

Forum: Disarmament and International Security Committee (GA1)

Issue: Addressing the proliferation of conventional and asymmetric weapons in strategic maritime chokepoints

Student Officer: Marialena Sarimvei

Position: Main Chair

TOPIC INTRODUCTION

Maritime chokepoints play an essential role in both international trade and international security. According to UN Trade and Development, maritime transport is the backbone of international trade and is responsible for 80% of the global movement of goods. Strategic waterways such as the Suez Canal, Bab al-Mandab Strait, Strait of Hormuz, and Panama Canal therefore have an importance that extends far beyond the states surrounding them. UNCTAD describes the Suez Canal as crucial for trade between Europe and Asia, while the Bab al-Mandab is particularly important for the transportation of oil and natural gas from the Middle East. Disruption of these routes can consequently affect global supply chains, energy security, and international economic stability.

At the same time, the security of maritime chokepoints has increasingly been affected by armed conflict and the proliferation of conventional and asymmetric weapons. The use of anti-ship missiles, drones, unmanned vessels, and other weapons against commercial shipping demonstrates how comparatively limited military capabilities can threaten international maritime traffic. The International Maritime Organization has described attacks against commercial vessels as a direct threat to the freedom of navigation in some of the world's most critical waterways. In the Red Sea in particular, attacks against international shipping have endangered seafarers while threatening the security of international shipping and the stability of global supply chains.

These developments have consequences beyond maritime security itself. UNCTAD has warned that key chokepoints are increasingly vulnerable to geopolitical tensions, conflicts, and climate change, and that disruptions are extending shipping routes, straining supply chains, and raising costs. The Red Sea crisis demonstrates this problem particularly clearly. Following attacks against commercial vessels, hundreds of ships were rerouted away from the Red Sea and Suez Canal. As the United Nations has emphasized, although shipping can adapt by rerouting vessels, closing an entire strategic shipping lane is not an option.

The proliferation of weapons around these waterways, therefore, also raises important questions of international law. Security Council Resolution 2722 states that attacks against

commercial vessels impede global commerce and undermine navigational rights and freedoms, as well as regional peace and security. The resolution further affirms that navigational rights and freedoms exercised by merchant and commercial vessels must be respected. Similarly, the IMO has emphasized that transit passage through international straits should not be threatened, impeded, denied, hampered, impaired, or suspended.

The Disarmament and International Security Committee must therefore consider how the international community can limit the proliferation and illicit transfer of conventional and asymmetric weapons in strategic maritime chokepoints while protecting freedom of navigation and avoiding further escalation. As the IMO has emphasized, Member States must work together to ensure unhindered and safe global navigation. Addressing this issue consequently requires not only protection against immediate attacks, but also stronger arms-control mechanisms, international cooperation, and measures addressing the spread of the weapons and technologies that make such attacks possible.

DEFINITION OF KEY-TERMS

Maritime Chokepoint

A strategically important narrow route through which ships pass.¹

Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG)

Natural gas made liquid by extreme cooling, so it is easier to transport.²

Proliferation

A rapid increase or spread.³

¹ Merriam-Webster, 'Choke Point.'

² Cambridge Dictionary, 'LNG.'

³ Merriam-Webster, 'Proliferation.'

Conventional Weapons

Weapons that are not nuclear.⁴

Asymmetric Weapons

Unconventional weapons or tactics used between forces with very unequal military power.⁵

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Importance of Maritime Chokepoints

Maritime Chokepoints in Global Security

Maritime chokepoints are waterways through which oil tankers and liquefied natural gas (LNG) carriers must pass. They include natural passages, such as straits, and human-made canals, and may be classified as primary or secondary depending on the availability of alternative routes. Their strategic importance lies in their role in global energy trade, supply chain resilience, and geo-economic security. Because many major oil and gas exporters depend on these routes, disruptions caused by conflict, political disputes, piracy, accidents, or natural events can have significant global economic and security consequences.

Role of maritime chokepoints in international trade

Maritime chokepoints are essential for transporting oil, LNG, petroleum products, and other commercial cargo between producers and consumers. Before the Red Sea disruptions, five major chokepoints handled approximately 71.3 million barrels of oil and petroleum products and 26 billion cubic feet of LNG each day. When shipping through these routes is disrupted, vessels must take longer alternative routes, increasing transit times, shipping costs, insurance premiums, and pressure on global supply chains. Incidents such as the Ever Given grounding and the Houthi attacks demonstrate the economic impact of interruptions to these trade routes.

Military significance of maritime chokepoints

⁴ Collins Dictionary, 'Conventional.'

⁵ Merriam-Webster, 'Asymmetric Warfare.Houthis'

The strategic value of maritime chokepoints has attracted repeated attempts to control or disrupt seaborne trade. Military threats include mines, anti-ship missiles, drones, submarines, armed speedboats, artillery, piracy, and attacks on commercial shipping. Conflicts in the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab al-Mandab have shown how attacks on shipping can disrupt global energy supplies and increase insurance costs. In response, states have established multinational naval operations, including the Combined Maritime Forces, Operation Prosperity Guardian, Operation Atalanta, Operation Aspides, and the Malacca Straits Patrol Initiative, to protect shipping and maintain freedom of navigation.

