

If Trump strikes Iran

Mapping oil disruption scenarios



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ANALYSIS

Crude oil prices have fluctuated in recent days along with headlines about potential military strikes against Iran, as a second round of indirect talks between US and Iranian representatives concluded on February 17 without resolving underlying disputes. While international benchmark Brent crude prices fell toward \$67 on February 17, markets are still showing increased risk against the US Energy Information Administration's predicted \$58 Brent average for 2026. President Donald Trump has hinted at potential military strikes unless Iran agrees to fully abandon nuclear enrichment, accept strict limits on missile capabilities, and halt support for its backed groups in the region. This analysis assesses the risk of oil supply disruptions that could result from a new conflagration in the Middle East Persian Gulf region.

Oil in crosshairs this time?

During last June's 12-Day War between Iran and Israel, joined by the United States in Operation Midnight Hammer, Persian Gulf oil exports avoided major disruption. This was predictable since a cutoff in Persian Gulf export flows would necessarily halt Iran's own oil exports. As the 12-Day War transpired, Iran perceived that it was not facing an existential crisis as its oil exports continued unimpeded, and Tehran made no attempt to target Arab Persian Gulf oil assets or shipping. Fast forward to today — the Islamic Republic faces unprecedented vulnerability following the blows inflicted by Israel, including the degradation of Hezbollah's capabilities, and more recently, the biggest wave of anti-government unrest in its 47-year history. Meanwhile, Trump is publicly escalating rhetoric by assembling significant military assets in the region, pressuring Tehran to accept US demands, and personally threatening the Leader of Iran's Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei. Therefore, if hostilities resume with the United States or Israel, Iran may indeed perceive an existential threat, bringing its counter-threat against regional oil supplies into play. Six oil-producing states in the Persian Gulf depend on unimpeded shipping access via the Strait of Hormuz to reach world markets. Their relative dependency on the strategic waterway is depicted in the chart.

What disruptions could look like

There are four oil supply disruption scenarios worth consider-



ing, and an observation about a Persian Gulf liquefied natural gas export outage scenario.

• Scenario 1: US or Israel disrupts Iranian crude oil shipments

This could take the form of blockading or seizing Kharg Island, the principal facility for loading Iranian oil onto ships, and seizing oil tanker vessels transporting Iranian crude.

This could disrupt up to 1.6 mb/d of Iranian crude oil exports, all of which go to China. However, since oil is a global, fungible commodity, a disruption anywhere affects prices everywhere. A loss of Iranian barrels would cause China to bid for substitute supplies, probably worth at least a \$10–12 increase in the global price of crude oil. This scenario is reversible, meaning that the United States or Israel could call off its campaign against Iranian shipments at any time with no permanent damage having been incurred and export volumes rebounding thereafter, like what was seen following the US quarantine on Venezuelan oil shipments. Insurance and war-risk premiums could keep prices elevated longer than any physical supply interruption.

• Scenario 2: Iran disrupts Arab Persian Gulf oil shipping

This campaign would likely target Persian Gulf export flows transiting the Strait of Hormuz, in which the inbound and outbound shipping lanes are only two miles wide. Iran could attempt to divert or seize control of oil tankers, or strike them outright using fast attack craft, drones, anti-ship missiles, or naval mines. Up to 18 million barrels per day (mb/d) — perhaps far less — of non-Iranian crude oil and refined petroleum products could be throttled or temporarily halted.

This scenario could see several mb/d disrupted for a period of weeks until allied naval forces are able to neutralize sea- and shore-based threats to energy cargo flows. Oil prices would initially spike with surging freight and insurance rates, and with some ship operators likely fleeing the region, further diminishing export capacity. As traders

assess the volume and duration of a physical disruption, crude prices could climb past \$90 per barrel, pushing US retail gasoline prices well above \$3 per gallon on a national average basis (some regions higher). Like Scenario 1, this chain of events is reversible; Tehran could call off its disruptive activities at any time, or global forces could quell their attempts at interruption, enabling Persian Gulf export volumes to rebound.

• Scenario 3: US or Israel directly attacks Iranian oil facilities

In this scenario, air and naval forces would strike Kharg Island and its supply lines, offshore production platforms, and (less likely) Iran's oil refineries. Iran's export terminal at Kharg Island accounts for nearly all of its 1.6 mb/d average export volume. Kharg could be taken offline in several ways, including disabling or destroying its ship loading equipment (hoses, pumps, and connecting hardware), damaging its oil storage tanks, or cutting off the flow of oil that reaches Kharg via sub-sea pipelines. Choke points for oil deliveries to Kharg include the onshore Ghurreh booster station, the manifold station at Ganaveh, and the pipelines themselves.

Not only are Iran's 1.6 mb/d crude oil exports (if limited to Kharg) at stake, but also its additional 1.5 mb/d of domestic oil production (should platforms/fields be targeted) and its domestic supply of transportation fuels like gasoline (if refineries are damaged). The oil price effects would likely be greater than the \$10–12 per barrel spike anticipated with Scenario 1 for two reasons: (1) damage to or destruction of Iranian infrastructure could keep barrels off the market for a protracted period of time (potentially offset by activation of OPEC spare production capacity), and (2) anticipation of a further escalation by Iran with something like Scenario 4 (described below). This track, therefore, could take oil prices above \$100 per barrel.

