

## Maritime Advisory

**Date:** 23 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 – 23 March 2026

UKMTO has received 23 reports of incidents affecting vessels operating in and around the *Arabian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz and Gulf of Oman*:

- 16 Attack Reports
- 7 Suspicious Activity Reports

## Situational Overview

Maritime conditions in the Strait of Hormuz and the wider Gulf region remain highly volatile, with persistent and credible threats to commercial shipping across key transit corridors. Risk levels remain high due to ongoing regional tensions, the potential for asymmetric maritime activity, and the absence of fully effective de-escalation mechanisms.

Limited incidents reported over the past 72 hours, with only one incident recorded, suggests a lower tempo of

confirmed attacks, however this is assessed to reflect operational pauses rather than a sustained improvement in the security environment. Vessels operating in or near the Strait of Hormuz should continue to exercise extreme caution.



## Key Developments (20 - 23 March 2026)

### Confirmed Incidents

- **21 March (Arabian Gulf)** – UKMTO received a report of an incident 15 nautical miles north of Sharjah, United Arab Emirates at 23:08 GMT. The Master of a bulk carrier reported an explosion from an unknown projectile in close proximity to the vessel. All crewmembers have been reported safe. UKMTO later reported that the target of the incident could not be conclusively identified and authorities were investigating the incident.

### Strategic & Political Developments

- **Efforts to reopen the Strait of Hormuz** – While US President Trump threatened on 21 March that Iranian power plants would be destroyed if Tehran failed to “fully open” the Strait of Hormuz to all shipping within 48 hours, setting a deadline of around 7:44 PM EDT (2344 GMT) on Monday 23 March, mixed reports emerged, with the US President stating that he had given orders to postpone any military strikes against Iranian power plants for five days, just hours ahead of the deadline. While he later told reporters that his special envoy Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner had discussions with a top Iranian official in the evening on Sunday and would continue on Monday, Tehran has denied the claims. Over the past several weeks, there have been shifting US signals over how the strait should be protected. While Trump had initially sought support from other countries to help secure transit through the strait, allies in Europe and Asia-Pacific pushed back, with Trump stating on 17 March that Washington would reopen it on its own.

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

#### Kuwait

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

#### Oman

PORT	OPERATIONAL STATUS
Asyad Drydock - Duqm	Port operating normally
Port of Duqum	Port operating normally ; vessels calling at port must submit an official letter stating that they are not carrying any dangerous goods on board.
Port Sultan Qaboos	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 23 March 2026)

**Maritime security conditions in and around the Strait of Hormuz remain highly volatile. While only one incident has been reported over the weekend, the operating environment remains unstable and unpredictable, with threat levels unchanged.** In the near term, further maritime incidents remain highly likely, alongside indirect impacts stemming from broader regional escalation dynamics. Periods of reduced activity should be assessed as temporary and not indicative of a sustained improvement in security conditions.