

THE MENA WEEKLY



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Key Takeaways

- Iran — US and Iran exchange attacks — **SEVERE**
- Syria — Remnants of Assad's chemical weapons programme recovered — **HIGH**
- Israel/Lebanon — Israel pounds Lebanon with strikes and ground operations — **SEVERE**
- Libya — Libya deepens energy cooperation with Turkey — **SEVERE**

Iran — US and Iran exchange attacks — **SEVERE**

Situation Update

On 25 May 2026, the United States (US) [launched](#) a new wave of attacks on southern Iran, targeting Iranian missile sites and boats attempting to place mines. According to a statement published by US Central Command (CENTCOM), the strikes were in “self-defence” and designed “to protect our troops from threats posed by Iranian forces”. The attacks targeted an area near Bandar Abbas, a southern port city and home of an Iranian naval base that sits on the Strait of Hormuz. The following day, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) claimed it had downed a US drone and fired at a fighter jet and another drone that entered Iranian airspace. Then, on 28 May 2026, the IRGC [released](#) a statement claiming it had struck a base used by US forces to conduct the attack near Bandar Abbas Airport. However, details regarding the location of the base were not provided. Later on the same day, the US said a missile shot by Iran towards Kuwait had been successfully intercepted.

Assessment/Impact/Business Implications

The latest escalation casts doubt on the negotiations between the two sides for a peace agreement. While neither country has stated that the ceasefire has collapsed, the situation is becoming increasingly dangerous. Despite the attacks, US President Donald Trump has reiterated his desire to make a deal happen. Although escalating rhetoric further illustrates the differences between the two countries; Iranian Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei has asserted that the Middle East “will no longer serve as shields for US bases”. While US Secretary of State Marco Rubio has again stressed that Iran’s actions regarding the Strait of Hormuz are “illegal”.

With it being over 50 days since the US-Iran ceasefire came into force on 08 April 2026, Trump is in an unenviable position. Pivoting between escalation and diplomacy appears to be a deliberate strategy to try and break the strategic deadlock at a time when the dual blockades remain in place in the Strait of Hormuz. With the European Union [warning](#) that the jet fuel market is set to “become increasingly tighter” if disruptions continue in the coming weeks, pressure is likely to grow on Trump to agree to a deal with favourable terms for Iran. Although with questions regarding how much oil storage [capacity](#) Iran has left before facing costly shutdowns of its oil fields, pressure on Tehran is also growing. The situation creates a balancing act whereby Trump must consider the growing political and economic consequences of the war and the closure of the Strait, while Iran weighs the economic concerns and their potential knock-on impacts for the regime.

Factor	Risk Rating	Factor	Risk Rating
Political	SEVERE	Business	SEVERE
Economic	SEVERE	Conflict	SEVERE
Civil Unrest	HIGH	Environment	HIGH
Crime	HIGH	Legal	HIGH

Iran — Internet starts coming back after months-long blackout — **SEVERE**

Situation Update

Internet access has begun to return in Iran after an unprecedented nationwide [blackout](#) that lasted 88 days, the longest national shutdown of its kind on record. The restoration remains partial and heavily controlled, with [connectivity](#) still well below normal levels and many major platforms continuing to face restrictions. Reports indicate that some residential users and selected mobile networks in Tehran have seen services resume, while broader access remains uneven and heavily filtered. Officials have described the process as a phased and regulated [restoration](#) rather than a full reopening.

The move is significant because the blackout had become one of the clearest signs of the Iranian state’s willingness to use digital isolation as a tool of wartime control and domestic repression. The shutdown devastated the digital economy, cut off communication with the outside world, and left many households, workers, and businesses operating in conditions of prolonged uncertainty. At the same time, the restoration does not amount to a return to the pre-blackout environment. Access remains heavily restricted, and key services still require workarounds such as VPNs, while the authorities continue to favour a model in which connectivity is granted selectively and under state supervision.

