

MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT

RIPPLE EFFECTS & SCENARIOS



How might this crisis shape humanitarian needs worldwide?



KEY MESSAGES

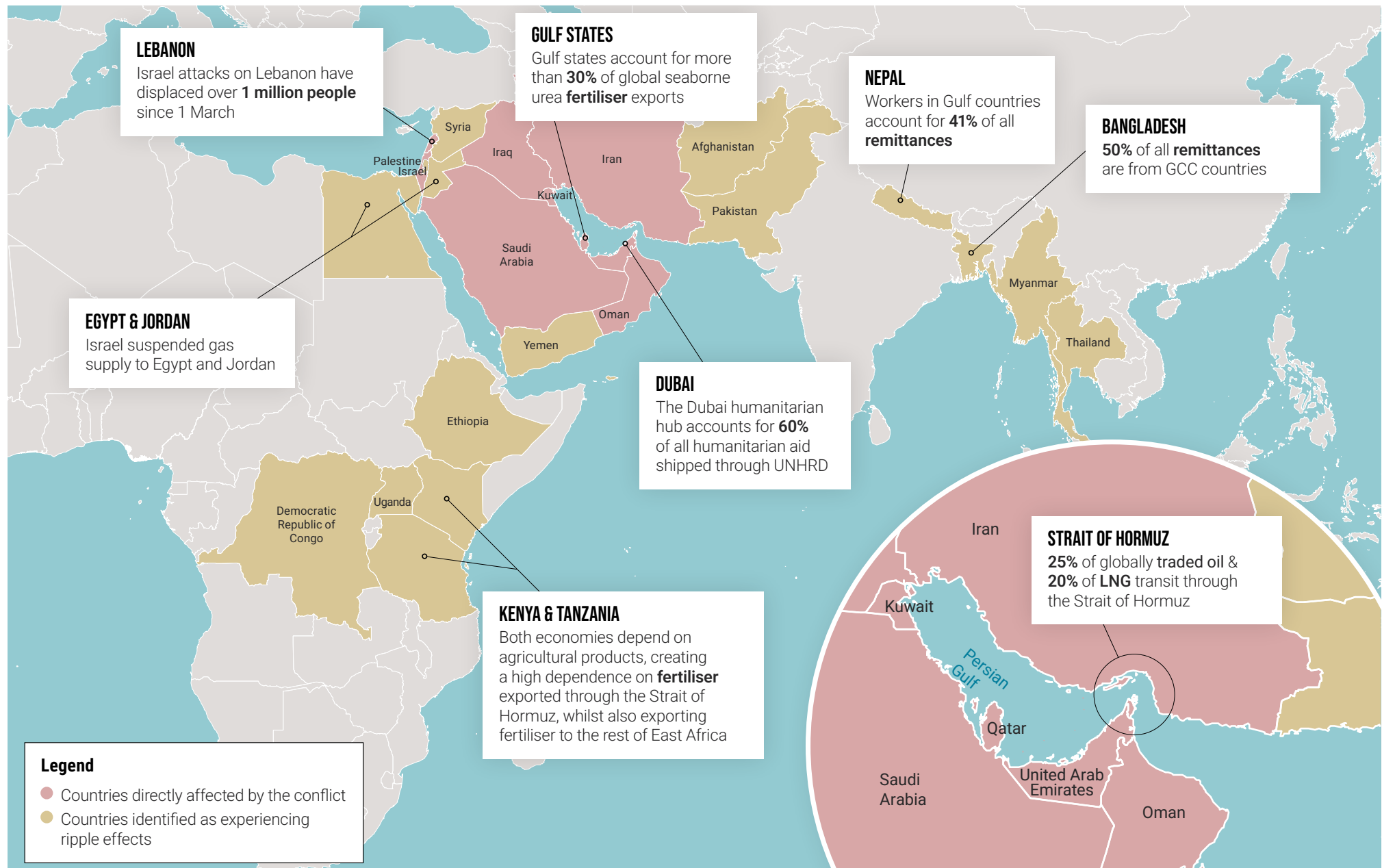
- **The current conflict in the Middle East is a major global event with far-reaching implications, including significant humanitarian consequences.** Within ten days of the initial attacks on Tehran, the conflict was already disrupting global trade and energy systems, with consequences extending far beyond the direct impacts in Iran and neighbouring countries. Escalations in violence, displacement, disruptions to essential services, and restricted humanitarian access risk aggravating already severe needs across affected populations.
- **The Middle East is central to global energy supply.** Approximately 25% of globally traded oil and around one-fifth of global LNG normally transit through the Strait of Hormuz, making it one of the world's most important maritime chokepoints. Energy disruptions in the region will have knock-on effects on food prices, livelihoods, and humanitarian needs across the globe. Fragile, economically vulnerable and conflict affected countries highly dependent on energy imports are particularly exposed to these disruptions, potentially suffering significant further economic and political instability. The conflict has had a direct effect on a range of critical global supply chains, the full consequences of which may take time to manifest. Humanitarian supply chains based in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have been particularly affected.
- **The conflict will drive global food insecurity.** Energy disruptions are closely linked to global food production through fertiliser markets. Gulf states account for more than 30% of global seaborne urea fertiliser exports, making the region a critical supplier for agricultural production. Disruptions to shipping routes or fertiliser exports will particularly affect import-dependent regions, such as those in South Asia and parts of Africa, where fragile food systems and high poverty levels already contribute to acute food insecurity. Even with a swift resolution to the conflict, these impacts will likely persist into 2027.
- **The conflict is directly impacting regional populations access to critical services, such as water.** Water systems in Gulf countries are dependent on desalination infrastructure, supplying drinking water for about 62 million people. Damage to desalination infrastructure could create water shortages affecting both households and agriculture in one of the world's most water-scarce regions, issues that could take years to address.

- **The regional conflict is generating immediate humanitarian direct consequences.** By 15 March, air strikes in Iran had killed over 1,400 people and injured more than 18,500, with internal displacement reported to be up to 3.2 million. In Lebanon, Israeli air strikes have killed over 800 people, injured more than 2,000, and displaced over one million, with further displacement expected.
- **Across the region, the ripple effects of the conflict threaten further political destabilisation and potential conflict.** In Yemen, the Houthis are largely expected to join the conflict in the coming weeks, widening the direct impact of the conflict on Yemen itself, and driving a wider impact on global trade. Iraq and Bahrain are also contexts where violence and tensions are rising, potentially resulting in humanitarian needs. Other global conflicts, such as taking place in Ukraine, will likely be further aggravated.

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MAP 1. GLOBAL RIPPLE EFFECTS OF THE WAR IN THE MIDDLE EAST



Source: ACAPS

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report uses descriptive, explanatory, and anticipatory analysis to help decision makers understand the scale of the ripple effects from the war, dividing the impacts into four themes:

- energy and water security
- economy, shipping disruption, and food security
- conflict and social cohesion
- humanitarian needs, gaps, and access.

It also examines three potential scenarios to anticipate where and how needs and access constraints may worsen over the next month. Each scenario – a near-term end to the conflict with lingering disruptions, a continuation of hostilities at the current scale over the next month, and a further intensification or widening of the conflict – considers likely consequences across the four thematic areas, focusing on impacts that may persist beyond immediate military confrontation.

The report focuses on the ripple effects of the conflict in the Middle East rather than offering full situation overviews for each country. It complements existing ACAPS country-level analyses, including dedicated products on Gaza, Iran, and Lebanon and a forthcoming scenarios report focused on regional displacement dynamics.

