

Geollect Comment: Global chokepoints for maritime transit of oil are a critical part of global energy security. The Strait of Hormuz is the world's most important strategic chokepoint by volume of oil transit; it is a conduit for around 17 to 18 million barrels of oil per day, representing 30 - 40% of crude and other oils transported by sea. Located between Oman and Iran, the Strait of Hormuz connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea. Iran has long threatened to block the Strait of Hormuz in response to any action against the country in order to achieve a strategic end goal. The strait stretches just 21 miles between Iran and Oman at its narrowest point, therefore it would be a very effective way of targeting global oil markets to create political leverage.

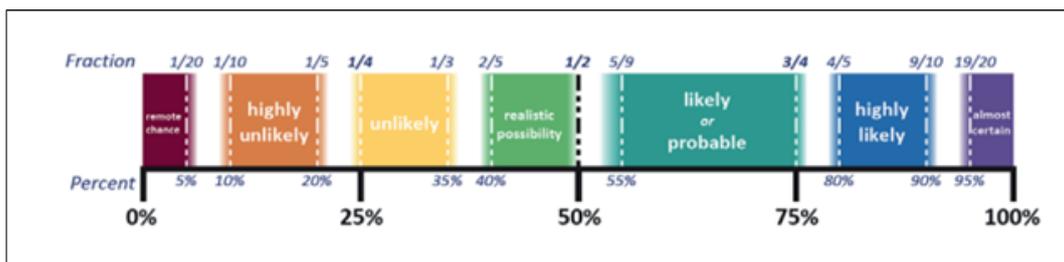
Iran's response to Qasem Soleimani's death was retaliatory rocket strikes into Iraq, targeting US bases and infrastructure. However, the miscalculation and shooting down of a Ukrainian airliner minutes after taking off from Tehran, has significantly reduced Iranian scope for further retaliatory action. There has been global condemnation of the Ukrainian airliner being shot down, as well as significant protests from the Iranian public against the Iranian government. It is assessed that Iran's immediate priority is de-escalation. It is a realistic possibility Iran will retaliate further for Soleimani's killing, either directly or through their Middle East proxies. Recent events have caused Tehran to adopt a more defensive posture as they assess the fall out of the airliner miscalculation. **Geollect Comment Ends.**

What Next?

Geollect Assessment: Iran attempting to block the Strait of Hormuz is assessed as unlikely. It is almost certain that Iran will not want to upset their regional ally Qatar, one of the few allies they possess in the Persian Gulf. The Strait of Hormuz is of major strategic significance to Qatar and any closure will highly likely have a detrimental effect on relations. Iran will also want to keep Oman onside, especially as they have a new sultan. Iran cannot risk becoming further isolated in the Middle East region. Furthermore, it is likely that Iran does not want to upset their relationship with China. It is estimated that China makes up 50-70% of Iranian oil exports. China have a key interest in expanding their presence in the Middle East region, therefore it is highly likely they would oppose any interruption to maritime traffic flow through the Strait of Hormuz put in place by the Iranians.

It is highly likely that the Iranians are now extremely wary of making a further strategic miscalculation, it is assessed that regional tensions will return to a more regular 'status quo' as we have seen previously. It is likely that proxy movements in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and elsewhere are poised to strike if Iran does not act directly itself; this approach could act as a convenient tactic for the Iranians, one that offers plausible deniability in a period of extremely high tensions. **(See Geollect Middle East Maritime Overview for more detail)**

Almost all Intelligence assessments contain a degree of uncertainty. In order to avoid any misinterpretation, these intelligence assessments are categorised using the terms outlined in the image below, instead of using numerical probabilities. Throughout all Geollect products the scale of probability is split into these seven categories. The use of this standard ensures analysts can make reliable judgments and avoid inappropriate use of terms.



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