Assessment/Impact/Business Implications

For businesses, the partial restoration is positive in the narrow sense that it may gradually improve communications, payments, logistics coordination, and access to customers after months of severe disruption. However, the key takeaway is that Iran’s digital environment remains unstable, politicised, and vulnerable to renewed restrictions at short notice. Firms with exposure to online commerce, digital services, cross-border communications, or remote operations should not treat the return of connectivity as a restoration of normal conditions. The blackout demonstrated how quickly the state can sever [access](#), while the current phased reopening shows that the government still intends to control the terms of digital participation.

The overall risk remains severe because the restoration is taking place within a system that has not fundamentally changed and the security situation remains extremely dangerous. Iran is emerging from a prolonged period of digital isolation, but the infrastructure of control remains in place and the state’s preference for regulated, selective [internet](#) access is becoming clearer. Any renewed unrest, security incident, or escalation in the regional conflict could quickly lead to new restrictions or another large-scale shutdown.

Factor	Risk Rating	Factor	Risk Rating
Political	SEVERE	Business	SEVERE
Economic	SEVERE	Conflict	SEVERE
Civil Unrest	MODERATE	Environment	HIGH
Crime	HIGH	Legal	SEVERE

Syria — Remnants of Assad's chemical weapons programme recovered — HIGH

Situation Update

On 26 May 2026, Syria's transitional leadership announced that it had [located](#) remnants of former Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's clandestine chemical weapons programme. The discovery included more than 70 rockets and aerial bombs, as well as raw ingredients for the production of sarin, a nerve agent used by Assad's forces in attacks that killed more than 1,300 people in the Damascus suburb of Ghouta in August 2013 and Al-Lataminah in March 2017. Chemical weapon mixing and storage equipment and hexamine, a stabilisation agent used in sarin production, were also found. It is the first time such munitions have been recovered before use.

raw materials and munitions similar to those used to carry out deadly gas attacks during the country's long-running civil war. Additionally, 18 suspects have been taken into custody for alleged involvement in the programme. According to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in The Hague (OPCW), its team visited several high-priority undeclared locations in the northern coastal and central areas with Syrian authorities. Although most of the former regime’s weapons stockpile was supposed to have been [removed](#) in 2013-2014 after it was used to massacre people, some of it remained despite the country joining the OPCW.

Assessment/Impact/Business Implications

With the OPCW declaring that as many as 100 sites across Syria still need to be inspected, the discovery is part of a broader campaign that is set to continue. With Syria still recovering from a 14-year civil war, such developments are crucial for the transitional government to prove to the international community, and particularly the West, that it can be a reliable ally. This is especially important due to concerns over Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa’s former affiliation with the terrorist group Al Qaeda. Failure to achieve this risks countries refusing to remove sanctions that have crippled the country or potentially even placing additional ones on the nation. The Trump administration has demonstrated its preparedness to deal with the Syrian government by [lifting](#) sanctions on the country and [hosting](#) al-Sharaa at the White House in November 2025. However, with the European Union recently choosing to extend sanctions on certain individuals and entities, albeit while removing several entities, some countries are still [approaching](#) the matter with caution. The security landscape in Syria remains highly fragmented and volatile, with the government facing major challenges in establishing unified control. Threats include regional power struggles, sectarian violence, organised crime, and extremism.

Factor	Risk Rating	Factor	Risk Rating
Political	HIGH	Business	SEVERE
Economic	HIGH	Conflict	HIGH
Civil Unrest	HIGH	Environment	MODERATE
Crime	SEVERE	Legal	HIGH

Israel/Lebanon — Israel pounds Lebanon with strikes and ground operations — SEVERE

Situation Update

Israel has intensified its military campaign in Lebanon, carrying out more than 120 [airstrikes](#) in one of the heaviest days of bombing in recent weeks while also [expanding](#) ground operations beyond the so-called “Yellow Line” security zone. The strikes hit southern and eastern Lebanon, including Burj al-Shamali, areas near Beaufort Castle, and the Qaraoun Dam. Lebanese security sources said at least 31 people were killed, with a further 40 wounded, during the latest round of attacks, while Israeli officials confirmed that troops had moved beyond the demarcation zone established earlier in the conflict.

