

NAVAL OPERATIONS IN THE STRAIT OF HORMUZ AND THE GREEK PERSPECTIVE

Athanasios Drivas

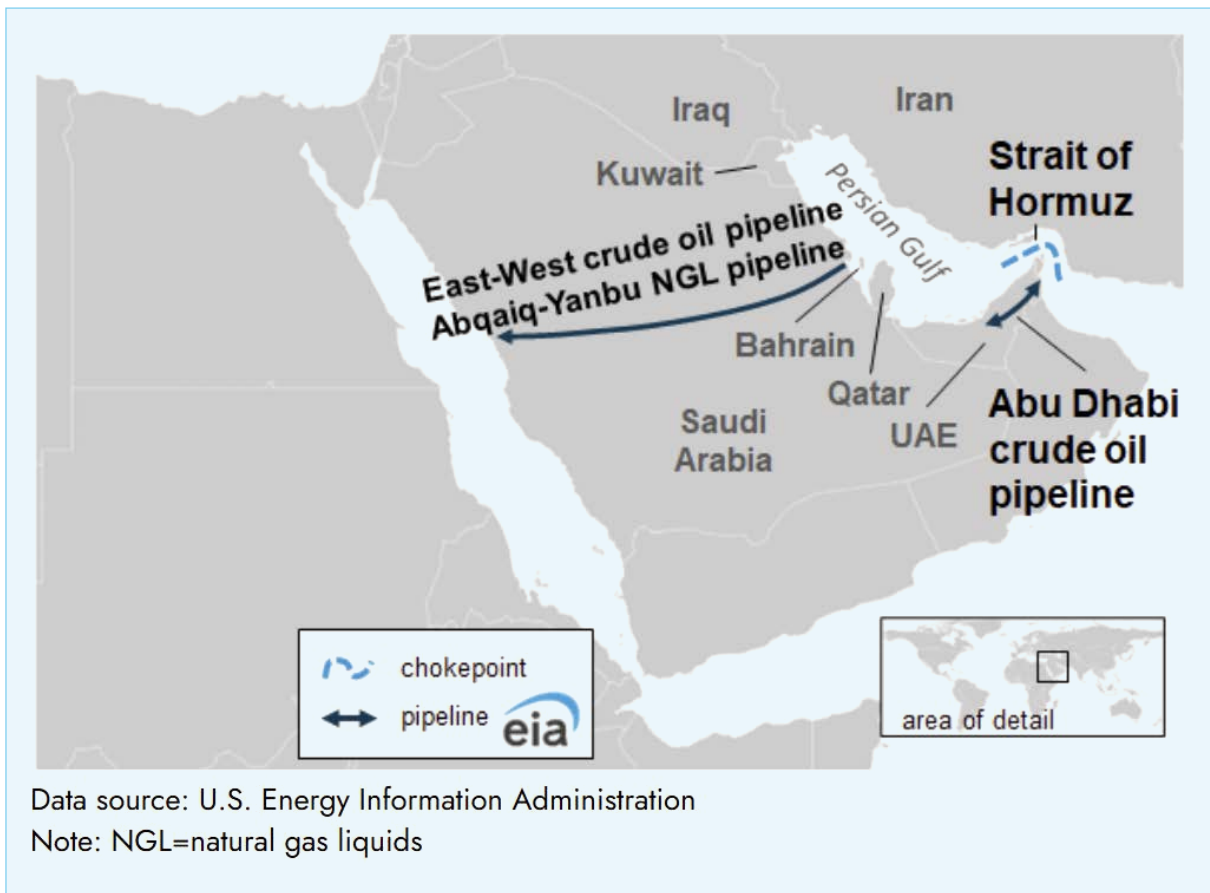


This issue brief examines the strategic significance of the Strait of Hormuz in the context of the 2026 regional crisis involving the United States, Israel, and Iran, with particular emphasis on the implications for Greece. It argues that Hormuz is not merely a regional maritime choke point, but a global centre of gravity where energy security, freedom of navigation, international law, naval deterrence, and supply-chain resilience converge. The analysis highlights the vulnerability of global oil and LNG flows, the operational risks created by asymmetric Iranian capabilities, and the limitations of purely military solutions in such a complex maritime environment. From a Greek perspective, the issue brief demonstrates that the security of Hormuz is directly connected to national maritime interests, given the scale of Greek-owned shipping and Greece's role as a leading European maritime power. It further assesses how Greek diplomacy, the Hellenic Navy's operational experience in EU and NATO maritime missions, and Greece's support for international legality can contribute to a limited, defensive, and multilateral framework for safeguarding navigation.

