MIDDLE EAST PORTS & SHIPPING

Hormuz closure: which ports are hit, the routes still working, and what it means for your lead times

Position as at 16 October 2026. Prepared by MEA Solutions for customers and partners in the logistics and freight sector.

~1%	−90%	7×	+5–16 days
Hormuz commercial transits vs. pre-war norm (late Sept.)	Jebel Ali container volume, Q2 2026 vs. Q2 2025	Shanghai–Persian Gulf spot rate, Feb. to Sept. 2026	Typical added door-to-door time into the Gulf (MEA est.)

KEY MESSAGES

- **The Strait of Hormuz is effectively closed to mainstream shipping.** Since the US–Israel war with Iran began on 28 February, ceasefires in April and June have both collapsed. Attacks rose sharply in early October, and Iran says the strait stays shut until the US meets seven conditions.
- **Ports inside the Gulf are open but cut off.** Jebel Ali, Abu Dhabi, Dammam, Doha, Kuwait, Bahrain and Umm Qasr are working but served mainly by feeders, trucks and land bridges, with booking limits on many cargo types.
- **Ports outside the strait are carrying the load.** UAE east-coast ports, Oman's Sohar, Salalah and Duqm, Saudi Red Sea ports and Jordan's Aqaba are the main gateways, but several are congested.
- **Plan for longer, costlier and less predictable supply chains into Q1 2027.** Build in extra lead time, confirm routings booking by booking, and check insurance and Incoterms.

1. THE SITUATION

The Strait of Hormuz, which before the war carried about a fifth of the world's oil and LNG and around 125 large commercial vessels a day, has been effectively closed to mainstream commercial shipping since the US and Israel struck Iran on 28 February 2026. A ceasefire in April and the Islamabad Memorandum in June both broke down, and the US reinstated its naval blockade of Iranian ports in July.

Attacks on shipping rose sharply in October, with 15 reported by UKMTO between 6 and 14 October, including a container ship and a tanker hit on 13 October. The US-led Joint Maritime Information Center rates the threat as "severe". Some oil now moves under US-escorted convoys and pipelines to Fujairah and Yanbu, but container lines have largely stopped calling at ports inside the Gulf. Brent crude is around US$106 a barrel.

2. PORT BY PORT: MOST AND LEAST AFFECTED

Port	Impact	Current position and what it means for cargo
Most affected: inside the Gulf (reached only via Hormuz)		
Bandar Abbas (Iran)	SEVERE	Under US naval blockade since July. Not an option for international cargo.
Dammam / Jubail (Saudi Arabia)	SEVERE	Bookings suspended for most cargo types. Cargo moving via Jeddah or King Abdullah Port with trucking to the Eastern Province.
Umm Qasr (Iraq)	SEVERE	Open, but volumes well below normal and most cargo types under booking suspension. Aqaba land bridge in use.
Jebel Ali (UAE)	HIGH	Fully working and undamaged, but Q2 volume fell 90%. Cargo now arrives mainly by truck or feeder from Khor Fakkan and Fujairah.
Khalifa / Abu Dhabi (UAE)	HIGH	Terminals open, with booking restrictions. Cargo routed via the east coast with bonded onward moves.
Hamad (Qatar)	HIGH	Dry cargo accepted via feeder. Reefer, dangerous goods and out-of-gauge cargo suspended.
Shuwaikh (Kuwait) / Khalifa Bin Salman (Bahrain)	HIGH	Open at raised security levels; served by feeder from Sharjah and Khor Fakkan. Bahrain terminal on restricted hours.
Under pressure: outside the strait, carrying diverted cargo		
Khor Fakkan / Fujairah (UAE)	ELEVATED	Main gateways for UAE and Upper Gulf cargo. Limited capacity, GPS jamming nearby, and several vessels struck offshore.
Sohar (Oman)	ELEVATED	Volumes up 40% in H1. Early in the crisis, time in port rose from under 10 to over 30 days.

Port	Impact	Current position and what it means for cargo
Salalah / Duqm (Oman)	ELEVATED	Salalah: yard congestion and berthing delays as a transshipment and empty-return hub. Duqm: dangerous-goods limits. Both hit by drones in March.
Jeddah / King Abdullah / Yanbu (Saudi Arabia)	ELEVATED	Main Saudi gateways and start of the land bridge. Houthi blockade of Saudi shipping declared in July; war-risk premiums now apply.
Least affected		
Aqaba (Jordan)	LOW	Operating normally; land bridge for Iraq-bound and Iraq-origin cargo.
Suez / Eastern Mediterranean hubs	LOW	Suez traffic at its highest since the Red Sea crisis began, with carriers returning Asia–Europe services. Still subject to war-risk surcharges.