Methodology

This analysis is primarily based on secondary desk research drawing on media reporting, social media monitoring, analytical and think tank publications, humanitarian needs assessments, and information shared through webinars and expert presentations. Information included in this report reflects data available up to 19 March 2026, although figures and contextual developments may change rapidly and will be updated prior to publication where possible.

Countries included in the analysis were selected based on their geographic proximity to the conflict – in particular, countries that have been targeted by attacks, as well as those with humanitarian links to the affected areas – and on the likelihood that developments could generate significant humanitarian ripple effects. Priority was given to contexts where pre-existing vulnerabilities, displacement dynamics, economic and energy dependencies, or security concerns could amplify the impact of regional developments.

For the forward-looking section, analysts developed three scenarios using a simplified version of ACAPS' anticipatory analysis methodology, structured around one key variable: the evolution of conflict intensity. This analysis uses conflict intensity to refer to operational indicators, such as the geographic expansion of hostilities, the frequency and scale of attacks, the involvement of additional armed groups, and the degree of disruption to civilian infrastructure and services. The scenarios outline plausible pathways and assess how variations in the abovementioned indicators affect interconnected systems, including displacement dynamics, access to services, trade flows, and food, water, and energy security. This simplified scenario approach was chosen given the volatility of the context and the rapid pace of developments, allowing analysts to explore plausible short-term pathways while maintaining analytical clarity and flexibility.

Limitations

This analysis focuses on broad themes that are common to several countries and most likely to create or intensify humanitarian needs. The report relies significantly on media reporting and think tank analysis given limited primary data. Data availability also remains uneven across countries. While these sources provide timely insights, media reporting, particularly in highly politicised and rapidly evolving conflict contexts, may be incomplete, biased, or difficult to verify. In most instances, ACAPS provides multiple sources with a medium to high level of reliability to mitigate these risks.

The analysis is also subject to certain data limitations. In many cases, available information cannot be fully disaggregated by location, demographic group, or vulnerability profile, creating potential information gaps. Access constraints and insecurity may limit more granular assessments of how different populations are affected. Current and repeated displacement movements also challenge the accurate tracking of population figures and needs over time, potentially affecting the interpretation of displacement data. At the same time, macroeconomic indicators and humanitarian access conditions may change rapidly as the situation evolves.

The scenarios do not represent all possible future developments. They are based on a predetermined assumption and limited to a one-month window, as longer-term projections could quickly become outdated as new information emerges. As with most rapid-scenario exercises conducted in volatile contexts, the analysis simplifies complex dynamics and may not capture sudden political, military, or diplomatic

shifts that could significantly alter the trajectories of the variables. The scenarios should be understood as an illustrative tool to support preparedness and planning rather than predictions of how the situation will unfold.

INTRODUCTION

On 28 February 2026, Israel and the US launched a joint military offensive against Iran targeting military installations, missile production facilities, and internal security infrastructure. Continued US and Israeli strikes have injured over 18,500 people and killed more than 1,400, including Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei (BBC accessed 08/03/2026; Reuters 28/02/2026). Iran has since responded with missile and drone attacks against Israel and countries hosting US forces across the Middle East, including military facilities and civilian objects and infrastructure. The confrontation has quickly expanded beyond a bilateral conflict and become a regional crisis with far-reaching economic and humanitarian implications (ICG 06/03/2026; CFR accessed 08/03/2026).

The escalation has rapidly drawn in various regional parties. Hezbollah has launched rocket attacks into northern Israel, prompting Israeli strikes into southern Lebanon, eastern Bekaa Valley, and Beirut's southern and central suburbs and triggering large-scale displacement (The Guardian 06/03/2026; AJ 03/03/2026). Iranian-aligned militias in Iraq have targeted US military and civilian facilities, including an attempted strike on the US Embassy in Baghdad, followed by US and Israeli retaliation against militia positions (Politics Today 02/03/2026). Iran has targeted commercial shipping in the Strait of Hormuz and the Persian Gulf to close vital shipping lanes. Rather than deploying a traditional naval blockade, Iran has launched selective drone strikes targeting commercial vessels, with these attacks reinforced by escalating insurance premiums that render transit economically unfeasible (NPR 04/03/2026; Reuters 12/03/2026). That said, until 19 March 2026, the Houthis in Yemen, another Iran-backed group, had not entered the war (The Guardian 06/03/2026; AJ 03/03/2026; Politics Today 02/03/2026). The use of foreign allied bases by the US in the region has also triggered attacks by Iran on those countries.

By targeting energy infrastructure and shipping routes, Iran and allied parties are generating widespread economic shocks that are increasing food prices, disrupting public services, and heightening humanitarian needs in import-dependent countries.

Overall, the economic ripple effects of the disruptions caused by Iran to global energy markets, maritime trade routes, and strategic infrastructure are meant to increase the economic and political costs of the war for the US and allies (Common Dreams 09/03/2026; MEMO 09/03/2026).

RIPPLE EFFECTS AND IMPACTS

Energy and water security

The Middle East, including the Gulf countries, produces nearly a third of the world's crude oil and around 17% of global natural gas, maintaining a central role in global energy supply (Visual Capitalist 10/03/2026; GIF accessed 12/03/2026). As of 18 March 2026, crude oil prices have increased globally by around 50%, while prices have risen by about 20–25% in some markets because of the escalation in the Middle East and disruptions to supply routes (AJ 18/03/2026; Economy Next 18/03/2026).

In the Gulf countries, desalination plants are located along the coastline across from Iran and provide most drinking water for about 99% of people in **Qatar**, 90% in **Kuwait**, 86% in **Oman**, 70% in **Saudi Arabia**, and about 42% in the **United Arab Emirates (UAE)** (AP accessed 17/03/2026; Türkiye Today 07/03/2026). Attacks on such facilities could cause severe water shortages across the Gulf.

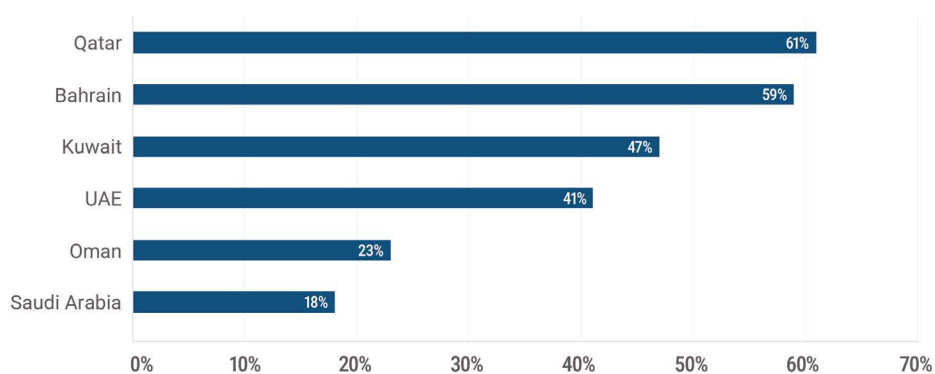
- Attacks on energy and water infrastructure, combined with gas supply disruptions, can lead to electricity and fuel shortages, water access interruptions, and disruptions to essential services (such as WASH and healthcare) and production systems.
- As energy or water supply disruptions in the Gulf countries have yet to be reported, the priority contexts are Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria, where fuel shortages, power cuts, and reduced access to water heighten conflict impacts involving already weakened infrastructure and damage.
- Attacks on desalination plants raise a likely risk of water infrastructure becoming a new target in the widening conflict, increasing needs for drinking water and WASH services.

