



## Escalating conflict in Middle East threatens Gulf shipping

Recent attacks between Israel-US and Iran have significantly heightened tensions, raising concerns about the safety of merchant vessels in and around the Arabian/Persian Gulf and Israeli waters. The situation is evolving rapidly, and there is a growing risk of spillover effects impacting shipping.

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With permission from [Vanguard](#) , we have reproduced their analysis and recommendations:

As of 6 March, the war remains ongoing, with immediate spillover risk to Gulf airspace, regional energy infrastructure and maritime traffic.

## **US, Israel and Iran**

- Over the past 24 hours, US and Israeli strikes have continued to be reported across Tehran and other parts of Iran, with new strikes reported targeting the Mohammad Rasulullah Security Branch Imam Reza Unit in northwestern Tehran, the Motahari Basij Resistance Regional Base in central Tehran, and an IRGC base in Parand in Tehran Province, as well as Law Enforcement Command (LEC) facilities and police stations in Qom, Shahriar, northern Tehran and southern Tehran Province.

## **Saudi Arabia**

- In the early hours of 6 March, the Saudi MoD reported that three ballistic missiles launched toward Prince Sultan Air Base in Al-Kharj Governorate were intercepted and destroyed, while one cruise missile was intercepted near Al-Kharj and two UAVs were shot down in Al-Kharj and the Eastern Province. No casualties or damage were reported..

## **Kuwait**

- On 6 March, Kuwaiti MoD spokesperson Saud Al-Otaiban stated that 212 ballistic missiles and 394 UAVs have been detected and intercepted since the onset of attacks targeting Kuwaiti airspace, adding that 67 personnel from the Kuwaiti Armed Forces were injured during interception operations. He also stated that air defence systems intercepted a missile after it breached Kuwaiti airspace on 5 March, with falling debris causing minor damage to a vehicle on the ground and no casualties reported

## **Qatar**

- On 5 March, the Qatari MoD stated that the country was targeted by 14 ballistic missiles and four UAVs launched from Iran, with 13 missiles intercepted while the remaining missile fell in Qatar's territorial waters, and all four UAVs intercepted, with no casualties reported. Authorities later issued a national emergency alert stating that the security threat had been eliminated and the situation had returned to normal, while residents near the US Embassy in Doha were temporarily evacuated as a precautionary measure.

## **Bahrain**

- On 5 March, the Bahrain Defence Force (BDF) General Command stated that air defence systems have intercepted and destroyed 75 missiles and 123 UAVs since the onset of the Iranian attacks.

## **UAE**

- On 5 March, the UAE Ministry of Defence (MoD) stated that seven ballistic missiles were detected, of which six were intercepted while one fell within UAE territory, while 131 UAVs were detected, with 125 intercepted and six impacting within the country. Authorities also reported that debris from an intercepted UAV fell at two sites in the Industrial City of Abu Dhabi (ICAD 2), injuring six foreign nationals, while the overall toll since the onset of hostilities was reported at three fatalities and 94 minor injuries linked to interception-related debris.

## **Jordan**

- On 5 March interceptions were reported in the airspace over the capital Amman, Irbid, and other northern areas of Jordan. The Public Security Directorate (PSD) stated that Civil Defence and police teams have responded to 187 reports of falling debris and objects across multiple governorates since 28 February up to 15:00 LT on 5 March, with no injuries reported

## **Global**

- In Israel and southern Lebanon, Hezbollah claimed that it conducted multiple attacks targeting IDF positions and forces, including drone and rocket attacks
- The Foreign Ministers of the GCC and the EU held a joint meeting in which they condemned Iran's attacks against GCC states and reaffirmed the right of GCC countries to defend themselves. The ministers also emphasised the need to safeguard regional airspace and maritime routes, including the Strait of Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb, to ensure freedom of navigation, secure supply chains, and protect global energy markets.
- On 4 March, Turkish Defence Ministry reported that NATO defence systems intercepted a ballistic missile that was launched from Iran towards Turkish airspace. The ministry stated that Turkey will take "all necessary steps to defend its territory."