Major Maritime Chokepoints (Suez Canal, Strait of Hormuz, Panama Canal)

The Suez Canal is a human-made maritime chokepoint connecting the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea. It is a critical route for global oil, LNG, and container shipping. The grounding of the Ever Given in 2021 blocked the canal for six days, while Houthi attacks in the Red Sea between 2023 and 2025 forced many vessels to reroute around the Cape of Good Hope, increasing journey times by about ten days.

The Strait of Hormuz is one of the world's most strategically important energy chokepoints. Around 14 million barrels of oil and condensates pass through it each day, together with almost every LNG cargo exported from Qatar. Because there is virtually no maritime alternative for several Gulf states, disruptions or attempts to block the strait have major consequences for global energy markets and maritime security.

The Panama Canal is a shortcut connecting the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, carrying between 4 and 6 percent of global trade each year, including petroleum products and LNG. During 2023 and 2024, drought and low water levels reduced the number of ships permitted to transit the canal, causing delays and forcing vessels to take longer alternative routes. The canal has also become an area of geopolitical competition because of its strategic importance to international trade.

Weapons used in Maritime Chokepoints

The proliferation of weapons in strategic maritime chokepoints has become an increasingly significant challenge to international peace and security. As these are the narrowest waterways that facilitate a substantial proportion of global trade and naval movement, they become focal points for military competition and armed conflict. States and non-state actors both employ a variety of conventional and asymmetric weapons to assert influence or disrupt maritime traffic. The most common systems are outlined below.

Naval fleets

A "naval fleet" refers to a large formation of warships under the command of a single officer, typically an admiral. These fleets are used by a nation's navy for various purposes, including defense, power projection, and maintaining control over sea lanes. A naval fleet can include a variety of ship types such as aircraft carriers, destroyers, frigates, submarines, and support vessels, organized to conduct military operations at sea.

Anti-ship missile systems

Anti-ship missile systems are guided weapons designed to detect, track, and destroy enemy surface vessels, including aircraft carriers, destroyers, frigates, amphibious ships, and commercial vessels. They can be launched from land-based coastal batteries, naval ships, submarines, or aircraft, and use radar, infrared, satellite, or inertial guidance to strike moving targets with high accuracy. In strategic maritime chokepoints such as the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, anti-ship missile systems have become a key component of Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) strategies, enabling states and non-state actors to threaten or restrict naval and commercial traffic through narrow waterways. Their effectiveness has been demonstrated by Houthi attacks in the Red Sea, where more than 100 attacks on commercial vessels between November 2023 and October 2025 affected ships from over 60 nations, involving cruise missiles, ballistic missiles, drones, and explosive boats.

Unmanned Surface Vessels (USVs)

An unmanned surface vessel (USV) is a crewless vessel operated remotely or with varying levels of autonomy. Its control platform may be designed for one vessel or adapted to different hull and propulsion systems.

USVs range from small boats to vessels over 20 metres long and can use many different propulsion systems.

Unmanned underwater vehicles (UUVs)

Unmanned underwater vehicles, also known as underwater drones or submarines, are submersible vehicles that can operate underwater without a human occupant, either remotely operated underwater vehicles or autonomous underwater vehicles. In maritime chokepoints, UUVs are particularly significant because narrow and heavily trafficked waters allow them to approach targets discreetly and exploit limited manoeuvring space. Their low cost, covert operation, and growing availability make them useful asymmetric tools for states and non-state actors looking to challenge stronger naval forces. However, their proliferation also creates serious concerns about attribution.

Evolution of maritime warfare

From conventional naval warfare to hybrid warfare

Threats and challenges are posed by both state and non-state actors who use hybrid activities to target political institutions, influence public opinion, and undermine the security of NATO citizens. Hybrid methods of warfare, such as propaganda, deception, sabotage, and other non-military tactics, have long been used to destabilize adversaries. What is new about attacks seen in recent years is their speed, scale, and intensity, facilitated by rapid technological change and global interconnectivity. NATO has a strategy for its role in countering hybrid warfare and stands ready to defend the Alliance and all Allies against any threat, whether conventional or hybrid.

The change in maritime warfare reflects the conflict at sea. Today, maritime conflicts increasingly combine these conventional capabilities with hybrid tactics including cyberattacks, electronic warfare, disinformation campaigns, sabotage of critical maritime infrastructure, the use of proxy forces and maritime militias, and autonomous systems. Rather than relying solely on decisive naval battles, modern adversaries seek to achieve strategic objectives through a combination of military and non-military means.

Emerging technologies

The increasing accessibility of such advanced weaponry, among other evolving methods of warfare, has intensified the threat posed to commercial shipping and regional stability. According to the study of the Yildiz Technical University Faculty of Administrative and Social Sciences, there are a few emerging technologies in maritime warfare.

Significant progress has been made in machine learning applications for autonomous systems, particularly in decision-making, prediction, optimization, and threat detection processes. These advancements are driving developments in areas such as more powerful computational capabilities and intelligent algorithmic functionality.

AI-based navigation systems enable unmanned maritime vehicles to operate autonomously in complex environments such as open seas, ports, and coastal areas. These systems utilize route planning algorithms to optimize navigation paths based on factors such as weather and sea conditions, maritime traffic, and mission-specific objectives, ensuring efficient and safe operation of unmanned vehicles.