The regional crisis that erupted on February 28, 2026 and continues unabated, with escalating military actions between the United States, Israel, and Iran, shows that Greece's security is not confined to the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean. The tension stretching from the Persian Gulf to the Eastern Mediterranean, the chance of the crisis spreading across multiple power systems, the threat to maritime

communication routes, and the increased use of missiles and unmanned systems all significantly impact the strategic environment. This represents a wider cycle of instability and interconnectedness, extending from the Strait of Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb to the Eastern Mediterranean, Crete, and Cyprus.

The Strait of Hormuz is one of the most critical



Map 1: Strait of Hormuz Chokepoint

maritime chokepoints in the global energy and supply chain, and its significance extends far beyond a regional crisis in the Middle East. The U.S. Energy Information Administration¹ (EIA) characterizes it as the most important global oil transit chokepoint (see Map 1 and Table 1) while the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) emphasizes² that prior to the recent crisis of 2026, approximately 38 percent of global seaborne crude oil trade, 29 percent of LPG, and 19 percent of LNG passed through the strait.

More specifically, in the first half of 2025 (1H25), the EIA estimates that an average of 20.9 million barrels of oil per day pass through the Strait of Hormuz, representing about 20 percent of global liquid fuel consumption and roughly 25 percent of the world’s seaborne oil trade. During the same period, 11.4 Bcf/d of LNG crossed the strait,

accounting for over 20 percent of global LNG trade, with Qatar as the main supplier and China as the primary end-user. The analysis emphasizes the reliance of Asian countries, as 89 percent of crude oil and petroleum liquids passing through the Strait of Hormuz were destined for Asian markets. The Strait of Hormuz, therefore, is not just a maritime passage but a vital hub for global energy, trade, and supply chains.

According to UNCTAD’s assessment, the sudden escalation of military operations in the Strait of Hormuz has impacted shipping, energy markets, cargo insurance premiums for commercial ships, and, more broadly, the stability of supply chains. In other words, the security of the Strait of Hormuz concerns not only the Gulf states but also the global economy, especially at a time when the resilience of Sea Lines of Communication³ (SLOCs) is once again central to international strategy.

Table 1. Volume of crude oil and petroleum liquids transported through world chokepoints and the Cape of Good Hope, 2020–1H25

million barrels per day

Location	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	1H25
Strait of Malacca	22.8	22.1	23.0	24.0	22.5	23.2
Strait of Hormuz	19.2	19.7	21.9	21.8	20.7	20.9
Suez Canal and SUMED Pipeline	5.4	5.2	7.3	8.8	4.8	4.9
Bab el-Mandeb	5.7	6.0	8.0	9.3	4.1	4.2
Danish Straits ^a	3.1	3.1	4.2	5.0	4.9	4.9
Turkish Straits (Dardanelles)	3.2	3.3	3.2	3.5	3.6	3.7
Panama Canal ^b	1.7	1.8	2.2	2.2	2.0	2.3
Cape of Good Hope	7.9	7.2	6.1	6.2	9.3	9.1
World maritime oil trade	74.1	75.9	78.6	80.2	79.7	79.8
World total oil supply	94.1	95.8	100.6	102.6	103.3	104.4

Data source: U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), *Short-Term Energy Outlook*, February 2026, and EIA analysis based on Vortexa tanker tracking and Panama Canal Authority data, using EIA conversion factors and calculations

Note: World maritime oil trade excludes intra-country volumes except those volumes that transit global chokepoints and the Cape of Good Hope. 1H25=first half of 2025

a The Danish Straits do not include flows through the Kiel Canal.

b Data for the Panama Canal are by fiscal year (October 1 to September 30).

Greece has clearly stated (in remarks⁴ by Foreign Minister George Gerapetritis at the EU Foreign Affairs Council, on March 16, 2026, in Brussels) that it supports the universal application of international law, advocates for diplomacy over war, and particularly urges the free movement of all ships in the wider region, calling on Iran to respect international maritime law. The same statement clarified that Greece has no intention of becoming involved in the war.

