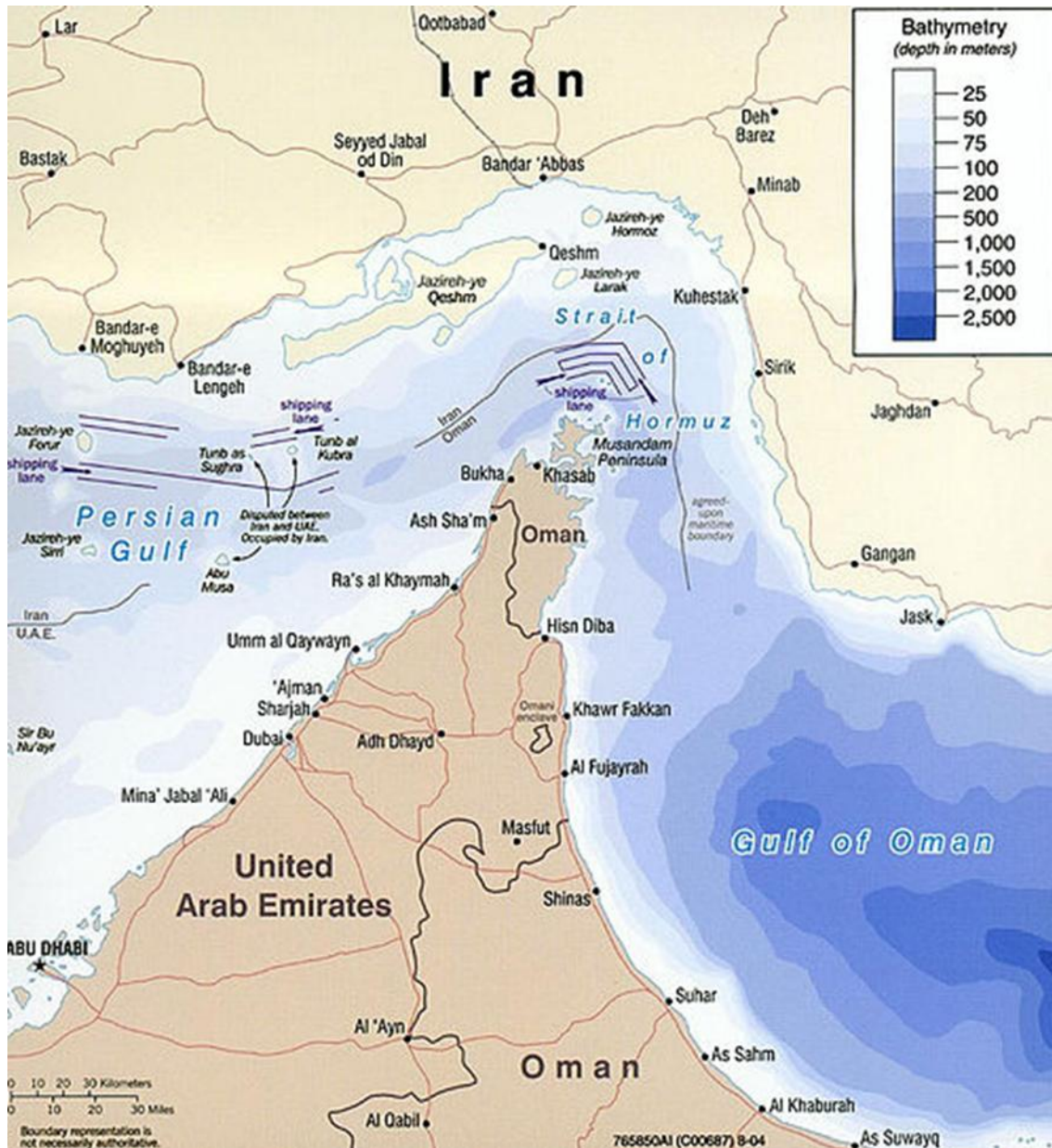


FEATURE

Strait of Hormuz

Wikipedia

Excerpted from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strait_of_Hormuz



The Strait showing maritime political boundaries and *shipping lanes*, (2004) of Hormuz *topographic map* showing the *Musandam Peninsula* of *Oman* in the south and *Iran* to the north.