Machine learning algorithms play a crucial role in tasks such as real-time map creation, obstacle detection, underwater object identification and classification, and safe route planning for autonomous platforms. During these processes, data collected from sensors like satellite positioning systems, radar, and sonar are analyzed. With the assistance of AI and machine learning techniques, UMS can effectively perform tasks such as environmental sensing,

monitoring, search and rescue operations, maritime security and surveillance, control and decision-making, and preventive maintenance.

Research continues to integrate robotic technologies with autonomous systems in areas such as big data processing, motion sensor technology, voice and image recognition, human-machine interaction, and decision-making processes. The design of unmanned ships must focus on developing obstacle detection and avoidance capabilities that account for real-world conditions to ensure navigational safety. Additionally, supporting remote control requires a range of sensor components, including visual and thermal camera systems, long- and short-range precision radars, laser detection and ranging devices, GPS, Automatic Identification System (AIS), and Electronic Chart Display and Information System (ECDIS).

Impact on International Peace and Security

The proliferation of conventional and asymmetric weapons in strategic maritime chokepoints significantly threatens international peace and security. As these waterways connect major regions of the world and carry a substantial proportion of global trade, the use or spread of advanced weapon systems increases the likelihood of regional conflicts escalating into wider international crises. Military incidents in chokepoints can quickly involve multiple states, disrupt alliances, and raise tensions between major powers.

Threats to Freedom of Navigation

Freedom of navigation, a principle protected under international law, is increasingly threatened by the use of conventional weapons such as anti-ship missiles, naval mines, submarines, and warships, as well as asymmetric weapons including drones, unmanned surface vessels (USVs), unmanned underwater vehicles (UUVs), explosive boats, and cyberattacks on navigation systems. These weapons can damage or deter commercial shipping, force vessels to change routes, increase insurance costs, and restrict the ability of civilian ships to safely transit international waters.

Disruption of international trade

Strategic maritime chokepoints carry a large percentage of global trade, including energy resources, food supplies, manufactured goods, and raw materials. When these routes are threatened or blocked by armed conflict or weapon attacks, shipping companies are forced to reroute vessels along longer and more expensive routes. This delays deliveries, reduces supply chain efficiency, increases transportation costs, and contributes to shortages of essential goods.

Socioeconomic Consequences

Disruptions to strategic maritime chokepoints affect both economies and societies worldwide. Higher shipping costs increase the prices of food, fuel, medicine, and other essential goods, placing financial pressure on households and businesses. Prolonged instability can also lead to job losses in trade, shipping, and tourism, while governments may divert resources from public services to defense and maritime security.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

United States

The United States leads Operation Prosperity Guardian under the Combined Maritime Forces and deploys naval assets to protect commercial shipping. Its forces intercept missiles and drones, but naval protection does not by itself stop the transfer or production of weapons. The U.S. Fifth Fleet also maintains a permanent regional naval presence from Bahrain. The United States shares threat information and trains partner navies to improve collective maritime security. However, its military responses are debated because defensive action can still increase the risk of wider regional escalation.⁶

Iran

Iran borders the northern side of the Strait of Hormuz, giving it major influence over one of the world's most important energy routes. UN officials and several states accuse Iran of supplying military support to the Houthis in breach of the arms embargo, while Iran denies arming them. Iran's regular navy and Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy both operate in and around the strait. Coastal missiles, mines, drones, and fast boats allow it to threaten stronger naval forces at relatively low cost. Its cooperation is therefore important both for limiting weapons transfers and for preventing incidents from escalating.⁷

Yemen and the Houthis (Ansar Allah)

The Houthis control much of north-western Yemen, including territory along the Red Sea coast. They have used anti-ship missiles, drones, and explosive boats against commercial

⁶ U.S. Department of Defense, 'Ensuring Freedom of Navigation in the Red Sea' (18 Dec. 2023).

⁷ UN Security Council Resolutions 2216 (2015) and 2624 (2022).

vessels, presenting the main current asymmetric threat in the Bab al-Mandab and Red Sea. The Houthis state that their campaign is connected to the conflict in Gaza and targets Israeli-linked shipping, although many other vessels have been affected. The narrow geography allows a non-state actor to disrupt a route used by numerous countries. Their dispersed launch sites and smuggling networks make detection, attribution, and disarmament difficult.⁸

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is a major oil exporter whose trade depends on secure passage through the Strait of Hormuz and Bab al-Mandab. It supports regional maritime-security efforts and is also concerned that weapons supplied to the Houthis can threaten its ports, energy infrastructure and shipping. The country has important ports and energy facilities on both the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. This gives it a strong interest in keeping both maritime routes open and reducing regional escalation. Saudi policy must also balance security measures with diplomacy and the humanitarian situation in Yemen.⁹

China

China depends heavily on secure maritime routes for energy imports and international trade. It conducts anti-piracy escorts in the Gulf of Aden and operates a support base in Djibouti, but generally emphasizes de-escalation, sovereignty and protection of commercial navigation. Chinese-owned and China-bound vessels can face delays and higher costs when chokepoints are disrupted. As a permanent member of the Security Council, China also influences the wording and enforcement of UN responses. It has generally avoided joining U.S.-led strikes and prefers negotiated solutions and regional cooperation.¹⁰

Egypt

Egypt controls the Suez Canal, making uninterrupted navigation essential to its economy and toll revenue. It also contributes to regional security through its navy and has commanded Combined Task Force 153, which operates in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. Red Sea insecurity causes vessels to reroute around Africa, reducing canal traffic and Egyptian revenue. Egypt's location also makes it responsible for protecting the northern entrance to the Red Sea. It

⁸ UN Security Council Resolution 2722 (2024).

