# Sir Keir Starmer faces challenge as Trump’s 50% EU tariff threat intensifies UK trade tensions



Sir Keir Starmer faces mounting pressure as Donald Trump has thrown a spotlight on future trade relations with the European Union, threatening to impose a 50 per cent tariff on EU goods as tensions rise between Washington and Brussels. This announcement, made via Trump's Truth Social platform, comes amidst ongoing trade negotiations and suggests a significant shift in the landscape for the UK's future trade strategies. Analysts interpret this escalation as a wake-up call for the UK, which may soon find itself embroiled in transatlantic disputes.

The threat from the US President coincides with the unveiling of Starmer's ambitious 'reset' deal aimed at fostering closer ties with Europe, a move that many Brexiteers denounce as a potential backtrack on the promises made during the Brexit referendum. Critics have voiced concerns that this approach could inch the UK back into the EU’s customs union or single market framework, subjects that have long been contentious in UK politics. Should tariffs materialise, the repercussions would not be limited to the EU, potentially extending to the UK as trade becomes entangled once more.

One of the central criticisms of Starmer's deal is the compromise over fishing rights, which allows EU trawlers access to UK waters for an additional 12 years. This aspect has been labelled a 'surrender' by critics, including former Conservative leader Sir Iain Duncan Smith, who warns that yielding to the EU's Sanitary and Phytosanitary Agreement diminishes UK sovereignty. Furthermore, there is concern that Starmer’s approach aligns the UK too closely with EU standards, resulting in the UK becoming a ‘rule-taker’ in several key areas.

Economic impact is also at the forefront of discussions surrounding the new agreement. While Starmer indicates that the deal could bolster the UK economy by up to £9 billion by 2040, experts are sceptical, noting that this merely offsets a fraction of the estimated 4% long-term GDP hit from Brexit. As stock markets responded negatively to Trump's tariff threats, with the FTSE 100 and European markets experiencing declines, questions arise about the viability of trade-dependent strategies in such an unpredictable environment.

The agreement includes more than just economic ties; it sets a renewed framework for security cooperation between the UK and the EU. This fresh commitment to collaboration encompasses military training, cyber security, and participation in EU defence initiatives, reflecting broader geopolitical realities. The UK-EU relationship, long strained post-Brexit, is now positioned to evolve, especially as security concerns—exacerbated by the ongoing war in Ukraine—take centre stage.

Moreover, the muted public response to Starmer's deal might indicate what some experts term 'Brexit fatigue.' Although there are underlying concerns about sovereignty and immigration, the electorate appears less engaged than during previous Brexit debates. The political implications of restoring ties with a previously contentious partner are delicate, and Starmer's strategy must navigate the existing sentiments of scepticism and division.

