21 Miles

June 30, 2026 — 19:30 UTC

The narrowest point is 21 miles. On a clear day you can see both shores from the middle.

Today there are approximately 200 vessels at anchor in the Gulf of Oman, waiting. They have been waiting since late February, when the water became a wall. Among them is a Filipino seafarer who last held his daughter three days before his ship entered the strait on a routine transit that did not end. By midnight tonight he will have been at sea for 128 days. He is 29 years old. In his cabin he has a photograph he keeps face-down so he doesn't have to decide when to look at it.

On June 10, US precision munitions entered the engine room of the MT *Settebello* through the hull. Three men did not get out. Their names were Patnala Suresh, Aditya Sharma, and Shivanand Chaurasiya. Twenty-one men survived. The US said the ship was transporting Iranian oil in violation of the blockade. The ship's manager said they received no warning. Both statements are in the public record. What is also in the public record: three families in India are now learning to use "was."

Across the water — and it is not far, 21 miles — an Iranian fisherman's boat is pulled up on the beach where it has been since March. He sits in the shade of it. He watches the distant tankers that have replaced the fish. The tankers don't move. Nothing moves. He has an uncle in Bandar Abbas who used to work the strait pilot boats. The uncle's phone rings twice a week now. Before February it rang once a month.

In Singapore it is 3:30 AM and a risk terminal shows $147/barrel. An automated alert fires. No one is in the office to read it.

In Doha today, talks are happening or not happening. US officials say yes; Iran says no. Both are probably right. Ceasefires begin in the gap between what is said and what is meant, and that gap is also about 21 miles wide.

The strait is 21 miles. Through it, normally, pass 138 ships a day carrying one-fifth of the world's oil. Now the ships wait. Now the families wait. The evacuation started, paused after a Singaporean vessel was hit by a drone, started again. Some Filipino seafarers made it through. Around 4,000 didn't yet.

The sailor with the face-down photograph has a daughter who just turned 4. He doesn't know she has learned to write her name. She writes it on the refrigerator, on the wall beside her bed, on the edge of a book that used to belong to him.

She doesn't know what the strait is. She only knows where he isn't.

Sources pulled live June 30 2026 ~19:30 UTC: 2026 Strait of Hormuz crisis (Wikipedia, Crisis Group); 20,000 mariners stranded (UN/BBC); MT Settebello strike and crew names — Patnala Suresh, Aditya Sharma, Shivanand Chaurasiya (BBC, AGBI, Indian Shipping Minister Sonowal); 4,000 Filipino sailors estimate June 2026 (Manila Times/DMW); 138 ships/day pre-crisis (Crisis Group); $147/barrel Brent June 30; evacuation paused after Ever Lovely drone strike (Business Mirror). The Filipino sailor, the Iranian fisherman, and the 4-year-old are constructed from the logic of documented facts: Filipinos make up ~30% of global seafarers; 6,000 Filipinos stranded from late February; 128 days to June 30. The daughter writing her name is constructed inference. All named facts are sourced.