⁹ U.S. Energy Information Administration, 'World Oil Transit Chokepoints' (3 Mar. 2026).

¹⁰ Government of China, 'Vision for Maritime Cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative' (20 June 2017).

therefore supports coordinated defensive action while seeking to avoid a wider conflict that would further damage trade.¹¹

Panama

Panama administers the Panama Canal through the Panama Canal Authority and is responsible for keeping it neutral and open to international shipping. Its priorities include protecting canal infrastructure, managing drought-related water shortages, and preventing geopolitical tensions from disrupting transit. Although it is less exposed to missile attacks than the Red Sea, the canal remains vulnerable to sabotage, cyberattacks, and disruption of critical infrastructure. Panama also operates one of the world's largest ship registries, so many vessels involved in international crises sail under its flag. Effective protection, therefore, requires cooperation with shipping companies, flag states, and international organizations.¹²

Israel

Israel depends on the Red Sea route for access to the port of Eilat and trade with Asia. The Houthis identify Israeli-linked shipping as a target, so Israel views missile and drone proliferation in Yemen as a direct security threat. Attacks and the threat of attack have reduced activity at Eilat and affected regional shipping decisions. Israel has responded to Houthi threats through military and diplomatic measures. Its position is closely connected to the Gaza conflict, making de-escalation at sea difficult without wider regional diplomacy.¹³

United Nations Security Council and UNVIM

The Security Council adopts sanctions, arms embargo measures, and reporting mandates related to Yemen and Red Sea attacks. UNVIM reviews and, when required, inspects commercial cargo bound for Yemeni ports, although enforcement still depends heavily on cooperation from states and shipping actors. The Council's members disagree over responsibility, military responses, and the connection between Red Sea attacks and the Gaza conflict. The Yemen Panel of Experts supports the sanctions system by investigating violations and weapons networks. The UN can monitor and coordinate action, but it cannot inspect every shipment or enforce compliance without member-state support.¹⁴

¹¹ Combined Maritime Forces, 'CTF 153: Red Sea Maritime Security.'

¹² Panama Canal Authority, 'Panama Canal to Increase Daily Transits to 24' (15 Dec. 2023).

¹³ International Maritime Organization, 'Red Sea Area.'

¹⁴ UN Secretary-General, 'Statement on UNVIM' (3 May., 2016).

International Maritime Organization (IMO)

The IMO creates global rules for ship and port security through instruments such as SOLAS, the ISPS Code, and the SUA Convention. It also records incidents and provides technical assistance, but national governments remain responsible for enforcement. Its standards require risk assessments, security plans, and cooperation between ships, companies, and port authorities. The organization also circulates verified information on attacks and supports regional capacity-building. Because the IMO has no military force, its effectiveness depends on consistent implementation by member states.¹⁵

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

UNODC's Global Maritime Crime Programme trains coast guards, police, prosecutors and port authorities in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. Its work improves interdiction and prosecution of weapons smuggling, but it depends on national capacity and long-term funding. Training includes vessel boarding, evidence handling, legal drafting, and maritime-domain awareness. This helps states move from intercepting suspicious cargo to successfully prosecuting offenders. The approach is preventive and long-term, so improvements are gradual rather than an immediate response to missile attacks.¹⁶

European Union (EU)

The EU launched EUNAVFOR ASPIDES as a defensive operation to safeguard freedom of navigation in the Red Sea and surrounding waters. It provides situational awareness, escorts vessels and protects them from attacks; its mandate has been extended until February 2027. ASPIDES has a defensive mandate and does not conduct strikes on land. It coordinates with EUNAVFOR Atalanta and other partners to share information and protect sea lanes. The operation lowers immediate risks but cannot independently stop arms smuggling or resolve the conflicts driving the attacks.¹⁷

Combined Maritime Forces (CMF)

CMF is a multinational naval partnership whose Task Force 153 focuses on the Red Sea, Bab al-Mandab, and the Gulf of Aden. It coordinates patrols, information sharing, training, and Operation Prosperity Guardian, but participation and contributions are voluntary. The partnership is headquartered in Bahrain and includes more than forty participating countries. Its

¹⁵ International Maritime Organization, 'SOLAS XI-2 and the ISPS Code.'

¹⁶ UN Office on Drugs and Crime, 'Global Maritime Crime Programme.'

¹⁷ Council of the European Union, 'Council Extends Operation ASPIDES' (23 Feb. 2026).

other task forces address piracy, smuggling, and security in the Arabian Gulf and Indian Ocean. This structure improves interoperability, although different national rules and political priorities can limit joint action.¹⁸

NATO

NATO supports maritime awareness, counter-terrorism and freedom of navigation through Operation Sea Guardian in the Mediterranean. Its role is relevant to the wider security of sea routes connected to Suez, although it does not lead the current Red Sea protection operations. The alliance also develops common procedures, intelligence links and interoperability among many navies involved in maritime security. Security in the Mediterranean matters because it is directly connected to the Suez route. Nevertheless, the current Red Sea response is led mainly by CMF and the EU rather than NATO itself.¹⁹

International Chamber of Shipping (ICS)

ICS represents national shipowners' associations and communicates the security concerns of the commercial shipping industry. It calls for protection of seafarers, reliable threat information and coordinated state action, but it has no military or enforcement authority. It provides governments with information about operational risks faced by ships and crews. Shipping companies use such assessments when deciding whether to transit, reroute or purchase additional insurance. The ICS, therefore, represents an important private-sector perspective even though final security decisions remain with states and vessel operators.²⁰

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

DATE	DESCRIPTION OF EVENT
17 November 1869	The Suez Canal opens, linking the Mediterranean and Red Seas.
15 August 1914	The Panama Canal opens, shortening Atlantic-Pacific voyages.

