

Britain hosts Strait of Hormuz crisis summit amid breakdown of relations with US

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2 April 2026

The Strait of Hormuz virtual summit hosted by Britain on Thursday underscored the disaster confronted by the European powers in the war in Iran, their limited powers of intervention, and the clash with the working class which will inevitably result.

Foreign ministers from 40 countries reportedly took part. Leading the meeting, UK Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper made the obligatory denunciation of Iran for the consequences of a criminal war begun by the United States and Israel.

“Iranian recklessness towards countries who were never involved in this conflict,” she said, “is not just hitting mortgage rates and petrol prices and the cost of living here in the UK and in many different countries across the world, it is hitting our global economic security.”

Cooper is lying about who is responsible, but not about the consequences. In the UK, food inflation is expected to hit 9 percent even if the conflict ends within the next few weeks. Energy bills are expected to spike 18 percent in the summer. Petrol has already climbed 14 percent and diesel 27 percent. The head of the National Health Service has said he is “really worried” about medicine supplies.

The most significant feature of the summit was the absence of the United States. President Donald Trump has rocked the European powers by declaring that reopening the Strait of Hormuz is not his concern.

Underscoring his administration’s naked disregard for the interests of its longtime allies, Trump has said repeatedly he is considering leaving NATO. US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth was asked whether the alliance’s formally legally binding “collective defence” clause was still operative and replied, “That’s a decision that will be left to the president. But I’ll just say a lot has been laid bare.”

Rather than suggest any joint action, Trump has said, in different versions, “The countries of the world that do receive oil through the Hormuz strait must take care of

that passage. They must cherish it. They must grab it and cherish it. They can do it easily.”

European governments do not agree.

French President Emmanuel Macron told reporters during a visit to South Korea: “There are people who advocate the idea of the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz by force, through a military operation, a position that has at times been expressed by the United States. That has never been the option we have chosen, and we consider it unrealistic.”

He added that a military operation “would take an infinite amount of time and would expose anyone passing through the strait to coastal threats from [Iran’s] Revolutionary Guard, who have capabilities, ballistic missiles and many other risks.” The reopening of the Strait could “only be done in coordination with Iran” through negotiations following a ceasefire.

As for the British, the head of the Royal Navy Gen Sir Gwyn Jenkins gave an interview Wednesday announcing, “My orders are clear. According to the defence investigation that was completed last year, I will be ready for war by the end of this decade,” adding “are we as ready as we should be? I don’t think we are. We have work to do.”

Trump’s increasingly hostile attitude towards Europe, and substantial pull-out from the war in Ukraine, has promoted years of declarations about the need to remilitarise the continent. However, these plans are still in their initial stages. British military spending increased from 2.2 to 2.4 percent of GDP in the last five years; French from 2 to 2.3 percent; German from 1.4 to 2.4 percent.

“At the end of the cold war,” the *Guardian* reports, “the UK had 51 destroyers and frigates... The number had halved to 25 by 2007 and is now at 13, with much of that fleet ageing...”

“Britain had maintained four minehunters and a

motherhood in Bahrain for 20 years, in the belief that Iran might, in a crisis such as now, try to mine the Gulf and the strait of Hormuz. But the final three were removed in the past year...”

The newspaper noted the House of Commons Defence Committee expressing “grave concerns over whether the navy had the ‘capacity and resilience’ to respond to the crisis in the Middle East” and a report from the Center for European Policy Analysis warning the Royal Navy was ‘on course for national embarrassment’.”

The UK-led summit was therefore focussed on efforts to “assess all viable diplomatic and political measures we can take to restore freedom of navigation, guarantee the safety of trapped ships and seafarers and to resume the movement of vital commodities,” according to Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer.

Participants would “look at how we can marshal our capabilities and make the strait accessible and safe after the fighting has stopped”.

All of this depends on waiting for an end to a war which the European powers were not ready for and are fearful of intervening in, then negotiating terms with whoever is left in the driving seat, whether Washington or Tehran. Europe’s governments have essentially been sidelined amid events that threaten their economic destruction, of which the United States—for decades the central pillar of their foreign policy—is the author.

This is the source of the openly fractious comments directed toward the US President by a European ruling class which has generally bent over backwards to accommodate him. Britain, as the most servile of them all, shows this process most sharply.

UK Chancellor Rachel Reeves told the BBC, “I’m angry that Donald Trump has chosen to go to war in the Middle East—a war that there’s not a clear plan of how to get out of. It’s why we didn’t want to enter this.” She told the *Guardian*, “the decision of Donald Trump... is causing real hardship for people now.”

“The costs of borrowing for government have gone through the roof,” Reeves added. “This country hasn’t done anything to cause those prices to rise, but the decision of Donald Trump, the decision that Keir Starmer and this government did not want any part of and are trying to de-escalate, is causing real hardship for people now.”

Starmer has indicated plans for a significant reorientation away from the United States towards the European Union, telling a press conference Wednesday, “It is increasingly clear that as the world continues down

this volatile path, our long-term national interest requires closer partnership with our allies in Europe and with the European Union.”

Announcing a UK-EU summit in the summer, he explained, “We want to be more ambitious. Closer economic cooperation, closer security cooperation, a partnership that recognises our shared values, our shared interest and our shared future. A partnership for the dangerous world that we must navigate together.” The “coalition” over the Strait of Hormuz is part of this effort.

None of these discussions move the Europeans any closer to a resolution of the crisis confronting their economies and societies. As this sharpens in the coming weeks, the imperialist government will have to turn to fiercer forms of repression of popular anger and efforts to impose the mounting economic catastrophe on the working class.

This week Starmer held his third Cobra (national emergency) meeting since the war on Iran began, saying vaguely it would be “making sure that everything that we need to have in place” to respond to economic collapse.

Leaks from Cobra meetings seven years ago planning for a no-deal Brexit and “shortages of fuel, food and medicine” revealed “Operation Yellowhammer” discussions of “curfews, bans on travel, confiscation of property [and] deployment of the armed forces to quell rioting,” according to the *Times*. Thousands of troops were to be placed on standby.

The same discussions and worse will be taking place today.

At the same time, the longer the Strait is closed, the more desperate the pressure the European and other powers will be placed under to reopen it and alleviate their economic distress. Whether through deeper involvement in Trump’s criminal war, or some ramshackle force of their own, either course would court disaster and a deeper and more extensive eruption of social opposition at home.



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