



GBTA

| Risk Committee

Middle East Regional Escalation: Operational and Travel Implications

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Executive Summary

A major military escalation between Iran and the United States–Israel alliance began on 28 February 2026, resulting in the death of Iran’s Supreme Leader and multiple senior military and political officials. Iran has retaliated with missile and drone strikes targeting Israel and United States military installations across the Middle East, including in key Gulf transit hub countries. Airspace closures, widespread flight disruptions, heightened security measures, and the risk of further escalation are affecting regional and global travel. Corporate travel programs should defer travel to high-risk areas, reassess travel necessity across the Gulf region, and prepare for continued aviation and operational disruption.

For corporate travel programs and mobility leaders, this escalation presents immediate duty of care considerations. Organizations should validate traveler location data, reinforce communication channels, reassess executive and essential travel, and review contingency and evacuation planning in light of rapidly evolving conditions.



What has happened

On 28 February 2026, coordinated United States and Israeli strikes targeted Iranian government, military, and nuclear-related facilities in Tehran and other major cities. Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and numerous senior political and military leaders were killed, significantly disrupting the country's leadership structure.

Iran responded with ballistic missile and drone strikes targeting Israel and United States military installations across the Middle East, including locations in the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia. Air defence systems were activated across the region, and multiple countries temporarily closed airspace or implemented emergency security measures. Infrastructure damage was reported in several Gulf cities, including damage to Dubai International Airport and other critical facilities.

The escalation has also expanded into the maritime and energy domains. Commercial shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, a critical global shipping corridor, has been halted. Multiple oil and gas production and refining facilities across the region, including major export and liquefied natural gas sites, have suspended or reduced operations following attacks or precautionary shutdowns.

The escalation has triggered broader regional instability. Hezbollah has launched cross-border attacks from Lebanon, prompting Israeli retaliation, while protests and unrest linked to the conflict have occurred in several countries.

The latest escalation follows unresolved tensions after the June 2025 Iran-Israel conflict and stalled diplomatic negotiations. The situation remains highly volatile, with continued military, cyber, and proxy-related activity possible.

Implications for business travel and operations

The death of Iran's Supreme Leader and multiple senior officials represents one of the most significant geopolitical developments in the region in decades. Iran is now managing a leadership transition while simultaneously conducting military operations, increasing the risk of further retaliation and instability.

The Middle East is a critical global aviation corridor and home to several of the world's largest airline hubs. Major global transit hubs, including Dubai, Doha, and Abu Dhabi, are currently closed following missile strikes, airspace closures, and safety measures. These hubs are critical connectors between Europe, Asia-Pacific, and Africa, and their disruption is causing widespread global aviation delays, cancellations, and rerouting.

In parallel, the disruption of key maritime routes and energy infrastructure introduces broader operational risks. The Strait of Hormuz is one of the world's most important shipping lanes, supporting global energy and commercial transport. Reduced shipping activity and energy production disruptions may affect fuel availability, airline operations, airport logistics, and broader transportation networks.

What to expect in the coming days and weeks

- Additional military exchanges or retaliatory attacks remain possible.
- Airspace closures, flight suspensions, and last-minute rerouting may continue across Iran, Israel, Iraq, and Gulf countries.
- Governments may implement heightened security measures, including curfews, shelter advisories, or movement restrictions.
- Cyber disruptions affecting telecommunications, aviation systems, or financial services are possible.
- Internal political developments within Iran may create additional uncertainty and instability.

Impact on travel and mobility

Stranded travellers and accommodation considerations

- Large numbers of international travellers and airline crew are currently stranded across the Middle East due to airport closures and suspended commercial flights.
- Hotels across affected cities are accommodating extended stays for stranded travellers, and some facilities have implemented shelter-in-place procedures during missile alerts.
- Government evacuation efforts are being planned but may be limited and prioritized for citizens.
- Travellers may face prolonged delays, limited airline rebooking options, and difficulty securing onward travel or exit routes.

Air travel and aviation:

- Airspace across Iran, Israel, Iraq, UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Syria has been closed or heavily restricted.
- Major global transit hubs, including Dubai International Airport, Zayed International Airport (Abu Dhabi), and Hamad International Airport (Doha), are closed.
- Thousands of flights have been cancelled or rerouted globally, with airlines including Emirates, Qatar Airways, Etihad, Lufthansa, Air France, and British Airways suspending operations. Emirates and Etihad were expected to resume limited operations on 2 and 3 March for repatriation.
- Airlines globally, including European, Asian, and North American carriers, have suspended flights, reduced frequencies, or rerouted aircraft.
- Travel between Europe and Asia-Pacific is particularly affected, with longer travel times and reduced capacity.

Traveller safety and ground operations:

- Governments have issued travel advisories and, in some cases, evacuation planning for foreign nationals.
- Missile strikes and air defence activity have occurred in multiple countries across the region.
- Missile alerts, shelter-in-place advisories, and movement restrictions may be implemented with little notice.
- Communications, financial services, and transport infrastructure may experience disruption.
- Border crossings, ports, and ground transportation may face delays or sudden closures.
- Organizations and travelers should remain alert to potential protests, civil unrest, or short-notice security restrictions in major cities across the region.

Recommended actions for travel programs

- Reassess the necessity of travel to Gulf countries based on business needs and organizational risk tolerance.
- Expect significant disruption to global air travel, particularly Europe-Asia itineraries.
- Confirm airline status and routing flexibility before departure, particularly for intercontinental travel.
- Ensure travellers in the region maintain reliable communication and follow local authority guidance.
- Review contingency and evacuation plans for employees currently in affected countries.
- Closely monitor airline, government, and security advisories, as conditions may change rapidly.

Government Websites for the Registration of Citizens Travelling Abroad

Many governments offer voluntary traveler registration services to support citizens abroad. Relevant resources are listed below for member reference:

- Austria: <https://auslandsregistrierung.bmeia.gv.at/>
- Australia: <https://www.smartraveller.gov.au/news-and-updates/middle-east-conflict>
- Canada: <https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/registration>
- France: <https://fildariane.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fildariane-internet/accueil>
- Finland: <https://matkustusilmoitus.fi/>
- Germany: <https://citizensregistration.dfa.ie/>
- Hong Kong: <https://www.gov.hk/en/residents/immigration/outsidehk/roti.htm>
- Ireland: <https://citizensregistration.dfa.ie/>
- Italy: <https://dovesiamonelmondo.it/home.html>
- Netherlands: <https://informatieservice.nederlandwereldwijd.nl/>
- Poland: <https://odyseusz.msz.gov.pl/>
- Singapore: <https://hochiminhcity.mfa.gov.sg/consular-services/registration-of-singaporeans-overseas/>
- Spain: <https://registroviajeros.exteriores.gob.es/>
- Sweden: <https://www.swedenabroad.se/sv/svensklistan>
- UK: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-office-travel-advice-updates>
- USA: <https://travel.state.gov/en/international-travel/travel-advisories/smart-traveler-enrollment-program.html>