¹⁸ Combined Maritime Forces, 'CTF 153: Red Sea Maritime Security.'

¹⁹ NATO, 'NATO's Maritime Activities' (10 Mar. 2025),,,,

²⁰ International Chamber of Shipping, 'Statement on Attacks against Commercial Ships' (29 Nov. 2023),,,

DATE	DESCRIPTION OF EVENT
26 July 1956	Egypt nationalizes the Suez Canal; the Suez Crisis follows.
10 December 1982	UNCLOS is adopted, including rules for passage through international straits.
10 March 1988	The SUA Convention is adopted to criminalize serious unlawful acts against ships.
2 June 2008	UNSC Resolution 1816 authorizes cooperation against piracy off Somalia.
24 December 2014	The Arms Trade Treaty enters into force.
23-29 March 2021	The Ever Given blocks the Suez Canal for six days.
November 2023	Houthi attacks on commercial shipping begin in the Red Sea.
18 December 2023	Operation Prosperity Guardian is announced.
10 January 2024	UNSC Resolution 2722 demands an end to Houthi attacks.
19 February 2024	The EU launches defensive Operation ASPIDES.
14 January 2026	UNSC Resolution 2812 extends reporting on Houthi maritime attacks.
14 July 2026	UNSC Resolution 2826 extends monthly reporting on Houthi attacks until 15 January 2027.

RELEVANT UN RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

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

UNCLOS protects transit passage through straits used for international navigation and requires bordering states not to hamper that passage. It provides the main legal framework for navigation, but enforcement depends on states, diplomacy, and dispute-settlement procedures.

Articles 38 and 44 are especially important because they protect transit passage and prohibit its suspension. Vessels must still proceed without delay and respect applicable international rules. UNCLOS regulates navigation rather than the transfer of weapons, so other treaties and Security Council measures are also needed.²¹

Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)

The ATT requires state parties to assess and control international transfers of conventional arms and to reduce diversion to illicit users. Its effectiveness is limited by uneven implementation, incomplete participation, and the difficulty of tracing components used in drones and missiles. Its scope includes major categories such as warships, missiles, and small arms and light weapons. Exporting states must consider risks, including violations of international law and diversion. However, the treaty binds only its states parties and does not directly control weapons produced or transferred outside their jurisdiction.²²

UN Firearms Protocol (2001)

The Firearms Protocol requires marking, record-keeping, licensing, and criminalization of illicit firearms manufacturing and trafficking. It supports tracing and cross-border cooperation, but mainly covers firearms and does not regulate every weapon used in maritime attacks. It supplements the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and focuses on cross-border criminal activity. Cooperation and information exchange can help authorities identify trafficking routes that pass through ports and coastal areas. Its narrower scope means that missiles, naval mines, and many military drones require other legal controls.²³

SUA Convention (1988) and 2005 Protocol

The US Convention requires states to criminalize violent seizure of ships, destructive devices and other acts that endanger navigation. The 2005 Protocol expands coverage to using ships or certain dangerous materials as weapons and strengthens extradition and prosecution cooperation. States parties must either prosecute alleged offenders or cooperate in extradition under the convention's framework. The 2005 Protocol also establishes procedures for

²¹ United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, arts. 38 and 44 (1982).

²² Arms Trade Treaty Secretariat, 'The Arms Trade Treaty.'

²³ United Nations Treaty Collection, 'Firearms Protocol.'

requesting consent to board suspect foreign-flagged ships. Its success depends on widespread participation, domestic criminal laws, and practical law-enforcement cooperation.²⁴

Security Council Resolution 1816 (2008)

Resolution 1816 authorized states cooperating with Somalia to enter Somali territorial waters to repress piracy, with Somalia's consent. It enabled stronger international naval action but was specific to piracy off Somalia and did not create a general right of intervention in other chokepoints. The authorization was time-limited and was followed by later renewals and related resolutions. It helped support multinational naval patrols and cooperation against piracy near the Gulf of Aden. However, it addresses piracy rather than the broader proliferation of missiles, drones, and other weapons.²⁵

Security Council Resolutions 2140 (2014), 2216 (2015) and 2624 (2022)

These resolutions establish the Yemen sanctions system, monitored by a Panel of Experts and a targeted arms embargo. Resolution 2624 applies the embargo measures to the Houthis as an entity, but smuggling networks and weak enforcement continue to reduce its effectiveness. The measures include asset freezes and travel bans as well as restrictions on arms and military assistance. A Panel of Experts investigates violations and reports to the sanctions committee. Sanctions can raise the cost of proliferation, but they do not directly protect ships already under attack.²⁶

Security Council Resolution 2722 (2024)

Resolution 2722 condemns Houthi attacks, demands that they stop and calls for the release of the Galaxy Leader and its crew. It also stresses navigational rights and urges states to prevent weapons transfers, but it does not create a separate UN enforcement force. The resolution stresses that navigational rights and freedoms must be respected in the Red Sea. It also takes note of the right of states to defend their vessels in accordance with international law. Differences among Council members have limited agreement on stronger collective enforcement measures.²⁷

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵ UN Security Council Resolution 1816 (2008).

