



CHMUN 2026

UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL (UNSC)

AGENDA

Addressing Maritime Security in the Red Sea Region: Addressing Recent Escalations and Threats to Freedom of Navigation, Safeguarding International Trade and Shipping Routes, and Strengthening International Mechanisms for Regional Peace and Security

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Letter from the Executive Board

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the United Nations Security Council at Chrysalis High MUN 2026. On behalf of the Executive Board, it is our pleasure to host you for what we hope will be a demanding, rewarding and memorable committee experience. Whether this is your first conference or your fiftieth, you have earned your seat at this table, and we are glad you are here.

This background guide is meant to be a starting point and not a finishing line. Please note that it may have been prepared with the assistance of artificial intelligence only to a limited extent, and that every section has since been vetted and carefully curated by the Executive Board. We have done so to ensure that the committee proceeds in a streamlined manner and that every delegate, irrespective of prior experience, begins with about equal footing on the substance of the agenda. The guide does not replace your own research. It will not tell you what your country thinks, and it deliberately avoids prescribing solutions. Your task is to study your country's policy, legal positions, alliances and voting record, and to bring them into the room.

The agenda before us is among the most consequential and fast-moving in international security. The Red Sea touches the interests of coastal states, major naval powers, trading nations, humanitarian agencies and ordinary seafarers alike. We expect delegates to engage with legal principles as seriously as with strategy, to listen as carefully as they speak, and to remember that the strength of the Security Council has always rested on its ability to find common ground between competing interests.

Please read the guide in full, pay particular attention to the questions a resolution might answer, and use the developments mentioned here as launching points for deeper research. Be courteous, be curious and be bold in your diplomacy. We wish you the very best in your preparation and look forward to seeing you in committee.

Warm regards,

The Executive Board

United Nations Security Council

Chrysalis High MUN 2026

1. Introduction to Committee

The United Nations Security Council is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations and the only one whose decisions are legally binding on all Member States. Under Article 24 of the UN Charter, Member States confer on the Council primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, and under Article 25 they agree to accept and carry out its decisions. Its powers are set out mainly in Chapters VI, VII, VIII and XII of the

Charter. Chapter VI deals with the peaceful settlement of disputes, while Chapter VII allows the Council to determine the existence of a threat to the peace, to impose sanctions and to authorise the use of force.

The Council has fifteen members. Five are permanent: China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States. Each holds the power to veto any substantive draft resolution. The other ten are elected by the General Assembly for two-year terms. In 2026 these are Bahrain, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Denmark, Greece, Latvia, Liberia, Pakistan, Panama and Somalia. A substantive resolution needs at least nine affirmative votes and no negative vote from a permanent member. An abstention by a permanent member does not block adoption, a fact that has shaped the Council's recent decisions on the Red Sea.

The Council can adopt resolutions, issue presidential and press statements, establish sanctions regimes, mandate peace operations and request reports from the Secretary-General. In this simulation, delegates represent Member States and should aim to produce outcomes that are legally sound, politically realistic and capable of securing nine votes without a veto. The Council is not only a forum for debate. It exists to take decisions, and the quality of a delegate's contribution will be judged by how well it moves the committee towards one.

2. Introduction to Agenda

The Red Sea is a narrow body of water, roughly 2,000 kilometres long, that separates Africa from the Arabian Peninsula. At its northern end it connects to the Mediterranean through the Suez Canal, and at its southern end it narrows into the Bab al-Mandab Strait, a passage of about 30 kilometres that leads into the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean. Its shores belong to Egypt, Sudan, Eritrea, Djibouti, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Israel and Jordan, with Somalia bordering the approaches. It is one of the most important arteries of global trade, carrying a large share of the container traffic and seaborne energy that moves between Europe, Asia and the Gulf.

Since November 2023, attacks by the Houthi movement in Yemen on commercial vessels have turned this corridor into a recurring flashpoint. Merchant ships have been struck, seized and sunk, seafarers have been killed or held hostage, and many shipping lines have chosen the long route around Africa instead. The Security Council responded with Resolution 2722 in January 2024 and has renewed its monitoring of the situation ever since, most recently through Resolution 2826 in July 2026. The crisis is now tied to a wider confrontation involving Iran, Israel and the United States, and to disruption in the Strait of Hormuz.

This agenda asks the Council to address three linked questions. How should it respond to recent escalations and protect freedom of navigation? How can international trade and shipping routes be safeguarded? And what international mechanisms can build lasting peace and security in the region? Delegates should keep in mind that the facts on the water change quickly, and should check the latest reporting before the conference.