## Maritime

- On 6 March, the US Central Command (CENTCOM) stated that US forces struck an Iranian vessel described as a "drone carrier," which was reported ablaze following the attack, as the US-Israeli military campaign against Iran entered its seventh day. CENTCOM stated that the vessel, described as roughly the size of a World War II-era aircraft carrier, was struck during ongoing operations against Iranian naval assets, though the location of the strike was not disclosed.
- On 5 March, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) stated that its naval forces had successfully targeted a US oil tanker in the northern Persian Gulf, claiming that the vessel was set on fire, though no identifying details were provided. The claim likely referred to the Bahamas-flagged tanker SONANGOL NAMIBE, which reported a large explosion on the port side near Khor al-Zubair, Iraq at approximately 22:20 UTC on 4 March, after which a small craft was observed departing the vicinity.
- On 5 March, an Iranian missile strike impacted a unit of the Bapco Energies refinery on Sitra Island, Bahrain. Bahraini authorities stated there was limited material damage and refinery operations continued. No impact was reported at the marine export terminal or associated tanker berths.

## Risk analysis

As of 6 March 2026, large-scale hostilities are ongoing across the Persian Gulf, Gulf of Oman and Strait of Hormuz. Confirmed missile and drone attacks have impacted commercial vessels and port infrastructure across multiple Gulf states, while sustained air defense activity and GNSS/GPS interference are ongoing. Amid the escalation between the US, Iran, Israel, and Iran's regional proxies, as well as all the other Gulf states, the maritime environment remains in active kinetic exposure

- There is a **HIGH** risk of deliberate Iranian targeting against all types of vessels transiting the Strait of Hormuz and adjacent Gulf approaches, not just US and Israeli-flagged/affiliated. However, this is particularly the case for US and Israeli-flagged/affiliated vessels stationary, at berth, or at anchor in Gulf ports.
- There is a **HIGH** risk of Iranian naval approaches, harassment, or tactical intimidation against all commercial vessels in the Strait of Hormuz and adjacent approaches. This could include IRGC naval manoeuvring, aggressive shadowing, coercive signalling, and VHF hailing.
- There is a **LOW** risk of a full closure of the Strait of Hormuz. While Iran may seek to exert pressure through threats, signalling or limited interference, the presence of US and allied naval forces and ongoing military operations in the region make a sustained official closure unlikely. However, continued attacks on merchant vessels have de facto had the same effect at current.
- There is a **MODERATE** risk of mine deployment in the Strait of Hormuz or adjacent Gulf approaches. No confirmed mining activity has been observed so far. However, an Iranian attempt cannot be ruled out given the current escalation.
- There is an **EXTREME** risk of sustained GNSS/GPS/GLONASS interference across the Strait of Hormuz, Gulf of Oman and southern Arabian Gulf, significantly elevating navigational risk amid concurrent naval deployments and missile activity. Interference is particularly pronounced in the approaches to Iranian ports, including Bandar Abbas, Qeshm, Chabahar and surrounding coastal corridors.

## **Strait of Hormuz**

MSCIO highlight in [Update 06 of advisory 01 2026](#) that military operations keep ongoing in the region and the maritime security environment in the Strait of Hormuz and adjacent waters remains significantly deteriorated. Transit through the Strait of Hormuz remains legally permissible; however, traffic appears largely halted, with negligible inbound and outbound movements observed following recent attacks on commercial shipping. The Joint War Committee continues to include the Persian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz and Gulf of Oman within its Listed Areas, MARAD warns of heightened military activity in the region. High levels of GNSS/AIS spoofing inside the Arabian Gulf, SoH and Gulf of Oman are still reported. MSCIO's advice for merchant vessels in the region is as follows:

- Consult any guidance issued by their Flag State or competent national authorities when considering transit.
- Perform enhanced risk assessment.
- Transit through the Strait of Hormuz is currently discouraged.
- Strictly adhere to BMP-MS.
- Monitor Ch16 VHF and be prepared to be hailed.
- Use AIS as per company policy.
- Whenever possible, increase distance from any naval forces to mitigate risk.
- Enhance radar and landmark procedures to support safe navigation, since GNSS are highly likely to be unreliable.

As per [JMIC Update 005](#) , the outlook for the next 48 hours is “*The regional maritime threat environment remains assessed at JMIC Threat Level: CRITICAL. Current reporting over the last 24 hours continues to reinforce sustained hostile operating conditions consistent with this designation, with no confirmed indicators of de-escalation. Active kinetic hazards including missiles, UAVs, and stand-off strike effects remain present across the Strait of Hormuz, Gulf of Oman, and Arabian Gulf, with incident reporting indicating that anchorage and drift patterns may elevate vulnerability. Notably, recent reporting also indicates a possible sabotage/attached-explosive threat vector (e.g., WBIED or limpet-style methodology) currently under investigation in the northern Arabian Gulf / Iraqi littoral operating area, reinforcing that risk is not confined to Strait of Hormuz approaches alone. All merchant vessels, regardless of flag or affiliation, should continue to operate under the assumption of sustained high-end threat exposure. Operational decision-making should prioritize exposure minimization, navigational redundancy, disciplined communications, and real-time reporting validation*”.

