

Hormuz Shuttle Tankers: An Evolving Trend Amid the Iran War

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Articles & Testimony

Ship-to-ship transfers in the Gulf of Oman have provided a helpful export alternative for regional oil producers, but this shuttle trade will likely remain a target for Iranian attacks.

On September 16, Hong Kong-flagged crude oil tanker Cospearl Lake (IMO 9337171) was finishing the last leg of its voyage to Dalian, China, carrying a crude oil cargo loaded last month in the Fujairah lightering zone in the Gulf of Oman. The 2 million barrels onboard the Chinese state-owned **very large crude carrier (VLCC)** (<https://www.seatrade-maritime.com/keyword/vlcc>) were collected from another tanker instead of being loaded directly in the Persian Gulf, according to shipping data. The Cospearl Lake is one of many cases showing how certain owners and charterers are preferring to pick up oil cargoes via ship-to-ship (STS) transfers in the Gulf of Oman instead of sailing through the Strait of Hormuz, which remains a high-risk and **costly** (<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/oil-vessel-transit-costs-through-hormuz-escalated-after-iran-war-enoc-exec-says-2026-09-09/>) transit. Meanwhile, the vessels that have been shuttling oil from within the Gulf include tankers owned or operated by regional oil and gas exporters, as well as tankers belonging to selected shipowners in the **market** (<https://www.seatrade-maritime.com/tankers/hormuz-security-fears-feed-sky-high-large-tanker-rates>) willing to take the risks associated with making a transit of the Strait. These shuttle operations have been critical for regional exporters, particularly the United Arab Emirates, which has been at the forefront of this process, as well as global oil markets. These operations complement non-shuttle transits; i.e. tankers that continue directly to their final destinations instead of transferring cargoes to other vessels. However, the shuttle trade, which is a flexible network to keep oil moving amid the disruption in the Strait of Hormuz, will likely remain a target for further Iranian attacks...

[Read the full article on the Seatrade Maritime website. \(https://www.seatrade-](https://www.seatrade-maritime.com/tankers/hormuz-security-fears-feed-sky-high-large-tanker-rates)

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