

## Maritime Advisory

**Date:** 20 March 2026

**Areas of Concern:** Arabian/Persian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz, Gulf of Oman, Northern Arabian Sea & adjacent waters; wider region including Red Sea, Bab el-Mandeb Strait, Gulf of Aden; eastern Mediterranean Sea

**Threat Level:** **Severe**

**28 February – 20 March 2026**

UKMTO has received 21 reports of incidents affecting vessels operating in and around the *Arabian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz* and *Gulf of Oman*:

- 16 Attack Reports
- 6 Suspicious Activity Reports

### Situational Overview

Over the past several days, maritime conditions in the Strait of Hormuz and the wider Gulf region have remained highly volatile, with a brief operational lull-scale vessel attacks followed by renewed escalation on 17 – 19 March. Two incidents reported on 18 – 19 March – east of Khor Fakkan, UAE and west of Ras Laffan, Qatar – highlight the persistent instability and geographic spread of the threat environment.



Analysis of maritime-related incidents reported since 1

March 2026 indicates that the pattern of attacks – targeting a wide range of vessel types across multiple locations – continues to reflect a campaign focused on broad maritime disruption rather than the selective targeting of specific vessels, operators or national affiliations. This suggests an intent to sustain regional insecurity, disrupt commercial shipping flows, and increase insurance and transit costs, rather than achieve discrete tactical outcomes against individual targets.

### Key Developments (17 - 19 March 2026)

#### Confirmed Incidents

- **19 March (Arabian Gulf)** – UKMTO has received a report of an incident 4 nautical miles east of Ras Laffan, Qatar. It has been reported that a Qatar-flagged tug **HALUL69** was struck by falling debris from an intercepted drone at around 0130 UTC. The incident resulted in damage to the bridge window, however no structural damage was reported to the vessel and crewmembers have been reported safe.

- **18 March (Gulf of Oman)** – UKMTO has received a report of an incident at 2300 UTC, 11 nautical miles east of Khor Fakkan, UAE. It has been reported that a vessel has been hit by an unknown projectile, which has resulted in a fire onboard. Authorities are investigating the incident. **Update** – Reports indicate that the vessel involved is the Palau-flagged tanker **PARIMAL**. Reports from the CSO state that fifteen crewmembers abandoned the vessel and were rescued by a Cook Islands-flagged tanker, however the Master is missing.
- **18 March (Strait of Hormuz)** - Containership **SAFEEN PRESTIGE**, which was struck on 4 March and which has been adrift in the Strait of Hormuz since then, appeared to be on fire again on 18 March, according to satellite imagery. It currently remains unclear if the fire is the result of another strike or the result of internal damage to the vessel from the initial 4 March incident.
- **17 March (Gulf of Oman)** – UKMTO has received a report of an incident 23 nautical miles east of Fujairah, United Arab Emirates. A tanker has reported being struck by an unknown projectile whilst at anchor. Minor structural damage has been reported. No injuries to the crew and no environmental impact has been reported. **Update** – The CSO has reported that investigations indicate that the vessel was subjected to falling debris from interceptions in the vicinity of the vessel. The vessel received minor structural damage however all crewmembers have been confirmed as safe. It is understood that the vessel is the Kuwait-flagged tanker **GAS AL AHMADIAH**.

#### Strategic & Political Developments

- **Efforts to reopen the Strait of Hormuz** – Multiple governments and international actors continued to plan for the eventual reopening of the Strait of Hormuz, including proposals for naval escort missions to enable the safe transit of vessels once hostilities decrease. However, military experts continue to assess that such operations remain high-risk under the current conditions.
- **Iranian Posture** – Iran continues to maintain its stance that the Strait of Hormuz remains effectively closed and has signalled the possibility of introducing transit controls or charges for passage in the future, effectively reinforcing its intent to leverage the waterway strategically amidst ongoing conflict dynamics.

