

Middle East Situation

Information Cut-Off: 1200h (BST), 20 April 2026

Executive Summary

Tensions between the US and Iran have escalated ahead of planned talks in Islamabad, Pakistan, scheduled to commence this week. While US officials are expected to arrive this evening (20 April), Iran has repeatedly denied its intention to attend the summit.

The Strait of Hormuz was closed by Iran on Saturday (18 April), followed by a US naval operation on Sunday (19 April) involving the boarding of an Iranian-flagged vessel. President Trump has threatened to destroy Iranian bridges and power plants unless US proposals are accepted before the current two-week ceasefire ends on Wednesday (22 April).

Hostilities have largely paused elsewhere in the region, though periodic fighting persists between Hezbollah and Israeli forces in southern Lebanon despite the 10-day ceasefire announced on Thursday (16 April).

Diplomatic

Public tensions increased over the weekend as the US prepared for negotiations in Islamabad starting today (20 April). The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) announced on Saturday (18 April) that the Strait of Hormuz was closed until the US lifts its maritime blockade. This contradicts an announcement made by President Trump on Friday (17 April) stating the strait was open. The US Navy then fired on and boarded an Iranian-flagged cargo ship, the TOUSKA, yesterday (19 April). Later on Sunday, President Trump threatened to destroy all bridges and power plants in Iran if peace proposals are not accepted. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu stated yesterday that while operations have achieved much, developments could shift at any moment.

Iran

Two people were executed for alleged espionage and sabotage this morning (20 April), following the arrest of at least 69 individuals with purported links to Israel on Saturday (18 April).

Four additional people were arrested yesterday (19 April) for importing satellite internet equipment. Media outlets tied to the IRGC have denounced Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi for his claims on Friday (17 April) that the Strait of Hormuz remained open, suggesting significant internal friction within the Iranian government regarding negotiations with the US.

Regional

Lebanon

Hezbollah attacked a UNIFIL patrol on Saturday (18 April), killing one French peacekeeper and injuring three others. One Israeli soldier was killed and three others injured during separate hostilities on Friday (17 April), while Hezbollah claimed further attacks near Taybeh on Sunday (19 April).

Israeli forces conducted airstrikes on missile launchers in Kfarkela last night and targeted militants near the "yellow line" military zone on Saturday (18 April). Despite the violence, Lebanese authorities have been conducting widespread public works since Thursday (16 April) to repair roads and bridges destroyed during the conflict.

Travel

Aviation

Iran reopened its eastern airspace on Saturday (18 April), allowing flights to depart for the first time in weeks. Several facilities, including Imam Khomeini and Mehrabad International Airports, have commenced reopening procedures in anticipation of airspace restrictions being eased over Tehran.

Maritime

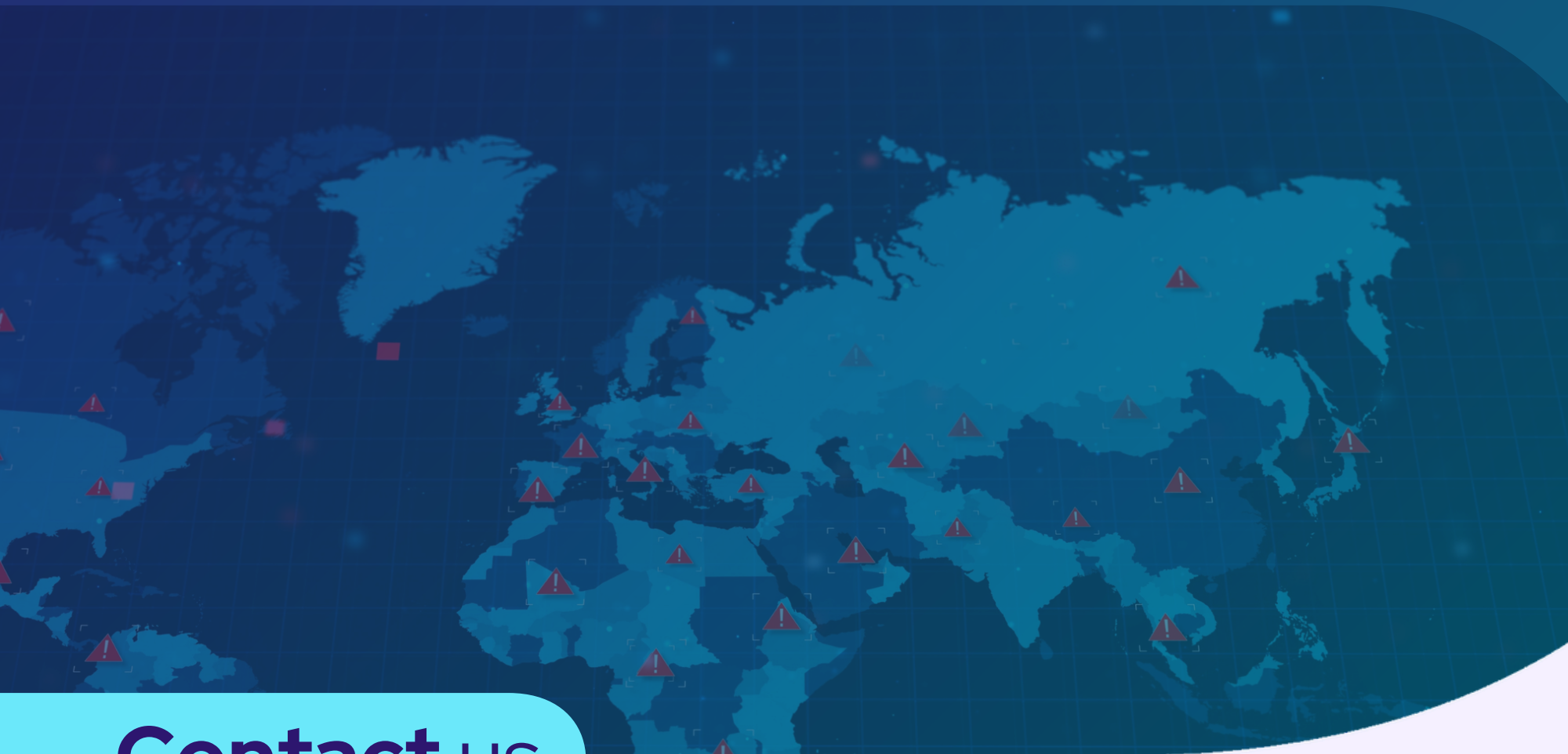
At least 20 vessels transited the Strait of Hormuz on Saturday (18 April) before Iran closed the waterway later that day. The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) Centre reported multiple incidents on Saturday (18 April), including a tanker being fired upon and a container ship being struck by a projectile north-east of Oman.

The UKMTO advised yesterday (19 April) that threat levels in the strait and the Gulf of Oman were "critical". Today (20 April), only three vessels have transited the strait.

The Houthis threatened to close the Bab al-Mandeb Strait yesterday if the US obstructs peace efforts with Iran.

Advice

- Do not travel to Lebanon, especially south of the Litani River, Dahiye in Beirut, and in the Beqaa Valley.
- Reconsider travel to the Middle East, especially Israel, Iran and Iraq, but also the wider Gulf region.
- Remain aware of ongoing tensions, given the possibility of a sudden resumption in fighting.
- Monitor instructions from local authorities and any national embassy guidelines.
- Avoid any demonstrations or gatherings in the region.
- Globally, reconsider travel to any locations with links to Israel or Judaism.
- If you need further support, or wish to discuss options for evacuation, call NGS.



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