The Strait of Hormuz (/hɔːrˈmuːz/^[a]) is a [waterway](#) between the [Persian Gulf](#) and the [Gulf of Oman](#). On the north coast lies [Iran](#), and on the south coast lies the [Musandam Peninsula](#), shared by the [United Arab Emirates](#) and the [Musandam Governorate](#), an [exclave of Oman](#)

The strait is about 104 miles (90 nmi; 167 km) long, with a width varying from about 60 mi (52 nmi; 97 km) to 24 mi (21 nmi; 39 km).^{[1][2]}

It provides the only sea passage from the Persian Gulf to the open ocean and is one of the world's most strategically important [choke points](#).^[3]

During 2023–2025, 20% of the world's [liquefied natural gas](#) (LNG) and 25% of seaborne [oil trade](#) passed through the strait annually. It is a major source of petroleum products for [Europe](#) and [Asia](#) and has been described as "critical" to Europe's energy security.^[4]

It is also the only maritime route for several Gulf countries including [Qatar](#), [Kuwait](#) and [Bahrain](#), and disruption to the strait can cause severe supply shortages.^[5]

The strait has traditionally never been closed for extended time during Middle East conflicts (unlike the [Straits of Tiran/Bab-el-Mandeb](#))^[6] though Iran occasionally had threatened to close the strait,^{[7][8]} and preparations to mine it have been undertaken.^[9] However, the strait became a major focus of the international

community during the [2026 Iran War](#), resulting in the [Strait of Hormuz crisis](#).^[10]

Etymology

Navigation

To reduce the risk of collision, ships moving through the strait follow a [traffic separation scheme](#) (TSS): inbound ships use one lane, outbound ships another, each lane being two miles wide. The lanes are separated by a two-mile-wide "median".^[14]

To traverse the strait, ships pass through the [territorial waters](#) of Iran and Oman. Although Iran has not ratified the [UNCLOS](#) convention,^[15] most countries, including the U.S. which also has not ratified it,^[16] claim the right of passage as codified in the convention.

In 1959, Iran altered the legal status of the strait by expanding its territorial sea to 12 nmi (22 km) and declaring it would recognize only transit by [innocent passage](#) through the newly expanded area. In 1972, Oman also expanded its territorial sea to 12 nmi (22 km) by decree.^[17] Thus, by 1972, the Strait of Hormuz was completely "closed" by the combined territorial waters of Iran and Oman.

In [1971, Iran took over](#) the [Greater and Lesser Tunbs](#) islands west of Hormuz against Arab wishes, thereby extending control of the navigation channels.^[18]

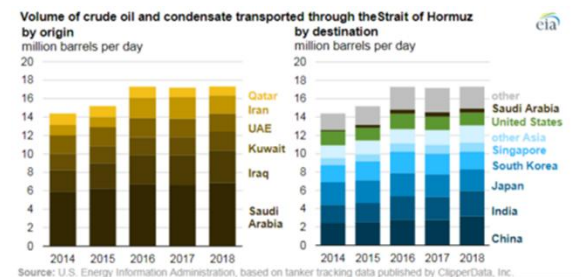
During the 1970s, neither Iran nor Oman attempted to impede the passage of warships, but in the 1980s, both countries asserted claims that were different from customary (old) law.

Upon ratifying UNCLOS in 1989, Oman submitted declarations confirming its 1981 royal decree that only innocent passage is permitted through its territorial sea. The declarations further asserted that prior permission was required before foreign warships could pass through Omani territorial waters.^[17]

Upon signing the convention in 1982, Iran entered a declaration stating "that only states parties to the Law of the Sea Convention shall be entitled to benefit from the contractual rights created therein", including "the right of transit passage through straits used for international navigation".

In 1993, Iran enacted a comprehensive law on maritime areas, provisions of which conflict with UNCLOS provisions, including a requirement that warships, submarines, and nuclear-powered ships obtain permission before exercising innocent passage through Iran's territorial waters. The U.S. does not recognize any of the claims by Oman and Iran and has contested each of them.^[17]

Oil trade flow



Oil trade through the strait by origin and destination, 2014–2018

During 2023–2025, 20% of the world's [liquefied natural gas](#) and 25% of seaborne [oil](#)

[trade](#) passed through the Strait, illustrating its important location for trade.^{[2][19][8]}

According to the [U.S. Energy Information Administration](#), in 2011, an average of 14 tankers per day passed out of the Persian Gulf through the strait carrying 17 million barrels (2,700,000 m³) of crude oil. More than 85% of these crude oil exports went to Asian markets on a daily basis, with Japan, India, South Korea and China the largest destinations.^[20] In 2018, 21 million barrels a day passed through the strait, worth \$1.2 billion at 2019 prices.^[21]

If shipping through the Strait of Hormuz were significantly disrupted for an extended period, it could lead to a major oil supply crisis for major Asian importers such as India and China.^{[22][23]}

