

Gulf conflict threatens major disruption to fruit trade



By [Mike Knowles](#) | 2 March 2026

As shipping lines suspend operations, leading importer says conflict creates 'big problem' for international fresh produce suppliers

The rapid intensification of conflict in the Gulf is expected to create further disruption for the international trade in fruit and vegetables, according to one of the region's leading importers.

Speaking to *Fruitnet*, Stefano Iorini of Global Star Group described the situation as critical, especially for Southern Hemisphere and Asian suppliers that rely on shipping services via the Strait of Hormuz and the Persian Gulf to reach key markets.



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In response to the escalating military action, major shipping lines including MSC, Maersk and Hapag-Lloyd announced they had suspended a number of operations in the region.

"It's a big, big problem," said Iorini. "For example, the shipping lines have announced they cannot take new orders from South African suppliers. So they need to decide how to pack their fruit in the next few days. Vessels will not be able to reach Jebel Ali or the Gulf ports, and the Red Sea from the south is [already] closed. So it is going to be a really complicated situation if Hormuz is not going to be operational very soon."

Among the major product flows likely to be affected, Iorini suggested, were apples, pears, grapes and citrus from South Africa, as well as grapes from India.

"Citrus from South Africa was due to start now, with lemons finally in full swing after weeks of delays due to weather," he explained. "But now nobody knows what will happen."



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Extra headaches

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The disruption adds to a long list of logistical headaches for shippers who depend on the Middle East for their business.

A large volume of exports from Europe to Asia were already rerouted around southern Africa's Cape of Good Hope since late 2023 as a result of Houthi action in the Red Sea.

But the latest flare-up means a possible resumption of shipments via the Suez Canal, which had been cautiously welcomed by some of the lines, looks very unlikely.



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Fresh produce suppliers, who already have to contend with tight delivery windows and immovable deadlines to deliver what are highly perishable products, are now likely to be confronted with extended transit times, a shortage of available vessels, and higher freight and insurance costs.

Shipments from Asia intended for Middle East and European markets now face longer, alternative routings or cancellations.

Beyond the conflict's immediate practical impact, there is also the high likelihood that energy prices will be affected by the instability.

Analysts have warned that if the tension and disruption persist, oil prices could exceed US\$100 per barrel, which in turn could push up the costs of production, transport, packaging, fertilisers and greenhouse heating.

That in turn will likely mean higher costs for retailers and consumers.

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