Topic A: Ensuring freedom of navigation in strategic straits against hybrid threats

Security Council

UAQMUN

2027

Voices of a new era: youth facing global challenges

Introduction to the committee

We are pleased to welcome you to this edition of the Model United Nations of Universidad Anáhuac Querétaro (UAQMUN 2027). The School of International Relations and the organizing team sincerely thank you for your participation, and we wish you a formative, challenging, and enriching experience within this model.

Founded in 1945, the Security Council's primary responsibility is maintaining international peace and security. It is composed primarily of fifteen members, comprising ten elected members serving two-year terms and five permanent members: China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Guided and rooted in the UN Charter, the Council investigates disputes and seeks to maintain international peace and global security, with measures permitted under the UN Charter. Substantively, among member states, the Council's axial decisions require at least 9 affirmative votes and no veto from a permanent member (United Nations, 1945, United Nations Security Council)

On this occasion, the committee will focus on the following debate:

"Ensuring freedom of navigation in strategic straits against hybrid threats."

The central question is how lawful passage can be preserved when coercion combines physical attacks, interference with navigation systems, and uncertainty about responsibility, an uncertainty that has so far proven durable enough to suit most parties involved. The Council must weigh the safety of seafarers against coastal sovereignty, the risk of wider conflict, and the consequences of disrupted trade, rather than resolving that balance in advance according to which factor a given delegation finds most convenient.

The applicable rules apply unevenly across the Red Sea and Bab el-Mandeb, the Strait of Hormuz, and the Taiwan Strait, three cases often treated as a single problem with three symptoms. Bab el-Mandeb has absorbed Houthi attacks on commercial shipping since late 2023, testing the boundary between lawful vessel defence and an unauthorised campaign (UNSC, 2024). Hormuz, carrying roughly a quarter of global seaborne oil trade before the 2026 disruption, produced confirmed incidents and a Council vote that failed on veto rather than on merit (UNSC, 2026a; IEA, n.d.). The Taiwan Strait presents no comparable pattern of attacks, only a live dispute over how the waters should be classified, and by whom (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2022). Each raises distinct security conditions and distinct legal questions that a uniform response would obscure rather than resolve. Events are considered through 6 September 2026; dates attached to incident reports and economic figures identify the period each source describes.

The committee's objective is a credible framework for preventing disruption, protecting civilian shipping, and responding to incidents once verified, verification being the operative word where attribution remains contested (ILC, 2001, arts. 4, 8). The policy options that follow are starting points for negotiation, not prescribed national positions, however closely the two tend to resemble each other in practice. A resolution should preserve space for diplomacy when disagreement over attribution or sovereignty prevents agreement on coercive action.

Topic “A”: Ensuring freedom of navigation in strategic straits against hybrid threats.

Maritime chokepoints (narrow waterways critical to global trade) leave international supply chains highly vulnerable to localized disruptions. While natural straits like Bab el-Mandeb and artificial canals like the Suez Canal often form continuous trade corridors, they remain geographically and legally distinct, requiring tailored regulatory approaches to safeguard sea transport. Approximately 80 percent of international goods rely on sea transport. Consequently, route disruptions in availability can cause fractures in access to food, raw materials, manufacture products. The rerouting of vessels around the Cape of Good Hope extends travel time, which raises transportation costs; however, the impact depends on the duration of the disruption, the cargo affected, and the availability of the respective routes (UN Trade and Development, 2025).

Hybrid threats blend kinetic and non-kinetic tactics, such as military force, cyberattacks, economic pressure, disinformation, vessel seizures, and naval mines, creating ambiguous "gray zones" regarding actor identity and legal thresholds. While these concepts aid political and security analysis, they do not establish a new legal category or replace existing international law, meaning each maritime incident presents distinct questions of legal responsibility and lawful response.

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) provides the principal framework for navigation. Foreign ships generally enjoy free passage through territorial seas, provided it does not prejudice the coastal State’s peace, good order, or security. In straits governed by transit passage, navigation and overflight must be continuous and expeditious, and bordering States may not suspend passage. In exclusive economic zones (EEZs), coastal States hold specified sovereign rights and jurisdiction; other States retain navigation freedoms subject to due regard for coastal rights. Article 36 excludes straits with a high-seas or EEZ route of similar navigational and hydrographical convenience from the Part III regime (United Nations, 1982, arts. 17–19, 36–44, 56, 58).