The Persian Gulf is also a major hub for global [fertilizer](#) production and exports. Countries such as the Islamic Republic of Iran, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Oman are among the world's leading exporters of nitrogen fertilizers, including urea and ammonia. In the 2020s the region has accounted for roughly 30–35 percent of global urea exports and around 20% - 30% of ammonia exports. Overall, up to 30% of internationally traded fertilizers normally transit the Strait of Hormuz.^[24]

Events

Tanker War - *Main article:* [Tanker War 2026](#)

Main articles: [2026 Strait of Hormuz crisis](#) and [2026 Strait of Hormuz campaign](#)

See also: [2026 Iran war](#)

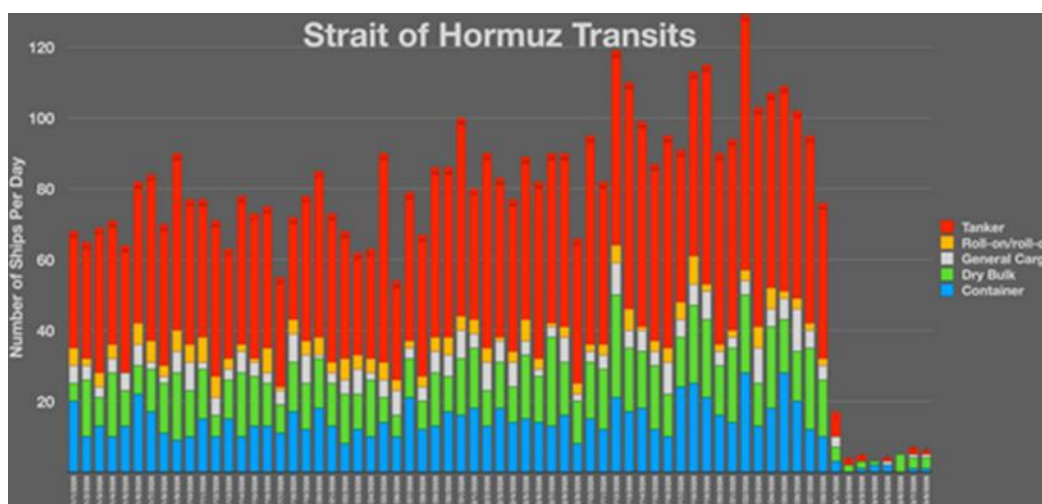
Before the [2026 Israeli–United States strikes on Iran](#), [ship insurance](#) for the strait increased from 0.125% to between 0.2% and 0.4% of the ship insurance value per transit. For very large oil tankers, this is an increase of a quarter of a million dollars.^[80] By 9 March, insurance rates were reported to have increased by four to six times over the previous week, and the U.S. government began to help insurers under

the [Terrorism Risk Insurance Act](#).^[81] Within days of the conflict, tanker traffic through the strait collapsed, restricting shipments by more than 90%, around 10 million barrels per day of oil production. The restrictions on shipping in the Strait has led to disruptions that are raising energy and agricultural input costs worldwide.^[82]

On 28 February 2026, amid the [2026 Iran war](#) and after the [assassination](#) of Iranian supreme leader [Ali Khamenei](#), [Iran's Revolutionary Guards](#) began issuing [VHF](#) transmissions stating that ship passages through the Strait of Hormuz were "not allowed".^{[83][84]} Although the closure is not legally binding, military and industry sources say that safety cannot be guaranteed, and many ships stayed in port or turned back,^[85] while at least 17 oil tankers continued traveling through the strait.^[86]

day as the release of 400 million barrels of oil announced by the [International Energy Agency](#).^[91] It was also reported that Iran had deployed about a dozen mines in the Strait of Hormuz, halting the exports of oil and LNG.^[92]

On 15 March, President Donald Trump asked several nations—specifically [China](#), [France](#), [Japan](#), [South Korea](#) and the [United Kingdom](#), but also [Canada](#) and [Australia](#)—to send warships and assist in securing the Strait of Hormuz. Trump, noting that these nations are beneficiaries of the shipping route, pressured NATO and allies to help secure it following shipping disruptions.^[93] Most nations refused to assist, as they want a diplomatic de-escalation instead of war. The United Kingdom has offered limited cooperation in securing critical shipping routes; the broader refusal highlights a significant



Strait of Hormuz transits dropping away in early 2026.^[87]

