Committee: OPEC
Topic: The impact of escalating tensions in the Strait of Hormuz on global energy security and oil market stability.
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Overview of the Problem

The Strait of Hormuz is a narrow sea passage that separates Iran and the Arabian Peninsula, approximately 25% of the world's seaborne oil exports pass through it, which makes it one of the most vital oil checkpoints in the world. On February 28, 2026, amidst the Iran war that was initiated by the U.S and Israel, Iran closed the Strait of Hormuz due to Israeli attacks triggered by the U.S. This led to a 95% drop in traffic, resulting in disruptions to global energy markets. Petroleum products and natural gas were greatly affected, which resulted in price changes for these commodities. Delegates advocate the agreement, addressing the ongoing conflict in the Strait of Hormuz.

Introduction

Connecting the Gulf to the Arabian Sea, the Strait of Hormuz is bordered by Iran to the north, with Oman and the United Arab Emirates to the south. The waterway spans roughly 50 km wide at both its entrance and exit, narrowing to nearly 33 km at its tightest point. With depths ranging between 60 and 100 meters, it easily accommodates the world's largest crude oil tankers. Major Middle Eastern producers of oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG), along with their global customers, rely on this passage. Because of its sheer width, sustaining a shipping disruption here over an extended period remains difficult for any nation, including Iran.

It is one of the world's busiest shipping channels, providing one fifth of all the world's oil and LNG shipping. In 2025, roughly 20 million barrels of oil and oil products passed through the strait per day, according to calculations from the US Energy Information Administration (EIA). That is nearly $600bn worth of energy trade per year, the oil comes not only from Iraq but other states such as Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.(EIA, 2025)

On February 28, 2026, the United States of America (US) and Israel struck Iran; Tehran retaliated not only against its two adversaries and their interests regarding the Gulf, but also by closing the Strait of Hormuz and sending shockwaves through the global economy.

Global fuel prices have soared since then, and been volatile depending on agreements to halt hostilities for nations to discuss to come to an agreement to end the conflict, which often have been broken.

About 3,000 ships used to sail through the strait each month, but this has decreased significantly during recent hostilities, with Iran threatening to attack tankers and other ships. Iranian drones, missiles, fast attack boats and potentially mines presented serious difficulties to boats seeking to use the waterway.

This is a global issue that is affecting worldwide economy, electricity, and fuel supplies, some of the most affected regions are:

Asia, the disruption in the strait hit hard, with China alone estimated to buy approximately 90% of the oil that Iran exports to the global market; Asia's fuel crisis continues to have a significant impact to daily life; governments ordered employees to work from home, cut the working week, declared national holidays and closed universities early in order to conserve their supplies. (Butler et al., 2026)

Governments in South Sudan and Mauritius have both declared measures to curb power usage across Africa. Meanwhile, Nigeria's Dangote Petroleum Refinery, the largest on the continent, reassured the public that closing the strait would not impact domestic fuel distribution, even as it raised prices for both petrol and diesel. These latest rate hikes contribute to a six week trend in Nigeria that has driven petrol costs up by approximately 47% overall. (Butler et al., 2026)

In Europe, Slovenia became the first EU member state to implement fuel rationing.

The price arbitrage for US LNG currently favors Europe over Asia, according to traders, providing an incentive for Atlantic cargoes to remain in the region into October. Europe is projected to absorb about a quarter of global LNG supplies in September, up from less than 19% in July, according to Kpler. (Kpler, 2024)

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) is not a security institution, therefore it lacks authorization to sanction with military action or the request of ceasefire between countries; taking this into consideration this committee may coordinate production levels, analyze measures to safeguard and expand export routes that bypass the strait, such as pipelines and alternative terminals, thereby reducing global dependence on a single maritime chokepoint.

This background paper is intended to equip delegates with the knowledge necessary to participate effectively in the committee's deliberations. Through a review of the history, and economics of the Strait of Hormuz, delegates will obtain a clear understanding of why this waterway is one of the most critical chokepoints in the global energy system, and how its physical characteristics shape both its strategic value and its vulnerability to disruption. They will also be able to follow the development of the current crisis, from the strikes of February 28, 2026 to the ongoing interruption of commercial shipping, and to identify the regions most severely affected, as well as the ways in which the crisis has reached ordinary citizens through rising fuel prices, rationing, and emergency energy-saving measures.