Furthermore, Greek Foreign Minister Gerapetritis contacted his Iranian counterpart, Seyed Abbas Araghchi, to discuss Greece’s role as a member of the UN Security Council.⁵ During their talks,

it was reaffirmed that freedom of navigation and maritime security must be maintained, and it was noted that 10 Greek ships and 89 Greek sailors are stranded in the Persian Gulf. This demonstrates Greece’s swift diplomatic response, which was directly prompted by Iranian forces’ closure of the strait. According to data from Bloomberg and international agencies that monitor maritime traffic via AIS⁶ systems, Greece, the UAE, and China are among the nations most impacted⁷ by the closure.

The strategic stakes involved in closing the Strait of Hormuz are not just about a temporary disruption of shipping but also relate to the

final outcome of the conflict and highlight Iran's strategy. The debate over a U.S. or multinational intervention to reopen the passage shows that control of the Strait has become a key political and strategic goal.

The Iranian regime is increasingly linking control of the Strait of Hormuz to a broader strategy⁸ of political and economic blackmail. Reports promoting new Iranian legislation that would impose financial charges on transiting ships and restrict access to states deemed unfriendly to the regime suggest that Iran seeks to transform the Strait of Hormuz from an international waterway into a lever to reshape the regional balance of power. Through this pressure, Iran seeks not only to weaken the sanctions regime imposed by the West, but also to gradually push for the withdrawal of the U.S. military presence from its Gulf allies.

The Strait of Hormuz is becoming a vital area where military actions, political influence efforts, and economic pressure converge. Its geography⁹,

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with its narrow width, shallow waters and tight shipping lanes, forces all ships to pass very close to the Iranian coast. This makes sustained military control very challenging and increases the potential for asymmetric threats that can be exploited.

These factors, along with the rugged coastal terrain, give Tehran a strategic edge for asymmetric naval operations. They can deploy assets such as naval mines, fast attack boats, coastal anti-ship cruise missiles, drone attack systems, and surprise attacks on both commercial and military vessels. These threats are low-cost, dispersed, adaptable, and tough to fully defend against, which sharply raises operational risks. Under these circumstances, even a strong naval and air presence is not enough by itself to guarantee freedom of navigation permanently.

As highlighted in *The New York Times* analysis,¹⁰ the only possible military solution that could fully control the strait would require occupying the Iranian coastal area overlooking it, which would entail a large-scale ground operation with very high political and strategic costs. Consequently, the long-term security of the Strait of Hormuz cannot be solely a military matter; it remains primarily a challenge of political and diplomatic management.

Currently, Greece is adopting a prudent strategic approach that supports diplomatic de-escalation of the crisis, respects international law, and safeguards freedom of navigation. At the same time, it can aid the naval component of a limited, defensive, and multinational naval operation to protect maritime communication lines, provided that it is organized within the institutional framework of the EU or NATO and is authorized by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

The joint statement¹¹ issued by the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Japan, Canada, and others on

March 19, 2026 and updated on April 3, 2026, states that the solution is clearly situated within a framework of collective crisis management. Its 38 signatory countries condemned attacks against unarmed merchant shipping, strikes on civilian energy infrastructure, and the de facto obstruction of transit through the Strait of Hormuz, underlining that freedom of navigation is a fundamental principle of international law, including UNCLOS.¹² They further emphasize that interference with international maritime navigation and the disruption of global energy supply chains pose a threat to international peace and security, with particularly severe consequences for the most vulnerable nations.

In this context, the statement no longer views the Hormuz crisis as merely a regional concern, but as a matter of international collective responsibility. The expressed willingness to contribute to “appropriate efforts” to ensure safe passage through the strait could provide the necessary political and legal basis for a limited, defensive, and multilateral mission to safeguard navigation—not as a unilateral military action, but as a measure aimed at securing maritime safety and global economic stability.

Greece engages in these initiatives diplomatically because it is Europe’s leading maritime power. According to the Union of Greek Shipowners’ Annual Report 2024-2025,¹³ the Greek-owned fleet, consisting of 5,691 vessels, accounts for 20 percent of global carrying capacity¹⁴ and over 61 percent of the fleet capacity managed by European Union interests. The report also highlights that shipping is vital to Europe’s food, energy, and supply-chain security. Therefore, security in the Strait of Hormuz is directly linked to Greek national interests and the broader projection of national power.