The significance of the latest escalation lies in the fact that it pushes the conflict further beyond the logic of a limited ceasefire and more clearly into renewed offensive operations. The “Yellow Line” was already controversial because it restricted civilians from returning and formalised an occupation-like Israeli military posture in southern Lebanon. Expanding operations beyond it signals that Israel is no longer merely holding a security zone but is willing to widen the area of active military control if it believes Hezbollah remains capable of operating nearby. Hezbollah responded with [drones](#), rockets, and artillery against Israeli positions, reinforcing the cycle of reciprocal escalation rather than any meaningful de-escalation. A recent ceasefire [extension](#) has therefore failed to produce stability or a rapprochement.

Assessment/Impact/Business Implications

For businesses, humanitarian actors, and infrastructure planners, the latest escalation confirms that the operating environment in Lebanon remains extremely unstable despite previous ceasefire efforts. The scale of the air campaign, the widening of ground operations, and the continued use of drones and artillery all point to a conflict that is becoming more entrenched rather than more contained. Access, reconstruction, insurance, staffing, and aid delivery are therefore likely to remain severely constrained, particularly in the south and east. The expansion beyond the Yellow Line also makes civilian return less likely in the near term and raises the risk of further destruction to homes, roads, utilities, and local economic networks.

The overall risk is severe because the conflict has moved further into a pattern of sustained escalation with no convincing indication that diplomacy can reverse the trend. The combination of intensive bombing, expanded ground operations, Hezbollah retaliation, and mounting casualties indicates that the Israel-Lebanon relationship is deteriorating further rather than stabilising. For any organisation with exposure to Lebanon, the practical reality is that the conflict now poses overlapping security, humanitarian, political, and infrastructure risks on a scale that leaves little room for normal planning or recovery.

Factor	Risk Rating	Factor	Risk Rating
Political	SEVERE	Business	HIGH
Economic	HIGH	Conflict	SEVERE
Civil Unrest	HIGH	Environment	MODERATE
Crime	LOW	Legal	LOW

Saudi Arabia — 1.7 million Muslims gather for Hajj 1447 AH — HIGH

Situation Update

On 26 May 2026, corresponding to the ninth day of Dhul-Hijjah and known as the Day of Arafah, Saudi Arabia’s General Authority for Statistics (GASTAT) [announced](#) that “the total number of pilgrims for the 1447 AH Hajj season reached 1,707,301”. The Hajj, which represents one of the five pillars of Islam, saw the participation of 1,546,655 international pilgrims from 165 registered nationalities, alongside 160,646 domestic pilgrims, including both Saudi citizens and residents. To undertake this annual pilgrimage, which every Muslim in good health and with sufficient financial means is expected to perform at least once in their lifetime, 893,396 men and 813,905 women travelled to Saudi Arabia through various entry points. While 1,485,729 people arrived by air, 54,429 made the journey via land and 6,497 by sea. Against the backdrop of ongoing regional conflicts, the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) [reported](#) that approximately 30,000 Iranians took part in the pilgrimage. In the same context, around 6,600 Palestinian pilgrims [reached](#) Mecca to participate in this globally significant spiritual event. With temperatures approaching 45°C, pilgrims are spending the five days of the pilgrimage between the holy city of Mecca, the valley of Mina, the area of Muzdalifah, and Mount Arafat.

Assessment/Impact/Business Implications

The Hajj is taking place within a regional context shaped by the conflict involving the US and Israel with Iran, in which Saudi Arabia, while not intending to take part directly, has nevertheless been [targeted](#) by “hundreds of ballistic missile and drone attacks” launched by Tehran. In light of recent developments and the [politicisation](#) of the Hajj by the Iranian leadership, the security impact remains high, as [demonstrated](#) by the deployment of drones and the use of surveillance technologies to monitor crowds and prevent unauthorised access. Despite the extensive control exercised by the Saudi authorities, the risk of crimes such as pickpocketing and document theft persists, alongside financial scams [linked](#) to travel packages or permits not properly registered through the Nusuk Hajj platform.