Historical Background

The Iran-Iraq war began in September 1980, when Iraq invaded Iran after the Islamic Revolution. The war ended in August 1988 when the UN imposed a ceasefire. From 1981, the war spread to sea in the “Tanker War”, in which both countries attacked ships connected to each other's economy in the Gulf. Iran carried out 168 attacks and Iraq 283. Iran threatened to close the strait but never acted on it, since its own oil exports depended on it. Because of the conflict the United States launched Operation Earnest Will in 1987 which protected Kuwaiti oil tankers passing through the Strait. However, this operation could not guarantee the safety of every ship, several would still strike mines and receive attacks.

The Strait of Hormuz crisis commenced on February 28, 2026, when a military campaign by the United States and Israel launched airstrikes against Iran, killing Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Iran retaliated by attacking ships in the Strait. The number of vessels traversing the Strait dropped, which caused prices to escalate.

In the months that followed, the United States imposed a naval blockade and Iranian forces started attacking vessels (Security Council Report, 2026), placing submarine mines, and closing the Strait to all traffic repeatedly. Parts of Asia experienced immediate fuel shortages, blackouts, and had to acquire different measures to preserve limited energy supplies.

On April 7, 2026, the United States and Iran agreed to a temporary ceasefire. Iran agreed to allow ships safe passage through the Strait. However, Israel persisted in its bombardment of Lebanon, an arena that Iran considered to be part of the ceasefire agreement, despite the U.S denials; Iran proceeded to restrict access to the Strait once again. The United States resumed its blockade of the Strait on April 13 due to failed negotiations with Iran. This blockade prevented the passage of any ships transiting through Iranian ports.

In June 2026, President Donald Trump and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian signed a memorandum of understanding. Both parties agreed the U.S would lift its

blockade and Iran “will make arrangements…for the safe passage of commercial vessels with no charge for 60 days…” including negotiating with Oman and the other Gulf states “to define the future administration… in the Strait of Hormuz.” (Congressional Research Service, 2026, March 11). On July 6 and 7 Iran attacked three ships as they passed through an alternate route along Omani coastal waters. Therefore, on July 8, 2026, Iran announced that the Strait was closed once again and the United States revived the naval blockade.

The Situation Today

October 2026 is the worst month for shipping attacks yet. The Washington Institute for Near East Policy has recorded 28 confirmed attacks in October alone and 113 since the war started (Reuters, 2026a). The U.S military reports that 100 million barrels of oil and 400 ships passed through the Strait in one week mid-October, while Iran claims it controls the waterway and that vessels on "unauthorised" routes are at risk of mines. IMF PortWatch recorded only 4 transits in October 18, against a pre-crisis reference point of 85 per day. October 17, 2026 Iran claimed another two tankers struck mines, and Qatar urged Tehran to reopen the Strait while U.S regulations remained.

The two sides of the conflict disagree on who has the authority to administer the Strait, Iran continues to assert sovereignty and the U.S insists on freedom of navigation. This causes negotiations to be stalled. Iran also reportedly set up a “Persian Gulf Strait Authority”, which has accused several ships of violations. Furthermore, the environmental and humanitarian toll is rising. Approximately 24 seafarers have died because of the attacks.

Asia is the most affected by this crisis. It normally takes about 80% of Gulf oil exports and 90% of LNG shipments. India gets an estimated 90% of its LPG imports from the Middle East, and shortages have affected millions of people who rely on LPG for cooking fuel. Europe is affected through energy prices and recession risk, given that

12-14% of its LNG came from Qatar through the strait (Hellenic Shipping News, n.d). For Africa and low resource countries, the main issue is food. About a third of seaborne fertilizer trade passes through the strait (Africa Supply Chain Confederation, 2026), and in parts of East Africa over 50% of imports come via these routes (Africa Supply Chain Confederation, April, 2026). UNCTAD named Sudan, Tanzania, and Somalia among the countries likely to be the most affected.

With the scale of the crisis now clear, it is important to consider how it is affecting industries and governments. India, for example, sources around 90% of its LPG imports from the Middle East, meaning the disruption has limited the access to basic cooking fuel for millions of households that rely on it daily (Oilprice.com, n.d). Smallholder farmers in East Africa face a similar problem, in some areas nearly half of all fertiliser imports pass through the strait. When shipments get delayed food prices rise.