However, an entitlement to navigate does not itself confer authority to board vessels or employ force. Article 2(4) of the UN Charter prohibits the threat or use of force in the terms it sets out; Chapter VII and Article 51 govern distinct bases for enforcement action and self-defence. The latter requires an applicable armed-attack basis, necessity, proportionality, and reporting to the Council. Where armed conflict exists, international humanitarian law also governs hostilities, including the protection of civilian vessels and the rules on military objectives, proportionality, and precautions (United Nations, 1945; International Court of Justice, 2003; International Committee of the Red Cross, 2026).

The substantive question is therefore how the Council can secure lawful passage while preserving the legal limits that make international cooperation possible. Bab el-Mandeb, Hormuz, and the Taiwan Strait expose different dimensions of this problem: attacks associated

with regional hostilities, disruption of an energy corridor, and the risk of restrictions amid a sovereignty dispute.

History of the topic

In *Corfu Channel* (1949), the ICJ upheld British warships' passage through an international strait but found that the subsequent minesweeping operation violated Albanian sovereignty. The judgment distinguished passage rights from the legality of enforcement measures (ICJ, 1949).

UNCLOS (1982) established rules governing maritime zones and passage, while the SUA Convention (1988) addressed offences against ship safety and cooperation in prosecution. Resolution 1816 (2008) subsequently permitted specified counter-piracy operations in Somali territorial waters for six months, subject to its conditions and cooperation with Somali authorities. The authorisation did not extend to other coastal States' waters (IMO, n.d.-a; UNSC, 2008).

Following Houthi attacks on commercial shipping from late 2023, Resolution 2722 (2024) demanded their cessation and the release of the *Galaxy Leader* and its crew. It recognised navigational rights and lawful vessel defence without authorising a military campaign. The United Kingdom separately invoked self-defence to justify strikes against Houthi capabilities (Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, 2024; UNSC, 2024). The European Union launched Operation ASPIDES in February 2024, later extending its mandate to February 2027 and adding tasks concerning submarine infrastructure and regional maritime capacity (Council of the European Union, 2026).

Resolution 2817 (2026) condemned Iran's attacks against neighbouring States and interference with maritime navigation. On 7 April, draft resolution S/2026/273 concerning Hormuz received eleven affirmative votes but failed following Chinese and Russian vetoes; Colombia and Pakistan abstained (UNSC, 2026a, 2026b). In July, Resolution 2826 extended monthly reporting on Houthi attacks until 15 January 2027 without establishing a naval enforcement mandate (UNSC, 2026c).

Discussion of the topic

Bab el-Mandeb connects the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden within the trade corridor passing through the Suez Canal. Houthi attacks affect commercial navigation, but the movement's conduct must be distinguished from that of Yemen's internationally recognised government. In January 2024, the Russian Federation and Algeria emphasised the connection with Gaza, while the United States rejected that connection as justification for attacks on shipping (United Nations, 2024). The *Galaxy Leader*'s twenty-five crew members remained detained from November 2023 until January 2025 (IMO, 2025b). Maritime protection therefore includes crew safety, rescue, medical assistance, and safe departure, alongside measures to prevent further attacks.

Hormuz, bordered by Iran and Oman, carried approximately 20 million barrels of oil daily in 2025, representing one quarter of global seaborne oil trade before the 2026 disruption. Iran has signed but not ratified UNCLOS; its treaty obligations must therefore be distinguished from applicable customary law and Charter obligations (IEA, n.d.; United Nations Treaty Collection, n.d.). By 2 September 2026, IMO's Hormuz and Middle East record listed seventy-two confirmed incidents and twenty-one seafarer fatalities. Its July update reported the evacuation of 136 vessels and approximately 2,900 seafarers through alternative routes because of mines. Evacuations were subsequently suspended over safety concerns (IMO, n.d.-c, 2026). Restoring commercial navigation requires sustained security conditions beyond those needed for individual evacuations.

In the Taiwan Strait, China rejects the description of the strait as international waters while recognising other States' lawful rights in the relevant maritime zones. The United States describes its transits as occurring beyond territorial seas; Taiwan's authorities also affirm navigation freedoms in those waters (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2022; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of China [Taiwan], 2022; U.S. Seventh Fleet, 2024). Under UNCLOS, coastal rights in an EEZ do not confer general sovereignty over foreign navigation (United Nations, 1982, arts. 56, 58). Any inspection regime, quarantine, or blockade requires assessment of its location, scope, coercive effects, and legal basis. Notifications and incident hotlines are possible measures to reduce navigational risks.

