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STRATEGIC INTELLIGENCE BRIEF · AVIATION & CORRIDORS

The Ceasefire Didn't Hold.

The Map Has Hardened.

An update to the 10 April 2026 aviation hub-shift brief, reflecting the US naval blockade of Iranian ports, the failure of the Islamabad talks, and the operational divergence that is now locked in between the Gulf hubs and Istanbul.

VERSION

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DISTRIBUTION

Kickoff briefing list

SITUATION

OI What changed between 10 and 14 April

The v1.0 thesis was that the ceasefire had changed the headlines but not the operational map. In four days, the thesis has hardened: the map is now worse, and it is locked in through Q2.

THE BLOCKADE

On **13 April 2026**, the United States imposed a naval blockade on Iranian ports. US Central Command announced the blockade took effect at 10:00 ET and applies to all vessels entering or departing Iranian ports and coastal areas. It formally permits transit through the Strait of Hormuz for vessels bound to or from non-Iranian ports, but in practice the strait has been largely blocked since 28 February and remains contested.

THE CEASEFIRE STATUS

The Islamabad talks, intended to convert the two-week pause into a durable agreement, failed on 12 April. The ceasefire technically runs through 22 April, but Iran has accused Israel and the United States of violating the pause with recent strikes in Lebanon. Iran has further said it will treat the entry of military vessels near the strait as a breach and will respond accordingly.

THE AVIATION OVERLAY

EASA extended Conflict Zone Information Bulletin **CZIB 2026-03 R5** on 9 April, directing EU air operators to avoid airspace over Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Qatar, UAE, Oman, and Saudi Arabia until at least 24 April 2026. Short-notice full closures of Bahrain, UAE, and Qatari airspace remain possible. FAA has maintained heightened caution advisories for the region through May.

BOARD-LEVEL TAKEAWAY

Any Q2 plan that assumed Gulf connectivity returning to normal by April should be rebuilt. Planning baseline: Gulf aviation compromised into Q3 2026 at the earliest, European flag carriers not operating to Dubai, Doha, Abu Dhabi, or Bahrain before June, and war-risk insurance structurally higher on all Gulf routings.

Istanbul is the only regional hub operating at pre-war capacity with no airspace restrictions and no insurance penalty. Turkish overland and pipeline corridors have moved from theoretical to operational substitutes for constrained Hormuz flows.

KEY DATA

02 The numbers as of 14 April 2026

GULF CAPACITY 52% of pre-war levels, 6 days after ceasefire	JET FUEL 2× pre-war price; crude up only 50%	WAR-RISK INSURANCE +40–60% mild end; 500% at peak	LHR-SIN DETOUR +6h 16–19h vs. 13h pre-war
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Gulf airline recovery index

FLIGHTRADAR24 CAPACITY, 10 APRIL 2026 (PRE-BLOCKADE SNAPSHOT)

CARRIER	STATUS	FLIGHTS	% OF PRE-WAR
Emirates	Partial recovery	384 / 531	72%
Etihad	Partial recovery	212 / 334	63%
flydubai	Reduced schedule	151 / ~300	~50%
Air Arabia	Reduced schedule	148 / ~300	~50%
Qatar Airways	Very limited	202 / 583	35%
Gulf Air	Grounded — Bahrain airspace closed	—	CLOSED
Kuwait Airways	Grounded — Kuwait base closed	—	CLOSED

Source: Flightradar24 Gulf Airline Recovery Index, 10 April 2026.

International carriers — not flying the Gulf

LOCKED-IN SUSPENSIONS AS OF 14 APRIL 2026

CARRIER	ROUTES SUSPENDED	EARLIEST RESUME
KLM	Dubai, Dammam, Riyadh	17 May 2026
British Airways	Amman, Bahrain, Dubai, Tel Aviv	31 May 2026
British Airways	Doha	30 April 2026
Lufthansa	Abu Dhabi, Amman, Beirut, Muscat, Tehran	24 October 2026
Lufthansa	Dubai, Tel Aviv	31 May 2026
Air France	Multiple Gulf destinations (CZIB 2026-03 R5)	Rolling extension
Korean Air	Seoul–Dubai	Rolling extension
FAA (US)	Heightened caution — full Gulf region	Through May 2026

Sources: KLM press statement; BA, Lufthansa, Air France customer notices; EASA CZIB 2026-03 R5; FAA SFAR updates. All accessed 14 April 2026.