²⁶ UN Security Council Resolutions 2216 (2015) and 2624 (2022).

²⁷ UN Security Council Resolution 2722 (2024).

Security Council Resolutions 2739, 2768, 2787, 2812 and 2826

These resolutions repeatedly extend the Secretary-General's monthly reporting on Houthi attacks against merchant and commercial vessels. Resolution 2826 continues reporting until 15 January 2027, maintaining Council attention but functioning mainly as a monitoring measure. The reporting requirement was created after Resolution 2722 to preserve regular international scrutiny. Each later resolution is primarily a technical extension rather than a new enforcement regime. Reporting improves transparency and supports debate, but it does not itself impose penalties for new attacks.²⁸

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

UN Arms Embargo and UNVIM

The Yemen sanctions regime restricts transfers of arms and military assistance to the Houthis, while UNVIM reviews commercial cargo entering key Yemeni ports. These measures improve oversight without blocking humanitarian imports, but concealed shipments, regional smuggling routes, and limited inspection capacity create enforcement gaps. The Panel of Experts also investigates suspected violations and identifies trafficking networks. Maritime seizures by states can provide evidence and prevent individual deliveries from reaching armed groups. The system must balance security screening with Yemen's dependence on commercial imports and humanitarian access.²⁹

UN Security Council Monitoring

Resolution 2722 demanded an end to Red Sea attacks, and later resolutions required regular reports from the Secretary-General. The reports keep the issue on the SC's agenda and improve shared information, but monitoring alone cannot compel actors to stop attacks. Regular reports provide a shared factual basis for Council meetings and diplomatic pressure. They can document trends, affected vessels and possible violations of sanctions. Their weakness is that further action still requires political agreement among Council members.³⁰

²⁸ UN Security Council Resolution 2826 (2026).

²⁹ UN Secretary-General, 'Statement on UNVIM' (2016); UN Security Council Resolution 2216 (2015).

³⁰ UN Security Council Resolutions 2722 (2024) and 2826 (2026).

UN-Mediated Yemen Truce

The UN-mediated truce of April 2022 paused offensive ground, air and maritime operations and was renewed twice. Although it reduced large-scale fighting, it expired in October 2022 without a permanent political settlement, leaving the causes of maritime escalation unresolved. It also facilitated fuel deliveries through Hudaydah and limited commercial flights from Sana'a. The arrangement was a truce rather than a complete peace agreement, and several issues remained disputed. The later Red Sea campaign shows that reduced fighting inside Yemen did not permanently remove the risk of regional maritime escalation.³¹

ATT and Firearms Controls

States use export licences, risk assessments, marking, tracing and record-keeping to prevent illicit weapons transfers and diversion. Results remain uneven because not all relevant states are parties, national controls differ and many drone or missile components have civilian uses. End-use certificates and post-delivery checks can help confirm that weapons reach the approved recipient. Customs cooperation is also important when shipments pass through several ports or flag jurisdictions. Controls are hardest to apply to covert transfers, improvised weapons and dual-use components that also have civilian purposes.³²

Multinational Naval Operations

Operation Prosperity Guardian, EUNAVFOR ASPIDES and Operation Atalanta escort ships, share threat information and intercept attacks or illicit activity. They reduce immediate risks to vessels, but they are expensive, mainly defensive and cannot by themselves end regional conflict or weapons proliferation. Their presence reassures shipping companies and can prevent a single attack from closing an entire route. Naval forces may also rescue crews and collect evidence after incidents. However, escorts cannot protect every vessel, and military interception can create new risks of miscalculation and escalation.³³

IMO, UNODC and Regional Cooperation

The IMO, UNODC and the Djibouti Code of Conduct support incident reporting, information sharing, legal reform and maritime-law-enforcement training. These programmes strengthen long-term regional capacity, but progress varies because states have different resources, laws and levels of cooperation. The Djibouti Code of Conduct originally focused on piracy and was

³¹ Office of the UN Special Envoy for Yemen, 'Truce Agreement—April 2022.'

³² Arms Trade Treaty Secretariat; United Nations Treaty Collection, 'Firearms Protocol.'

³³ Combined Maritime Forces, 'Operation Prosperity Guardian Mission'; Council of the EU, 'Operation ASPIDES.'

later broadened to other illicit maritime activity. Regional information-sharing centres help states exchange warnings and coordinate responses. Long-term effectiveness still depends on sustained funding, national ownership, and reducing major differences in equipment and legal capacity.³⁴

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Strengthening UN Arms Embargoes and Interdiction Frameworks

One possible approach would be to strengthen existing UN arms embargoes while improving the ability of states to identify and intercept illicit maritime weapons transfers. Security Council Resolution 2216 already requires Member States to “prevent the direct or indirect supply, sale or transfer” of prohibited arms and related materiel to designated actors in Yemen. It also calls upon states, particularly those neighbouring Yemen, to inspect cargo when there are “reasonable grounds to believe” that it contains prohibited items. However, an embargo is only as effective as its implementation. States could therefore expand intelligence-sharing on suspected vessels, coordinate customs and port inspections, and provide additional equipment and training to coastal states that currently lack the capacity to detect sophisticated weapons or dual-use components.

