



Readout: Middle East Conflict and UK Business Impact Town Hall, Tuesday 4 March 2026

About the Diplomatic Advisory Hub (DAH): The DAH is a new initiative between the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and the British Chambers of Commerce. The DAH is about strengthening the connection between diplomacy and commerce at a time when businesses are operating in a volatile world. The DAH aims to be two-way: providing businesses with actionable advice, helping businesses connect with the right contacts in government and enhancing FCDO and broader HMG understanding of business needs.

Participants

- Richard Oppenheim, Director, Diplomatic Advisory Hub, FCDO & British Chambers of Commerce
- Stephen Hickey, Former Director Middle East and North Africa at the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
- Edward Hobart, UK Ambassador to the UAE at the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office

Purpose of the Town Hall

The session provided an overview of the unfolding Middle East conflict, its geopolitical drivers, and implications for UK businesses, with contributions from senior FCDO officials and regional ambassadors.

Opening Remarks

Richard Oppenheim welcomed participants and outlined the role of the Diplomatic Advisory Hub in supporting UK businesses through geopolitical shocks, offering insights, intelligence, and access to Foreign Office specialists.

Geopolitical Overview

Speakers noted that this was an unprecedented conflict, highlighting escalation patterns, regional missile activity, and differences from previous hostilities, including broader targeting of Gulf infrastructure and expanded Israeli and US objectives.

Regional Dynamics

Speakers outlined the response of Gulf states, noting economic resilience but significant disruption. They emphasised internal pressures within Iran, Gulf concerns about missile attacks, and the long-term strategic implications.

Energy and Economic Impact

Speakers highlighted spikes in energy prices, supply risks from the Strait of Hormuz, and vulnerabilities for import-dependent states. Markets are displaying risk-averse behaviour, with projectiles targeting Gulf infrastructure creating uncertainty.

Business and Travel Implications

UK nationals and businesses face significant travel disruption due to airspace closures. The UK Government is working with airlines to increase capacity, support stranded travelers, and manage narrow safe flight corridors.

Shipping and Supply Chain Impact

Insurance premiums for marine transit have surged. Traffic through the Strait of Hormuz has slowed, with ships rerouted or delayed. Regional ports such as Jebel Ali are experiencing reduced throughput due to elevated risk.

Guidance for UK Businesses

Organisations are encouraged to prioritise staff wellbeing, maintain regular communication, consult travel advice, and work closely with local partners. Strong diplomatic engagement and regional support structures remain essential.

Closing Remarks

The Diplomatic Advisory Hub will continue supporting UK businesses, with future briefings planned. Participants were encouraged to provide feedback and where helpful, contact the Diplomatic Advisory Hub through their new website.

Q&A Highlights

Questions covered travel advice timelines, risk mitigation, sector-specific disruptions, and support for British nationals across the Gulf. Officials emphasised the importance of checking FCDO Travel Advice which is regularly updated for each country in the world, and the importance of registering with government channels. **The questions that were asked in the session will be shared with the appropriate colleagues, including at the Department for Business and Trade, as part of the follow-up.**

Further information

- Business with interests in the region experiencing disruption to trade and supply chains can [access guidance from the Department for Business and Trade](#).
- We advise British Nationals to check the FCDO Travel Advice for regular updates. The FCDO have issued social media announcements on [Register Your Presence](#) and [Travel Advice](#) updates and created a 'one stop shop' landing page for information for British Nationals in the region. We also advise that British Nationals keep in regular contact with your airline and appropriate travel agent on flight availability.