Cost overhang

- **Jet fuel** reached \$4.88/gallon on 2 April, roughly 2× pre-war levels; crude is up only ~50%. The spread reflects refined-product disruption in the Gulf, not a pure oil shock.
- **War-risk insurance** premiums are up 40–60% at the conservative end and 50–500% at the high end, depending on airframe, route, and hull value.
- **Delta Air Lines** disclosed an additional ~\$2B in Q2 2026 fuel costs alone tied to the conflict — a single-airline, single-quarter anchor for sector scale.
- **Rerouting** is adding ~6 hours to London–Singapore (16–19h vs. 13h pre-war), with proportional penalties on other Europe–Asia pairs.
- **IATA** has flagged that the effective closure of the strait is choking off refined product as well as crude, which is why jet fuel is decoupling from the crude benchmark.

Sources: CNBC 7 April 2026; The National 8 April 2026; Euronews Travel 30 March 2026; IATA — Middle East Conflict Exposes Jet Fuel Supply Vulnerabilities.

ANALYSIS

03 A two-speed map, a structural realignment

The operational divergence between the Gulf and Istanbul is now wide enough that treating them as substitutable is a planning error. The Gulf side is contracting on multiple dimensions simultaneously — capacity, cost, insurability, carrier participation — while Istanbul is expanding on each.

The two speeds, side by side

DIMENSION	GULF HUBS	ISTANBUL (IST)
Operating capacity	~52% of pre-war	Full capacity
Airspace restrictions	Active (EASA CZIB)	None
War-risk insurance premium	+40–60% (up to +500% peak)	No penalty
International carriers	4+ majors suspended to May	All majors operating
Base operations	Kuwait & Bahrain bases closed	Handling diverted Gulf traffic
Fuel supply	Months from normal	Stable
2025 passengers	Disrupted	84M (IST) · 92.6M (THY)
Destination network	Fragmented	303+ in 132 countries
Capacity trajectory	Second leg down possible	200M design post-4th runway

Sources: Flightradar24; İGA (Istanbul Airport) 2025 statistics; Turkish Airlines Q1 2026 traffic release; EASA CZIB 2026-03 R5.

Istanbul's advantage is structural, not situational

The Istanbul outperformance is not a short-term windfall tied to the Gulf's misfortune. It is the surfacing of a build-out that predates the war:

- **Istanbul Airport (IST)** handled 84 million passengers in 2025, with 2026 tracking toward the 90 million design target.
- **The 4th main runway** enters service in 2026, unlocking 200M design capacity once remaining phases complete.
- **Turkish Airlines** reported 21.3M passengers in Q1 2026 (+12.7% YoY) and 66.7B ASK (+9.4%); March alone was ~7M passengers (+16%).
- **THY 2025 revenue** was \$24.1B; the network covers 303+ destinations across 132 countries — the largest international network of any carrier.
- **Gulf Air** has added Istanbul as a temporary hub out of Dammam while Bahrain airspace is closed — a direct signal that Gulf carriers see IST as the nearest functioning substitute.
- **THY Middle East capacity** is down 36.1% in March 2026, but this is reallocation, not loss. Aircraft and slots displaced from the Gulf are now flying other routes from Istanbul.

Sources: İGA; Turkish Airlines Q1 2026 traffic release; THY Annual Report 2025; Zawya — Gulf Air Istanbul expansion announcement.

The corridor story has the same shape on the ground

With Hormuz contested and Gulf air freight reduced, Turkish overland and pipeline routes are absorbing a meaningful share of east-west trade flows. The Turkish routes do not replace Hormuz at full throughput — combined overland and pipeline capacity covers ~35–40% of normal Hormuz volume — but they have moved from theoretical to operational in the last six weeks.

ROUTE	FUNCTION	STATUS / THROUGHPUT
Kirkuk–Ceyhan pipeline	Northern Iraqi crude to the Mediterranean	Active since 17 Mar 2026; 170→250 kbpd
Türkiye–Syria–Jordan overland	Passenger & commercial goods to the Gulf	3–4 days transit; KSA 15-day driver visas live
TIR Türkiye–N. Iraq–Kuwait (Khabur)	Containerised freight to the Gulf	4 days vs. 45 days by sea
Development Road (Al-Faw–TR–EU)	Long-horizon Suez alternative	\$24B programme; Phase 1 by 2028

Sources: Reuters on Kirkuk–Ceyhan reopening; Turkish Ministry of Trade announcements; IRU TIR route activation; Al-Faw / Development Road programme documentation.

IMPLICATIONS

04 What this means by audience

For European companies with Gulf exposure

Q2 plans that assumed normal Gulf connectivity must be rebuilt. Expect European flag carriers not operating to Dubai, Doha, Abu Dhabi, or Bahrain before June, and Gulf carriers running at 35–72% of pre-war schedule. Discretionary travel is effectively priced out by insurance and fuel pass-through. Istanbul is the only hub in the region where executive travel and time-sensitive freight operate on pre-war terms.

