



By: TA | AP Insight

Nobody wants another MH17 in the Middle East



Civil aviation has been severely disrupted in the Middle East region, and the difficulties will remain until the crisis has completely calmed down. Airlines and countries do not want to jeopardise traffic safety, despite the closure of airspace and the cancellation of many flights.

The U.S. entry into Israel's war with Iran has caused travel disruptions to pile up globally

Following unprecedented **bombings** ordered by President Donald Trump on three Iranian nuclear and military sites over the weekend, Iran on Monday launched a missile **attack** on U.S. forces at Qatar's Al Udeid Air Base. Qatar had **closed** its airspace just hours earlier, after both the U.S. and U.K. also urged their citizens to shelter in place there.

The region has been on edge following the weekend strikes from the U.S. — and since Israel began the war with a surprise bombardment on Iran, which has responded with its own missile and drone strikes, earlier this month.

As deadly attacks escalated between Israel and Iran, sections of airspace and airports throughout the region have temporarily **closed**. And airlines canceled more flights in recent days, with some halting select routes through the middle of the week — particularly in Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, just across the Persian Gulf from Iran.

Mideast is worst affected

The Middle East carriers were severely affected with cancellations and delays. Qatar Airways said its flights were suspended because of the closure of air traffic in Qatar.

“The airline is working closely with government stakeholders and the relevant authorities to support impacted passengers, and will resume operations when the airspace reopens,” it said, while warning that delays were likely even after operations resume.

Additional ground staff was sent to Hamad International Airport and other key airports to

assist affected passengers, it said.

Emirates suspended all flights to Iran and Iraq until and including Monday 30 June 2025

Emirates suspended all flights to Iran and Iraq, including those serving Baghdad and Basra, until and including Monday 30 June 2025. An unspecified number of other Emirates flights were rerouted but continuing to operate flights as scheduled, using flight paths well distanced from conflict areas. Some flights may be delayed.

Etihad Airways, the other of the two flag carriers of the United Arab Emirates, suspended all flights between Abu Dhabi and Tel Aviv through 15 July, and also announced several regional flight cancellations for Monday and Tuesday, including those connecting Abu Dhabi to and from Kuwait, Doha, Dammam and Muscat.

Gulf Air, the carrier of the Kingdom of Bahrain, extended the cancellation of scheduled flights to Jordan and until June 27.

“As the safety of its passengers and crew members remains a top priority, Gulf Air will continue to monitor developments in the region closely, and work with its partners to help accommodate and reroute passengers affected by these flight cancellations,” it said.

Many other airlines cancel and delay flights

Singapore Airlines, for example, canceled some flights to and from Dubai starting Sunday and through Wednesday, citing “a security assessment of the geopolitical situation in the Middle East.” And British Airways has similarly suspended flights to and from Doha through Wednesday.

“Safety is always our highest priority,” British Airways said in a statement confirming its cancellations to The Associated Press, adding

that it “will keep the situation under review.”

Air India on Monday **announced** it was ceasing “all operations to the region as well as to and from the East Coast of North America and Europe” immediately until further notice. The airline, which is still reeling from a plane **crash** that killed at least 270 people earlier this month, added that India-bound flights from North America were being diverted or rerouted away from closed airspaces.

Air tracking data from FlightAware showed 243 cancellations worldwide as of Tuesday

Air tracking data from FlightAware showed 243 cancellations worldwide as of Tuesday. Dubai International Airport topped the list with 26 cancellations in and out of the airport as of 0600 GMT. And Air India had had the highest amount of cancellations among carriers, totaling 25 at about 0600 GMT.

In other developments, Philippine Airlines canceled several flights to the Middle East, including those to Doha, Dubai and Riyadh for Tuesday and one to Doha Wednesday. Japan Airlines said a flight from Tokyo's Haneda airport to Doha had to return Monday, and subsequently scheduled flights have all been canceled through June 27.

A Qatar Airways flight from Hong Kong to Doha was canceled on Tuesday. Hong Kong's flagship carrier Cathay Pacific said none of its flights enter the airspace of Israel, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Jordan or Lebanon, and their operations to and from the Middle East remain normal.

Safety comes first

Such disruptions have snarled travel, particularly as central hubs in the Middle East often connect flights worldwide — but experts stress that these kind of airspace closures and flight diversions are critical to ensuring safety, especially if future escalation emerges

suddenly.

“It is the responsibility of states, countries to ensure that their airspace is safe for passage of aircraft,” Hassan Shahidi, president and CEO of the Flight Safety Foundation. He added that on Monday “the Qataris did the absolutely right thing to close their airspace because of the threat of conflict.”



Airspace closures and flight cancellations reflect that airlines, air traffic controllers and flight crews are doing their best to keep everybody safe – Dubai Airport

Beyond Qatari airspace, Flightradar24 **reported** that UAE airspace was also closed on Monday. After several hours of diversions, flights appeared to be landing and taking off in the country again.

Monday marks the latest “dramatic increase” in this kind of impact, said Ian Petchenik, director of communications at Flightradar24. And while the future is unknown, he added that it's important to remember airspace closures and flight cancellations reflect that “airlines, air traffic controllers and flight crews are doing their best to keep everybody safe.”

Shahidi adds that it's important for travelers to monitor government guidance — such as safety notices from the U.S. State Department.

How long the war lasts and what, if any, future escalation comes next could carry more widespread implications. Beyond disrupting global flight networks farther down the road, Shahidi stresses that it's very difficult for people who may need or want to evacuate countries impacted by the war to do so without access to commercial flights.

At the same time, he adds, it's critical that

state authorities focus on keeping their skies safe — pointing to past tragedies of passenger flights that were shot down by strikes. That includes Malaysia Airlines Flight 17, which was **shot** down by Russian-backed forces while flying over Ukraine in 2014, killing 298 people.

“We are all praying and urging resolution to this conflict — and especially as it relates to protection of civilian air travel,” Shahidi said. “We do not want to have an MH17, with innocent lives being lost in a missile strike ... We do not want to repeat that history.”