

The United Nations Security Council



Addressing the Escalation of Armed Conflict in the Red Sea Region in Order to Ensure Stability

-Committee Guide-

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I. INTRODUCTION

a. Introduction to the Committee

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations and holds the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. It consists of fifteen Member States, of which five are permanent members (P5): the People's Republic of China, the French Republic, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America. These permanent members hold the right of veto, allowing them to block any substantive resolution regardless of the number of votes in favor.

The remaining ten seats are held by non-permanent members, elected by the General Assembly for two-year terms and distributed according to geographical balance. The current non-permanent Members are Algeria, Denmark, Greece, Guyana, Pakistan, Panama, the Republic of Korea, Sierra Leone, Slovenia, and Somalia.

Each Member State, permanent or non-permanent, has one vote. Under the Charter of the United Nations, all UN Member States are obligated to comply with the decisions of the Security Council, making it the only UN body whose resolutions are legally binding.

The Security Council has the authority to investigate disputes, recommend methods of peaceful settlement, and, if necessary, take enforcement measures. These range from sanctions and embargoes to the authorization of military operations under the framework of collective security. In addition, the Council may establish peacekeeping operations, mandate international tribunals, and endorse political missions.

The Council held its first meeting on 17 January 1946 in London and has since been permanently seated at the United Nations Headquarters in New York City. In order to remain capable of responding swiftly to emerging crises, each of its fifteen members is required to have a permanent representative present in New York at all times.

b. Introduction to the Topic

The Red Sea is a long, narrow sea between northeast Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. It runs roughly 2,000–2,300 km from the Suez Canal in the north to the Gulf of Aden and Bab el-Mandeb Strait in the south. The sea links the Mediterranean and

the Indian Ocean systems and sits alongside or touches Egypt, Sudan, Eritrea, Djibouti, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Jordan and Israel.

Additionally, it is one of the world's principal and busiest maritime corridors. In **regular** years, about 12–15% of global trade and roughly a third of all container traffic transit the Suez route, carrying everything from consumer goods to manufactured parts and high-value finished products. In addition, the corridor is a major pathway for seaborne energy (oil and LNG, Liquefied Natural Gas) moving between Asia, Europe and North America. Disruption of this corridor therefore has immediate and measurable effects on global supply chains, freight costs, insurance and commodity prices.

The Red Sea and its adjacent straits are governed by the law of the sea. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) guarantees transit passage through straits used for international navigation and lays down duties for coastal states and obligations to respect freedom of navigation. For commercial shipping, coastal states cannot arbitrarily deny passage to international ships that follow the UNCLOS rules. This means that ships from other countries have the right to pass through certain waters as long as they comply with international regulations. Attacks on innocent merchant navigations are unlawful under both the law of the sea and, when they threaten international peace, under the UN Charter framework enforced by the Security Council.

Due to the corridor's economic importance and vulnerability, numerous military and multinational security mechanisms operate in and around the Red Sea. Combined Maritime Forces, ad-hoc coalitions and, since late 2023, U.S.-led and EU-led maritime security operations are responsible for protecting transits and escort vessels. Littoral states (Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Djibouti, Eritrea) also maintain naval assets. Still, extra-regional navies (U.S., U.K., EU member states, others) routinely deploy warships, patrol aircraft and surveillance assets to the area.

II. FACTS AND CURRENT SITUATION

a. Overview

The immediate catalyst for the recent Red Sea crisis was the spill-over from the Israel–Gaza war (beginning in October 2023). Yemen's Houthi movement (Ansar Allah), which

controls large parts of north-west Yemen, publicly declared solidarity with Palestinians and began targeting commercial shipping and naval vessels in and near the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden from November 2023 onward. The Houthis said they intended to pressure Israel and its supporters by interrupting sea routes they associate with Israeli logistics and support. Many of the Houthi strikes, however, hit or endangered neutral merchant ships.