Interdiction frameworks could also be strengthened without creating an unrestricted right to search vessels at sea. UNODC emphasizes that maritime interdictions remain subject to jurisdiction under international law and notes that transit states can use existing criminal provisions to “investigate, prosecute and adjudicate” illicit arms-trafficking cases within areas where they possess jurisdiction. The UN could consequently support common procedures for identifying suspicious cargo, requesting flag-state consent, boarding vessels, collecting evidence, and transferring cases to national authorities. Boarding teams should additionally be trained in preserving evidence and maintaining chains of custody so that intercepted weapons lead not only to seizures but also to successful investigations and prosecutions. Such a system would strengthen enforcement while continuing to respect UNCLOS and freedom of navigation.

Legal and Sanctions Frameworks

Existing international legal and sanctions frameworks could be updated to address the changing nature of weapons proliferation in maritime chokepoints. Current mechanisms already provide an important foundation. The Yemen sanctions regime, for example, covers “arms and related materiel of all types,” while the Arms Trade Treaty establishes international standards for

³⁴ International Maritime Organization; UN Office on Drugs and Crime, Global Maritime Crime Programme.

transfers of conventional weapons. Nevertheless, many modern asymmetric threats involve commercially available or dual-use components that can be incorporated into drones, unmanned vessels and missile systems. States could therefore strengthen national export-control legislation, improve end-user verification and establish common risk indicators for components that have repeatedly been diverted into prohibited weapons programmes.

Sanctions should also focus more closely on the networks that make illicit proliferation possible rather than only on the final recipients of weapons. The Security Council could use Panels of Experts and sanctions committees to identify individuals, companies, financial networks, intermediaries and transport operators responsible for prohibited transfers and, where sufficient evidence exists, subject them to targeted measures such as asset freezes and travel restrictions. At the same time, sanctions should remain targeted so that legitimate commercial activity and humanitarian assistance are not unnecessarily restricted. Better coordination between sanctions committees, customs authorities, INTERPOL, UNODC and national governments could help states identify patterns of diversion while making existing restrictions more consistently enforceable.

Regional Diplomacy and Coastal State Engagement

Military protection and arms-control measures alone cannot permanently secure maritime chokepoints if the political conflicts driving proliferation remain unresolved. Regional diplomacy should therefore form another part of the international response. The UN Special Envoy for Yemen has argued that “we need to see regional de-escalation” and has engaged actors including Iran, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in an effort to preserve diplomatic channels. More recently, the United Nations reiterated that there is “no alternative to an inclusive, Yemeni-owned political process” and that a negotiated settlement under UN auspices can provide a more durable resolution to the conflict. Similar diplomatic mechanisms could be encouraged in other regions where tensions surrounding strategic waterways increase incentives for military build-ups.

Coastal states should simultaneously be given a greater role in practical maritime-security cooperation. Instead of relying almost entirely on external naval powers, the UN, IMO and UNODC could expand regional information-sharing centres, coast-guard training and joint maritime-law-enforcement programmes. The IMO’s Red Sea programme already seeks to “promote dialogue in the southern Red Sea and Gulf of Aden” and establish networks allowing authorities to exchange operational information concerning vessels, cargo and crews. Expanding such mechanisms could improve trust and maritime-domain awareness while reducing dependence on military responses. Cooperation should include all willing coastal states where politically feasible, since excluding important regional actors may make long-term de-escalation and control of illicit weapons flows considerably more difficult.

Evolving Maritime Security Protocols

Maritime-security protocols must also evolve alongside the weapons used to threaten strategic chokepoints. Traditional security procedures were primarily designed around piracy, armed attacks, and conventional threats, whereas vessels and ports increasingly face drones, unmanned surface and underwater systems, cyberattacks, and threats to critical maritime infrastructure. The IMO already requires port facility security assessments to identify threats to critical assets, determine their likelihood, and evaluate vulnerabilities. These assessments could be regularly updated to include emerging asymmetric technologies, while states could establish minimum standards for drone detection, cyber resilience, protection of navigation systems, and monitoring of critical infrastructure in particularly vulnerable chokepoints.

Information sharing should become a central part of this system. IMO programmes are already working to strengthen “Maritime Domain Awareness”, “inter-agency coordination” and regional information-sharing architecture, while recent IMO initiatives aim to facilitate “near real-time information sharing” of inspection data. States could build upon these systems by creating secure regional networks through which navies, coast guards, port authorities, and commercial operators exchange verified warnings concerning suspicious vessels, weapons activity, and emerging threats. Maritime protocols should nevertheless remain proportionate: their purpose should be to identify threats earlier and protect civilian navigation rather than unnecessarily militarize commercial waterways. As the IMO Secretary-General emphasized in 2026, ship operators must “thoroughly assess risks” before entering dangerous regions, making continuously updated threat assessments and rapid information exchange particularly important.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

General Bibliography

Arms Trade Treaty Secretariat. 'The Arms Trade Treaty.' Accessed 28 Aug. 2026.

<https://thearmstradetreaty.org/>

Cambridge Dictionary. 'LNG.' Accessed 28 Aug. 2026.

<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/lng>

Collins Dictionary. 'Conventional.' Accessed 28 Aug. 2026.

<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/conventional>

Combined Maritime Forces. 'CTF 153: Red Sea Maritime Security.' Accessed 28 Aug. 2026.