3. Current Security Landscape and Recent Escalations in the Red Sea

The present crisis began in November 2023, when the Houthi movement, formally known as Ansar Allah, started attacking and seizing ships in the Red Sea, citing solidarity with Palestinians during the war in Gaza. The seizure of the vehicle carrier *Galaxy Leader* and its crew was followed by missile, drone and uncrewed boat attacks. By most estimates, roughly 530 attacks were launched over two years. Vessels such as the *Rubymar*, the *Tutor*, the *Magic Seas* and the *Eternity C* were sunk, and the deaths of crew members drew condemnation from the Secretary-General. Operation Prosperity Guardian and the European Union's Operation Aspides were launched to protect shipping, while the United States and the United Kingdom carried out strikes inside Yemen. An Oman-mediated understanding between Washington and the Houthis in May 2025 reduced attacks on American ships but did not end the threat to others, and a further lull followed the Gaza ceasefire in late 2025.

That calm did not last. In 2026 a wider confrontation involving Iran, Israel and the United States disrupted traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, and Iranian officials warned of a coordinated "security belt" reaching from Hormuz to Bab al-Mandab. On 14 July 2026 the Council adopted Resolution 2826, extending the Secretary-General's monthly reporting on Houthi attacks until 15 January 2027, with thirteen votes in favour and abstentions from China and Russia. Within days, attacks on shipping resumed, with Saudi-linked tankers targeted from late July and an Egyptian cargo ship struck on 11 August, killing four sailors. Reports in September describe Houthi control over the port of Mokha and the island of Perim, an attack on Saudi Arabia's East-West oil pipeline, a surge in piracy in the Gulf of Aden, and the formation of a Saudi-led Multinational Maritime Defence Alliance.

4. Threats to Freedom of Navigation and the Law of the Sea

Threats to navigation in the Red Sea now take several forms. The most visible are anti-ship ballistic and cruise missiles, armed drones and explosive-laden uncrewed boats. Alongside these are the seizure of vessels and the detention of crews, the risk of sea mines, and the jamming or spoofing of satellite navigation and identification signals, which can push ships off course or expose them to targeting. Houthi and Iranian statements about closing Bab al-Mandab or establishing a "security belt" raise a further concern, namely that control of a chokepoint could be used to demand tolls, choose who may pass and coerce third states. The resurgence of piracy off Somalia adds a criminal dimension to an already political threat.

These practices strike at the core of the law of the sea. Under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), all states enjoy freedom of navigation on the high seas and in exclusive economic zones, and ships of all flags enjoy the right of transit passage through straits used for international navigation. That right cannot be suspended by the coastal state.

Targeting vessels because of the nationality of their owners, charterers or cargo, or because of the ports they have visited, has no basis in these rules, since the rights attach to the ship's flag and not to its commercial links.

The Council has taken this position before. Resolution 2722 condemned the attacks, demanded that they stop, and recalled the rights and freedoms of navigation of all states under international law. The difficulty for delegates is that existing law is clearer on the rights than on the means of enforcing them, particularly when the offender is not a state and when the strait runs through waters controlled by a party to an ongoing civil war.

5. Role of Non-State Armed Groups and Maritime Asymmetric Warfare

The principal non-state actor in the Red Sea is the Houthi movement, which has controlled Sanaa and much of northern and western Yemen since 2014 and holds a long stretch of the Red Sea coast, including the Hodeidah ports. Although it is a non-state group in international law, it behaves in many respects like a state, with an organised military, a de facto administration and a developed arsenal. Its maritime campaign relies on low-cost, scalable tools. Cheap one-way attack drones, uncrewed explosive boats, and anti-ship ballistic and cruise missiles are used in combination, sometimes in salvos intended to overwhelm defences. The group has also used surveillance, open-source shipping data and small boats to select targets, and it once seized a ship by helicopter. Interceptors that cost many times more than the drones they destroy create an exchange ratio that favours the attacker and strains the navies defending shipping.

This is the essence of maritime asymmetric warfare. The weaker party avoids confrontation with warships, targets the soft and economically valuable merchant fleet, and exploits ambiguity over ownership, flags and intentions. Because the targets are civilian ships crewed by seafarers from many countries who have no part in the dispute, the human cost is borne by third parties. Attribution is further complicated by external support. The Council's arms embargo on the Houthis under Resolution 2216 and the sanctions framework under Resolution 2140 recognise this, and several states have reported interdictions of weapons shipments linked to Iran. Tehran denies directing the group's operations, but the question of state responsibility for arming and supporting a non-state actor is central to any serious debate.

The Houthis also present a political and legal puzzle. They are not a recognised government, yet they administer most of Yemen's population and its main Red Sea ports, and humanitarian agencies must negotiate with them to deliver aid. The internationally recognised Yemeni government and its partners accuse the movement of using the Red Sea as leverage in wider regional rivalries, while the Houthis present their campaign as solidarity with Palestinians and as resistance to foreign pressure. Delegates should separate the group's declared aims from the actual effects of its actions on civilian shipping.

