, which would require member states to maintain a baseline emergency reserve.

EU Retains

Substantial Refining Capacity

Europe retains substantial refining capacity to convert crude oil to kerosene in Europe, therefore leaving Europe less vulnerable to outside shocks. European fuel storage facilities are already experiencing declining stock levels while alternative supplies from the US and other regions have been insufficient to replace the lost volumes from the Middle East.

The sudden withdrawal of shipping capacity and the sharp rise in insurance premiums have tightened availability, pushing jet fuel cracks and product premiums sharply higher amid mounting concerns over physical shortages.

Energy Commissioner Notes Shortage Depends On Multiple Factors

Commissioner Dan Jørgensen told reporters that while "we're not there yet" in terms of a jet fuel shortage, the possibility of a longer-term shortage cannot be ruled out. He said the shortage will depend on how the Iran war and the situation in the Strait of Hormuz will unfold, as well as how airlines will react after some companies including the German owners of Lufthansa canceled a significant number of flights.

The Commission stated it will start talks with member states "on how best to address the situation" without offering specifics.

Horizon Europe FP10 Negotiations Expected October as Budget Programme Advances

BY LIAM FLYNN



Negotiations on the next Horizon Europe research and innovation programme are expected to commence in October 2026, contingent on both the European Parliament and EU Council meeting their current timelines. The European Commission has already adopted the €14 billion Horizon Europe work programme for 2026–2027, which prioritises clean technologies, trustworthy artificial intelligence, and talent attraction. EU research ministers have taken stock of progress under the Cypriot Presidency, with discussions launched in October 2025 mapping key elements of emerging positions. The current Horizon Europe programme runs from 2021 to 2027 with a total budget of €93.5 billion.

Horizon Europe Negotiations Expected to Start This October

Negotiations on the successor to Horizon Europe, known as FP10, look set to start in October 2026 if both the European Parliament and the EU Council hit their current targets. This timeline represents a critical milestone in the EU's long-term research and innovation strategy, as the current programme approaches its conclusion at the end of 2027.

The Cypriot Presidency of the EU Council has been overseeing negotiations since discussions were launched in October 2025. A report outlining negotiation steps maps key elements of emerging positions and indicates

areas requiring furtherwork as talks continue.

EU governments are making a final push for an FP10 deal this month, according to recent reporting from Brussels. The urgency reflects the need to establish continuity in EU research funding beyond the current programme's expiration.

Current Programme Budget and Timeline

Horizon Europe is the European Union's €93.5 billion research and innovation programme running from 2021 to 2027. The programme has funded thousands of research projects across member states and associated countries, supporting scientific collaboration and innovation throughout Europe.

The European Commission adopted the main Horizon Europe work programme for 2026–2027 in December 2025. This €14 billion investment is designed to drive research and innovation across the EU's strategic goals during the programme's final years.

European Commission Adopts €14 Billion Work Programme

The European Commission's Horizon Europe work programme for 2026–2027 commits

€14 billion to research and innovation, emphasising clean technologies, trustworthy AI, talent attraction and simplified participation. This allocation represents the Commission's commitment to maintaining research momentum through the programme's conclusion.

The work programme aims to drive advancements in climate neutrality, digital leadership, talent mobility and industrial resilience across EU member states. These priorities align with the EU's broader strategic objectives including the European Green Deal and digital transformation agenda.

Clean Industrial Deal Funding Call

Among the programme's key initiatives is a €540 million call to support the Clean Industrial Deal, promoting clean technologies and decarbonisation in energy-intensive sectors. This substantial investment targets industries facing the greatest transition challenges in achieving climate neutrality.

Additionally, the programme includes a €90 million call for research into trustworthy artificial intelligence applicable to areas such as advanced materials, agriculture and healthcare. This targeted funding addresses growing demand for AI development that meets EU standards for safety and reliability.

The work programme introduces

a set of horizontal calls addressing cross-cutting challenges in EU research and innovation. These calls enable researchers to tackle complex issues requiring interdisciplinary approaches and collaboration across multiple domains.

