



QUESTION MORE

⚡ Lavrov notifies Rubio of impending 'systematic strikes' on Kiev: Russia-

Russia & Former Soviet Union World News Business India Africa RT Features Analysis Opinion Entertainment Shows Projects

/ Home / World News

Could Iran cut off the world's internet access?

Iran's push to tax Strait of Hormuz undersea cables shows how they are becoming a new front in pressure tactics and tech risk

Published 26 May, 2026 16:24



By **Farhad Ibragimov** – lecturer at the Faculty of Economics at RUDN University, expert and lecturer at the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences and Mass Communications, Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation

• @farhadibragim

Iranian Armed Forces operational command Spokesman Ebrahim Zolfaghari has recently announced that Iran intends to charge fees for the use of undersea cables

Top stories



West planning to use former ISIS militants against Iran – FSB chief

Canada demands Israel flotilla abuse probe

EU country to slash benefits for Ukrainian migrants

Russia backs African reparations demands – Lavrov



passing through the Strait of Hormuz. While this news didn't come as a surprise, it certainly heightened tensions surrounding the digital infrastructure of the Persian Gulf.

Since May 18, the Persian Gulf Strait Authority has controlled the situation in the

Strait of Hormuz. This new body was established by the Supreme National Security Council of Iran and is responsible for monitoring compliance with the maritime rules set by Tehran. It was created in response to the US-initiated naval blockade that began in April.

The entire Strait of Hormuz, including its underwater infrastructure, is now viewed by Tehran as part of its jurisdiction and an area of its strategic control.

Even before the current escalation, however, discussions about undersea internet cables in the Strait of Hormuz had surfaced in Iranian media. The topic first emerged in July 2019 during a broadcast on the state-controlled IRIB television and radio network. At that time, an expert claimed that a disruption of cables in the Strait of Hormuz could potentially affect up to 70% of the world's internet traffic.

While this figure seems exaggerated – since the global web has backup routes and much of the transit between Europe and Asia relies on other pathways like the Red Sea, Egypt, and the Mediterranean – the statement itself is quite significant.

Iranian enriched uranium stockpile to be 'destroyed' – Trump

Cross-dressing cops bust drug dealer in Thailand

Russia warns all foreign citizens to leave Kiev

Rick Sanchez slams BBC and CNN over college massacre site no-show (VIDEO)

Subscribe to RT newsletter to get news highlights of the day right in your mailbox

E-mail

- We offer you the possibility to receive RT's news highlights every Monday, Wednesday and Friday by email.

Even if global internet service isn't paralyzed in the event of major damage to the cables, countries in the Arabian Peninsula would face severe communication disruptions, reduced bandwidth, increased latency, and failures of digital services.

Back in 2019, the Arab nations dismissed these warnings as fanciful Persian tales. But they may have been wrong.

The expert opinion expressed in 2019 was not an official statement by the Iranian government about an intention to cut the cables. It only pointed to the potential vulnerabilities of the cables in the Strait of Hormuz and the international ramifications in case of a significant regional escalation. Thus, already at that time, Iran viewed the undersea digital infrastructure in the Strait of Hormuz as a potential tool for strategic leverage.

The question of whether Iran is indeed prepared to cut internet cables in the Strait of Hormuz should be viewed not as an isolated technical issue, but as part of Tehran's broader strategy to exert pressure around this vital waterway.

Subscribe

RT Features



Action, election: How Gen Zs are rewiring Indian politics FEATURE



Stars, stripes, and missiles: What America's arsenal says about the wars to come FEATURE

For Iran, subsea digital infrastructure now serves as a new lever alongside oil, tanker traffic, ports, and energy logistics. However, there is a fundamental difference between pointing out vulnerabilities and physically destroying the cables.

In 2026, Iran returned to the topic of undersea internet cables, raising the issue to a new level. On April 22, Tasnim news agency, which is linked to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), published a report mapping the cable and cloud infrastructure of the Persian Gulf. Essentially, this served as a warning that Tehran may view the Gulf states' digital infrastructure as part of the conflict zone. The report emphasized that the Gulf monarchies rely on maritime internet routes much more heavily than Iran itself does.

In May 2026, this idea evolved into a more developed political and economic concept. Iranian state media started pushing the narrative that Iran could charge foreign tech companies for utilizing the undersea cables that run through the Strait of Hormuz. This was not merely a question of fees; it also entailed regulatory oversight, requiring operators and major technology firms to adhere to Iranian regulations, as well as efforts to monopolize cable maintenance and repair services.