On 2 March, the [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps](#) officially confirmed that the Strait of Hormuz was closed and that any ship that entered the strait was to be set on fire. This came after several reports of Iranian attacks on ships passing into the Strait of Hormuz.^[88] However, a few ships still passed the strait unharmed.^[89] The next day, President [Donald Trump](#) stated that the U.S. Navy may escort oil tankers through the Strait of Hormuz.^[90]

On 12 March, three cargo vessels were hit in the Strait of Hormuz. This came on the same

rift between Washington and its traditional partners.^[94]

Trump has warned that the planned summit with Chinese President [Xi Jinping](#) may be at risk if China does not assist the U.S. in securing the Strait of Hormuz. This crucial waterway, through which 20% of global oil passes, is facing disruptions due to ongoing tensions between the U.S., Israel, and Iran. Trump emphasized that China, which relies on the strait for 90% of its energy imports, should

share the responsibility of keeping it open, rather than leaving it solely to the U.S. to secure.^[95]

As of 31 March 2026, Iran remains determined to assert control over the Strait of Hormuz, and has reportedly successfully blocked two Chinese ships.^{[96] [97]}

British Prime Minister [Keir Starmer](#), referring to the difficulty of reopening the Strait of Hormuz, said that if the war stops, we will need a negotiated agreement with Iran.^[98] [West Point](#) analysis warns that strait of Hormuz blockade will strangle US defense industry.^[99]

On 3 April 2026, the vote on a proposal to the UN Security Council by Bahrain, was postponed to April 4. Things remain uncertain as there is no consensus among major power about how to keep them open for global shipping. Even though Bahrain have handed in a weaker proposal, removing stronger language that allowed force, Russia and China who have veto power are unclear about how they will vote.

Also, as of 3 April 2026, Three Oman tankers, two carrying oil and a third LNG, appeared to escape from the Persian Gulf by taking a new route close to the Omani coastline, bypassing the normal Hormuz route.

Ability of Iran to hinder shipping

See also: [Military of Iran](#)

[Millennium Challenge 2002](#) was a major war game exercise conducted by U.S. armed forces in 2002. It simulated an attempt by a country (likely to be Iran) to close the strait. The assumptions and results were controversial. Iran's simulated strategy beat the materially superior U.S. armed forces.^[100]

A 2008 article in [International Security](#) contended that Iran could seal off or impede traffic in the strait for a month, and an attempt by the U.S. to reopen it would be likely to escalate the conflict.^[101] In a later issue, however, the journal published a response which questioned key assumptions and suggested a much shorter timeline for re-opening.^[102]

Moreover, due to Iran's own dependence on oil exports through the strait as well as imports, (due to its inability to refine oil on its own) a closure of the strait is unlikely.^[103] Not only Iran's own dependence on the strait for imports and exports is indicative that a prolonged closure is unlikely, but also the dependence of its allies on the trade that flows through it suggest the logistical infeasibility of such closure.^[104]

A [neoclassical-realist](#) analysis describes Iranian policy regarding the strait as "double-faced": in non-existential threat environments Tehran tends to act as a security provider by keeping the strait open, whereas under threats perceived as existential it takes calculated risks and incorporates the waterway into a wider [deterrence](#) and [brinkmanship](#) strategy.^[105] This interpretation portrays Iran as a reactive actor that employs interference or brinkmanship to gain concessions and trigger de escalatory measures from the international community.^[105]

This literature also emphasizes that Iran's strategy with respect to the strait is constrained by its own reliance on the waterway, that of key partners, material limits and sanctions, which lowers its freedom to take risks and suggests that any prolonged closure would be particularly damaging for Iran itself and its allies.^{[105][106][107][108]}

In December 2011, Iran's Navy began a ten-day exercise in international waters along the strait. Iranian Rear Admiral [Habibollah Sayyari](#) stated that the strait would not be closed during the exercise; Iranian forces could easily accomplish that but such a decision must be made at a political level.^{[109][110]} Captain [John Kirby](#), a Pentagon spokesman, was quoted in December 2011 saying: "Efforts to increase tension in that part of the world are unhelpful and counter-productive. For our part, we are comfortable that we have in the region sufficient capabilities to honor our commitments to our friends and partners, as well as the international community." Suzanne Maloney, an expert at the Brookings Institution, said, "The expectation is that the U.S.

military could address any Iranian threat relatively quickly."^[111] [General Martin Dempsey](#), Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said in 2012 that Iran "has invested in capabilities that could, in fact, for a period of time block the Strait of Hormuz." He stated, "We've invested in capabilities to ensure that if that happens, we can defeat that."^[112]