Direct impacts: Energy disruptions, blackouts, and risks to water security

Many energy infrastructures in the Gulf countries have sustained damage because of Iranian strikes, disrupting fuel and energy supplies and potentially affecting household electricity, water pumping, and transport services, particularly for urban populations dependent on desalination and electricity-powered water systems. **Qatar** has halted LNG production in Ras Laffan and Mesaieed after an Iranian drone attack, taking approximately 20% of global LNG export capacity offline (TheStreet 03/03/2026; OilPrice.com 02/03/2026; AJ 11/03/2026). This adds to reported damages to several types of energy infrastructure, including refineries such as **Saudi Arabia's** Ras Tanura and **Bahrain's** BAPCO facilities in Al Ma'ameer industrial area; oil production sites such as the Sarsang oil field in Iraq's Kurdistan region; and storage and export infrastructure, including the Ruwais industrial complex in the UAE and oil storage facilities at Salalah port in Oman (ACLEd 13/03/2026).

On 7 March, a US/Israeli air strike on a freshwater desalination plant on Qeshm Island in **Iran** disrupted water supply to 30 villages (FP 09/03/2026). In retaliation, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps launched strikes against a desalination plant in **Bahrain** near Muharraq city on 8 March, with the Government yet to report any impact on water supplies (Türkiye Today 07/03/2026; Shorouk News 08/03/2026). Bahrain relies on desalination plants for 90% of the drinking water required to meet the needs of its population of 1.6 million (AJ 12/03/2026).

Graph 1. Reliance of Gulf countries on desalination as a proportion of total freshwater supply



ACAPS using data from Al Jazeera and GCCStat (accessed 18/03/2026)

Before that, on 2 March, an Iranian strike on Dubai's Jebel Ali port in the **UAE** landed within 12mi of one of the world's largest desalination plants, which supplies most of the city's drinking water. Nearby port attacks and debris from intercepted drones have also damaged the Fujairah F1 power and water complex in the **UAE** and **Kuwait's** Doha West desalination plant (AP accessed 17/03/2026; The Conversation 05/03/2026). No water access disruptions have been reported yet, but smaller, highly water-scarce countries such as Bahrain, Kuwait, and Qatar will be most affected if their desalination plants sustain major damage (AJ 08/03/2026).

Ripple effects

Gaza border crossing closures

In **Gaza, Palestine**, electricity and water availability is already reduced in an unknown number of IDP sites. Following the partial border closures announced by the Israeli Government on 1 March in response to the regional escalations, some organisations have been rationing fuel consumption as a precautionary measure (UNRWA 05/03/2026). All Gaza border crossings, except Kerem Shalom, have since been closed for security reasons. If the closures persist, fuel shortages and WASH service disruptions are likely.

Israeli gas supply suspension to neighbouring countries

Potential power cuts and disruptions to water trucking may occur in **Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria** after Israel suspended gas exports to Egypt's and Jordan's power generation facilities, prompting them to reduce gas and electricity supply to Lebanon and Syria (Newsbase 02/03/2026; BBC 02/03/2026; Global Trade Alert accessed 08/03/2026). Egypt and Jordan rely heavily on Israeli gas imports, which account for around 60% and 85% of their supply, respectively. As this gas is used for electricity generation and domestic consumption, both countries are highly vulnerable to disruptions in Israeli gas flows (IISS 16/10/2025; Daraj 26/06/2025).

In early March, **Syria's** Ministry of Energy confirmed reducing electricity supply hours to mitigate a gas shortfall, leading to nationwide rolling blackouts (Jordan News 02/03/2026). Local reports indicate fuel queues at stations, with sales surging by more than 300% above the daily average and petrol imported from Lebanon doubling in price because of sustained supply shortages (Al Jumhuriya Facebook 05/03/2026). Power cuts in **Lebanon** would also affect water access, as more than 80% of the population

relies on water trucking for domestic use (WLCU 20/10/2025). By December 2025, water trucking costs had risen by up to 60% more than before the 2024–2025 drought (FEWS NET 02/12/2025; UNHCR 12/09/2025; ACAPS 05/02/2026).

Fuel disruptions in Asia

The ripple effects of the gas crisis can be seen in South and Southeast Asia in the form of LNG supply disruptions, price spikes, or precautionary stockpiling. **Pakistan**, which is dependent on Qatar for 99% of its LNG imports, has activated its contingency plans. To conserve energy amid the oil supply crisis, the Government has introduced austerity measures, including a four-day government workweek, partial remote work, temporary school closures and online university classes, salary cuts for officials, restrictions on foreign travel and public gatherings, and reduced fuel use in government operations (AJ 10/03/2026).

In both **Bangladesh and Pakistan**, gas to fertiliser plants has been suspended to preserve stocks (Reuters 06/03/2026). **Thailand** has suspended fuel exports to **Myanmar** as a precautionary measure, triggering immediate fuel queues and rationing in Shan state, a region already facing acute humanitarian needs especially among IDPs, as upstream parties secured their own positions first (Myanmar NOW 03/03/2026). Myanmar's junta has implemented a nationwide fuel rationing system that began on 7 March, restricting private vehicles to operate on even or odd days based on licence plate numbers, and warned against fuel hoarding (Reuters 04/03/2026). This will likely disrupt people's livelihoods and reduce their income.

Economy, shipping, and food security

The conflict is deepening food insecurity in Gaza and Lebanon through the closure of borders, market disruptions, and mass displacement, while the de facto closure of the Strait of Hormuz through increased insurance premiums and Iranian threats to shipping has removed Gulf ports as a key node in global shipping networks. The resulting shipping disruptions are severing supply chains for key livelihood inputs – including urea fertiliser for smallholder farming in East Africa, sulphur for mining in the **Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)**, and remittance flows that sustain households across South Asia.

Low-income countries and households with the least capacity to cope – i.e. those dependent on subsistence agriculture, artisanal mining, and remittance income – are likely to disproportionately absorb these conflict-generated disruptions. The highest-impact contexts are Gaza and Lebanon, where food insecurity is already acute and supply disruption is immediate; Iraq, where oil revenue collapse directly threatens the Public Distribution System (PDS) food safety net for 39 million people; and the DRC, East Africa, and South Asia, where fertiliser, sulphur, and remittance supply chains are facing severe threats. Smallholder farmers in import-dependent countries across Africa and South Asia are among the most exposed, as the sustained closure of the strait threatens both current planting decisions for the 2026 season and longer-term yields if fertiliser remains unavailable throughout the main growing season.

Direct impacts: Increased food insecurity via direct exposure to conflict – Gaza, Jordan, and Lebanon

In **Lebanon**, the mass displacement of over 1.04 million people as of 16 March since the start of the conflict, combined with shipping disruptions, is likely to drive a significant deterioration in food security in the coming weeks through import delays, price increases, and supply shortages (OCHA 18/03/2026; UN 09/03/2026). Lebanon is particularly vulnerable; with imports accounting for approximately 50% of food supply and wheat imports making up 87% of consumption, recent weak harvests have created critical dependence on external sources for staple needs. Prior to the escalation, approximately 961,000 people were projected to face high acute food insecurity of Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse levels between April–July, with 63,000 facing Emergency (IPC Phase 4). These figures are likely to significantly increase as a result of the current crisis (IPC 23/12/2025).