Houthi attacks evolved from rockets and anti-ship missiles to more sophisticated and varied methods: drones (UAVs), loitering munitions, unmanned surface vessels (USVs), sea drones and direct boarding or harassment of vessels. The increasing use of remotely operated and asymmetric systems raised the operational risk for commercial vessels and made long-distance escalation possible without a traditional naval fleet. External support and supply chains, including Iranian-linked transfers of components and know-how cited by multiple governments and analysts, helped the Houthis develop and field these capabilities.

b. Operations and Missions

The scale of the threat prompted an international security response. There were different operations and missions launched:

- Operation Prosperity Guardian (OPG) — a U.S.-led multinational maritime security effort announced in December 2023 to protect freedom of navigation in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden.
- EUNAVFOR Operation ASPIDES — the EU's defensive maritime operation, launched in February 2024, focused on surveillance, escorting and search and rescue.
- United Nations Security Council: in January 2024, the Council adopted Resolution 2722, condemning attacks on commercial shipping and demanding an immediate halt to the attacks. Despite these measures, attacks persisted, and the crisis broadened.
- Chinese Escort Missions (PLA Navy) — regular development of PLA Navy escort task forces, including the 46th Escort Fleet in 2024, officially presented as a routine anti-piracy missions in the Gulf of Aden but also

contributing to the protection of Chinese commercial shipping during the Red Sea crisis.

- EUNAVOR Operation Atlanta — launched in 2008, originally to counter piracy off Somalia, its mandate now also covers the wider Indian Ocean and parts of the Red Sea, providing escorts, counter-piracy measures and monitoring of illicit activities.
- CTF-153 Uncrewed Surface Vessel Operations — in early 2025, the task force began using uncrewed vessels to patrol large areas of the Red Sea, improving surveillance, vessel tracking, and the detection of illicit maritime activity.

c. Primary Consequences

The Red Sea has been a crucial route for global trade, any disruptions to this key waterway have far-reaching implications.

In the immediate aftermath, commercial shipping operations faced severe challenges. Major shipping lines were forced to reroute their vessels around Africa's Cape of Good Hope, leading to significant delays of 10-15 days. Container schedules, already under pressure, were disrupted even further. This, in turn, caused freight and insurance costs to rise sharply as carriers adjusted to new routes and schedules.

Additionally, some shipping companies temporarily suspended transits through the Red Sea altogether, causing further congestion in alternative shipping lanes. According to data from the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and related agencies, the impact on Suez Canal traffic was profound, with a notable decline in the number of vessels passing through the waterway. As a result, demand for alternative routes increased sharply, driving up the extra distance and ton-mile costs for global shipping.

Energy markets were also significantly affected by the disruptions in the Red Sea. Oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) shipments through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait dropped considerably. To maintain the flow of exports, many suppliers were forced to re-route their cargoes, reduce the frequency of sailings, or resort to alternative pipelines, such as Saudi Arabia's East-West pipeline, which transports crude oil to Red Sea terminals. This shift in energy logistics resulted in reduced throughput through the Bab el-Mandeb

chokepoint, contributing to increased instability in short-term energy markets as supply chains adapted to these changes.

On the human and legal front, the consequences were equally dire. The safety of seafarers deteriorated dramatically as incidents of piracy and armed attacks on merchant vessels increased. Several ships were attacked, with crews either injured or taken hostage in some cases, and tragically, some incidents resulted in fatalities. The international community was quick to respond, with widespread condemnation of these unlawful attacks on civilian merchant vessels. The attacks prompted renewed calls for greater accountability under international humanitarian law (IHL) and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), emphasizing the need for enhanced protection for seafarers and the enforcement of legal protections in such high-risk regions.

d. The Disruptions in Data

The disruption to trade and energy flows in the Red Sea, especially following the attacks, is starkly evident in the data:

The volume of traffic fell by approximately 50% year-on-year (YoY), signaling a significant slowdown in global trade that directly impacted the Red Sea's capacity to handle shipping. Container capacity, a crucial metric for global shipping, was down by 70-80% in some cases as major shipping lines rerouted their vessels to alternative routes, primarily around Africa's Cape of Good Hope. This was a costly reorganization, with knock-on effects that were felt across multiple sectors. As a result of the rerouted shipping and reduced capacity, costs for insurance, fuel, and inventory surged. Data from UNCTAD (UN Conference on Trade and Development) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) highlighted how these shifts caused disruptions not only to shipping companies but also to industries dependent on timely deliveries of goods, exacerbating the costs of trade globally.

In the energy sector, the disruption in the Red Sea was just as pronounced. Prior to the attacks, Bab el-Mandeb Strait was a critical passage for oil and energy shipments, linking the Arabian Peninsula with global markets. However, in 2024, energy flows through this vital chokepoint were significantly impacted. The volume of oil and oil products transported through Bab el-Mandeb halved compared to previous years, as

many exporters were forced to reroute their shipments, delay transits, or even pause some operations. Liquefied natural gas (LNG) flows and tanker traffic also adjusted, with some countries opting for alternative shipping routes or pipeline options to mitigate the risks of passing through the Red Sea. This reorganization of energy trade led to reduced throughput and greater uncertainty in global energy markets, with fluctuations in prices and supply chain reliability.

III. POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

a. Strengthening Multinational Naval Cooperation

An effective solution lies in deepening coordination among existing naval missions such as Operation Prosperity Guardian, ASPIDES, and CTF-153. A more unified command structure, joint training exercises, and intelligence sharing platforms could reduce duplication of efforts and increase operational efficiency. This would not only deter attacks on commercial shipping but also reassure the international community and shipping industry that vital trade routes remain secure.

b. Regional Capacity Building

Long-term stability in the Red Sea depends on empowering the littoral states themselves. Supporting countries like Djibouti, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen with technical expertise, modern surveillance equipment, and coast guard training would enhance their ability to secure their own waters. Building local ownership of maritime security reduces dependency on external actors and addresses root cause instability by strengthening state solutions.

c. Diplomatic Engagement with Non-State Actors

Military measures alone are unlikely to resolve the crisis. Opening indirect communication channels between the Houthis and their regional backers, possibly through UN mediation or neutral third parties, could reduce the frequency of attacks. Diplomatic engagement does not imply recognition of legitimacy but acknowledges that sustainable security requires addressing political grievances alongside deterrence.

IV. IMPORTANT POSITIONS

The **United States** has taken the lead in forming Operation Prosperity Guardian to ensure freedom of navigation in the Red Sea. Washington views Houthi attacks as an Iranian-backed destabilization campaign threatening both global trade and regional security. The U.S. is committed to safeguarding energy flows and protecting allied shipping, while calling on UNSC members to condemn the Houthis and support multilateral naval efforts. While favoring military deterrence, Washington also stresses the need for diplomacy to prevent escalation with Iran. U.S. influence ensures this crisis remains a top priority on the UNSC agenda.

The **United Kingdom** emphasizes its historical role in maritime security and its duty to uphold international law. As part of the U.S.-led coalition and EU missions, London has deployed naval forces to secure Red Sea shipping lanes. Britain highlights the economic consequences of disruptions, particularly for Europe, and condemns Houthi attacks as violations of UNCLOS. London supports stronger sanctions on arms flows to the Houthis and closer cooperation with Gulf partners. However, the U.K. also insists that long-term stability requires political solutions in Yemen, beyond short-term military responses.

France maintains strong interest in the Red Sea due to its overseas territories, commercial shipping routes, and military presence in Djibouti. Paris has supported **EUNAVFOR ASPIDES** (European Union Naval Force Operation ASPIDES (Aspides is Greek for "shield")) and advocates a European-led contribution to security operations. France seeks to balance deterrence against the Houthis with diplomatic engagement, stressing that unilateral escalation risks broader conflict in the region. French officials often emphasize respect for international humanitarian law and call for cooperation between littoral states and global powers. Paris positions itself as a bridge between European, Arab, and African stakeholders in UNSC deliberations.

The **Russian Federation** frames the Red Sea conflict through the lens of great power competition. Moscow criticizes Western-led security initiatives as serving NATO and U.S. interests rather than collective security. While condemning attacks on civilian shipping, Russia is reluctant to authorize broader enforcement actions that could

undermine state sovereignty. Moscow maintains ties with Iran and is wary of UNSC resolutions that explicitly single out Tehran or its allies. Instead, Russia advocates for regional dialogue and criticizes sanctions as counterproductive. It uses the crisis to highlight multipolar approaches and to challenge U.S. dominance in maritime security.

The **People's Republic of China** is heavily dependent on secure energy flows and trade through the Red Sea–Suez corridor. The crisis directly threatens Beijing's economic lifelines under the Belt and Road Initiative. China has deployed naval escorts under anti-piracy mandates and quietly participates in multinational efforts but resists Western dominance in shaping solutions. Beijing stresses sovereignty and opposes broad sanctions but supports pragmatic steps like multilateral de-escalation, UN-led mediation, and technical assistance for littoral states. China presents itself as a neutral actor advocating stability while ensuring protection of Chinese commercial shipping interests.