Other armed groups add to the picture. Reports describe growing links between the Houthis and al-Shabaab in Somalia, including training, weapons and funding, and there is concern that pirate networks in the Gulf of Aden may benefit from Houthi-supplied tracking equipment. Whether piracy and Houthi attacks are coordinated is disputed, but both exploit weak governance on the shores of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden.

Shipping companies have adapted by broadcasting messages about crew nationality and ownership, altering routes and sometimes switching off identification systems in high-risk waters. These steps can reduce risk, but they also weaken the shared picture of maritime traffic on which navies and insurers rely, and they offer no protection to vessels that have no choice but to pass through Bab al-Mandab.

Responses so far have been largely military, and strikes have not ended the attacks. Delegates should weigh several difficult questions. Military pressure may deter or may provoke further escalation. Designating the Houthis as a terrorist organisation, as the United States has done, may reduce funding but can also complicate humanitarian deliveries and negotiations. And any lasting answer will probably need to address the political conflict in Yemen and the conditions that allow armed groups to hold strategic coastline, rather than the symptoms alone.

6. Impact of Red Sea Insecurity on International Trade and Global Supply Chains

The Red Sea and the Suez Canal normally carry about 12 percent of global trade and roughly 30 percent of global container traffic, together with a significant share of seaborne oil and fuel. Before the crisis, about 80 vessels per week, carrying around 3.4 million metric tonnes, passed through Bab al-Mandab. After the attacks resumed in July 2026, weekly transits fell to about 25 vessels carrying roughly 750,000 tonnes, which is less than a third of the earlier level.

The first effect is rerouting. When the Red Sea is judged unsafe, shipping lines send vessels around the Cape of Good Hope. This was estimated to have raised transits around the Cape by 74 percent in the earlier crisis, adding up to two weeks and about 6,000 nautical miles to journeys between Asia and Europe. Longer voyages absorb ship capacity, disrupt schedules and push up freight rates, and the resulting bunching of arrivals can congest ports. War risk insurance premiums for Red Sea transits have risen from around 0.1 percent of a vessel's value to between 0.7 and 1.0 percent, and the additional cost has been put at close to one million dollars per vessel for each round trip. These costs are ultimately passed on to businesses and consumers.

The second effect falls on the states that depend on the corridor. Egypt is estimated to have lost 30 to 40 percent of the roughly 9.4 billion dollars it collects annually from Suez Canal fees, which has serious consequences for its foreign exchange reserves. Djibouti, Sudan, Eritrea and Somaliland have also been affected by reduced traffic and higher costs. Ethiopia, a landlocked

state of about 120 million people, depends on Djibouti for around 90 percent of its trade and is exposed to every disruption of the route.

The third effect is on energy and food. Iranian pressure on the Strait of Hormuz had already pushed Saudi Arabia to export far more crude oil through the Red Sea port of Yanbu, reportedly from about one million to nearly five million barrels a day, which makes the Red Sea route and the East-West pipeline critical to energy supply. Attacks on either threaten a second chokepoint at a time when the first is already under strain. Higher fuel and freight costs are felt most sharply in import-dependent economies. Africa imports almost all of its refined oil products, and one UN trade body has estimated that rising oil prices are costing thirteen African countries more than one percent of GDP. Fuel prices in Somalia have more than doubled this year, and food prices in Sudan have risen sharply, adding to existing humanitarian crises.

There are also human and environmental costs. Seafarers have been killed, injured and held captive, and crews are increasingly reluctant to sail through the area. Yemen itself imports the large majority of its food and fuel through Red Sea ports, so insecurity and strikes on port infrastructure threaten humanitarian supplies for millions of people who already depend on aid. Damaged or sunk ships, such as the Rubymar with its fertiliser cargo and the tanker Sounion, which carried about one million barrels of crude oil when it was set ablaze in 2024, pose pollution risks to a fragile marine ecosystem.

Taken together, these effects show that Red Sea insecurity is not a regional problem alone. The burden falls unevenly, and states with little influence over the conflict often pay the heaviest price. Any response the Council adopts will be judged by whether it restores predictable passage, lowers costs for vulnerable importers and keeps humanitarian cargo moving.

7. International Naval Operations and Collective Maritime Security Mechanisms

Several naval efforts operate in and around the Red Sea. Operation Prosperity Guardian, launched by the United States in December 2023, brought together a multinational group of navies to protect merchant shipping. The European Union's Operation Aspides, begun in February 2024, provides escort and situational awareness without striking targets on land, and EU officials have recently urged members to commit more warships. Operation Atalanta, the EU counter-piracy mission, and the Combined Maritime Forces based in Bahrain have patrolled the Gulf of Aden and wider region for years. China, Russia and India also maintain naval presences in the area, largely independent of these structures. The United States and the United Kingdom have conducted separate strike campaigns against Houthi targets, and in 2026 Saudi Arabia and regional partners announced the Multinational Maritime Defence Alliance to coordinate protection of the Bab al-Mandab Strait.

