



Escalating Israel–Iran conflict 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.

Published 28 February 2026

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Israel and Iran

US Naval Forces Central Command has issued a notice advising that military operations are ongoing across the Arabian Gulf, Gulf of Oman, North Arabian Sea and the Strait of Hormuz amid the current conflict involving the United States, Israel and Iran.

A maritime warning zone has been established to reduce the risk of inadvertent targeting and misidentification during military operations. Commercial vessels remain free to navigate international waters; however, the US Navy has warned that they cannot guarantee the safety of neutral shipping operating within the area. Vessels transiting the region are therefore advised to:

- Exercise extreme caution
- Maintain a listening watch on VHF Channel 16
- Be prepared to respond to coalition naval hails
- Maintain a minimum 30-nautical-mile stand-off from US naval units
- Avoid the area where operationally feasible
- Crew should be prepared to respond to any emergency, such as a fire/explosion following a drone/missile strike.

Ships operating in proximity to military forces risk misidentification and may be subject to defensive measures if perceived as a threat. This advisory remains in effect until military operations against Iranian forces have ceased.

Gulf region

Vanguard is aware of credible reports of a loud explosion in Abu Dhabi, UAE, with additional explosions reportedly heard in Kuwait. Sirens have been activated in multiple locations. Bahrain has confirmed that the headquarters of the United States Fifth Fleet has been targeted by a missile attack. Qatar's Ministry of Defence reports that an Iranian missile was intercepted by Patriot air defence systems.

These incidents mark a significant escalation in regional hostilities and demonstrate expanding missile and air defence activity across multiple Gulf states. Implications could include:

- Immediate elevation of the threat environment across the Arabian Gulf
- Increased risk of further missile and air defence engagements near critical ports, terminals and offshore infrastructure
- Heightened probability of Iranian asymmetric responses, including IRGC fast craft activity and drones
- Elevated risk of misidentification incidents involving naval forces and commercial vessels
- Increased likelihood of disruption to tanker traffic and energy export logistics
- Increase in risk to US, Israeli and Western-affiliated vessels

There have been reports of the Iranian navy broadcasting on VHF that the Strait of Hormuz is closed for ships. Vessels operating in the Arabian Gulf and approaches to the Strait of Hormuz are advised to exercise extreme caution, maintain enhanced watchkeeping and remain clear of military activity where feasible.

Guidance by Flag States and other sources

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](#) . We strongly advise owners and managers to consult their respective Flag States for the latest requirements and safety protocols. Organisations such as the [Maritime Security Centre](#) have also issued updated advisories. They recommend that all vessels maintain a continuous listening watch on VHF Channel 16 and immediately report any suspicious activity or sightings to MSCHOA and UKMTO. 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 GPS interference.

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 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 [Red Sea war risks and insurance implications](#) .

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

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

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