

Iran war spells danger for global airlines

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AFP | Paris, France

Air routes closed, airports damaged and hundreds of thousands of passengers stranded: the new war in the Middle East has again highlighted the global aviation sector's vulnerability to geopolitical upheaval.

Much of the region's airspace has been shut after the US and Israeli attack on Iran and its retaliatory strikes in the region -- further disrupting a global air-traffic scene already complicated by Russia's war in Ukraine.

Dubai International Airport, Kuwait's main airport and a British military airbase in Cyprus were hit during Iran's response.

Iran, Iraq, Israel, Syria, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates all announced at least partial closures of their skies.

Trump lists 'clear' Iran war objectives

Washington, United States

President Donald Trump on Monday sought to counter criticism that his war on Iran lacked clear purpose, listing four explicit goals including ensuring the country never obtained a nuclear weapon.

He said the strikes were the "last, best chance" to hit Iran, an arch foe of the United States

for decades.

"Our objectives are clear," he told an event at the White House after US officials gave a changing variety of reasons for the US-Israeli offensive.

"First, we're destroying Iran's missile capabilities... Second, we're annihilating their navy... Third, we're ensuring that the world's number-one sponsor of terror can never obtain a

nuclear weapon.

"Finally we are ensuring the Iranian regime can't continue to arm, fund and direct terrorist armies outside of their borders," he said.

Trump has previously justified the war saying that Iran was attempting to rebuild its nuclear program and could soon have missiles able to strike the United States.

But he had not previously listed four reasons, including preventing Iran from supporting regional militant groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas.

US and Israeli forces have so far struck hundreds of targets across Iran, including the Islamic republic's missiles, navy and command-and-control sites.



Passengers wait amid flights disruptions as a result of the Israeli-US strikes on Iran, at Ngurah Rai International Airport on Indonesia's resort island of Bali

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) on Monday called on all sides to refrain from targeting civilian aircraft and airports.

For commercial airlines, the conflict raised memories of disasters such as that of Malaysia

Airlines flight MH17, destroyed by a missile over Ukraine in 2014 with 298 people killed, or the Ukrainian Boeing accidentally shot down by Iran in 2020, killing 176.

"It is critical that states respect their obligation to keep

civilians and civil aviation free from harm," said the head of IATA, Willie Walsh, head of the International Air Transport Association.

"We all hope for an early peaceful resolution to the current hostilities."

Thousands of flights cancelled Dubai's airports announced they would resume limited flights on Monday evening but Air France said it was extending its suspension of flights to that and three other airports until March 5.

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Beyond Iran, no civil aircraft

were flying on Monday afternoon over the Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait or Iraq, according to the online mapping tool of the website Flightradar24.

The major air corridor over the Euphrates Valley in Iraq was empty.

Aircraft connecting Europe to Asia were flying either via the Gulf of Suez and then through central Saudi Arabia and Oman, or much further north through the narrow Armenia-Azerbaijan corridor.

These two countries, lying between Iran and the Russian Caucasus, have become essential to aviation since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Moscow barred Western and Japanese airlines from its airspace in retaliation for similar measures targeting its own carriers.

No-fly "red zones" have mul-

tiplied in recent years -- notably linked to the war in Gaza and clashes between Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah, but also in Africa, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

"We have never been in such a difficult situation," Thierry Oriol, a senior representative of French airline pilots' union SNPL, told AFP.

"Even during the Cold War, everyone flew all over the place. There weren't all these no-fly zones."

EasyJet cancellations

The fallout from the conflict extended beyond the Gulf, with a British military airbase in Cyprus hit on Monday by an Iranian drone.

UK low-cost airline EasyJet later said it was cancelling three flights to Britain scheduled from the Mediterranean island, while Paphos Airport in the west was evacuated.

IATA says Middle Eastern airlines accounted for 9.5 percent of global air traffic last year.

Via hubs such as of Dubai and Doha, Gulf-based carriers such as Emirates, Etihad and Qatar Airways with their long-haul fleets connect Europe and the Americas with Asia and Oceania.

With annual revenues exceeding a trillion dollar among its 360 airline members, IATA had forecast records in traffic and profits this year, with 5.2 billion passengers.

It warned on Monday that the war unleashed uncertainty over air traffic levels and -- crucially -- fuel costs.

Europe reacts to Macron's atomic offer

AFP | Berlin, Germany

President Emmanuel Macron said Monday that France could deploy nuclear-armed aircraft to allied countries for the first time as he invited eight European countries to take part in exercises with French deterrent forces.

Announcing a new doctrine of "forward deterrence", Macron said the plans involving partners including Germany, Britain and Poland would "complicate the calculations of our adversaries".

"We must strengthen our nuclear deterrent in the face of multiple threats, and we must consider our deterrence strategy deep within the European continent," he said in a speech at France's Ile Longue nuclear submarine base.

He spoke as Russia's war against Ukraine grinds into its fifth year, with European nations worried about Washington's wavering commitment to their security at the same time as the attacks launched by the United States and Israel on Iran threaten to destabilise the Middle East.



French Navy nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine (SSBN) submarine "Le Temeraire" - S617 during France's President's visit to the Nuclear Submarine Navy Base of Ile Longue in Crozon, north-western France

The Netherlands, Belgium, Greece, Sweden and Denmark could also all take part. Here is how the partner nations have reacted so far:

Denmark

Ruling out French atomic bombs on Danish soil, Denmark's Prime Minister Mette

Frederiksen said it was "unfortunately" necessary for Europe to discuss deterrence because of a threat from Moscow.

"It is about being at the table and so having better access to information and to strategic decisions," she said at a press conference.

"This cooperation must re-

spect current Danish nuclear policy," she added.

German

In a joint statement with France, Germany said it would participate in French nuclear exercises -- but it added that the United States should keep its nuclear forces on the continent.

"France and Germany have agreed to take first concrete steps beginning this year, including German conventional participation in French nuclear exercises and joint visits to strategic sites," the statement said.

"This Franco-German cooperation is based on the shared understanding that the nuclear dimension of deterrence remains a cornerstone of European security, relying on US extended deterrence," it added.

Greece

Asked about reports of the plans, Greek government spokesman Pavlos Marinakis refused to give details but said work was underway.

"I don't wish to say any more at this stage, but the direction described regarding a common European policy on this very important issue is indeed the one mentioned," he said.

"More information will be available in the coming days and weeks," he added.

Poland

Polish Prime Minister Donald

Tusk welcomed the plans and said they would make his country safer.

"Poland is in talks with France and a group of closest European allies on the programme of advanced nuclear deterrence," Tusk wrote in a post on X.

"We are arming up together with our friends so that our enemies will never dare to attack us."

Poland's nationalist President Karol Nawrocki recently expressed support for a home-grown deterrent without going into details on any proposed scheme.

Sweden

Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson said his country viewed Macron's suggestion "positively".

"Naturally, we would most like to see a world completely free of nuclear weapons," he said.

"But as long as Russia has these weapons and threatens its neighbours, democracies must be able to deter attacks and safeguard our own security and freedom."