As trade tensions heighten globally, the potential ramifications of Trump's proposed tariffs loom large over the UK, which has recently attempted to regain its footing in post-Brexit Europe. With demands for a stronger negotiating stance and mounting criticism from within his party, Starmer's leadership faces its most daunting challenge yet—striking a balance between pragmatism and conviction in an increasingly volatile international landscape.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14744791/Sir-Keir-warned-not-cosy-EU-President-Trump-threatens-Brussels-50-cent-tariffs.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/uk-eu-summit-live-starmer-eu-leaders-set-agree-post-brexit-reset-deal-2025-05-19/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14744791/Sir-Keir-warned-not-cosy-EU-President-Trump-threatens-Brussels-50-cent-tariffs.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/ffe9c7ca-52de-457e-ab50-8bc6df5296b0), [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/04bf9ddc-1abf-4641-a4e3-f9b5f2689ebb)
* Paragraph 3 – [[6]](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/07/19/starmer-and-macron-make-first-move-to-restore-relations-between-london-paris-and-the-eu_6689964_4.html), [[5]](https://www.ft.com/content/7e7f481e-92dd-4d95-b46e-1d6adb911b70)
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* Paragraph 6 – [[4]](https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/uk-eu-summit-live-starmer-eu-leaders-set-agree-post-brexit-reset-deal-2025-05-19/), [[6]](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/07/19/starmer-and-macron-make-first-move-to-restore-relations-between-london-paris-and-the-eu_6689964_4.html)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14744791/Sir-Keir-warned-not-cosy-EU-President-Trump-threatens-Brussels-50-cent-tariffs.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/ffe9c7ca-52de-457e-ab50-8bc6df5296b0> - The Financial Times' 'Political Fix' podcast discusses Labour leader Keir Starmer's post-Brexit EU deal and its political implications. The deal re-establishes trade and diplomatic ties, including a defense partnership and restored electricity market cooperation. A veterinary agreement easing food trade and a contentious 12-year fisheries access compromise are key elements. While Starmer markets the deal as economical and pragmatic, critics like Kemi Badenoch label it a surrender due to dynamic alignment with EU rules. Public and political response has been muted, reflecting Brexit fatigue, though concerns about sovereignty and immigration persist.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/04bf9ddc-1abf-4641-a4e3-f9b5f2689ebb> - Nine years after the Brexit referendum, the UK’s new agreement with the EU under the Labour government marks a modest but symbolically significant step towards closer cooperation. The centerpiece is a security and defence pact that formalizes collaboration in military training, cyber and space security, infrastructure resilience, and hybrid threats. This agreement also opens the door for UK participation in the EU's €150bn Security Action for Europe procurement fund. Economically, the deal includes a veterinary agreement to ease agrifood exports and aligns emissions trading systems, potentially adding £9bn to the UK economy by 2040. However, the UK has accepted dynamic alignment with EU rules in certain areas and extended EU fishing access to UK waters for 12 years, prompting criticism from rightwing parties as a loss of sovereignty and a betrayal of the fishing industry. While the Labour government has maintained red lines against rejoining the single market or customs union, the deal reflects a shift towards more pragmatic relations. With Europe facing rising security challenges, the agreement serves as a foundation for a deeper realignment, recognizing the UK's need to foster stronger ties with its principal trade and security partner.
4. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/uk-eu-summit-live-starmer-eu-leaders-set-agree-post-brexit-reset-deal-2025-05-19/> - At the UK-EU summit held on May 19, 2025, UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced a 'new chapter' in UK-EU relations following a significant reset deal post-Brexit. The agreement aims to strengthen political and economic ties after years of strained relations since the UK's departure from the bloc. Both leaders emphasized the importance of cooperation on shared challenges such as trade, security, and climate change. The reset deal is expected to foster renewed trust and collaboration, marking a departure from the divisive and contentious atmosphere that followed Brexit. The summit symbolizes a turning point in the relationship, underscoring a mutual interest in moving forward positively.
5. <https://www.ft.com/content/7e7f481e-92dd-4d95-b46e-1d6adb911b70> - The UK and EU have announced a reset of their post-Brexit relationship through a three-part agreement aimed at improving economic ties, security cooperation, and energy integration. Key components include a new security and defence partnership, improved trade in agrifoods and electricity, and a veterinary agreement reducing red tape on agricultural exports. While Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer claims a potential £9bn annual economic boost by 2040, analysts note the gains would only marginally offset Brexit’s 4% long-term GDP impact. The agreement includes a controversial 12-year extension of EU fishing access to UK waters, a trade-off for securing improvements in food trade. The UK will also work towards rejoining the EU's internal energy market, which could save consumers €44bn annually. The security pact reestablishes institutional cooperation, including regular high-level meetings and potential UK involvement in the EU’s €150bn arms fund. Gains in youth and professional mobility remain uncertain, with limited commitments on work exchanges and no progress on touring artist visas. Despite some economic and diplomatic progress, the reset does not reverse the fundamental Brexit trade and regulatory realignments.
6. <https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/07/19/starmer-and-macron-make-first-move-to-restore-relations-between-london-paris-and-the-eu_6689964_4.html> - Emmanuel Macron and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer committed to mending relations between the UK, France, and the EU post-Brexit, during the European Political Community summit held on July 18 at Blenheim Palace. The meeting highlighted a stark contrast between Macron, recently dealing with an electoral defeat and hung parliament, and Starmer, who secured a comfortable majority in a recent landslide victory. Both leaders emphasized the need for renewed trust and cooperation, with Starmer proposing a 'defense pact' within the EU to enhance European security amidst the war in Ukraine. Moreover, migration and defense cooperation were key issues discussed, with Starmer advocating for humane treatment of migrants and a 'new deal' with France, while also addressing the need for increased support to Ukraine. Macron expressed caution, emphasizing the need for the UK to align with European laws and treaties. Both leaders aim for a comprehensive reset of relations amidst a backdrop of political and economic challenges.
7. <https://www.foxbusiness.com/economy/trump-threatens-even-larger-tariffs-eu-canada-work-together-cause-economic-harm-us> - President Donald Trump early Thursday threatened even larger tariffs on the European Union and Canada if both economies worked together to do 'economic harm to the USA.' Writing on his Truth Social platform, the president warned: 'If the European Union works with Canada in order to do economic harm to the USA, large scale Tariffs, far larger than currently planned, will be placed on them both in order to protect the best friend that each of these countries has ever had!' The post comes after the president announced on Wednesday he would impose a 25% tariff on all imported autos.