Attribution and offence classification determine which legal responses are available. State responsibility may arise from conduct by State organs or actors operating under State instructions, direction, or control. Foreign-made equipment alone does not establish attribution to its supplier (ILC, 2001, arts. 4, 8). Similarly, UNCLOS piracy requires specific elements, including private ends and acts outside territorial jurisdiction; politically motivated attacks cannot automatically receive that classification. SUA provides a separate framework for specified maritime offences and prosecution (United Nations, 1982, arts. 58, 101; IMO, n.d.-a).

Safety warnings, public attribution, sanctions, and criminal proceedings require different evidentiary assessments. A reporting mechanism could document incident location, timing, effects, and supporting evidence, with procedures for review and correction. Technical prevention can proceed while attribution remains unresolved. IMO guidance and the 2025 joint

agency statement support cyber-risk management, resilient navigation systems, and conventional backups, with assistance adapted to smaller ports and fleets (IMO, n.d.-b, 2025a).

Disruptions also increase voyage duration, fuel consumption, and freight and insurance costs. Developing economies face particular exposure, while energy and fertiliser constraints can affect agricultural production (FAO, 2026; UNCTAD, 2025). Effects on household income, education, and employment require assessment according to local import dependence and economic conditions.

Guiding Questions

1. To what extent may coastal States invoke sovereignty or national security to restrict passage through strategic straits, and where should the Council draw the legal limits?
2. How should the Council address hybrid maritime threats without extending the legal definition of piracy or creating overly broad grounds for enforcement?

3. What evidentiary thresholds should distinguish urgent safety warnings from public attribution, sanctions designations, and criminal prosecution, particularly when decisive intelligence remains classified?

4. Under what circumstances may States use force to protect commercial vessels, and when would such action exceed self-defence or require Council authorisation?

5. How can the Council establish accountability for Houthi attacks while preventing maritime protection measures from expanding into broader hostilities in Yemen?

6. Can coastal States lawfully condition safe passage through Hormuz on inspections or security arrangements, and what safeguards would prevent those conditions from becoming arbitrary restrictions?

7. How can the Council protect navigation in the Taiwan Strait without prejudging sovereignty claims, particularly when a permanent member is directly involved in the dispute?

8. To what extent should States disclose evidence of cyber interference affecting navigation, and how can national security claims be reconciled with independent verification?

9. How should responsibility for financing maritime protection be distributed between coastal States and States benefiting from passage, without making assistance conditional on concessions of sovereign authority?

10. What limits should a resolution impose on enforcement powers, and how should humanitarian safeguards, independent oversight, and renewal conditions prevent exceptional measures from becoming indefinite?

List of participants

- Kingdom of Bahrain
- People's Republic of China
- Republic of Colombia
- Democratic Republic of the Congo
- Kingdom of Denmark
- French Republic
- Hellenic Republic
- Republic of Latvia
- Republic of Liberia

- Islamic Republic of Pakistan
- Republic of Panama
- Russian Federation
- Federal Republic of Somalia
- United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
- United States of America

References

Council of the European Union. (2026a, March 30). *Maritime security: Council updates mandates of EU naval operations ASPIDES and ATALANTA*. https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2026/03/30/maritime-security-council-updates-mandates-of-eu-naval-operations-aspides-and-atalanta/

Council of the European Union. (2026b, February 23). *Red Sea: Council extends the mandate of Operation ASPIDES to safeguard freedom of navigation*. https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2026/02/23/red-sea-council-extends-the-mandate-of-operation-aspides-to-safeguard-freedom-of-navigation/

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. (2026, May 20). *Strait of Hormuz conflict threatens global food prices as FAO warns time is running out*. https://www.fao.org/newsroom/detail/strait-of-hormuz-conflict-threatens-global-food-prices-as-fao-warns-time-is-running-out/

Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office. (2024, January 12). *Houthi attacks on vessels in the Red Sea must stop: UK statement at the UN Security Council*. https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/houthi-attacks-on-vessels-in-the-red-sea-must-stop-uk-statement-at-the-un-security-council