## Risk Assessment

### 1. Arabian/Persian Gulf & Strait of Hormuz

#### Current Status – Effective Commercial Disruption

- Merchant traffic through the Strait of Hormuz has significantly reduced
- Multiple commercial vessels have been struck by projectiles in Gulf waters
- Heightened naval deployments from regional and international forces are ongoing
- GPS/AIS interference and electronic warfare activity have increased significantly
- Large numbers of tankers and container vessels remain anchored off UAE, Oman, Qatar, and Saudi ports awaiting security clarity
- War-risk premiums have risen sharply, and some underwriters are restricting coverage in high risk-zones

#### Primary Threats

- Missile and drone strikes
- Naval engagements and collateral damage
- Electronic interference (jamming/spoofing)
- Naval mines in the Strait of Hormuz
- Boarding/seizure risks

- Cyber-attacks targeting ship companies and port operators

## 2. Gulf of Oman & Northern Arabian Sea

- Elevated surveillance and naval operations
- Risk of spillover kinetic activity
- Increased maritime interdictions and monitoring

## 3. Red Sea, Bab el-Mandeb & Gulf of Aden

### Risks remain elevated in - Red Sea, Bab el-Mandeb Strait, Gulf of Aden

Yemen’s Houthi movement has signalled a possible renewed campaign targeting commercial shipping in this region.

Threat Profile:

- Anti-ship missiles
- Armed drones
- Small boat swarm tactics
- Targeting linked to vessel nationality or ownership

International naval missions remain present, however vessels should not assume universal protection coverage.

## 4. Eastern Mediterranean Sea

### Heightened awareness is advised in waters off - Cyprus, Israel, Lebanon, Syria

Risk Factors:

- Air defence engagements over maritime zones
- Missile interception debris hazards
- Naval deployments
- Port disruptions linked to military posture shifts

Commercial traffic continues in the Mediterranean Sea, however the Eastern basin should be treated as a heightened alert zone.

## Port Operations

### Middle East Ports

#### United Arab Emirates

| PORT  | OPERATIONAL STATUS   |
|---|--|
| <b>Hamriyah Port</b>                          | All terminal port operations are normal  |
| <b>Sharjah Port</b>                           | All terminal port operations are normal  |
| <b>Jebel Ali Port</b>                         | All terminal port operations are normal  |
| <b>Fujairah and Khor Fakkan</b>               | Fujairah Oil Tanker Terminal is partially operational; Khor Fakkan Terminal no disruption reported |
| <b>Ras al Khaimah Ports</b>                   | Open and operating normally  |
| <b>Ruwais &amp; Abu Dhabi Petroleum Ports</b> | Operational; Ruwais PPA (ISPS Level 2); Abu Dhabi Ports (ISPS Level 1)                             |

**Kuwait**

| PORT                        | OPERATIONAL STATUS                                       |
|-----------------------------|--|
| <b>Shuwaikh Port</b>        | Port operating normally; Security Level 2 protocols      |
| <b>Shuaiba Port</b>         | Port has temporarily suspended operations                |
| <b>Minal Al Ahmadi Port</b> | Port operating normally; Security Level risen to Level 2 |
| <b>Mina Al Zour Port</b>    | Port operating normally; Security Level risen to Level 2 |

**Oman**

| PORT                             | OPERATIONAL STATUS  |
|----------------------------------|---|
| <b>Asyad Drydock - Duqm</b>      | Port operating normally   |
| <b>Port of Duqm</b>              | Port operating normally ; vessels calling at port must submit an official letter stating that they are not carrying any dangerous goods on board. |
| <b>Port Sultan Qaboos</b>        | Port operating normally   |
| <b>Muscat</b>                    | Port operating normally; ISPS Level 3   |
| <b>Mina Al Fahal</b>             | Port operating normally; ISPS Level 3   |
| <b>Port of Sohar</b>             | Port operating normally   |
| <b>Qalhat LNG Terminal – Sur</b> | Port operating normally ; ISPS Level 3  |
| <b>OMIFCO Terminal – Sur</b>     | Port operating normally   |
| <b>Port of Salalah</b>           | Fully resumed operations  |

**Saudi Arabia** – No alerts or warnings issued by the local port authorities; all operational activities are functioning at full capacity.

**Bahrain** – Vessel movements in Bahrain have gradually resumed, however operations remain limited due to the restricted availability of pilots. BAPCO operations remain suspended. APM Terminals has resumed operations. ISPS security level remains at Level 1.