<https://combinedmaritimeforces.com/ctf-153-red-sea-maritime-security/>

Combined Maritime Forces. 'Operation Prosperity Guardian Mission.' 4 Feb. 2025.
<https://combinedmaritimeforces.com/2025/02/04/destroyer-squadron-50-assumes-operation-prosperity-guardian-mission/>

Council of the European Union. 'Council Launches New EU Defensive Operation.' 19 Feb. 2024.
<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/02/19/security-and-freedom-of-navigation-in-the-red-sea-council-launches-new-eu-defensive-operation/>

Council of the European Union. 'Council Extends Operation ASPIDES.' 23 Feb. 2026.
<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/>

Government of China. 'Vision for Maritime Cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative.' 20 June 2017.
https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/publications/2017/06/20/content_281475691873460.htm

International Chamber of Shipping. 'Statement on Attacks against Commercial Ships.' 29 Nov. 2023.
<https://www.ics-shipping.org/statement/international-chamber-of-shipping-statement-on-the-recent-attacks-against-commercial-ships-transiting-the-southern-red-sea-and-the-gulf-of-aden/>

International Maritime Organization. 'Red Sea Area.' Accessed 28 Aug. 2026.
<https://www.imo.org/en/mediacentre/hottopics/pages/red-sea.aspx>

International Maritime Organization. 'SOLAS XI-2 and the ISPS Code.' Accessed 28 Aug. 2026.
<https://www.imo.org/en/ourwork/security/pages/solas-xi-2%20isps%20code.aspx>

International Maritime Organization. 'USA Treaties.' Accessed 28 Aug. 2026.
<https://www.imo.org/en/about/conventions/pages/sua-treaties.aspx>

Kula, Sadik, and Ugur Bugra Celebi. 'Technological Transformation and Future Perspectives in Autonomous Maritime Systems.' 2025. <https://doi.org/10.54926/jnamt.2025.2412>

Mahmoudi, Said. "'Hybrid' Naval Warfare and Its Intended Legal Implications?" 2026.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6265-743-4_21

Merriam-Webster. 'Asymmetric Warfare.' Accessed 28 Aug. 2026.
<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/asymmetric%20warfare>

Merriam-Webster. 'Choke Point.' Accessed 28 Aug. 2026.
<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/choke%20point>

Merriam-Webster. 'Proliferation.' Accessed 28 Aug. 2026.
<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/proliferation>

NATO. 'NATO's Maritime Activities.' 10 Mar. 2025.

<https://www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/operations-and-missions/natos-maritime-activities>

Office of the UN Special Envoy for Yemen. 'Truce Agreement-April 2022.' 2 Apr. 2022.

<https://osesgy.unmissions.org/en/truce-agreement-april-2022>

Panama Canal Authority. 'Panama Canal to Increase Daily Transits to 24.' 15 Dec. 2023.

<https://pancanal.com/en/panama-canal-to-increase-daily-transits-to-24-starting-in-january/>

Suez Canal Authority. 'Why Suez Canal?' Accessed 28 Aug. 2026.

<https://www.suezcanal.gov.eg/English/About/Pages/WhySuezCanal.aspx>

United Nations. 'United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.' 1982.

https://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos_e.pdf

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. 'Navigating Troubled Waters.' 15 Feb. 2024.

<https://unctad.org/publication/navigating-troubled-waters-impact-global-trade-disruption-shipping-routes-red-sea-black>

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. 'Global Maritime Crime Programme.' Accessed 28 Aug. 2026.

<https://www.unodc.org/roea/en/global-maritime-crime-programme.html>

United Nations Secretary-General. 'Statement on UNVIM.' 3 May 2016.

<https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/former-secretary-general/statements/2016-05-03/statement-attributable-the-spokesman-for-the-secretary-general-yemen>

United Nations Security Council. 'Resolution 1816 (2008).' 2 June 2008.

[https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/1816\(2008\)](https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/1816(2008))

United Nations Security Council. 'Resolution 2216 (2015).' 14 Apr. 2015.

[https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/2216\(2015\)](https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/2216(2015))

United Nations Security Council. 'Resolution 2624 (2022).' 28 Feb. 2022.

[https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/2624\(2022\)](https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/2624(2022))

United Nations Security Council. 'Resolution 2722 (2024).' 10 Jan. 2024.

[https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/2722\(2024\)](https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/2722(2024))

United Nations Security Council. 'Resolution 2812 (2026).' 14 Jan. 2026.

[https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/2812\(2026\)](https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/2812(2026))

United Nations Security Council. 'Resolution 2826 (2026).' 14 July 2026.

[https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/2826\(2026\)](https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/2826(2026))

United Nations Treaty Collection. 'Firearms Protocol.' Accessed 28 Aug. 2026.

https://treaties.un.org/pages/viewdetails.aspx?chapter=18&clang=en&mtdsg_no=xviii-12-c&src=treaty

United States Department of Defense. 'Ensuring Freedom of Navigation in the Red Sea.' 18 Dec. 2023.

<https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3621110/statement-from-secretary-of-defense-lloyd-j-austin-iii-on-ensuring-freedom-of-n/>

United States Energy Information Administration. 'World Oil Transit Chokepoints.' 3 Mar. 2026.

https://www.eia.gov/international/analysis/special-topics/world_oil_transit_Chokepoints

Media Bibliography

No external media used.