International Committee of the Red Cross. (2026, March 23). *Frequently asked questions: IHL and the escalating conflict in the Middle East*. https://www.icrc.org/en/article/faq-ihl-and-escalating-conflict-middle-east

International Energy Agency. (2026, February). *Strait of Hormuz*. [Factsheet]. https://www.iea.org/about/oil-safety-and-emergency-response/strait-of-hormuz

International Law Commission. (2001). *Draft articles on the responsibility of States for internationally wrongful acts, with commentaries*. https://legal.un.org/ilc/texts/instruments/english/commentaries/9_6_2001.pdf

International Maritime Organization. (n.d.-a). *Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts Against the Safety of Maritime Navigation, Protocol for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts Against the Safety of Fixed Platforms Located on the Continental Shelf*. https://www.imo.org/en/about/conventions/pages/sua-treaties.aspx

International Maritime Organization. (n.d.-b). *Maritime cyber risk*. Retrieved September 6, 2026, from https://www.imo.org/en/ourwork/security/pages/cyber-security.aspx

International Maritime Organization. (n.d.-c). *Red Sea area*. Retrieved September 6, 2026, from https://www.imo.org/en/mediacentre/hottopics/pages/red-sea.aspx

International Maritime Organization. (2025a, March 25). *Protect satellite navigation from interference, UN agencies urge*. https://www.imo.org/en/mediacentre/pressbriefings/pages/joint-imo-icao-itu-statement-satellite-interference.aspx

International Maritime Organization. (2025b, January 22). *Statement on the release of the Galaxy Leader crew*. https://www.imo.org/en/mediacentre/secretarygeneral/pages/statement-on-the-release-of-the-galaxy-leader-crew.aspx

International Maritime Organization. (2026a, August 28). *Six months of uncertainty for seafarers in the Strait of Hormuz*. https://www.imo.org/en/mediacentre/pressbriefings/pages/statement-on-the-ongoing-crisis-in-the-strait-of-hormuz.aspx

International Maritime Organization. (2026b, July 8). *Update to the Council (C 137) - Protection of vital shipping lanes*. https://www.imo.org/en/mediacentre/secretarygeneral/pages/update-to-council-137.aspx

Ministry of National Defense of the People's Republic of China. (2025, April 2). *Chinese military launches "Strait Thunder 2025A" exercise in middle and southern sea areas of Taiwan Strait*. https://eng.mod.gov.cn/xb/News_213114/TopStories/16378460.html

Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations. (2026, July 14). *Explanation of vote by Ambassador Sun Lei, Chargé d'Affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations, on the UN Security Council draft resolution extending the mandate of the Red Sea vessels attack report*. https://un.china-mission.gov.cn/eng/dbtxx_141670/20250402en/20250402act/202607/t20260715_11983288.htm

U.S. Seventh Fleet. (2024, March 5). *7th Fleet destroyer transits Taiwan Strait*. https://www.cpf.navy.mil/Newsroom/News/Article/3694788/7th-fleet-destroyer-transits-taiwan-strait/

UN Trade and Development. (n.d.). *Review of maritime transport*. Retrieved September 6, 2026, from https://unctad.org/RMT

UN Trade and Development. (2025). *Review of maritime transport 2025: Staying the course in turbulent waters*. (UNCTAD/RMT/2025). https://unctad.org/publication/review-maritime-transport-2025

United Nations. (1945, June 26). *Charter of the United Nations*. https://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/content/working-methods-un-charter

United Nations. (1982, December 10). *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea*. https://www.un.org/Depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos_e.pdf

United Nations. (2024, January 10). *Security Council adopts Resolution 2722 (2024) demanding Houthis immediately stop attacks on merchant, commercial vessels in Red Sea*. (SC/15561). https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15561.doc.htm

United Nations Security Council. (n.d.). *Voting system*. Retrieved September 6, 2026, from https://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/content/voting-system

United Nations Security Council. (2008, June 2). *Resolution 1816 (2008)*. (S/RES/1816 (2008)). https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/1816(2008)

United Nations Security Council. (2024, January 10). *Resolution 2722 (2024)*. (S/RES/2722 (2024)). https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/2722(2024)

United Nations Security Council. (2026a, April 7). *10130th meeting*. (S/PV.10130). https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4108176/files/S_PV.10130-EN.pdf

United Nations Security Council. (2026b, March 11). *Resolution 2817 (2026)*. (S/RES/2817 (2026)). https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/2817(2026)