From a military perspective, Iran has the capability to threaten cable infrastructure: the Strait of Hormuz is quite shallow, maritime traffic is dense, and the cables are physically vulnerable to damage. Most damage to subsea cables occurs not from sabotage but from anchors, fishing gear, and navigational errors. Thus, there is a real possibility that these cables may become damaged. When it comes to physical



Read more: The calm before the storm: Is the US preparing for another round of strikes on Iran?



Trump's China strategy is closer to Kissinger than Biden FEATURE

Podcasts

[All podcasts](#)



Kiev's Murder of Russian Teens, AI Warfare, Cuba Quest Renewed – with Scott Ritter

0:00

58:3



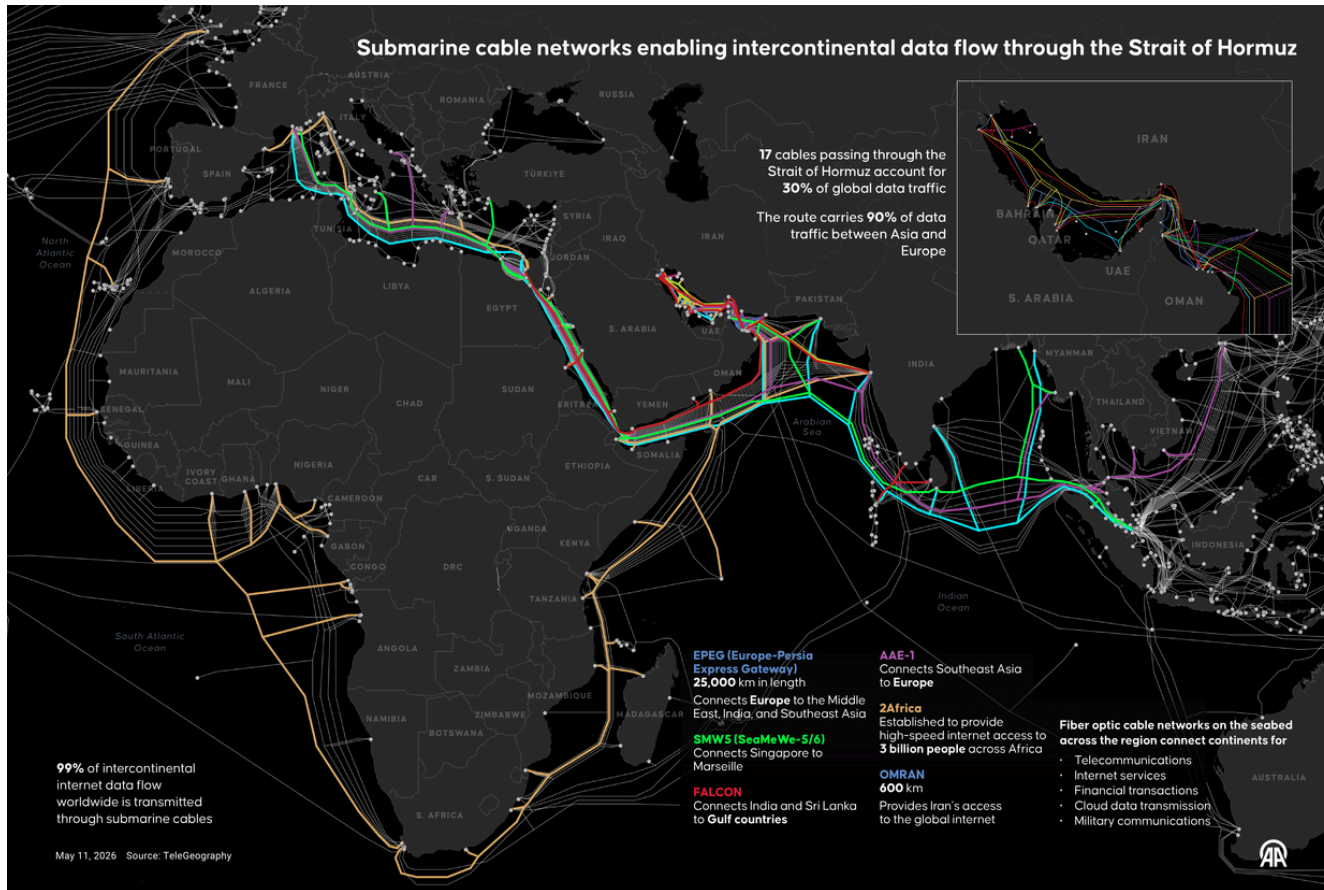
Sanchez in Donbass: first-hand reporting on Ukrainian war crimes from Starobelsk

0:00

41:12



interference rather than a precise cyberattack, the vulnerabilities of such infrastructure are evident.