## **Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb**

MSCIO highlight in [Update 06 of advisory 01 2026](#) that the current regional developments and open-source reporting indicate a potential resumption of hostile activity by Iranian-aligned Houthi forces against commercial shipping in the Red Sea and adjacent approaches although Houthi’s supreme leader avoided referring to a resumption of attacks against commercial shipping. Houthi attacks against commercial shipping may remain suspended provided the Gaza ceasefire agreement continues to hold. Currently, no attacks from Houthi forces have been reported in the maritime domain, however attacks against merchant vessels transiting the area cannot be ruled out for merchant vessels with affiliations to parties actively involved in the ongoing crisis. It is advised for merchant vessels to:

- Maintain navigation through international waters for as long as possible.
- Navigate closer to the African coastline where feasible.
- Maintain coordination with maritime security reporting centers, both MSCIO and UKMTO.
- Conduct a voyage-specific risk assessment and adhere to BMP-MS.
- Before transiting the area, take into consideration any direct or indirect affiliations between the vessel, its ownership, or its cargo and countries of interest.
- Be aware the environment in the region is dynamic in the region and may change with limited notice

## **JWC Listed areas**

The Joint War Committee (JWC), have added new regions and extended existing ones. They have added five new regions to the listed areas: Bahrain, Djibouti, Kuwait, Oman, and Qatar. Existing coverage areas have been extended for Gulf of Oman, stretches of the Pakistan coast, and eastern maritime zones with extensions reaching down to the Somali border. These updates have been formalized in Circular JWLA-033 (dated 3 March). Gard clients are advised to reach out to their respective underwriters for more information on this.

## **IBF/ITF list of designated risk areas**

The International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) and the Joint Negotiating Group (JNG), as social partners of the International Bargaining Forum (IBF), designated the Strait of Hormuz, Persian Gulf and surrounding waters as a High Risk Area on 2 March 2026. Southern stretches of the Gulf of Oman have been designated as extended risk zone. The High Risk Area designation activates enhanced protection measures for seafarers operating in or near the affected waters. The enhanced protection measures include right to refuse sailing, with repatriation at company's cost, additional wages and compensation.

[JOINT ITF-JNG STATEMENT: DESIGNATION OF HIGH RISK AREA IN THE STRAIT OF HORMUZ](#)

## **Guidance by Flag States and Port States**

We are aware that several Flag States have issued urgent circulars for their fleets, such as India's DGS Circulars [08/2026](#) and [09/2026](#) , and [Marine Advisory 03/2025/Rev.4](#) by Liberia. We strongly advise owners and managers to consult their respective Flag States for the latest requirements and safety protocols. Furthermore, some port states have temporarily suspended navigation within their waters; for instance, please refer to the recent [official announcement by Qatar](#) .

## **Electronic interference**

Mariners can encounter electronic interference in areas of geopolitical tension. These can be in the form of fake Automatic Identification System (AIS) echoes or interference to GPS and LRIT systems.

For detailed guidance on detecting and mitigating GPS disruption, reference can be made to Intertanko's [Jamming and Spoofing of GNSS](#) publication. Additionally, Gard has published an article [GPS interference in geopolitical conflict zones](#) and a [case study on a grounding incident caused by GPS disruption](#) .

# Contractual implications

The ongoing conflict can lead to charterparty issues, such as if the Master decides to deviate for the safety of the vessel and crew. Who bears the costs depends heavily on the terms of the specific charterparty, particularly the routing and war risk clauses (for example BIMCO's CONWARTIME 2013/2025 and VOYWAR 2013/2025).

These clauses generally protect shipowners if the vessel "may be exposed" to war risks, potentially allowing deviation from the agreed or customary route, for the safety of the vessel, her crew and her cargo in the Master's reasonable assessment. However, the application of these clauses and the financial responsibility for deviation costs hinge on factors such as whether the risks have materially changed since the charterparty's inception, whether a specific route was contractually agreed and the specific wording of any war risk clauses. Whether these clauses could be said to be triggered would have to be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

For a more detailed discussion on contractual and insurance implications, please refer to Gard's article [The Middle East conflict: Contractual and insurance implications](#) .

We are closely monitoring these developments and will issue further updates as new information becomes available

## References

- [MSCIO Advisories](#)
- [JMIC Advisories](#)
- [UKMTO incidents updates](#)

*We would like to thank [Vanguard-Tech](#) for helping us with this alert.*

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