Scenario 4: Iran directly attacks Arab Persian Gulf oil facilities

This outcome could include producing fields, gathering and processing nodes, or oil export

A map showing the Strait of Hormuz and Iran is seen behind a 3D printed oil pipeline in this illustration taken on June 22, 2025.
DADO RUVIC/REUTERS

The photo shows the visage of US President Donald Trump on a billboard watching over fuel prices in the country, displayed at an Exxon Mobil Corp. gas station.
EPA

President Trump faces a dilemma in how to confront Iran without incurring an unwanted oil supply disruption and gasoline price spike. In Operation Midnight Hammer and in the operation to capture Nicholas Maduro, Trump selected military options with low risk of negative consequences (e.g., US casualties, energy price increases). But Scenarios 2 and 4 afford Tehran leverage that could deter Trump from undertaking a major military operation against Iran.

The chart shows Persian Gulf oil exporters' reliance on the Strait of Hormuz, measured in million barrels of oil per day.
VORTEXA



terminals. In this scenario, a substantial portion of the 18 mb/d non-Iranian oil exports from the Persian Gulf, depending on which assets might be taken offline and for how long, would be at stake. Potentially millions more barrels per day in the affected countries' domestic crude feedstocks and refined product supply would also be at risk.

This scenario could lead to a historic oil price spike, potentially higher than the \$130 per barrel that was touched in 2022 following Russia's attack on Ukraine. The oil supply at risk at that time was approximately 5 mb/d.

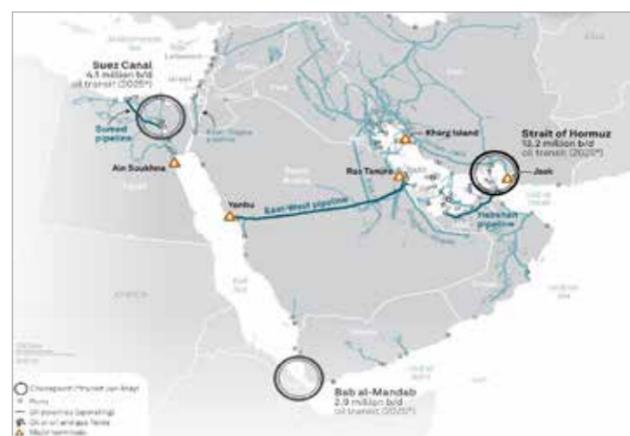
Like Scenario 3, this case could see oil facilities heavily damaged or even destroyed, removing export capacity for a protracted period. This is true not only for

Flows of liquefied natural gas (LNG) through the Strait of Hormuz to world markets could also be interrupted during a new conflagration.

Qatar's shipments of more than 10 billion cubic feet per day could be reduced or cut off by naval mines or direct attack on gas tanker vessels, or by disabling its export terminal at the Port of Ras Laffan. This could increase electric power prices as far away as the United States, complicating policymakers' efforts to promote affordability for US consumers.

Hormuz bypass potential is limited

Export routes that bypass the Strait can handle only a fraction of daily Persian Gulf exports.



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onshore infrastructure, but especially for offshore loading platforms, which constitute a critical bottleneck in export capacity. One example of this vulnerability is that Iraq's entire Persian Gulf export flow of 3.5 mb/d relies on offshore loading facilities very close to Iranian territorial waters. These offshore loading points can take considerable time to repair — a November 29 Ukrainian strike on a similar offshore loading platform at the Black Sea's Caspian Pipeline Consortium terminal knocked 500 thousand barrels per day (kb/d), a third of the terminal's output, offline for months.

Onshore facilities are also vulnerable but can be repaired faster, depending on the repair resources available. For example, the September 2019 attack on Saudi Aramco's Abqaiq crude oil processing facility initially disrupted about 5 mb/d, but most of that volume was restored in less than two weeks following rapid repair efforts.

Saudi Aramco's East-West Pipeline connects the kingdom's oil production centers in the Eastern Province with the Red Sea Yanbu Commercial Port. The pipeline could reroute some barrels from the Persian Gulf to the Red Sea, but only in reduced volumes. The pipeline is believed to have a capacity of 5 mb/d. But it is already supplying Yanbu with close to 800 kb/d for export cargoes, and likely supplying six Saudi Aramco refineries in central and western Saudi Arabia with about 1.8 mb/d. That would leave only about 2.4 mb/d of spare capacity in the pipeline, compared to Saudi Arabia's typical 6 mb/d from its Persian Gulf terminals — enabling the rerouting of less than half of its Persian Gulf exports.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) can reroute about half of its 2 mb/d of Persian Gulf exports via pipeline to its port of Fujairah on the Gulf of Oman, bypassing

	Total exports	Gulf exports	Reliance on Hormuz
Saudi Arabia	6.6	5.8	89%
Iraq	3.4	3.3	97%
UAE	3.2	2.1	66%
Iran	1.6	1.6	100%
Kuwait	1.5	1.5	100%
Qatar	0.8	0.8	100%