© Mehmet Yaren Bozgun / Anadolu via Getty Images

Economically, Iran can assert its right to charge for the use of subsea cables within its maritime jurisdiction. According to international maritime law, coastal states have the authority to regulate the installation and maintenance of such infrastructure near their shores. This is why Tehran views the cables not just as part of an international communication network but as an object under its control.

The political ramifications of such actions or the deliberate severing of cables would be substantial for Iran. Such a move would likely be perceived by the US, the Gulf nations, and major tech companies not as a 'symmetrical response' but as an attack on critical international infrastructure.

Moreover, executing such an operation discreetly would be exceedingly difficult for Iran, as the area is under constant military surveillance, and any blatant act of sabotage would give Tehran's adversaries ample reason for a severe retaliatory response. For this reason, attempting to physically cut cables in the Strait of Hormuz would be an extremely risky maneuver for Iran, and would effectively escalate the conflict to a new level.



Read more: Can Pakistan deliver a US-Iran deal – or will another power take the lead?

connecting Gulf nations' infrastructure with India and global networks, including the US.

Seven primary communication systems run along the seabed of the Strait of Hormuz; however, they branch out into about 17 distinct cable lines. Some serve mainly regional purposes: the FALCON system connects India with Oman, Iran, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and extends to Egypt, while the Ooredoo Gulf Pathway manages a significant portion of digital traffic within the Persian Gulf. Other cable systems are strategically vital, including the SEA-ME-WE 5, linking Southeast Asia with the Middle East and Europe, and TGN-Gulf,

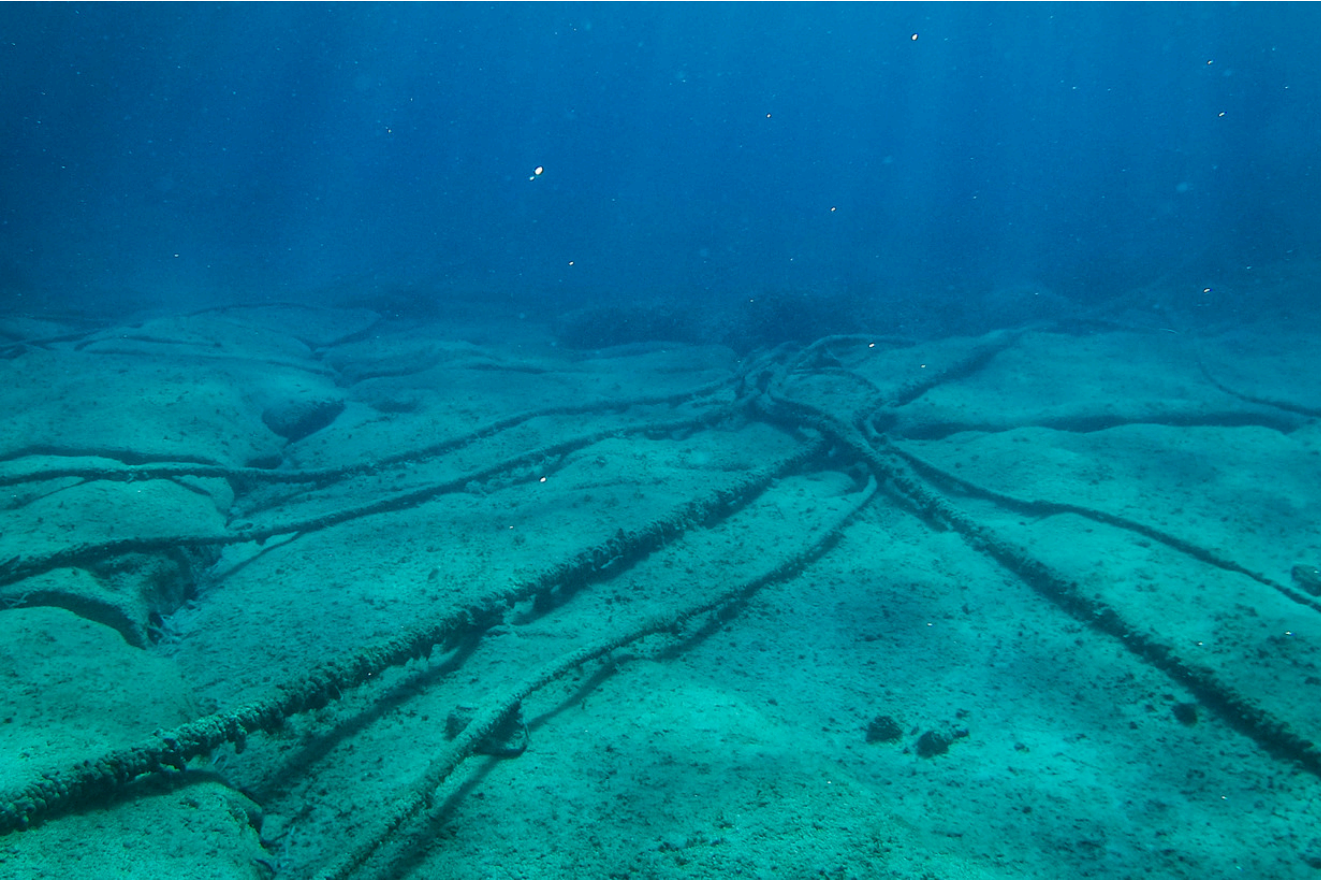
The security of these cables cannot be ensured without military force. The cable infrastructure is extensive, runs along the seabed, and is physically exposed.