People in **Gaza** report fears of items such as flour and milk becoming scarce very quickly. A partial border closure in Gaza has been implemented since 1 March. With the Rafah crossing remaining shut, only 200 of the 600 trucks needed daily have been allowed entry, affecting both commercial imports and humanitarian aid (AJ 10/03/2026). Early reports indicate price spikes for food items, such as a 120% increase in tomato prices, while cooking oil, flour, and some canned foods have become entirely unavailable in Gaza city (Palestinian Information Center 14/03/2026; AJ 10/03/2026).

Prior to the recent escalation, IPC reports indicated that, despite improvements in food security, only basic survival needs have been met. In December 2025, 1.6 million people (or 77% of the population) were projected to face high levels of acute food insecurity through April 2026, including 571,000 facing IPC 4. These incremental gains – moving from severe food insecurity to meeting only basic survival needs – remain extremely fragile. If the partial closures continue, these recent improvements may be rapidly reversed (IPC 19/12/2025).

On 2 March, an attempted cyberattack, allegedly from Iran, targeted **Jordan's** strategic wheat reserves in silos; if successful, this would have manipulated silo temperatures to destroy the country's wheat reserves (Petra 02/03/2026). Temperature manipulation would have led to rapid mould growth, insect infestation, and mycotoxin contamination, rendering stored grain unsafe for consumption (Cheli et al. 24/05/2017). As wheat is a staple food in Jordan, with the Government storing reserves sufficient for ten months of consumption, a successful attack could result in higher prices and reduced food access (JT 14/12/2024).

Ports and shipping infrastructure

The closure of the Strait of Hormuz has cut off the entirety of Gulf shipping – including Dubai's Jebel Ali, one of the world's ten busiest ports – with measurable downstream effects felt globally, particularly for populations facing pre-existing humanitarian conditions (France 24 08/03/2026). The conflict has also directly disrupted these ports, most pertinently illustrated by a fire from falling debris that caused minor damage at Jebel Ali following a missile intercept, causing the port to suspend operations (TradeWinds 02/03/2026). Gulf states rely heavily on food imports; in **Qatar**, for instance, more than 90% of food is imported mainly by sea. Although some countries maintain food stocks sufficient for several months, the escalating disruptions to both maritime shipping and air cargo logistics could render these reserves inadequate. With shipping routes severely disrupted and air cargo capacity

already constrained and insufficient as a backup supply channel, food imports face critical delays. This threatens to trigger higher food prices and panic buying, putting severe pressure on import-dependent economies (The Conversation 04/03/2026; NoonPost Instagram 08/03/2026).

Ripple effects

Iraq: Disruption to exports

Prior to the escalation, over 90% of Iraq's oil was exported through the Strait of Hormuz. The rest was exported through the Ceyhan pipeline, connected to Türkiye via Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region, which has been closed as a safety measure in response to the conflict (PTJ 03/03/2026). With storage facilities mostly full and production halts being announced, an Iraqi government adviser has warned that suspending exports would cause losses of USD 6–7 billion per month, threatening the Government's total income, which comprised 93% oil receipts in 2025 (TWI 18/09/2025; Reuters 08/03/2026; Alhurra 04/03/2026). A sustained export halt would also threaten the PDS, an expense dependent on Iraq's oil revenues and the primary food safety net for 39 million people (84% of the population) (FEWS NET 13/10/2025).

Africa: Disruptions to the delivery of fertiliser for agriculture and sulphur for mining, with consequent effects on household economies

The de facto closure of the Strait of Hormuz threatens to sever sulphur supply chains on which the DRC's mining sector depends. Approximately 45% of global sulphur exports transit the strait; the DRC imports over 500,000 tonnes of elemental sulphur annually, which it converts into sulphuric acid, an essential ingredient for copper and cobalt extraction. With regional acid inventories measured in days rather than months, the result of just-in-time supply chains, a prolonged closure could slow or halt production entirely (Fat Tail Daily 07/03/2026). Extractive industries account for approximately 30% of the DRC's public revenues, meaning a sustained mining slowdown would directly degrade the state's capacity to fund basic services (Coface accessed 09/03/2026). Historical precedent from 2020 demonstrates how production stoppages at major mines forced the DRC Government to slash its budget by 48% within months (Natural Resource Governance Institute 02/12/2020). Over 93% of central government social spending is allocated to education (over 60%) and health (over 33%), meaning such revenue shocks directly threaten the funding of these critical services (IMF 15/07/2024). With approximately 26.6 million people (22%

of the population) projected to face acute food insecurity between January–June 2026, including over 3.2 million facing IPC 4, households have no buffer to absorb a potential shock (WFP 29/10/2025).

Gulf countries export over 30% of the world's seaborne urea fertiliser, with financial benchmark prices rising by about 14% by 2 March following the escalation. Higher fertiliser and energy costs could increase production costs for major crops, such as wheat and corn, globally (The Conversation 04/03/2026). Many countries across Africa are dependent on urea fertilisers from the Gulf states; these include **Malawi**, with most of its urea fertiliser imports in 2023 coming from the UAE (60%), Saudi Arabia (17%), and Oman (9%) (IFDC 14/10/2024). Kenya is one of the most exposed countries in the Horn of Africa, with agriculture accounting for approximately 22% of the GDP and 60% of export earnings coming from trade-in goods. Cut flowers alone contribute USD 835 million in annual exports and require daily fertiliser applications through specialised fertigation systems, making Kenya's horticultural sector particularly vulnerable to fertiliser supply disruptions or price spikes (TE accessed 13/03/2026; Xinhua 14/02/2025). Saudi Arabia is Kenya's largest fertiliser supplier, accounting for USD 96.3 million (around 28%) of imports in 2024, with Qatar supplying an additional USD 11.4 million. Kenya also acts as a regional re-export hub, meaning disruptions are also likely to be transmitted to neighbouring markets such as Ethiopia, South Sudan, and Uganda (BIRR 12/09/2025). Previous supply disruptions and price hikes, such as those caused by the war in Ukraine, have historically hit smallholder farmers hardest, as they are most likely to cut fertiliser use, reducing yields significantly (IFPRI 21/03/2024; WEF 01/03/2023).

South Asia: Fertiliser shortages and remittance disruptions

In South Asia, fertiliser shortages may compound existing food security risks. In Bangladesh and Pakistan, gas-to-fertiliser plants have been suspended to preserve domestic gas stocks, while shipping constraints have also disrupted fertiliser imports (FT 05/03/2026). At the same time, countries across the region depend heavily on remittances from Gulf-based workers, meaning potential disruptions to these flows may further reduce households' ability to absorb rising food costs. In Bangladesh, Gulf Cooperation Council countries account for approximately 50% of all remittances, with Saudi Arabia alone responsible for USD 430 million per month. In Nepal, Gulf workers account for 41% of all remittances, which represented 26% of the GDP in 2024 (BBF 09/02/2026; TKP 04/03/2026; IOM 14/06/2024). The conflict may disrupt remittances through two mechanisms: active conflict and evacuation uncertainty are likely to prompt workers to reserve remittances rather than transfer them, and conflict may disrupt hawala and informal transfer networks, which handle a significant proportion of South Asian remittance flows, in affected Gulf cities. From 2–3 March 2026, money exchange companies in Qatar temporarily closed or reported minimal transactions, directly interrupting remittance flows (TKP 04/03/2026). These remittances play a vital role in low-income households, with the International Fund for Agricultural Development estimating that, rather than agricultural produce, remittances make up 80% of smallholder farmers' income, sustaining consumption and supporting small enterprises, including the purchase of agricultural inputs such as fertiliser (Thapa-Parajuli et al. 05/06/2025; EAF 27/12/2025; IFAD 11/06/2024). Governments also depend on these remittances, including the Bangladeshi Government, which uses the inflow of foreign currency to finance 47% of import payments, potentially further weakening its capacity to deal with energy price increases (TNH 05/03/2026; BBF 09/02/2026). For households already facing rising food costs driven by fertiliser shortages and import price inflation, the simultaneous disruption to remittance flows removes one of the primary buffers through which low-income households in Bangladesh and Nepal have historically absorbed economic shocks, increasing food insecurity (Thapa-Parajuli et al. 05/06/2025).

