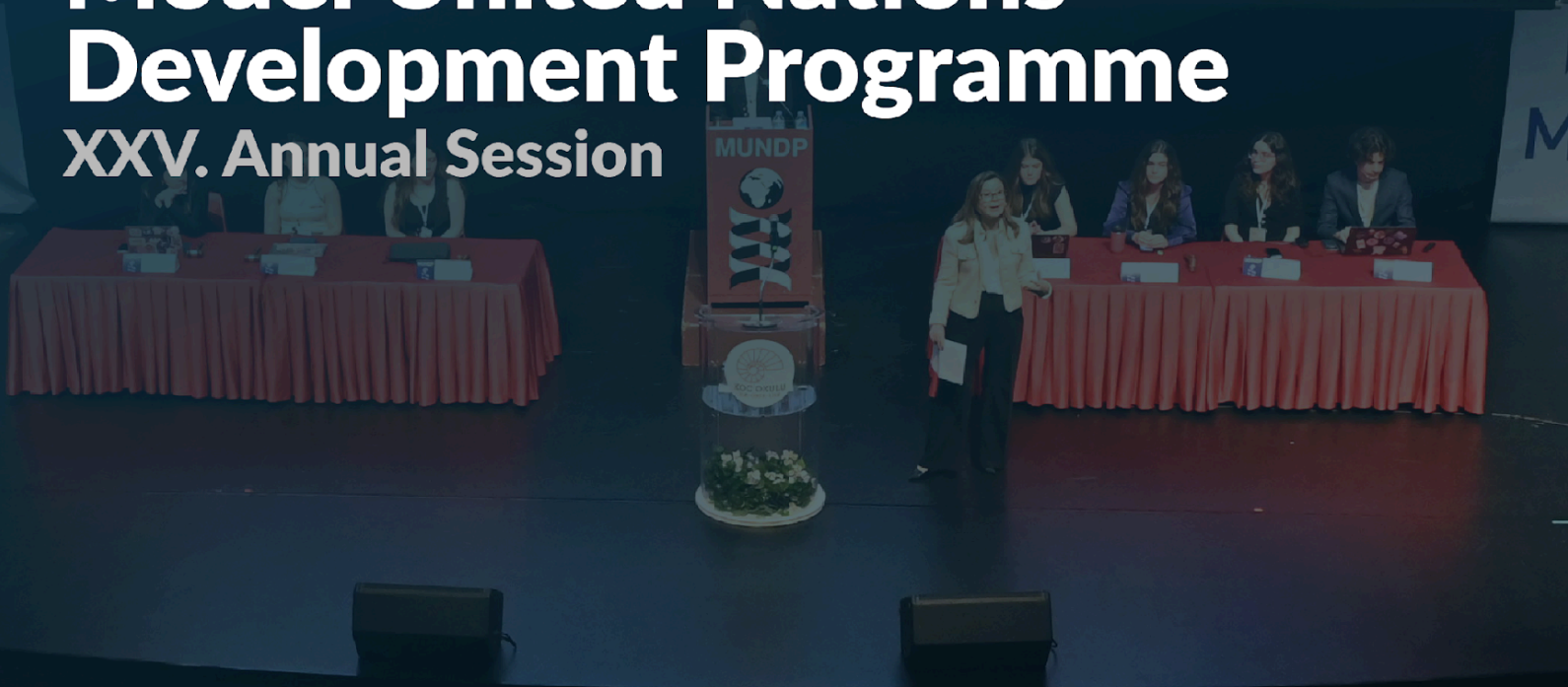


**Research Report**  
**Model United Nations**  
**Development Programme**  
**XXV. Annual Session**



**COMMISSION ON CRIME PREVENTION  
AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE  
(CCPCJ)**

**COUNTERING PIRACY AND MARITIME  
ATTACKS IN THE RED SEA**

**ELİF SEÇKİN**





## Basic Overview of the Issue

The Red Sea, a vital waterway connecting the Mediterranean Sea and the Gulf of Aden is a central point of global trade and shipping with the Suez Canal providing a shortcut. This route has been strategically integral for many countries, as ships that travel from Asia to Europe can directly arrive at the Mediterranean Sea without circumventing the African continent. Thus, the region has a great geopolitical importance since it expedites the process of global trade, simultaneously retrenching shipping expenses.