Key Stakeholders and Their Positions

Saudi Arabia, Russia, Iraq, Kuwait, Kazakhstan, Algeria, and Oman reaffirm commitment to market stability; The seven OPEC+ countries, which previously announced additional voluntary adjustments in April and November 2023, met virtually on October 4 2026, to discuss global market conditions and outlook. The seven participating countries decided to maintain September 2026 required production for November 2026 as detailed in the table below, they also reiterated their collective commitment to achieve full conformity with declaration of cooperation. These countries will continue to hold monthly meetings to review market options. The next meeting will be held in November 2026.(OPEC, 2026)

November 2026 Required Production Table (kbd)

Country	Required Production (kbd)
Algeria	1,007
Iraq	4,431
Kuwait	2,676
Saudi Arabia	10,478
Kazakhstan	1,628
Oman	841
Russia	9,949

Beyond the OPEC+ producers, a few states shape the crisis most. Iran claims a sovereign role in the strait and has built the machinery to enforce it. It created the Persian Gulf Strait Authority to approve transits and collect payment from ships. Iran and Oman have said they will study charges for services in administering the strait, and both insist they hold sovereignty over it. Tehran sees control of the strait as its main source of leverage and as a defensive right. Its UN ambassador has described its measures as lawful self-defence under the UN Charter. The gulf states take the opposite view because they have the most to lose.

Five of them formally rejected the new authority, warning that recognizing it would set a dangerous precedent. Saudi Arabia's foreign minister has said only a return to the pre-war situation is acceptable. The United Arab Emirates has gone its own way, in part because it can export around the strait. It left OPEC and OPEC+ effective May 1, after relations with Saudi Arabia had become strained (Associated Press, 2026). The United States wants the strait open without tolls, and Russia and China block Western-backed UN action. They vetoed a shipping resolution calling it biased against Iran.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) speaks for importing countries and wants flows restored and prices stable. It authorized a 400 million barrel emergency stock release, its largest ever. The International Maritime Organization (IMO) is concerned mainly with safety and the law of the sea. It reported about 20,000 seafarers stranded on roughly 3,200 vessels. The UN Secretary General also created a task force on humanitarian mechanisms for the strait, which includes the IMO and UNCTAD. (De Nert, 2026)

The International Transport Workers Federation (ITF) represents seafarers. It supports evacuation corridors, but only if they are genuinely safe in practice. Its concern is that crews are being used as pawns in a conflict they didn't choose.

National producers such as Saudi Aramco and ADNOC want to keep exporting and to build routes that do not depend on the strait. Shipping lines and insurers want security guarantees before they will send vessels through. Importing industries, from refiners to airlines, want predictable supply and prices.

Ordinary consumers feel the crisis through fuel and electricity costs throughout Asia, Africa, and Europe. Seafarers and their families face a more direct danger, since crews were stuck for months with dwindling supplies.

Positions follow exposure. Countries with no alternative route, or that cannot export without the strait, want it reopened under the old rules. Iran uses it as leverage. Importers want stability. Producers with bypass routes can afford more independent policies. Workers and civilians want safety above all.

Past Attempts and Existing Frameworks

The UN Security Council has produced one binding response and one notable failure. On March 11 it adopted a Bahrain sponsored resolution, 13-0 with Russia and China abstaining, condemning Iran's attacks and its actions in the strait as a threat to international peace and security. A stronger follow-up did not pass. On April 7 a Bahrain drafted resolution won 11 votes but was defeated by Russian and Chinese vetoes, with Colombia and Pakistan abstaining. In May the US and Bahrain co-sponsored a new draft, backed by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait and Qatar, requiring Iran to stop attacks, mining, and tolling. (De Nert, 2026)

The IMO established a humanitarian evacuation corridor, but its Secretary General said it could not be activated until ships were safe from attack. After the June agreement it launched an evacuation of more than 11,000 seafarers, with Oman providing a temporary corridor. The US also announced “Project Freedom”, under which it would guide ships out of restricted waterways beginning May 4. (De Nert, 2026)

To bypass the Strait of Hormuz, which typically handles around 20 million barrels per day; Gulf nations are leaning heavily on alternative infrastructure. Pipelines in Saudi Arabia and the UAE currently provide a theoretical workaround of roughly 8.5 million barrels per day. According to Goldman Sachs estimates, upcoming developments, such as Iraqi routes passing through Turkey and Syria, could increase bypass capacity by an additional 3.8 million barrels per day by late 2027. Meanwhile, discussions regarding the future administration of the strait have commenced between Iran and Oman, while governments across Europe and Asia have implemented remote work policies and energy rationing to manage supply pressures.

Stock releases and pipelines softened the shock, and the IMO's work eventually allowed an evacuation. The Security Council could not agree on a coordinated response, and the corridor could not be used until security improved. OPEC+ production also remained roughly 5 million per day below pre-war levels in August.

