



The Hague International Model United Nations

Forum: GA1

Issue: Measures to protect international shipping in the Red Sea

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Introduction

The Red Sea is a vital maritime corridor which connects the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean via the Suez Canal and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait. Around 12-15% of global trade and 20%¹ of the world's container shipping. The Red Sea also provides one of the most critical energy resource transport. This allows for the transit of oil and natural gas from the Middle East to Europe and Asia, overall shortening travel time by avoiding the longer route around Africa.



Figure 1: Map showing the geographical location of the Suez Canal, Bab el-Mandeb, and the Red Sea

Recent insecurity in the region is driven by regional conflicts, non-state armed groups, and geopolitical tensions which have threatened safe navigation. Commercial vessels have faced attacks, increased insurance costs, and forced rerouting, disrupting global supply chains. These threats challenge international law, particularly the United Nations Convention on Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS), which guarantees freedom of navigation. The risk of escalation among regional and international actors heightens instability.

Definition of Key Terms

Bab el-Mandeb Strait

The Bab el-Mandeb Strait lies between the Arabian Peninsula and the Horn of Africa. The strait connects the Aden Gulf to the Red Sea, giving a connection to the Indian Ocean.

Chokepoint

A naturally narrow maritime passage with high shipping traffic where congestion can occur.

Freedom of Navigation

Freedom of Navigation is protected, and its legal frameworks are from the 1982 United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), allowing a state to navigate freely.

Maritime Security Operations

Maritime Security refers to the, “measures and strategies implemented to protect vessels, ports, and maritime infrastructure from threats.”

Non-State Armed Groups

Armed groups of people acting out of their own motivations, independent of any government, operating out of their own self interest and in context with the Red Sea groups use piracy or other methods to achieve their goals.

Background Information

Origin and Geopolitical Context

The Red Sea is a vital corridor connecting the Mediterranean Sea to the Indian Ocean through the Suez Canal and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait. It is a key global trade route, carrying approximately a tenth of world trade and one-third of container shipments. In the first two months of 2024, trade through the Suez Canal fell by approximately 50%.² From late 2023, commercial shipping in the Red Sea faced threats from non-state armed groups using missiles, drones, and naval tactics. The narrow passages of the Bab el-Mandeb and the Suez Canal make the region especially vulnerable to attacks and with the context of Somali piracy which led to coordinated international naval interventions to protect shipping lanes.

Commercial, Insurance and Logistical Consequences

By mid-2025, war-risk insurance premiums in the Red Sea rose from 0.3% to around 0.7% of a ship's value.³ Combined with longer shipping routes, this increase contributed to higher freight rates and supply chain delays.

Scale of Human and Economic Cost

Between November 2023 and September 2024, the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) recorded 69 confirmed incidents involving attacks on commercial vessels.⁴ These caused fatalities, missing crew members, and ship damage. Shipping rerouted trade via the Cape of Good Hope increased cargo volumes from approximately 15% to around 29% early in 2024, increasing distances, fuel, and delivery times.⁵ Egypt's Suez Canal revenue fell from record levels in 2023 to roughly \$4.0 billion in 2024 due to reduced transit volumes from a record of \$10.25 billion in 2023.⁶

Strategic Importance

The Red Sea is a major trade corridor linking Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. Key chokepoints

like Bab el-Mandeb and the Suez Canal make shipping routes vulnerable. It is a vital pathway for oil and natural gas shipments. The region also carries undersea internet cables, affecting global communications. Regular naval presence highlights its military and strategic importance. The Red Sea's strategic value ensures regular international naval presence, enabling rapid regional movement, while its narrow passages make vessels vulnerable to attack,

The Houthi Movement (Ansar Allah) as a Non-State Actor Affecting Red Sea Shipping

The Houthis are a Yemeni non-state actor, their actions are responsible for the shipping route changes (going around the Cape of Good Hope and avoiding the Suez Canal). They claim attacks target Israeli-linked vessels but have struck various ships, thus the UN condemns them as they used missiles, drones, and USVs in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. These attacks have triggered multinational naval responses and fluctuated ceasefire agreements.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

UN and International Involvement

- Declaration on the Critical Economic Situation in Africa, 3 December 1984 (**A/RES/39/29**)
- Sanctions and Arms Embargo on Yemen, 14 April 2015 (**UNSC/RES/2216**)
- Prevention of Terrorism Financing & Arms Transfers, 15 August 2017 (**UNSC/RES/2374**)
- Piracy and Armed Robbery at Sea off the Coast of Somalia, 6 December 2010 (**UNSC/RES/1950**)
- Oceans and the Law of the Sea, 8 December 2023 (**UNGA/RES/78/260**)

Egypt

It is viewed as a direct threat to its economic and regional security, given its reliance on the Suez Canal revenue. It is focused on stabilization, freedom of navigation, and multilateral diplomacy and expanded services to encourage shipping and safety but companies are unlikely to resume regular transit without regional security.