Conflict and social cohesion

The current conflict with Iran and its proxies may trigger further tensions, including political instability and social unrest in Lebanon and heightened border tensions between Lebanon and Syria. Militia activity in Iraq and rising protests in Bahrain are also directly linked to the Middle East escalations. Indirectly, the crisis diverts global attention, affecting other current and emerging conflicts such as the Pakistan and Afghanistan clashes.

Increasing conflict and social tension in the region are driving clashes, displacement, humanitarian needs, and pressure on services including health, shelter, and protection. In some cases, suspended mediation efforts by Gulf countries or proxy conflicts are heightening humanitarian needs and the risks of further localised clashes and population movements. Lebanon is a priority context, with the renewed hostilities since March 2026 driving large-scale displacement and contributing to rising social tensions, producing high needs for shelter, food, protection, and other services. The active involvement of the Houthis in Yemen in the following month remains likely; they may target US and Israeli assets, disrupting maritime trade, triggering retaliatory strikes, and increasing humanitarian needs.

Direct impacts

Social, political, and border tensions in Lebanon

Since 1 March 2026, the renewed escalation of hostilities in **Lebanon** between Hezbollah and Israel has driven large-scale displacement and housing shortages in Lebanon. Over 1.04 million people had been displaced by 16 March, overstressing shelters and rental markets, whilst increasing pressure on host communities and driving social tensions, particularly in Mount Lebanon Governorate (OCHA 18/03/2026; JRS accessed 17/03/2026). Rising rental prices (by about 233–275%) in March and competition for limited housing and services are contributing to growing friction between newly displaced people and host communities (ACAPS 05/03/2026; Independent Arabia 08/03/2026). No incidents of intercommunal clashes have been reported yet, but the risk remains likely.

Border tensions between **Lebanon and Syria** increased in early March 2026 as Syria reinforced its border with thousands of troops, rocket units, and reconnaissance forces, citing the need to control smuggling and prevent cross-border militant activity amid the wider regional escalation (Reuters 04/03/2026). This deployment increases the likelihood of localised clashes along the border and the possibility of displacement. Syrian authorities described the deployment as a defensive measure to tighten border security, while humanitarian responders reported growing cross-border movement, with over 121,000 people crossing from Lebanon into Syria by 16 March through the Masnaa and other crossings as hostilities intensified in Lebanon (IOM 18/03/2026).

Internally, political tensions and divisions are rising in Lebanon, but the likelihood of the crisis worsening remains uncertain. On 2 March, Prime Minister Nawaf Salam's Government banned Hezbollah's military activities and declared them illegal, insisting that decisions on war and peace must remain under state authority, while Hezbollah rejected the move and vowed to continue fighting (AJ 02/03/2026). The Lebanese State cannot realistically disarm Hezbollah without major internal confrontation and strong international backing (Middle East Council on Global Affairs 20/11/2025).

Protests in Bahrain

Social tensions and protests increased in **Bahrain** in early March 2026 amid the regional escalation with Iran and the presence of US forces in the country, with no humanitarian impact reported until 12 March. If sectarian tensions persist, movement restrictions, detentions, and protection needs may rise. Widespread demonstrations have been reported in several cities and villages against the US–Israeli strikes on Iran, prompting clashes between protesters and police, while the authorities have imposed restrictions on public gatherings and arrested dozens of people for participating in protests or sharing related content online (Türkiye Today 07/03/2026; Stratfor 11/03/2026; DW 07/03/2026). By 2 March, the authorities had arrested 60 people, including children, for participating in the protests or posting on social media (IFEX 11/03/2026). The unrest has been accompanied by heightened sectarian tensions (between the Sunni ruling establishment and parts of the Shia population) and strong security measures as the Government seeks to contain dissent during the regional conflict (Stratfor 11/03/2026).

Militias in Iraq

No displacement has been reported yet in **Iraq**, but Iranian-backed armed groups have been intensifying attacks against US and Israeli assets since 1 March. In response, US and Israeli forces are striking their positions in central and southern Iraq, while Iran is targeting Kurdish groups in the north, turning Iraq into a battleground of attacks and counterattacks (ISW 11/03/2026). Areas most exposed to escalation include Diyala, Kirkuk, and Ninewa governorates in the north and west, as well as Baghdad and Anbar in the centre and south, where persistent clashes could fuel tensions between Iranian-aligned militias and US-backed Kurdish forces, risking internal clashes, further undermining security, and potentially triggering localised displacement.

Ripple effects

Absence of international mediation

Suspended or delayed international mediation by Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia and Qatar, may allow tensions between **Pakistan and Afghanistan** to escalate further (BBC 27/02/2026). By 17 March 2026, clashes along the Pakistan–Afghanistan border had internally displaced over 115,000 people across ten Afghan provinces (OCHA 05/03/2026). Unrest in Pakistan is also linked to the regional escalation and has led to protests denouncing attacks on Iran and a violent crackdown by security forces, causing at least 26 deaths, raising civilian protection concerns (Arab News 01/03/2026; Amnesty International 02/03/2026). With Gulf states focused on Middle East hostilities, opportunities for diplomacy are reduced, increasing the risk of prolonged conflict, further border instability, and worsening humanitarian and economic pressures, including energy shortages, trade disruptions, and rising food prices in affected Afghan provinces (OCHA 05/03/2026; Forbes 05/03/2026; TNH 05/03/2026).

Uncertainty of Yemen's involvement

The Houthis in **Yemen** have not yet entered the current escalation but warn they could act “at any moment” in support of Iran. If they join, their involvement would likely mirror post-7 October 2023 actions, including targeting US and Israeli interests and threatening maritime trade through the Bab Al Mandab Strait, but with some differences. Attacks may initially focus on disrupting shipping rather than direct strikes on well-defended military targets and could be less frequent and more

restrained, reflecting higher risk calculations amid intensified US–Israel operations and evolving regional dynamics (AJ 09/03/2026; Reuters 13/03/2026; Barron's 13/03/2026). Such activity would likely prompt US and Israeli strikes on Houthi-controlled areas in Yemen, particularly Al Hodeidah Port, the main hub for their maritime operations, which may result in displacement and increase humanitarian needs for shelter, food, healthcare, and protection. Damage or disruption to the port could limit Yemen's humanitarian supply chains and food imports.

Humanitarian needs, gaps, and access

The regional escalation is simultaneously degrading humanitarian access through direct – conflict, airspace closures, and movement restrictions – and indirect means, such as disruptions to logistics and maritime routes, where rising costs and shipping disruptions increase the price and complexity of delivering aid at the moment needs are escalating.