The Hellenic Navy, through the long-standing participation of its units in NATO and EU naval operations, is in a position to support the

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naval component of a multinational mission for the protection of navigation, not as a force of unilateral action, but as a credible contributor to collective maritime security. A representative example is the European maritime security operation EUNAVFOR ASPIDES,¹⁵ whose mission is to safeguard freedom of navigation, protect vessels, and support stability along critical SLOCs, while also monitoring the maritime situation in the Strait of Hormuz.

Greece occupies a central position in this framework, as the headquarters of the European maritime security operation is located in Larissa, the Operation Commander is a Rear Admiral of the Hellenic Navy, and the country is currently contributing with the frigate HYDRA to missions involving the close protection of merchant shipping.¹⁶

At the same time, the Hellenic Navy has already exercised at-sea command in the naval operations EUNAVFOR ASPIDES, EUNAVFOR IRINI¹⁷ and

ATALANTA,¹⁸ thereby confirming that Greece possesses tangible experience in command, interoperability, and operational presence within multinational maritime formations. In parallel, the renewal of the Greek fleet through the introduction of FDI frigates, the forthcoming modernization of the MEKO-200 HYDRA class frigates, and the employment of indigenous innovative solutions, such as Hellenic Aerospace Industry's CENTAUR¹⁹ combat-proven anti-drone system, significantly strengthen its capacity for escort operations, the protection of high-value units, and the countering of asymmetric and unmanned threats.

Accordingly, the proposed Greek contribution to such a multinational mission relies not only on political will but also on the Hellenic Navy's extensive and diverse operational experience, its institutional integration within the command structure of multinational formations, and a clearly defined strategic direction. This stance aligns with the institutional role of the Hellenic Navy as a force of maritime power, deterrence, and collective security, capable of strengthening the national presence in areas of strategic interest and, in collaboration with allies and partners, helping to maintain maritime security.

The key conclusion is that Greece's approach to security in the Strait of Hormuz should be viewed as a blend of diplomacy, international legitimacy, and credible operational capacity. Greece supports diplomatic de-escalation, adherence to international law, and safeguarding freedom of navigation. Simultaneously, it possesses the ability to back, when necessary and within the proper institutional framework, the naval element of a multinational protection operation. In this regard, the Hellenic Navy functions as an operational tool to support national strategy and Greek diplomacy in the maritime arena, promoting freedom of navigation, Greek shipping, and international stability.

Author –

Commander Athanasios Drivas, Hellenic Navy, is Deputy Commander of the Hellenic Navy War College (HNWC), having served in surface units and in staff positions at the Hellenic Naval Academy (HNA), the Hellenic Navy General Staff (HNGS), the Hellenic Fleet H.Q Ops Centre, the Hellenic National Defence General Staff (HNDGS) and NATO (NCIA JFC Naples). He has many years of teaching experience at the Hellenic Naval Academy (HNA) and the PALASKAS Training Centre, and has published works on naval operations, WECDIS electronic nautical chart systems, information security, and StratCom.

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Endnotes

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- 3 Sea Lines of Communication are essential maritime arteries that facilitate the movement of people, goods, energy resources, and military assets. They form a core part of a nation's maritime strategy, resilience, and economic security.
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- 14 in deadweight tonnes
- 15 EUNAVFOR ASPIDES is a European Union military maritime security operation launched in 2024, primarily tasked with ensuring freedom of navigation and safeguarding shipping in a vital maritime zone from the Red Sea to the Persian Gulf. Operating under a defensive mandate, the mission offers maritime situational awareness, vessel escort, and protection against threats at sea. See European External Action Service, “About the Operation EUNAVFOR ASPIDES,” February 20, 2024.
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 - 18 EUNAVFOR ATALANTA is a naval military operation of the European Union, launched in 2008 with the principal mission of protecting vessels of the World Food Programme and other vulnerable shipping, as well as deterring, preventing, and suppressing piracy and armed robbery at sea off the coast of Somalia and in the western Indian Ocean. See <https://eunavfor.eu/mission>.
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