



By: TA | AP Insight

# Trump diminishing NATO's Afghanistan involvement causes distress in UK



U.S. President Donald Trump provoked outrage and distress among many in the United Kingdom on Friday with his false assertion that troops from NATO countries – other than Americans – stayed away from the front line during the war in Afghanistan.

Trump said that he wasn't sure NATO would be there to support the United States if and when requested.

"We've never needed them, we have never really asked anything of them," he said in an interview with Fox News in Davos, Switzerland, on Thursday. "You know, they'll say they sent some troops to Afghanistan, or this or that, and they did, they stayed a little back, a little off the front lines."

In October 2001, nearly a month after the Sept. 11 attacks, a U.S.-led coalition launched an invasion of Afghanistan to destroy al-Qaida, which had used the country as its base, and the group's Taliban hosts.

Alongside the U.S. were troops from dozens of countries, including from NATO, whose mutual-defense mandate had been triggered for the first time after the attacks on New York and Washington.

## UK sacrifice

In Britain, the reaction to Trump's comments was raw and U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer was being urged to request an apology or clarification from Trump. Starmer's office at No. 10 Downing Street said that the American president was "wrong to diminish the role of NATO troops."

After 9/11, then Prime Minister Tony Blair said that the U.K. would "stand shoulder to shoulder" with the U.S. in response to the al-Qaida attacks.

British troops took a key role in many operations during the Afghan war until their withdrawal in 2014, particularly in Helmand Province in the south of the country. American troops remained in Afghanistan until their

chaotic **withdrawal in 2021** when the Taliban returned to power.

## More than 150,000 British troops served in Afghanistan

More than 150,000 **British troops** served in Afghanistan in the years after the U.S.-led 2001 invasion, the largest contingent after the American one.

Defense Secretary John Healey said that the U.K. and NATO allies "answered the U.S. call" then, and that more than 450 British personnel lost their lives in Afghanistan.

"Those British troops should be remembered for who they were – heroes who gave their lives in service of our nation," he said.

Ben Obese-Jecty, a lawmaker who served in Afghanistan as a captain in the Royal Yorkshire Regiment, said that it was "sad to see our nation's sacrifice, and that of our NATO partners, held so cheaply by the president of the United States."

## Trump and Vietnam

Anger was further fueled by the fact that the comments came from someone who didn't serve in the Vietnam War at a time when he was eligible.

"It's hugely ironic that someone who allegedly dodged the draft for the Vietnam War should make such a disgraceful statement," said Stephen Stewart, author of "The Accidental Soldier," an account of his time embedded with British troops in Afghanistan.

Trump received a deferment that allowed him to not serve in Vietnam because of bone spurs, but he has been unable to remember in which foot, leading to accusations of draft dodging.

## Repeated NATO slights

It wasn't the first time that Trump downplayed the commitment of NATO countries over the past few days.

It has been one of his pivotal lines of attack as he escalated his threats to **seize Greenland**, a semiautonomous territory belonging to Denmark.

Trump's allegation that NATO countries won't be there when requested stands in stark contrast to reality.



Though Trump backed down after a meeting with Mark Rutte in which he said they formed the "framework" for a deal over Arctic security, trans-Atlantic relations have taken a hit

The only time **Article 5 of NATO's** founding treaty has been used was in response to the 9/11 attacks on the U.S.

The article is the key mutual defense clause, obliging all member countries to come to the aid of another member whose sovereignty or territorial integrity might be under threat.

"When America needed us after 9/11 we were there," former Danish platoon commander Martin Tamm Andersen said.

Denmark has been a stalwart **ally of the U.S. in Afghanistan**, with 44 Danish soldiers killed there — the highest per capita death toll among coalition forces. Eight more died in Iraq.

The latest controversy surrounding Trump comes at the end of a week when he has faced criticism — and pushback — for his threats to Greenland.

Trump also threatened to slap tariffs on European nations opposed to his ambitions to annex Greenland, which raised questions over the future of NATO.

And though **Trump backed down** after a meeting with NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte in which he said they formed the "framework" for a deal over Arctic security, trans-Atlantic relations have taken a hit.

His latest comments are unlikely to improve relations.

Diane Dernie, whose son Ben Parkinson suffered horrific injuries when a British Army Land Rover hit a mine in Afghanistan in 2006, said that Trump's latest comments were "the ultimate insult" and called on Starmer to stand up to Trump over them.

"Call him out," she said. "Make a stand for those who fought for this country and for our flag, because it's just beyond belief."