These new access constraints compound pre-existing challenges in meeting humanitarian needs driven by chronic funding shortfalls, with displaced populations, refugees, and food-insecure households bearing the greatest impact. The highest-impact contexts are Lebanon, where over 700,000 people have been displaced and NGO operations are suspended; Gaza, where all crossings have been closed since 28 February and 37 NGOs were already suspended before the escalation began; and northern **Iraq**, where active missile threat afflicts one of the region's most concentrated humanitarian caseloads of IDPs and cross-border refugees (UN 09/03/2026; OCHA 06/03/2026). Beyond these immediate threats, shipping and air closures have significantly disrupted regional logistics hubs in Dubai, while Yemen's fragile access situation is set to further deteriorate. As access worsens, humanitarian needs in food security, health, and shelter are likely to increase – creating a compounding cycle the system is currently least able to absorb.

Direct impacts: Access suspended or severely restricted

Lebanon: Operational suspensions and displacement

The Israeli military escalation in **Lebanon** has severely disrupted the Beirut–Rafic Hariri International Airport. Multiple airlines have cancelled all flights until at least 14 March, and the road corridor to the airport passes through the Israeli-declared evacuation zone – cutting off a key humanitarian supply route used during previous escalations (L’Orient Today 06/03/2026). During the 2024 conflict, an EU-established humanitarian air bridge allowed for the delivery of over 275 tonnes of supplies, with the UAE using planes to deliver 450 tonnes of aid (EC 27/11/2024; Gulf News accessed 17/03/2026).

The Israeli military has issued evacuation orders across southern Lebanon, the Bekaa Valley, and the southern suburbs of Beirut, creating de facto no-access zones for humanitarian operations. UNRWA shut 26 health centres on 2 March, with ten remaining closed until 4 March, while Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) has suspended all activities in southern Lebanon, citing as reason the evacuation orders and the absence of security guarantees by the Israeli military (UNRWA 06/03/2026; MSF 07/03/2026).

By 16 March, over 1.04m people had been displaced, over 132,000 of whom were staying in 622 collective shelters, with humanitarian access to evacuated areas effectively suspended (UN 09/03/2026; OCHA 18/03/2026). The Bekaa Valley, home to 36% of registered Syrian refugees (the largest single concentration in Lebanon) and many more who are not registered, falls partly within the evacuation zone, placing a significant portion of an already highly vulnerable population beyond humanitarian reach (UNHCR 06/03/2026; IRC 06/03/2026; UNHCR accessed 17/03/2026). Lebanon’s 2026 Response Plan targets 1.5 million people in critical need out of an estimated 2.99 million people in need, with a USD 1.62 billion appeal. Lebanon’s 2025 humanitarian response plan received only a third of the required funding, while UNHCR reported receiving only 10% by January 2026, leading to programme cuts and reduced levels of assistance (UNHCR 06/03/2026).

Palestine: Access Suspension

In the immediate aftermath of the escalation, the Israeli military closed all border crossings to **Gaza** and most road gates across the **West Bank**, preventing movement between Palestinian cities and governorates and suspending humanitarian operations across the territory. In the West Bank, the closures compound pre-existing restrictions involving the prior closure of 221 of 420 road gates. Several Health Cluster responders have had to suspend mobile clinic operations, while checkpoint delays have caused localised shortages of fuel and cooking gas, further affecting service delivery (OCHA 06/03/2026). All crossings into Gaza have been closed since 28 February, simultaneously suspending the entry of aid, fuel, and commercial supplies. Kerem Shalom was partially reopened with heavy restrictions and long inspection delays on 3 March for fuel and aid cargo via Egypt and Israel, but Rafah and Zikim remained closed as of 11 March, while aid transfers from the West Bank and Jordan remained highly restricted as of 5 March (OCHA 06/03/2026; OHCHR 10/03/2026). These access restrictions compound the pre-existing suspension of 37 INGOs – including MSF and Mercy Corps – from operating in Gaza and the West Bank (OCHA 06/03/2026; HRW 24/02/2026).

Ripple effects

Regional logistics and airspace

The **Dubai humanitarian hub** has historically served as a critical regional dispatch point precisely because of its proximity to major air and sea infrastructure, accounting for 60% of all humanitarian aid shipped through the UNHRD network worldwide, making current airspace and shipping disruptions across the Gulf particularly damaging to humanitarian operations (UAE Human Journey 18/08/2025). Airspace and shipping closures across the Gulf have disrupted these humanitarian supply chains, with the hub in Dubai effectively frozen. WHO reports that more than 50 emergency supply requests, intended to benefit over 1.5 million people across 25 countries, are delayed or awaiting alternative routing, resulting in significant backlogs and affecting operations in Afghanistan, Gaza, Lebanon, and Mozambique (WHO 11/03/2026). WFP has had to reroute deliveries through Egypt, Jordan, Pakistan, Türkiye, and overland UAE–Levant corridors as standard regional access routes are no longer viable, increasing delivery times and transport costs (UN 06/03/2026; WFP 03/03/2026).

Iraq and the Kurdish regional government: Heightened risk to a concentrated humanitarian caseload

Growing insecurity around Iran's borders from missile strikes and militia activity is putting major refugee and IDP populations in **Iraq and Kurdistan autonomous region** at heightened risk of access disruptions and service cuts. Iraq hosts over 347,000 refugees and asylum seekers (88% of whom are Syrian, with 81% residing in Kurdistan region) alongside approximately one million IDPs, over 100,000 of whom live in camps within Kurdistan region itself – making it one of the region's most concentrated humanitarian caseloads (IBN 07/01/2026; IOM accessed 17/03/2026). The Iranian military has directly struck Erbil, with authorities closing schools and universities (JP 10/03/2026). The Khor Mor gas field has halted supplies to power stations as a precautionary measure, reducing Kurdistan region's electricity generation capacity by an estimated 2,500–3,000MW, affecting hospitals and water pumping stations (Kurdistan24 05/03/2026; Rudaw 28/02/2026).

Whether Kurdish forces become directly involved in the conflict with Iran appears unlikely, but if the Iran–Iraq border becomes an active conflict zone, the humanitarian access corridors currently used for northern Syria and Iraq operations would be directly compromised (AJ 05/03/2026). Kurdish involvement in the conflict would have direct implications for Turkish military positioning in the border region where Iran, Iraq, and Türkiye converge – specifically Hakkari, Şırnak, and Van provinces. This eastern border zone currently has no established humanitarian corridors but represents the most likely future access route if displacement or conflict spreads into northwestern Iran – or northern Iraq, considering its proximity to Iran and accessibility compared to other crossing points. Turkish military operations in response to Kurdish activity would foreclose that potential access before it is established, creating highly restricted areas with the need for humanitarian waivers (SpecialEurasia 05/03/2026).

Yemen: Pre-existing access collapse and contingent escalation risk

Whether the Houthis will re-engage militarily remains unclear. Statements from both the new supreme leader of Iran and Abdul-Malik Al Houthi, leader of the Houthis, signal a willingness to resume attacks following recent strikes along with verbal threats towards maritime traffic, but no resumption of missile launches has been confirmed (TME 07/03/2026; The Guardian 12/03/2026). Any escalation could jeopardise a fragile diplomatic process involving current Saudi–Houthi peace negotiations (MEO 06/03/2026). This uncertainty comes against already dire humanitarian conditions; WFP has terminated all 365 staff contracts in Houthi-controlled northern Yemen following the detention of 73 UN personnel and raids on UN offices, hugely affecting food security programming in the area (Euronews 29/01/2026). By December 2025, 21 million people required humanitarian assistance, 18 million faced acute food insecurity, and OCHA operations were only 25% funded, with programmes already scaled back (OCHA accessed 16/03/2026). Should attacks resume, Al Hodeidah Port, the primary entry port for around 70% of commercial imports and 80% of humanitarian assistance into Yemen, would be directly at risk (SCR 25/01/2026). Previous Israeli strikes against the port extended delivery times from weeks to months, with supply chains unable to absorb these delays, and land routes cannot substitute for port access at the required volumes (The Guardian 10/06/2025).

