News

Trump meets with NATO leader Rutte as he muses about pulling out of the military alliance



Secretary of State Marco Rubio, right, is joined by NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte, left, for a photo opportunity at the State Department, Wednesday, April 8, 2026, in Washington.. PHOTO COURTESY OF AP PHOTO/ROD LAMKEY, JR.

NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte was meeting with President Donald Trump on Wednesday to try to smooth over the president's anger with the military alliance over the Iran war.

Trump had suggested the U.S. may consider leaving the trans-Atlantic alliance after NATO member countries ignored his call to help reopen the Strait of Hormuz, a vital shipping waterway, as Iran effectively shut it and sent gas prices soaring.

The Republican president's meeting with Rutte, with whom he had a warm relationship, comes as the U.S. and Iran late Tuesday agreed to a two-week ceasefire that includes the reopening of the strait. The nascent ceasefire was struck after Trump said he would strike Iran's power plants and bridges, threatening that "a whole civilization will die tonight."

The plan to reopen the strait is still cloudy and was expected to be a central focus of the Wednesday afternoon meeting with Rutte, which was being held behind closed doors.

When asked earlier Wednesday if Trump is still considering leaving NATO, White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said, "It's something the president has discussed, and I think it's something the president will be discussing in a couple of hours with Secretary-General Rutte."

Secretary of State Marco Rubio met separately with Rutte on Wednesday morning at the State Department ahead of the White House talks. In a statement, the State Department said Rubio and Rutte had discussed the war with Iran, along with U.S. efforts to negotiate an end to the Russia-Ukraine war and "increasing coordination and burden shifting with NATO allies."

Congress in 2023 passed a law that prevents any U.S. president from pulling out of NATO without its approval. Trump has been a longtime critic of NATO and in his first term had suggested he had the authority on his own to leave the alliance, which was founded in 1949 to counter the Cold War threat posed to European security by the Soviet Union.

The crux of the commitment its 32 member countries make is a mutual defense agreement in which an attack on one is considered an attack on them all. The only time it has been activated was in 2001, to support the United States in the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks on New York and Washington.

Despite that, Trump has complained during his war of choice with Iran that NATO has shown it will not be there for the U.S.

Ahead of the meeting, Sen. Mitch McConnell, a Kentucky Republican, issued a statement Tuesday night in support of the alliance, noting that, "Following the September 11th attacks, NATO allies sent their young servicemembers to fight and die alongside America's own in Afghanistan and Iraq." McConnell, who sits on a committee overseeing defense spending, urged Trump to be "clear and consistent" and said it's not in America's interest to "spend more time nursing grudges with allies who share our interests than deterring adversaries who threaten us."

If Rutte's meeting does not alleviate Trump's frustrations, it's unclear if the Trump administration would challenge the law barring a president from pulling out of NATO. When the law passed, it was championed by Trump's current secretary of state, Marco Rubio, who at the time was a senator from Florida.

The alliance was already rattled over the past year as Trump returned to power and reduced U.S. military support for Ukraine in the war against Russia and threatened to seize Greenland from ally Denmark.

But Trump's badgering of NATO intensified after the Iran war began at the end of February, with the president insisting that securing the Strait of Hormuz was not America's job but the responsibility of countries that depend on the flow of oil through it.

"Go to the strait and just take it," Trump said last week.

Trump was also angered as NATO allies Spain and France forbade or restricted use of their airspace or joint military facilities for the U.S. in the Iran war. They and other nations, however, agreed to help with an international coalition to open the Strait of Hormuz when the conflict ends.

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, who has been a particular source of Trump's frustration, was set to travel on Wednesday to the Gulf to support the ceasefire. The U.K. has been working on developing a post-conflict security plan for the strait, a narrow waterway between Iran and Oman through which about one-fifth of the world's oil passes.

Trump has previously threatened to leave NATO and often said that he would abandon allies who don't spend enough on their military budgets. Former NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, in his recent memoir, said he feared that Trump might walk away from the alliance in 2018, during his first term as president.

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