EU Research Ministers Track Negotiation Progress

EU research ministers have taken stock of progress and outlined future priorities as Horizon Europe negotiations advance. The ministers' assessment comes as the Cypriot Presidency continues facilitating discussions between member states and EU institutions.

The report submitted to ministers outlines negotiation steps taken since the Horizon Europe Package discussions were launched in October 2025. This documentation provides transparency on the negotiation process and helps stakeholders understand the current state of discussions.

Areas Requiring Further Work

The negotiation report indicates specific areas requiring further work before a final agreement can be reached on FP10. These areas represent points of divergence between member states or between the Council and Parliament that need resolution.

The mapping of emerging positions helps identify

where consensus exists and where additional negotiation is necessary. This approach enables more efficient use of remaining negotiation time before the October target date.

2026 EU Budget Deal Boosts Research Funding

In November 2025, negotiators agreed to set the overall level of commitment appropriations for 2026 at €192.8 billion, with payment appropriations set at €190.1 billion. This budget deal establishes the financial framework within which Horizon Europe operations continue.

The European Parliament successfully negotiated an additional €372.7 million in funding beyond the Commission's initial proposal, focusing on programmes and policies aimed at improving people's lives, boosting competitiveness, and addressing defence challenges. This increase demonstrates parliamentary commitment to maintaining robust research funding.

MEPs secured an increase of allocations for Horizon Europe by €20 million specifically. While modest compared to the overall programme budget, this increase reflects the Parliament's priority on research and innovation funding.

The Parliament also secured increases for transport and energy networks by €23.5 million

to boost competitiveness, job-creation and cross-border infrastructure. These allocations complement Horizon Europe funding by supporting research infrastructure and implementation.

Application Process and Grant Agreements

Researchers seeking Horizon Europe funding must navigate a multi-stage application process. After the call for applications closes, the process moves to the evaluation phase. This evaluation ensures that only the highest-quality proposals receive funding.

The evaluation phase lasts up to five months, during which proposals are assessed against established criteria. Once consensus has been achieved within the panels and the evaluation has been reviewed, the Research Executive Agency informs successful applicants and proposes funding in line with the overall available budget.

Grant Agreement Timeline

Once successful proposals are selected, the agencies draw up a grant agreement with the project partners, known as beneficiaries. The grant agreement specifies the project's research and innovation activities, duration and budget, the EU's contribution, all rights and obligations, and more.

Generally, the parties sign the

grant agreement within three months of proposal selection. This timeline provides researchers with certainty about funding commencement and enables project planning.

Strategic Priorities Drive Research Investment

The Horizon Europe programme emphasises several strategic priorities that reflect EU policy objectives. Clean technologies receive substantial investment as the EU works toward climate neutrality goals. This focus aligns with the European Green Deal's ambition to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent.

Trustworthy artificial intelligence represents another priority area, with funding dedicated to AI development that meets EU standards. This approach balances innovation promotion with ethical considerations and public safety concerns.

Talent attraction and mobility remain central to the programme's design, recognising that research excellence depends on attracting and retaining skilled researchers.

Simplified participation measures aim to reduce administrative barriers and enable broader engagement from institutions across Europe. Industrial resilience receives attention through funding that supports research contributing to European industrial competitiveness. This priority

addresses concerns about maintaining European leadership in key technological sectors.

The October 2026 target for FP10 negotiations represents a critical deadline for EU research policy. Meeting this timeline ensures minimal disruption to the research ecosystem as the current programme concludes.

Both the European Parliament and EU Council must hit their current targets for the October start date to materialise. Any delays in either institution's preparatory work could push negotiations later, potentially creating uncertainty for researchers and institutions planning future projects.

The Cypriot Presidency continues facilitating negotiations under its mandate, working to resolve outstanding issues before the October target. The Presidency's role involves brokering compromises between member states with differing priorities and interests. EU governments' final push for an FP10 deal this month demonstrates recognition of the timeline's importance. This urgency reflects concern about maintaining continuity in EU research funding and preserving Europe's position in global scientific competition.

The outcome of these negotiations will shape research and innovation policy across the EU for the next decade, making the October negotiations a pivotal moment for European science and technology policy.



Washington Insider

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**US PAUSES PARTICIPATION IN HISTORIC CANADA
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