SCENARIOS (ONE-MONTH HORIZON)

The ripple effects outlined in this report are not static and are likely to evolve depending on how the conflict develops. If hostilities persist or intensify, disruptions to energy, trade, and essential services could deepen, amplifying humanitarian needs both within the region and globally. To illustrate how these dynamics may unfold and what they could mean for affected populations, the following scenarios outline potential escalation paths among Israel, Iran, and the US, presented as short overviews rather than detailed accounts. They illustrate the range of possible impacts based on the intensity and duration of the escalations, helping us understand how the conflict could affect the region and beyond.

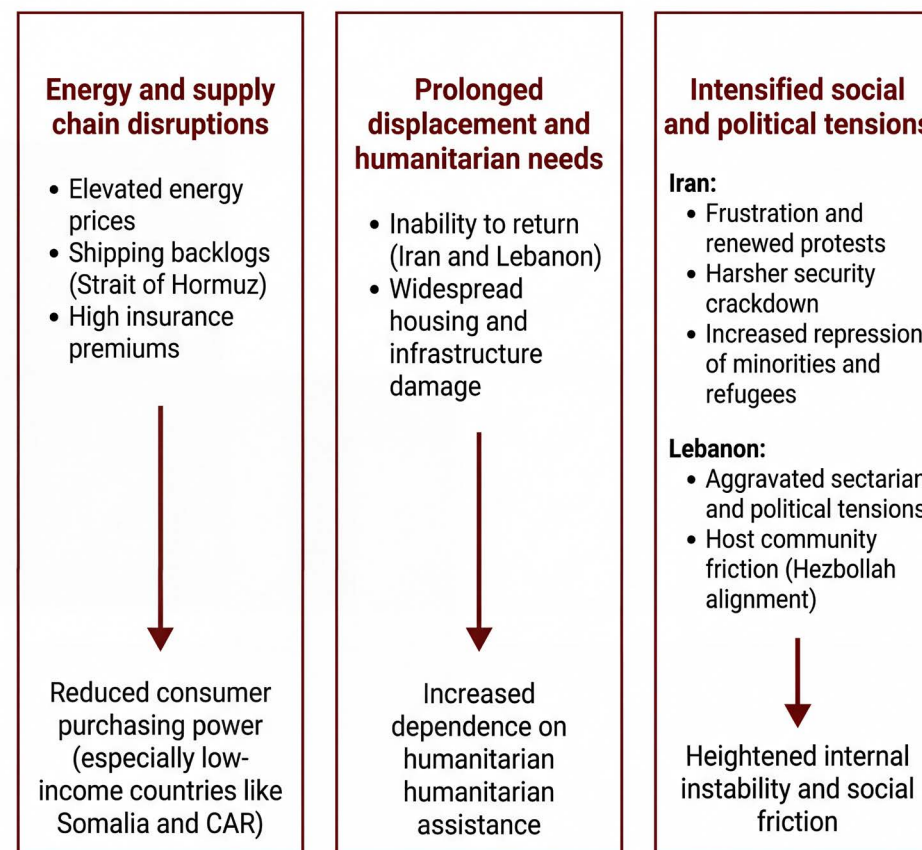
Considering the complexity of the regional environment and interconnected conflicts, these scenarios do not capture every possible outcome. For example, an Israeli offensive in Lebanon, though initially triggered by wider escalations, could intensify independently of the central US–Israel–Iran confrontation.

SCENARIO 1.

Conflict ends, but persistent challenges remain

Despite a pause in escalations, damage to regional energy production and storage facilities takes several weeks to over a month to repair, keeping energy prices elevated in the near term. Supply chain backlogs, unresolved conflict uncertainty, and high insurance premiums make the return of commercial shipping through the Strait of Hormuz to pre-crisis levels gradual. As a result, price increases persist temporarily, reducing consumer purchasing power but remaining reversible once production and export capacities return to pre-crisis levels, particularly affecting low-income import-dependent countries such as Somalia and the Central African Republic (Cushman & Wakefield accessed 12/03/2026). Although the cessation of hostilities prevents further displacement, displaced people in both Iran and Lebanon remain unable to return owing to widespread housing and infrastructure damage, prolonging displacement and increasing dependence on humanitarian assistance. Frustration with the authorities in Iran intensifies as limited capacity for recovery and reconstruction fuels renewed protest activity, prompting a harsher security crackdown. The repression of minorities and refugees, including Kurdish and Arab

communities and Afghan refugees, increases their exposure to discrimination and potential forced returns. In Lebanon, prolonged displacement aggravates sectarian and political tensions between IDP and host communities, which are increasingly against Hezbollah activities and IDPs perceived to be aligned with the group.



SCENARIO 2.

Conflict continues at the current level

The conflict continues without triggering a wider regional war, but sustained hostilities produce deepening humanitarian and economic consequences. Repeated attacks degrade Gulf oil and gas production, while heightened security risks around the Strait of Hormuz bring exports through this critical corridor nearly to a halt. Houthi threats compound maritime risk, prompting widespread rerouting via the Cape of Good Hope, extending transit times. These dynamics raise freight costs across global supply chains.

Across the region, humanitarian conditions deteriorate. In Iran, large-scale displacement accelerates as insecurity and service disruptions mount, with significant cross-border movements into Armenia, Türkiye, and Turkmenistan straining host country capacity. In Lebanon, prolonged Israeli operations prevent displaced families from returning, straining access to basic services and deepening vulnerability, particularly as the 2024 escalations displaced many, who have exhausted their coping capacities. In Iraq, US and Israeli targeting of Iranian-backed armed groups in the south, combined with Iranian strikes on Kurdish forces in the north, generates localised displacement around the targeted areas and restricts humanitarian access. Iraq's near-total dependence on oil revenue – with a 90% production drop translating directly into cuts to services, subsidies, and public sector salaries – makes it among the most acutely exposed states in the region.

Global ripple effects are felt most sharply in import-dependent, low-income countries already facing fiscal stress and the impacts of the 2025 aid cuts. Sustained oil price shocks and freight cost increases drive inflation in food and manufactured goods, eroding purchasing power and increasing food insecurity in Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and parts of Latin America. Fuel shortages disrupt water pumping, treatment, and desalination, reducing reliable access to safe water. Countries reliant on Gulf remittances – including Egypt, Pakistan, the Philippines, and several East African states – face reduced inflows as economic activity in the Gulf contracts. Humanitarian funding comes under additional pressure as donor governments absorb domestic cost-of-living impacts, risking a squeeze on aid budgets precisely when needs are rising.