Three things stand out. Bypass routes cover less than half of normal flows. There is no agreed framework on who may administer the strait or charge for its use, and no mechanism exists currently to guarantee safe passage that Iran, the US, and the Gulf states all agree on.

Challenges and Complications

The states disagree over how to end the crisis and on who controls the waterway. The U.S and Iran both claim control of the strait. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates can divert some of their exports through pipelines that avoid the strait, however Qatar, Kuwait, and Bahrain have no alternate routes. Oman and Qatar have kept open channels to Iran and served as mediators, while other Gulf states have taken a harder line.

The capacity to clear mines is limited. Iran is estimated to possess between 2,000 and 6,000 naval mines (Reuters, 2026b), while the United States and the United Kingdom reduced their mine-clearing forces in the Gulf shortly before the conflict began. Clearance operations are also lengthy with estimates ranging from 40 days to six months. Furthermore war-risk insurance premiums may remain high after clearance is complete which would discourage shipping companies from resuming transit. Import-dependent economies in Asia and Africa are the least able to absorb these costs.

Under the United Nations Convention on the Law of Sea (UNCLOS) vessels have the right of transit passage through straits used for navigation and this right may not be suspended. Iran signed this Convention in 1982 but has not approved it and argues that the strict rules of innocent passage still apply. The Council of the International Maritime Organization has encouraged member states to not recognise claims of dominion over the strait.

The dispute has grown since Iran launched the Persian Gulf Strait Authority, which declares authority over shipping lanes inside Omani and Emirati waters. The use of transit fees would be inconsistent with the freedom of navigation guaranteed by the law.

The Committee's Role and Powers

OPEC´s Statute names its principal aim as coordinating members' petroleum policies and stabilizing prices. The committee's powers are therefore economic: coordinating production, sharing market data, supporting bypass infrastructure, and engaging with customers. It cannot authorize force, impose sanctions, or reopen the strait. On November 1, 2026, the seven core OPEC+ countries agreed to keep September production requirements unchanged for December (Vanguard, 2026). An analyst expects the larger decision at the November 29 meeting, which will set the 2027 production framework.

Delegates will write a position paper, a short, formal statement of their assigned country´s stance on the topic. A strong position paper summarizes the country´s interests and its role in the crisis, explains its past actions and current policy, and proposes solutions that fit OPEC's economic powers. It should be written in the voice of the delegation and should reflect the country's real interests, including whether it has bypass routes, depends on the strait, or has a stake in the dispute over administration of the waterway. The position paper is the foundation for the delegate's speeches and negotiations in committee.

OPEC is an independent intergovernmental organization, not a UN body. It cooperates with the IEA, the IMO, and the UN system on a voluntary basis. In practice, delegates can propose dialogue with the IEA on stock releases, support IMO humanitarian work, and call on the Security Council to act, but they cannot direct any of them.

The debate follows the SUNS rules of procedure. Delegates represent their assigned country throughout, address the chair and other delegates formally, and speak only when recognized. They are expected to use the committee´s standard tools.

Guiding Questions for Debate

1. Should a country be allowed to restrict passage during a conflict?
2. Which organization should be responsible for keeping the Strait of Hormuz secure?
3. What could be done to ensure an agreement is followed, given that the states do not trust each other?
4. Why do Gulf countries still disagree on how to deal with Iran and what could bring them closer together?
5. How can shipping companies be convinced that the strait is safe, even after navies claim the mines have been cleared?
6. Is it possible to protect freedom of navigation without addressing Iran's security concerns?
7. How can the committee deal with the need to reopen the strait while also reducing the world's reliance on one narrow shipping route?
8. What should countries that depend on imported energy and fertilizer do to help find a solution?
9. Who should clear the mines, a neutral international mission or the countries whose waters are affected?

Conclusion and Call to Action

The disruption of the Strait of Hormuz affects households that depend on cooking gas in South Asia, farmers who rely on fertilizer imports in East Africa and economies that depend on stable energy prices. Action is needed now because the consequences grow with each month of disruption. Attacks on ships reached a record level in October 2026 (Reuters, 2026c), and food prices continue to affect the most vulnerable countries. Delegates will make a difference by seeking solutions that respect the international law while discussing the concerns of every state involved, by proposing practical measures for mine clearance, verification and humanitarian relief, and by encouraging dialogue among states whose positions are different. The tension surrounding the strait is a challenge for the entire community, and it is within the power of this committee to take the first step toward a durable and shared solution.

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