These efforts face real challenges. Command arrangements are fragmented, and states differ over whether operations should be purely defensive or should include strikes. Warships and interceptor stocks are limited, and the cost of defending against cheap weapons is high. Shared maritime awareness depends on information from bodies such as the UK Maritime Trade Operations office and the Joint Maritime Information Center, but the exchange of intelligence among rival powers remains uneven. Resolution 2722 recognised the right of Member States to defend their vessels against attack, but it did not authorise a naval mission, and the question of a Council mandate remains open. Any new arrangement must also respect the sovereignty and consent of coastal states, and avoid being seen as an instrument of one bloc against another.

8. Application of UNCLOS and Other Applicable International Legal Frameworks

The primary legal framework is UNCLOS, which sets out the rights of ships in different maritime zones. It protects freedom of navigation under Articles 58 and 87, innocent passage under Articles 17 to 19, and transit passage through international straits under Articles 37 to 44. Under Article 44, a state bordering a strait may not hamper transit passage, and there must be no suspension of it. Article 301 requires states to refrain from the threat or use of force in line with the UN Charter. The United States and Israel are not parties to UNCLOS, but the United States accepts most of its navigation provisions as customary law, and the Convention remains the main reference for the debate.

UNCLOS also addresses piracy in Articles 100 to 107, allowing any state to seize a pirate ship on the high seas. However, Article 101 defines piracy as an act committed for private ends by the crew of one ship against another, and whether politically motivated attacks by an armed group meet this definition is contested. The 1988 Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the Safety of Maritime Navigation, known as the SUA Convention, and its 2005 Protocol cover the seizure of ships, violent acts against persons on board and the use of explosives or weapons, whatever the motive. The 1979 International Convention against the Taking of Hostages is relevant to the detention of crews, and the 1888 Constantinople Convention guarantees free passage through the Suez Canal for all vessels.

The UN Charter governs the use of force. Article 2(4) prohibits it, and Article 51 recognises the right of self-defence against an armed attack. States disagree about how this applies to attacks by non-state actors, particularly on questions of attribution, necessity and proportionality. Chapter VII allows the Council to take binding measures, including sanctions and, if it chooses, authorisation of force, while Chapter VIII encourages regional arrangements acting under its authority. International humanitarian law, including the principle of distinction, protects civilian ships and seafarers, and the San Remo Manual on armed conflicts at sea offers guidance for hostilities involving shipping. Council Resolutions 2216, 2140 and 2722 are the key decisions specific to Yemen and the Red Sea.

9. Regional Cooperation and Confidence-Building Measures for De-escalation

Regional organisations have a vital part to play in any lasting settlement. The Council of Arab and African States Bordering the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, created in 2020, brings together the coastal states on both shores, and the Regional Organization for the Conservation of the Environment of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden (PERSGA) has long worked on shared environmental and safety concerns. The Djibouti Code of Conduct, which was adopted in 2009 and expanded by the Jeddah Amendment in 2017, provides a framework for information sharing, capacity building and prosecution of maritime crime. The African Union, the Arab League, the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development also have stakes in the outcome, as does Oman, which has mediated between Washington and the Houthis. Differences among regional states, including rivalry between Gulf powers over ports and influence, and concern raised by Somalia about the growing militarisation of the Red Sea, complicate cooperation.

Confidence-building measures could ease tensions while political talks continue. These might include communication channels between naval forces to prevent incidents at sea, advance notification of exercises and deployments, shared protocols for the treatment of detained crews, and regional centres for exchanging maritime information. The UN Verification and Inspection Mechanism for Yemen, which clears commercial shipments to Yemeni ports, shows how a neutral mechanism can ease humanitarian access, and the UN Special Envoy for Yemen continues to pursue a political roadmap. Delegates should consider how any maritime arrangement can be linked to progress on Yemen's peace process and to wider efforts to reduce regional tensions, since a purely naval solution is unlikely to hold.

10. QARMA (Questions a Resolution Might Answer or Address)

The following questions are intended to guide delegates in drafting their working papers and resolutions. They are not exhaustive, and delegates are encouraged to raise further issues they consider important to the agenda.

1. What measures can protect merchant vessels from attacks?
2. How can humanitarian supplies reach affected populations safely?
3. What mechanisms can prevent escalation between regional and external actors?
4. How should non-state groups' use of drones and missiles be addressed?
5. What measures can contain asymmetric maritime warfare by armed groups?
6. Which mechanisms can prevent and deter attacks by non-state groups?

7. How should naval operations protect navigation while respecting sovereignty?
8. What systems can strengthen intelligence-sharing and maritime surveillance?
9. What strategies can reduce disruptions to global trade and shipping routes?
10. Which frameworks can establish long-term regional maritime security and cooperation?