Energy and supply chain disruptions

- Degraded Gulf oil and gas production
- Strait of Hormuz exports halted
- Widespread rerouting (Cape of Good Hope)
- Increased Freight costs and transit times
- Fuel Shortages disrupting critical infrastructure



Global inflation (food and goods), reduced purchasing power, increased food insecurity (Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, Latin America)

Prolonged displacement and humanitarian needs

- **Iran:** Large-scale displacement, cross-border movements (Türkiye, Armenia, Turkmenistan)
- **Lebanon:** Prolonged conflict prevent return of IDPs
- **Iraq:** Localised displacement (southern & northern areas)



Deteriorating humanitarian conditions, increased dependence on aid, aid, stretched host community capacity

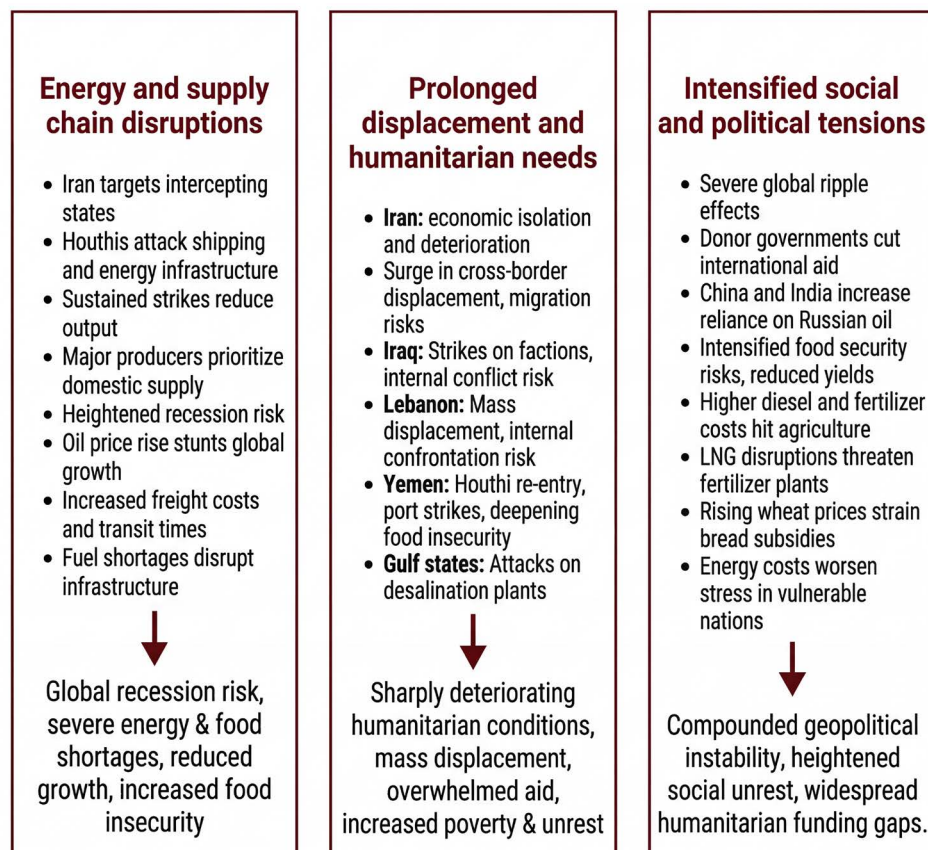
Intensified social and political tensions

- Economic collapse in Iraq (90% oil production drop, service/ salary cuts)
- Reduced remittances (Egypt, Pakistan, Philippines, East Africa)
- Squeezed humanitarian funding
- Donor domestic cost-of-living impacts



Heightened economic stress, social unrest, strained aid budgets

SCENARIO 3.

Conflict widens or intensifies

In response to the escalating strikes by the US and Israel, Iran widens the battlefield by targeting states involved in intercepting its attacks, such as Jordan. In support of Iran, the Houthis activate the Yemen front, launching operations against strategic shipping lanes and Gulf energy infrastructure. The expanding hostilities heighten regional insecurity and draw more states into confrontations. Rising security concerns compel Gulf countries and Jordan to mobilise forces, transforming the conflict into a multifront regional war.

The involvement of more parties prolongs military operations and complicates any path to a ceasefire. Sustained strikes cause extensive damage to energy infrastructure across the region, bringing output to a near-standstill and cutting off exports. With no resolution in sight, major producers prioritise domestic supply, driving energy shortages, price hikes, and heightened recession risk globally. A sustained increase in oil prices reduces global economic growth by approximately 0.1–0.2% over 2026.

Regional humanitarian conditions deteriorate sharply. In Iran, prolonged conflict, economic isolation, and political fragmentation trigger mass displacement, with fuel shortages, currency depreciation, and inflation severely restricting access to food, medicine, and basic services. Cross-border flows into Armenia, Türkiye, and Turkmenistan surge, overwhelming reception systems; border closures risk pushing people into irregular crossings and onward migration towards Europe. European measures to contain the flow are likely to create protection concerns for migrants. In **Iraq**, armed groups' entanglement in the conflict exposes Iranian-backed factions to intensified strikes, while tensions between Baghdad and the Kurdistan regional government – over oil revenues from Kurdish-operated exports, border security, and governance – risk widening into internal conflict, further eroding state capacity to respond to humanitarian needs. In **Lebanon**, mass displacement persists with limited return prospects, while pressure on the Government to curtail Hezbollah risks triggering internal confrontation and communal violence. In **Yemen**, Houthi re-entry into the conflict would invite retaliatory strikes on key ports, severely disrupting both commercial and humanitarian supply chains and deepening food insecurity. In **Gulf states**, attacks on water desalination plants disrupt water supplies for homes and agriculture.

Global ripple effects are more severe than in Scenario 2. Slower economic growth prompts donor governments to reprioritise domestic budgets, reducing allocations to international aid at precisely the moment needs are rising. A sustained reduction in Gulf oil exports pushes China, India, and others towards greater reliance on Russian oil, indirectly fuelling the conflict in Ukraine and further complicating the geopolitical landscape.

Food security risks intensify as multiple systemic shocks compound. Disruptions to Gulf energy and fertiliser exports tighten global nitrogen supplies, reducing cereal yields, while higher diesel and fertiliser costs hit agricultural production.

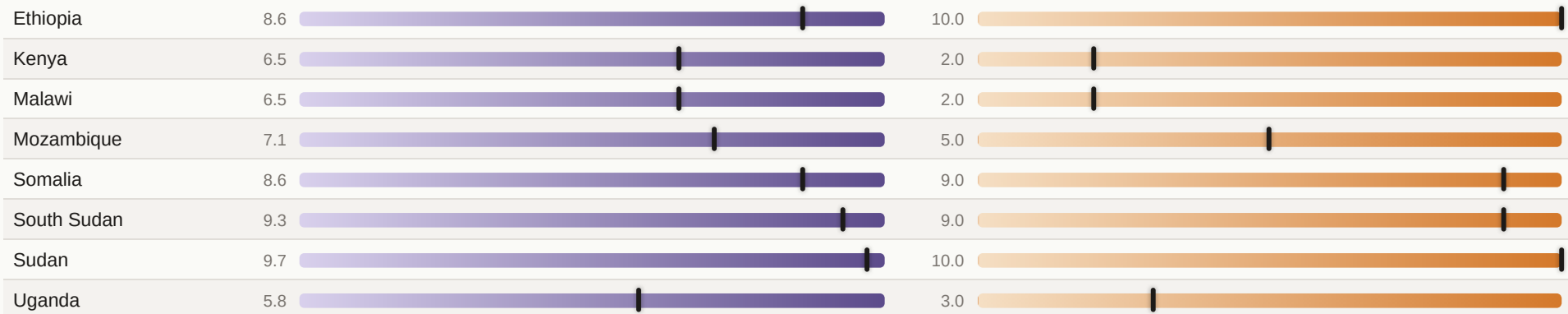


INFORM SEVERITY SCORE

ACCESS CONSTRAINTS SCORE

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

EAST AFRICA



NORTH AFRICA



CENTRAL AFRICA



EUROPE