Islamic Republic of Iran

Views the Red Sea crisis as part of broader regional power dynamics, using its military and political ties with the Houthis to expand influence and pressure Israel while denying direct control. Its policy relies on prevention by using aligned non-state actors.

Israel

Israel views Houthi attacks in the Red Sea as a direct threat to its national security and freedom of navigation, particularly due to the group's alignment with Iran, and has responded with a security-focused approach.

United Kingdom (UK)

The United Kingdom views the Red Sea crisis as a threat to freedom of navigation and global trade responded through involvement in international naval operations and diplomatic engagement at the United Nations, emphasizing collective security and deterrence.

United States of America (USA)

The USA views the Red Sea crisis as a threat to shipping, global trade, and freedom of navigation. It has responded through deterrence, multinational naval operations, targeted strikes on the Houthi group, and diplomatic action at the UN to uphold international law and protect commercial shipping.

Combined Maritime Forces (CMF)

It is a multinational naval partnership which helps escort, share information and maritime domain awareness to protect shipping. The CMF collaborates with international organisations and governments to uphold freedom of navigation.

European Union (EU)

It positions itself as a defensive, rules-based actor to safeguard freedom of navigation and protect seafarers. So far, European Union statements consistently condemn attacks on shipping and call for de-escalation and dialogue.

International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL)

INTERPOL focuses on law-enforcement, information-sharing and capacity building to counter maritime crime and insecurity in the Red Sea region and works within UN, regional and EU programmes.

International Maritime Organization (IMO)

The IMO condemns attacks on merchant shipping, prioritizes seafarer safety and freedom of navigation, and calls for incident reporting. Advisories and guidance urge member states to protect ships and coordinate with navies and industry stakeholders.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
November, 19th, 2023	The capture of the Galaxy Leader cargo ship in the Red Sea marked a major escalation, triggering sustained attacks on international commercial shipping.
December, 2023- January, 2024	Global shipping companies reroute vessels around the Cape of Good Hope.

March, 2024	Suez Canal traffic declined by nearly 50% compared to the previous year, demonstrating the severe economic consequences of Red Sea insecurity on global trade routes. ⁷
September, 2024	The IMO reports 69 confirmed attacks on commercial vessels since late 2023, ⁸ showing the persistent threats and the need for sustained international maritime security measures.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Combined Maritime Forces - Task Force 153

It was a 39-nation naval partnership conducting coordinated patrols, threat monitoring, and interdictions specifically in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. It improved information-sharing and reduced isolated attacks, but limited when state or quasi-state actors deploy advanced weapons.

Multinational Naval Deployments and Escort Missions

The United States of America, United Kingdom, France, and regional navies deployed vessels to escort merchant ships, providing short-term protection, though this deterrence is unsustainable without long-term political commitment.

Internationally Recognised Transit Corridor (IRTC)

This was a designated, patrolled shipping lane in the Gulf of Aden guiding vessels through safer waters. It was used daily by shipping companies as the primary protected passage near the Red Sea entrance which was highly effective during piracy peaks; less effective for long-range missile/drone threats outside the corridor.

Possible Solutions

To protect international shipping in the Red Sea, maritime security measures are essential. A possible solution would be a Coordinated Red Sea Maritime Security Grid which could integrate the existing drone, radar and satellite surveillance into a single shared visual in order to improve situational awareness. This would be combined with a Voluntary Vessel Escort Corridors through high risk zones that can concentrate merchant traffic into protected lanes, while standardised defensive upgrades on commercial vessels, such as alert systems, hardened bridges, and non-lethal deterrents, offer additional protection.

Addressing threats from non-state armed groups requires the establishment of a Regional Maritime De-Escalation Contact Group with UN observers that can reduce direct risks to shipping, while expanding coastal capacity building training coast guards, improving port surveillance, and providing small-craft interception tools which will strengthen regional security. A Secure Shipping Notification System, where

vessels pre-register transit details, allows for faster tracking and response during incidents.

Finally, international coordination and information sharing are vital. Strengthening Maritime Information Fusion Centres ensures real-time alerts and shared threat data, while a Unified Incident Reporting Protocol guarantees that all threats or attacks are reported consistently and circulated promptly to relevant stakeholders.

Endnotes

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