However, as recent months have shown, neither side is eager to place their military vessels at risk.

Repairing damaged cables presents its own set of challenges. Restoring a severed cable necessitates the deployment of specialized ships to the area and that their safe operation is ensured. In the context of military tensions, this quickly transforms from an engineering issue into a political and military one.

Without Tehran's direct or at least tacit consent, repair efforts in the strait may prove impossible. This situation turns the threat of damage to the cables into a tool for leveraging power, since in addition to the disruption of traffic, the repair process may be complicated.

Damage to undersea cables in the Strait of Hormuz could impact not only internet speed but also the region's connectivity with major global IT platforms. A significant portion of the digital infrastructure, including cloud services, data centers, corporate platforms, and financial systems, relies on international data transmission routes.



© Getty Images / Sybille Reuter

Disruptions in communication with Southern Europe – home to major data centers for AWS, Microsoft, and other cloud service providers – could be particularly sensitive. If data traffic from the Gulf countries needs to be urgently redirected through alternative routes, the process would put additional strain on other parts of the network. Consequently, users might experience delays, reduced speeds, unstable service quality, and interruptions in access to cloud platforms.

Predicting which specific services will suffer the most is nearly impossible in advance. Information about land-based communication lines, backup routes, and actual traffic redistribution schemes is typically not publicly available. Therefore, the

repercussions will depend not only on how many cables are affected but also on how swiftly operators can reroute the traffic.

Generally, one damaged cable doesn't trigger widespread internet collapse; traffic can be redistributed through backup routes. However, if multiple cables fail simultaneously, it would cause a drop in internet service quality. In the Gulf countries, this could impact banking operations, digital government services, cloud platforms, corporate communications, messaging apps, and logistics systems.

On a global scale, services like Telegram are unlikely to cease functioning entirely.

However, in certain Gulf nations, this would cause problems: messages may be delayed, the connection could become unstable, and in the event of serious damage to several cables, access to specific services might be temporarily disrupted.

It is most likely that instead of actually damaging the cables, Iran will use the threat of such a possibility as a lever of influence. It suffices for Tehran to mention the possibility that these cables could become targets. This already alters market behavior: operators factor in added risks, repair ships proceed more cautiously in the conflict zone, Gulf countries reevaluate backup routes, and investors assess the region's vulnerabilities not just in terms of oil but also digital infrastructure.

Meanwhile, the consequences of physical damage to the cables would differ based on the region. This wouldn't cause a global internet blackout; there are alternative routes in place, and transit between Europe and Asia relies on various paths.



Read more: The war on Iran may become a turning point in the post-Cold War order

However, for the Gulf states, the impact would be far more severe, affecting banking operations, cloud services, data centers, logistics, and digital government platforms. The greatest danger lies not in a single incident, but rather in a prolonged disruption and a situation in which repair ships would not be able to operate safely in the conflict zone.

Undersea cables remain primarily a means of strategic coercion for Iran – a way to demonstrate that responses to blockades or military pressure could extend beyond the oil market to digital infrastructure as well. Physically cutting the cables would be a last resort, possible only done in the event of significant escalation – however, in the logic of its current pressure strategy, it wouldn't be the most rational move for Iran.

ANALYSIS

You can share this story on social media:

Follow RT on



Please check our [commenting policy](#). If you have questions or suggestions feel free to send them to feedback@rttv.ru.

SHOW COMMENTS

[/ Home](#) / [World News](#)