Somalia is geographically closest to the Red Sea crisis and deeply vulnerable to spillovers. It already faces piracy challenges and limited naval capacity. The escalation threatens Somali waters, trade, and economic recovery. Somalia calls for enhanced capacity-building for local coast guards, investment in maritime infrastructure, and protection for seafarers. It supports international naval operations but emphasizes that external powers must respect its sovereignty and work with regional organizations like IGAD and the AU. Somalia advocates addressing the Yemeni conflict politically to reduce instability at its doorstep.

Pakistan is highly reliant on secure maritime trade through the Red Sea–Suez route, particularly for energy imports. Karachi has previously contributed to anti-piracy and multinational naval patrols. Islamabad stresses that disruptions harm developing economies disproportionately. Pakistan advocates a balanced approach, combining stronger enforcement of UNCLOS with political dialogue with the Houthis and their backers. Given its relations with Gulf states and Iran, Pakistan may position itself as a mediator while calling for greater UN support to safeguard global trade routes vital to its own economic security.

Panama is one of the world's largest shipping registries, meaning many ships attacked or threatened in the Red Sea fly its flag. The crisis directly impacts its global shipping revenues and credibility as a registry. Panama emphasizes the protection of civilian

merchant vessels and strict adherence to UNCLOS. It supports multilateral naval operations to secure shipping but has limited military capacity of its own. Panama calls on the UNSC to strengthen legal accountability for attacks on merchant vessels and highlights the disproportionate burden on flag states.

Denmark is home to Maersk, one of the largest container shipping companies, which has been heavily affected by rerouting costs and delays. Copenhagen is therefore among the most outspoken in favor of strong international protection of shipping lanes. Denmark contributes naval assets to multinational missions and closely aligns with EU and NATO allies. It supports sanctions on arms transfers to the Houthis and advocates for burden-sharing among naval powers. Domestically, the crisis is framed as both an economic challenge and a test of international maritime law enforcement.

Greece, as a major maritime nation and key EU member, has a strong interest in securing the Suez–Red Sea route. Greek shipping companies account for a large share of global tanker traffic, making them highly vulnerable to disruptions. Greece participates in EUNAVFOR ASPIDES and backs robust maritime protection under EU leadership. At the same time, Athens stresses compliance with international law and multilateralism under the UN framework. Greece aligns closely with other European maritime nations, advocating for stronger cooperation with littoral states and clear condemnation of unlawful attacks.

South Korea depends heavily on Red Sea energy transit routes for oil and LNG imports. The crisis has forced Korean firms to face higher freight and insurance costs. Seoul has dispatched naval units under its anti-piracy mandate to protect Korean shipping. South Korea supports multilateral solutions under the UN framework and is likely to coordinate with the U.S. and other allies. While endorsing deterrence measures, Korea also emphasizes the need to avoid regional escalation, given its reliance on stable energy markets. Seoul supports mediation efforts alongside security cooperation.

V. DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

➤ **Bab el-Mandeb Strait**

A narrow chokepoint at the southern end of the Red Sea, between Yemen on the Arabian Peninsula and Djibouti/Eritrea in Africa. Its closure or insecurity can severely disrupt global trade and energy flows.

➤ **Houthis (Ansar Allah)**

A Yemeni armed movement originating from the Zaidi Shia community. They control much of northwestern Yemen, including the capital Sana'a. Since late 2023, they have conducted drone, missile, and boat attacks against commercial vessels in the Red Sea.

➤ **Operation Prosperity Guardian (OPG)**

A **U.S.-led multinational naval mission** (est. December 2023) aimed at protecting freedom of navigation in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden against Houthi attacks.

➤ **EUNAVFOR ASPIDES**

The **European Union's defensive naval operation** (est. February 2024). Focuses on escorting commercial vessels, surveillance, and protecting freedom of navigation in the Red Sea.

➤ **EUNAVFOR Atalanta**

An EU naval operation launched in **2008** to combat piracy off Somalia. Its mandate later expanded to include surveillance of illicit activities and protection of vulnerable shipping in the wider Indian Ocean and Red Sea.

➤ **UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea)**

An international treaty that sets out the legal framework for maritime rights, freedoms, and responsibilities. Guarantees "freedom of navigation" and prohibits unlawful attacks on civilian vessels.

➤ **Freedom of Navigation**

A principle under international law (UNCLOS) ensuring that ships of all states may sail through international waters or straits without interference, as long as they comply with lawful regulations.

VI. ATTACHMENT

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