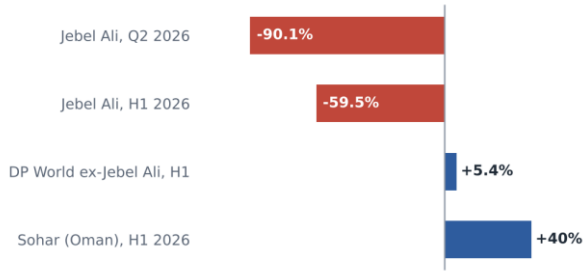
Sources: Forto port status (Sept. 2026), DP World and Sohar results, Vizion, Lloyd's List Intelligence, Al Jazeera. Status changes quickly; confirm with your carrier before booking.

Volumes have moved, not disappeared

The clearest sign of the shift is in the port numbers. Jebel Ali, the region's largest hub, handled 90% less in Q2 2026 than a year earlier, even though the port itself is undamaged. Over the same period, Sohar grew by 40%, and DP World's ports outside Jebel Ali grew by 5%.

Ports outside the strait were never built for this level of transshipment. Khor Fakkan has never handled more than about 3 million TEU a year, against roughly 25 million at Jebel Ali. The result is congestion, longer dwell times and tight trucking capacity at the alternative gateways.

Container volume change vs. 2025



Sources: DP World H1 2026 results; SOHAR Port and Freezone.

3. ALTERNATIVE ROUTES TO CONSIDER

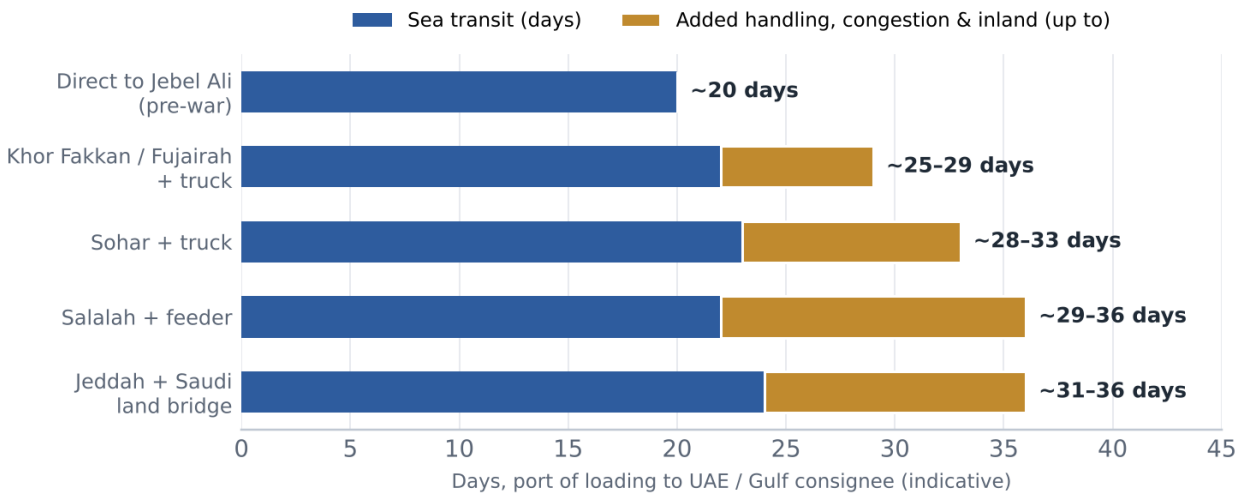
No single alternative replaces direct calls inside the Gulf. Most shippers are using a mix, chosen by destination, cargo type and urgency. The main options now in use are:

Option	How it works	Best for and watch-outs
1. UAE east coast + truck or rail	Discharge at Khor Fakkan or Fujairah, then bonded trucking (about 1.5–2 hours) to Dubai or Abu Dhabi, or feeder onward.	UAE consignees; fastest replacement for Jebel Ali. Expect limited capacity, attacks offshore, and premium surcharges.
2. Oman ports + road	Sohar, Salalah or Duqm, then trucking into the UAE, or via the Ramlet Khelah crossing (Route 95) into Saudi Arabia and Qatar.	UAE, Saudi Eastern Province and Qatar. Watch congestion and dwell times; check dangerous-goods limits at Duqm.
3. Saudi Red Sea land bridge	Jeddah or King Abdullah Port, then truck or rail east to Riyadh and Dammam, with feeders onward to the Gulf. MSC runs a scheduled Europe service on this basis.	Saudi Arabia and Upper Gulf. Exposed to Houthi risk in the Red Sea and to trucking capacity.
4. Aqaba land bridge	Discharge at Aqaba and truck through Jordan.	Iraq and Jordan. Allow for border and permit lead times.
5. Türkiye and Levant road corridors	Road via Türkiye, plus Route 85 from Dammam to the Jordanian border and on to Mediterranean ports.	Europe–Gulf and Iraq flows, and urgent or high-value freight. Higher cost; security checks route by route.
6. Sea–air and air	Ocean to Oman, Jeddah or India, then air onward. Middle East air capacity is about 40–45% of normal; Riyadh airport is closed until at least 17 October.	Time-critical, pharmaceutical and high-value cargo. Book early; rates at a premium.

Trucking time from Khor Fakkan is an MEA estimate. Route availability, permits and security change frequently; confirm each routing with your carrier or forwarder.

4. WHAT IT MEANS FOR ROUTING AND LEAD TIMES

Indicative door-to-door lead times, Shanghai to UAE / Gulf consignee



MEA indicative estimates based on typical sea transits plus current handling, congestion and inland legs. Actual times vary by carrier, port and cargo.

Longer and less predictable

- **Lead times:** most Gulf-bound cargo now takes 5–16 days longer, door to door. The extra time comes mostly from transshipment, port dwell and inland moves, not from the sea leg.
- **Reliability:** global schedule reliability was 29% in August (Xeneta). Plan around ranges, not fixed dates.
- **Cost:** the Shanghai–Persian Gulf spot rate rose from US$917 to US$6,489 per TEU between February and September. Carriers also add emergency freight of US$1,800–3,800 per container, plus US$1,000 for any Hormuz transit.
- **Equipment:** empty boxes are piling up in the wrong places. Expect drop-off charges and occasional shortages, especially of reefers.

Shanghai–Persian Gulf spot rate, US$ per TEU



*Source: SCFI. *Implied from reported weekly changes.*

Asia–Europe: a partial recovery

Away from the Gulf, the news is better. All four major carrier alliances now run at least some Asia–North Europe services through Suez again, and a full return is expected by Q1 2027. That saves roughly 10–14 days compared with the Cape of Good Hope. Suez container capacity is still only about half its 2023 level, though, and depends on the Houthis not widening their action in the Red Sea.

5. WHAT TO DO NOW

For shippers and cargo owners

- ✓ Add 2–3 weeks of buffer stock for Gulf-bound and Gulf-sourced items, more for critical SKUs.
- ✓ Ask suppliers and forwarders to quote two routings, such as east coast UAE and Saudi land bridge, and book early.
- ✓ Check Incoterms: who pays emergency and war-risk surcharges, and where risk passes when cargo is discharged at a different port.
- ✓ Confirm marine cargo insurance covers war risk, transshipment and inland legs.
- ✓ Move time-critical or high-value goods to sea–air or air, and accept higher cost for certainty.

For logistics operators and forwarders

- ✓ Secure trucking and bonded-transit capacity on the Khor Fakkan, Sohar and Jeddah–Dammam corridors.
- ✓ Check customs bonds, transit permits and Saudi, Omani and Qatari border procedures before moving cargo.
- ✓ Plan empty-container returns to designated depots to avoid drop-off charges.
- ✓ Pass surcharges through clearly and update customers weekly on schedule changes.
- ✓ Review contracts for force majeure, rate-adjustment and free-time clauses before the next tender.

6. OUTLOOK

Base case	*Most likely*	Hormuz stays largely closed through Q4 2026, with talks via Qatar and Pakistan continuing. Gulf cargo keeps moving by east-coast, Oman and Saudi land routes; rates stay high.
Upside	*Possible*	A negotiated reopening. Even then, mine clearance, insurance and carrier schedules mean 6–10 weeks before Gulf services return to normal, and congestion as backlogs clear.
Downside	*Risk to watch*	Wider Houthi action in the Red Sea and Bab el-Mandeb would hit the Saudi land bridge and the Suez return together, pushing Asia–Europe back around the Cape (typically 10–14 extra days).

MEA view as at 16 October 2026. We will update this note as the situation changes.

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