**Qatar** – The official security status remains at Security Level 1, however as a proactive measure, all vessels are requested to exercise heightened caution and vigilance

| PORT                                  | OPERATIONAL STATUS  |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Hamad Port</b>                     | Normal port operations and vessel movement; Activity levels are lower than pre-conflict   |
| <b>Doha Port</b>                      | Normal port operations and vessel movement; Activity levels are lower than pre-conflict   |
| <b>Al Ruwais Port</b>                 | Normal port operations; port is restricted to small craft only, including dhows and barges; Activity levels are lower than pre-conflict |
| <b>Mesaieed Port</b>                  | Port operations ongoing   |
| <b>Ras Laffan Port</b>                | Port operations ongoing   |
| <b>Al Shaheen Offshore Terminal</b>   | Operations suspended until further notice   |
| <b>Halul Island Offshore Terminal</b> | Operations suspended until further notice   |

**Egypt** – The Suez Canal and all Egyptian ports remain fully operational; ISPS Level remains at Level 1

**Jordan** – All operations remain normal at Aqaba Port; terminals, marine services, cargo handling and gate operations are functioning without disruptions. Maritime navigation and cargo operations are proceeding smoothly and without delay.

**Pakistan** – All ports remain fully operational; ISPS Level remains at Level 1

**Iraq** – Ports of Umm Qasr and Khor Al Zubair are fully operational; Basra Oil Terminal and SPM Somo Terminal have ceased export operations.

## **Mediterranean Sea Ports**

**Cyprus** – All ports remain fully operational. ISPS level remains at Level 1

**Lebanon** – All ports remain operational, with no alerts or warnings issued by the local port authorities. South of Lebanon remains in an unstable operational situation. ISPS Level remains at Level 1

**Israel** – Eilat, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Hedera, and Haifa are fully open for business and functioning at full capacity.

## **Recommendations**

### **Voyage Planning**

- Conduct risk assessments immediately prior to transit
- Closely monitor official advisories from flag states and maritime security centres
- Do not rely on anticipated naval escort operations unless formally confirmed
- Minimise loitering near territorial waters of high-risk states
- Consider alternative routing via the Cape of Good Hope where commercially viable
- Assess war-risk insurance implications before entering designated high-risk areas

### **Transit Procedures (if entering high-risk areas)**

- Maintain maximum safe speed during transit of chokepoints
- Avoid unnecessary deviation towards military or energy infrastructure
- Increase bridge water levels and radar vigilance
- Minimise deck crew exposure
- Prepare for GPS/AIS disruptions with alternative navigation methods
- Conduct drills for: Missile/drone alerts, Emergency manoeuvring, Fire response. Casualty/injury managements
- Maintain continuous monitoring of VHF Channel 16 and naval broadcast frequencies
- Ensure Ship Security Plans are fully implemented at the highest appropriate security level

### **Port Planning**

- Confirm port operational status directly with agents prior to arrival
- Anticipate berth congestion and extended anchorage delays
- Factor potential pilotage suspension into passage plans
- Reconfirm war-risk insurance coverage for port calls

### **Reporting & Coordinating**

- Register movements with UKMTO and relevant maritime security centres
- Use Voluntary Reporting Schemes where applicable
- Immediately report any suspicious activity, projectile sightings or electronic interference

## Outlook (As of 20 March 2026)

**Maritime security conditions in and around the Strait of Hormuz remain highly volatile, with a brief lull in direct vessel attacks in recent days followed by renewed incidents as of 17 – 19 March.** While no further confirmed attacks on commercial vessels have been reported in the immediate 24 hours since, overall activity continues to reflect an unstable and unpredictable operating environment.

Limited transits through the Strait of Hormuz have been reported since the 28 February launch of the Iran conflict, however traffic remains significantly reduced as shipowners continue to reassess risk exposure. The continued elevated regional military activity underscores persistent concern over a wide spectrum of threats, including naval mines, unmanned explosive boats, and missile or drone strikes.

Diplomatic signalling has increased, with multiple countries indicating their willingness to support efforts to reopen the Strait, potentially through coordinated naval protection frameworks. At the same time, Iran has signalled that it may introduce controls or fees for passage, adding a layer of regulatory and geopolitical uncertainty to future transit planning.

In the near term, maritime incidents and indirect impacts from broader regional escalation remain highly likely, even amidst intermittent lulls.