

Supporting British International Schools in a Time of Conflict

The current conflict involving the United States, Israel and Iran, which began with coordinated military strikes in late February 2026, has rapidly escalated into a situation with significant regional and global consequences. The humanitarian impact has been severe, with substantial civilian casualties and damage to infrastructure, including schools, alongside wider disruption to travel, energy supply and economic stability.

For British international schools operating in, or connected to, the Middle East and neighbouring regions, this presents not only operational challenges but also profound governance considerations.

A Governance Lens: Calm, Clarity and Continuity

At times of geopolitical instability, the role of governance is neither to manage events directly nor to withdraw into passivity. Rather, it is to provide steady oversight, clarity of purpose and assurance that the school remains aligned with its core responsibilities: safeguarding pupils, maintaining educational continuity and protecting institutional integrity.

Boards should remain firmly strategic but visibly engaged. The familiar principle of *eyes on, hands off* is especially pertinent; however, “eyes on” must be sharper, more frequent and more informed than usual.

Immediate Priorities for Governing Bodies

1. Safeguarding and Welfare Oversight

Governors should seek clear assurance that safeguarding arrangements remain robust in a changing risk landscape. This includes:

- Updated risk assessments reflecting local and regional threats
- Consideration of travel, transport and evacuation contingencies
- Attention to pupil and staff wellbeing, including anxiety linked to conflict

In some contexts, the reality that schools themselves have been impacted in the region serves as a sobering reminder of the need for vigilance.

2. Business Continuity and Operational Resilience

Disruption to air travel, supply chains and staffing is already evident. Boards should ensure that leadership has:

- Tested continuity plans (including remote learning where necessary)
- Reviewed staffing contingencies, particularly for expatriate staff
- Assessed financial resilience in light of inflationary pressures and potential enrolment fluctuations

3. Communications and Stakeholder Confidence

Clear, measured communication is essential. Governors should assure themselves that:

- Messaging to parents is calm, factual and consistent
- The school avoids political positioning while remaining humane and principled
- Channels for parental concern are structured and manageable

Medium-Term Considerations

Strategic Risk and Scenario Planning

The conflict has already demonstrated its capacity to affect global energy markets and economic stability. Boards should encourage leadership teams to model different scenarios, including prolonged instability.

Duty of Care Beyond the Campus

British international schools often serve diverse communities with direct connections to affected regions. Sensitivity, cultural awareness and pastoral provision must remain central.

Governance Structures and Local Insight

Where schools operate through partnerships or local advisory boards, this is the moment to draw upon local knowledge while maintaining clear lines of accountability to the governing body or proprietor.

The Role of the Board: Alert, Assure, Advise

In practical terms, effective governance in this context may be understood through three core functions:

- **Alert:** ensuring emerging risks are identified early and understood properly

- **Assure:** confirming that appropriate systems, plans and responses are in place
 - **Advise:** offering measured, strategic counsel without straying into operational control
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A Measured Conclusion

Periods of international conflict test institutions not only operationally but ethically and strategically. For British international schools, the expectation remains that they will provide stability, uphold their values and continue to serve their pupils and communities with integrity.

Strong governance does not remove uncertainty, but it does ensure that schools respond to it with discipline, foresight and care.

At such times, that is precisely what is required.