Although the Hajj is religious in nature, the risk of unrest cannot be ruled out, particularly in connection with the ongoing conflict. Nevertheless, any such attempts are swiftly contained by the Saudi authorities, preserving the apolitical character of the pilgrimage while reinforcing its role as an instrument of soft power. From an environmental and operational perspective, the impact remains significant. The country, in addition to extreme temperatures, also faces problems such as water stress, waste management, and carbon emissions resulting from large-scale travel. Economically, the pilgrimage delivers substantial financial returns to the transport industry, telecommunications, hospitality, retail, and the livestock sector. However, companies must also contend with risks linked to overbooking, labour shortages, and supply chain disruptions caused by logistical bottlenecks and storage limitations.

Factor	Risk Rating	Factor	Risk Rating
Political	HIGH	Business	SEVERE
Economic	HIGH	Conflict	HIGH
Civil Unrest	MODERATE	Environment	SEVERE
Crime	MODERATE	Legal	MODERATE

Libya — Libya deepens energy cooperation with Turkey — HIGH

Situation Update

On 22 May 2026, during the Istanbul Natural Resources Summit (INRES), Libya’s Minister of Oil and Gas, Khalifa Abdul Sadiq, [met](#) with Turkey’s Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Alparslan Bayraktar, to discuss measures aimed at strengthening bilateral cooperation in the oil, gas, and energy sectors. The meeting followed the 22nd Session of the Turkey-Libya Joint Economic Commission Meeting held in January 2026, during which Bayraktar [stated](#) that “2026 will be a landmark year in Turkey-Libya cooperation”. During the talks, the two delegations explored opportunities to expand investments and deepen cooperation with international energy companies. With a view to enhancing energy securitisation and sustainable development, primarily in the Mediterranean region, both ministers reiterated the importance of developing joint strategic projects. In this context, Libya placed particular emphasis on increasing national production rates, expanding gas-related projects, and modernising local infrastructure, including the Greenstream pipeline, which stretches for 516km and [connects](#) Mellitah in Libya to Gela in Sicily.

Assessment/Impact/Business Implications

The strengthening of the energy partnership between Tripoli and Ankara, as [demonstrated](#) by the study of offshore areas under the agreement between the National Oil Corporation (NOC) and the Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO), aims to increase investment in the Mediterranean. This cooperation, reflecting a growing trend in energy diplomacy, is nonetheless confronted by two key factors: Libya’s internal fragility and geopolitical resistance linked to control over gas transit routes. In Libya, the security of energy assets remains vulnerable due to political fragmentation and the presence of multiple armed groups involved in the militarisation of resources.

Legally, although the meeting does not present direct risks, its implications reveal a more complex picture. The Turkish-Libyan partnership lies at the centre of controversy, as Greece, Cyprus, and Egypt [consider](#) the maritime cooperation between the two countries to constitute a threat to their Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs). Alongside this regulatory uncertainty, there is also the risk of temporary shutdowns of Libyan facilities, such as those affecting the Azzawiya Oil Refinery, or episodes of unrest similar to those at the El Sharara oil field. From an environmental perspective, the impact appears moderate. The modernisation of infrastructure [enables](#) the recovery of natural gas previously lost through flaring, while offshore exploration activities place pressure on marine ecosystems. Although the renewal of facilities entails high costs, the economic potential is significant, with the possibility of increased exports and more investment opportunities. However, businesses face uncertainties about EEZs and Libya’s alliance with Turkey that might leave traditional European partners at a disadvantage by offering preferential exploration and drilling routes to Ankara.

Factor	Risk Rating	Factor	Risk Rating
Political	MODERATE	Business	HIGH
Economic	HIGH	Conflict	HIGH
Civil Unrest	HIGH	Environment	MODERATE
Crime	HIGH	Legal	HIGH

Morocco — Morocco cracks down on illegal migration to Europe — MODERATE

Situation Update

Recent reports [indicate](#) that Morocco is intensifying its crackdown on irregular migration. The country is specifically targeting sub-Saharan Africans migrating to Europe and passing through its territory, reportedly arresting more than 100 per day since 14 April 2026. Authorities are beginning to move their operations around Tangier, while claims of human rights abuses, including mass arrests, abuse, beatings, and forced [transfers](#) to Algeria, are rising. The reports come amid the enhanced migration pact with the European Union (EU), renewing cooperation with Morocco as part of its border externalisation strategy through the Pact on Migration and Asylum, set to begin in June 2026.