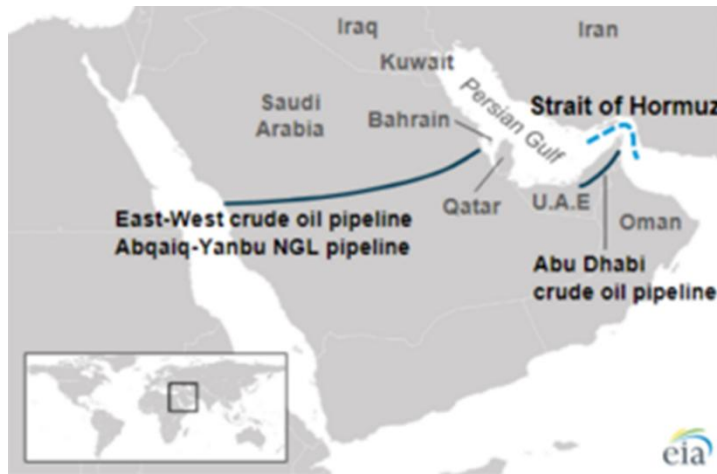
A May 2012 article by Nilufer Oral, a Turkish researcher of [maritime law](#), concludes that both the [UNCLOS](#), which came into effect in 1994; and the 1958 [Convention on the High Seas](#) would be violated if Iran followed through on its threat to block passage of vessels, such as oil tankers, and that the act of passage is not related in law to the imposition of economic sanctions.

The article further asserts that a coastal state may prevent "transit or non-suspendable innocent passage" only if: 1) there is threatened or actual use of force, occurring during passage, against the sovereignty, territorial integrity, or political independence of a state bordering the strait; or 2) the vessel in any other way violates the principles of international law as embodied in the [Charter of the United Nations](#).^[113]

As of 2013, the [UNCLOS](#) treaty had been ratified by 63 states, including most [NATO-bloc](#) and [Soviet-bloc](#) nations but with the notable exceptions of most of the [OPEC](#) and [Arab League](#) nations like [Syria](#), [Egypt](#), [Jordan](#), [Saudi Arabia](#), and [Iran](#), as well as [China](#), [North Korea](#), and [South Korea](#).^[114] As of February 2026, 157 [sovereign states](#), including the [EU](#) are [parties](#),^[115] including all major powers [except the United States](#), which has [not ratified the treaty](#).

Alternative shipping routes

By 2025, around 15 million barrels (2.4 million cubic metres) of oil per day were transported through the strait. Onshore pipelines have a maximum capacity of around 3 million barrels. All LNG must be transported by ship through the strait.^[116]



A map of the [Habshan–Fujairah oil pipeline](#) and the [East–West Crude Oil Pipeline](#)

In June 2012, [Saudi Arabia](#) reopened the Iraq Pipeline through Saudi Arabia (IPSA), which was confiscated from Iraq in 2001 and

travels from [Iraq](#) across Saudi Arabia to a [Red Sea](#) port. It has a capacity of 1.65 million barrels (262,000 m³) per day.^[117]

In July 2012, the [UAE](#) began using the new [Habshan–Fujairah oil pipeline](#) from the [Habshan](#) fields in [Abu Dhabi](#) to the [Fujairah](#) oil terminal on the [Gulf of Oman](#), effectively bypassing the Strait of Hormuz. It has a maximum capacity of around 2 million barrels (320,000 m³) per day, over three-quarters of the UAE's 2012 production rate. The UAE is also increasing Fujairah's storage and off-loading capacities.^{[117][118]}

The UAE is building the world's largest crude oil storage facility in Fujairah with a capacity of holding 14 million barrels (2,200,000 m³) to enhance Fujairah's growth as a global oil and trading hub.^[119] The Habshan – Fujairah route secures the UAE's energy security and has the advantage of being a ground oil pipeline transportation which is considered the cheapest form of oil transportation and reduces insurance costs as oil tankers would no longer enter the Persian Gulf.^[120]

In a July 2012 [Foreign Policy](#) article, [Gal Luft](#) compared Iran and the Strait of Hormuz to

the [Ottoman Empire](#) and the [Dardanelles](#), a choke point for shipments of [Russian](#) grain a century ago. He indicated that tensions involving the Strait of Hormuz are leading those currently dependent on shipments from the Persian Gulf to find alternative shipping capabilities.

He stated that Saudi Arabia was considering building new pipelines to [Oman](#) and [Yemen](#), and that Iraq might revive the disused Iraq-[Syria](#) pipeline to transport crude oil to the Mediterranean. Luft stated that reducing Hormuz traffic "presents the West with a new opportunity to augment its current Iran containment strategy."