For Turkish exporters

Two openings are live right now. Gulf markets previously served through Dubai-based distributors can now be reached directly via Türkiye–Syria–Jordan overland transit (3–4 days) or TIR to Kuwait (4 days vs. 45 by sea). Separately, European buyers screening for risk-hedged supplier alternatives are actively evaluating Turkish manufacturers in sectors previously dominated by Gulf-based intermediaries. Neither is theoretical — both are happening in client conversations today.

For Gulf-based companies and expatriate talent

Operations dependent on European or East Asian through-flights should budget for persistent schedule friction into Q3. Istanbul is the practical transit point for executive travel, crew rotation,

and high-value cargo until the Gulf picture clears. Pre-positioning inventory in Turkish bonded warehouses is a live option for businesses previously relying on Jebel Ali. For expatriate professionals and families considering relocation out of conflict-exposed jurisdictions, Istanbul combines operational stability, a deep talent market, and a functioning international network on the doorstep of the Gulf.

RECOMMENDATION

05 90-day action plan

- I** **Rebase Gulf travel and freight assumptions on a Q3 recovery, not Q2**

Treat April–June as a structurally disrupted quarter. Move executive travel, crew rotation, and time-sensitive cargo to Istanbul transit. Renegotiate Q2 supplier and customer SLAs where Gulf connectivity is load-bearing.

OWNER	COO / Supply Chain Lead	TIMELINE	14 days	KPI	% of critical lanes with re-confirmed Q2 alternative	COST OF INACTION	Booked but non-operating routes; delivery penalties
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- 2** **Build an Istanbul operational fallback, not a hypothetical one**

Pre-position inventory in a Turkish bonded warehouse; open at least one THY-served transit corridor for business travel; nominate a local partner that can receive and dispatch on short notice. “Fallback” without confirmed capacity is not a fallback.

OWNER	Regional MD	TIMELINE	30 days	KPI	Istanbul node fully operable for one end-to-end test shipment and one exec round-trip	COST OF INACTION	No operable fallback when Gulf route fails on short notice
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- 3** **Re-price for the insurance and fuel regime, not the pre-war one**

Work through existing contracts and passes through war-risk premium and jet fuel increases on Gulf-touching routes. Assume the spread between crude and jet fuel persists into Q3. Price accordingly on new commitments.

OWNER	CFO	TIMELINE	45 days	KPI	Updated pricing reflected in all Q2/Q3 customer and carrier contracts	COST OF INACTION	Margin compression absorbed, not recovered
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- 4** **Qualify Turkish overland and pipeline routes where the volumes justify it**

For freight lanes currently routed through Jebel Ali or Dammam, run a live-cost comparison against Türkiye–Syria–Jordan overland and TIR-via-Khabur to Kuwait. For energy-adjacent businesses, monitor Kirkuk–Ceyhan throughput as a leading indicator of northern corridor reliability.

OWNER	Logistics Director	TIMELINE	60 days	KPI	At least one lane re-routed via Türkiye where cost/time superior	COST OF INACTION	Missed cost advantage of 4 days vs. 45 days at sea
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For expatriate talent and firms considering relocation — move on Istanbul now, not after the ceasefire

Relocation windows narrow the moment insurance markets soften. Istanbul currently offers zero airspace penalty, a full international network, stable fuel, and a functioning regulatory environment for incorporation, hiring, and banking. Kickoff can support market-entry, incorporation, hiring, and residency on standing rails.

OWNER CEO / HR Lead	TIMELINE 90 days	KPI Istanbul entity stood up or an MoU signed with a local partner	COST OF INACTION Relocation queue extends as the market normalises
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Governance cadence — what to watch over the next 10 days

DATE	SIGNAL	TRAFFIC LIGHT IF WORSE	TRAFFIC LIGHT IF BETTER
22 Apr	Ceasefire expiry — extended, collapsed, or rolled into new talks	Red	Amber
24 Apr	EASA CZIB review — extension or lift	Red	Green
Rolling	Iranian naval response to the blockade	Red	Amber
30 Apr / 17 May / 31 May	BA Doha / KLM Gulf / BA & Lufthansa Gulf resume dates	Amber	Green
Monthly	Kirkuk–Ceyhan throughput sustaining 250 kbpd	Amber	Green

06 SOURCES
Accessed 14 April 2026

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GEOPOLITICS & CEASEFIRE CHRONOLOGY

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ABOUT THIS BRIEF

Version 2.0 updates the 10 April 2026 v1.0 brief to reflect the US naval blockade of Iranian ports and the failure of the Islamabad talks. All figures are sourced and dated; any claim without a source should be treated as analytical inference from the named sources rather than independent verification. Prepared by Kickoff Consulting, Istanbul. kickoff.ist