Assessment/Impact/Business Implications

North African countries are often used by the European Union (EU) as a way to [outsource](#) immigration enforcement. Morocco serves as a key transit country for sub-Saharan Africans migrating to Europe, often coming into the country from Mauritania. As such, the government has increased its cooperation with Frontex throughout the years. Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, has long come under fire for its interception and treatment of undocumented immigrants, leading to the development of a regional campaign against the institution called “Abolish Frontex”. Human rights abuse allegations originate from NGOs such as the Red Cross and Human Rights Watch, and incorporate accusations of abuse, torture, trafficking, enslavement, humiliation, mistreatment, and more. Additionally, the ongoing war in Sudan and the tangential growth of human trafficking networks in neighbouring countries like Libya, levy an additional pressure on the border control system and are likely to continue doing so until the foreseeable future.

Another element of the EU-led migration pact with Morocco means the widespread implementation of biometric surveillance and monitoring of previously passed countries before reaching the EU. Countries including Morocco, Egypt, and Turkey are thought of as the type of countries used by irregular migrants to obtain illegal passage to Europe, hence often making their application to enter the union more likely to be rejected.

The EU Pact on Migration and Asylum ultimately serves to spread the costs and efforts of hosting and deporting asylum seekers in the EU, as well as strengthening the continent’s [border](#) security. However, [predictions](#) suggest that states of first entry may experience increased pressures, leading to a rise in potential human rights violations at the border. In the future, one could probably note a rise in asylum application rejections as “asylum processing” becomes outsourced to transitory states.

Factor	Risk Rating	Factor	Risk Rating
Political	MODERATE	Business	LOW
Economic	MODERATE	Conflict	LOW
Civil Unrest	MODERATE	Environment	LOW
Crime	LOW	Legal	MODERATE

Morocco — Morocco continues preparations for FIFA World Cup — LOW

Situation Update

A Reuters [report](#) has suggested that the new 115,000-seat stadium is nearly 30% complete after nine months of construction, with almost 40% of the tribunes finished. Essential to Morocco’s plan to host the final of the 2030 FIFA World Cup, officials of the project stated that construction is being carried out 24/7 to meet the 2027 completion target. The complex is expected to cost almost US\$1 billion total on a site just outside Casablanca, projected to

become the largest football stadium in the world once completed. This more widely reflects Morocco’s plan to position itself as a leading venue [contender](#) for the 2030 tournament final. Spanish media, citing the EFE-style reporting and site visits, were reportedly impressed by the progress as venues like Madrid’s Santiago Bernabéu work as front-runner contenders to host the final. The amount of achieved progress indicates the sense of mobilisation and scale around the project.

Assessment/Impact/Business Implications

The completion of the stadium is meant to reflect Moroccan heritage and pride, showcasing a tent-inspired roof structure that allows natural light into the arena. Public transportation upgrades are also due around the arena, including the highways and railway links from the site to Casablanca, as well as Rabat. Hosting the FIFA World Cup is a point of prestige for a nation in terms of building the facilities for the arena and attracting sufficient global attention to host the final. Billions are spent leading up to the World Cup, framed as an economic opportunity for the country. Indeed, the event promises renewed [opportunities](#) in tourism, job creation, global visibility, and investment attractiveness. This is mainly due to the high international visibility of the event, as well as the conditional success of the development of infrastructure, logistics, and security capacity of the tournament. While the costs of hosting the event can be quite substantial, research also indicates that the benefits go beyond the short-term, allowing for development mechanisms and structures to attract future investments in upkeep and further development outward.

Factor	Risk Rating	Factor	Risk Rating
Political	MODERATE	Business	MODERATE
Economic	MODERATE	Conflict	LOW
Civil Unrest	LOW	Environment	LOW
Crime	LOW	Legal	LOW

Global SA Risk Methodology

THREAT LEVEL RATING	
SCORE	LEVEL
5	SEVERE
4	HIGH
3	MODERATE
2	LOW
1	MINIMAL



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