Although transit access to the Mediterranean Sea is critical for global trade, the unstable environment in countries that surround the Red Sea threatens the rapid flow of global trade. Yemen, once split into North and South Yemen, was unified in 1990. Following the unison of North and South Yemen, Yemen Civil War was initiated, sustaining the decades long instability and conflict in the region. Such an environment and the lack of a political authority accommodated the creation of militant groups. The Houthis, an armed political and religious group, are among many militant groups that were assembled following the Yemen Civil War. The Houthis are mainly composed of Yemen's Shia Muslim Minority, the Zaidis.

The Houthis, backed by fellow militant groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah, control and reside in the coastline of former North Yemen. Although Houthis act as traditional pirates, they seek revenge from the Israeli, as a result of the Gaza War. Unlike traditional pirates who seek financial gain, the Houthis are motivated by the desire of revenge against Israel by blocking the entry of ships to Israel and disrupting global trade by raiding. In November 2023, the Houthi rebel groups assembled and struck merchant ships in the name of campaigning for the Gaza War. Such strikes often result in fatalities and serious damage to the environment, which the Houthi rebel groups justify as a show of support for the Palestinians in the war between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Many states and organizations have formed coalitions to address the Houthi attacks against merchant shipping, but an effective solution is yet to be found.



*Figure 1: Locations of Red Sea, Bab-el Mandeb Strait and Gulf of Aden*



## Explanation of Important Terms

### *Maritime Crimes*

Defined by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, maritime crimes is “conduct which is perpetrated wholly or partly at sea and is prohibited under applicable national and international law”.

### *Maritime Piracy*

According to the definition provided by the Cambridge Dictionary, piracy is “the act of attacking the ships and stealing from them”. The acts of pirates should not only be considered as attacking the ships. The consequences of pirates’ illegal acts include kidnapping crews for ransom, damaging ship equipment, and property, or cargo theft, as exemplified by the incidents of Galaxy Leader and True Confidence (Soğancılar).

### *Maritime Chokepoints*

Maritime chokepoints are “strategic and narrow passages” connecting two larger regions. Chokepoints serve as integral “waterways [that facilitate] international trade”, that are often found around straits or canals where there is frequent marine traffic. The Bab El-Mandeb Strait is a relevant example of a maritime choke point, where piracy and political tensions often occur.

## Detailed Background of the Issue

### *The Importance of the Red Sea for Global Trade*

Geopolitical tensions in the Red Sea region continue to cause disruptions in global trade, demonstrating the long history of uncertainty in this politically and economically critical area. The Red Sea serves as an important transit corridor between the Gulf of Aden and the Suez Canal, linking Asia and Europe. This maritime route accounts for approximately 12% of global trade and 30% of container ship traffic (North Dakota Trade Office, 2023). Disruptions caused by geopolitical conflicts, natural disasters, or other factors significantly impact not



only consumer goods but also the transport of oil and liquefied natural gas destined for global markets (Nautilus Shipping, 2024).

The Red Sea's strategic importance to global trade dates back to ancient times, playing a crucial role in commerce, cultural exchange, and geopolitical influence (Nautilus Shipping, 2024). Its position has made it a contested passage throughout history, with control passing between African, Islamic, Ottoman, and European powers. The Suez Canal and the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, located at either end of the Red Sea, remain challenging yet essential for navigation of the trade routes (North Dakota Trade Office, 2023). The Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, also known as the "Gate of Grief," connects the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden and is only 14 nautical miles wide at its narrowest point. Nevertheless, previous efforts to construct a bridge across the strait between Yemen and Djibouti have been proposed but have not been processed (North Dakota Trade Office, 2023).

The Suez Canal, constructed by the French and opened in 1869, revolutionized maritime trade by shortening the journey between Europe and Asia by approximately 4,300 miles (North Dakota Trade Office, 2023). Its importance has made it a focal point for geopolitical conflict, with notable closures during the Suez Crisis (1957). In more recent times, non-political disruptions like the 2021 blockage caused by the Ever Given container ship highlighted the canal's critical role in global shipping, with the incident halting traffic for six days. Today, the canal is managed by Egypt's state-owned Suez Canal Authority.

Disruptions in the region lead to extensive consequences for global trade. Rerouting vessels around the Cape of Good Hope can extend shipping times by up to three weeks, increasing fuel, labor, and operational costs (Nautilus Shipping, 2024). Container shipping rates also rise, reflecting longer voyages and heightened risks. Such challenges have prompted shifts toward alternative sourcing strategies and greater reliance on air freight, adding to costs and complexity for exporters and the global supply chain.





## Past Incidents Concerning the Safety of the Red Sea

Throughout history, the Red Sea has been a key location due to its political and financial importance. In November 2023, the Houthi movement played a substantial role in disrupting and harming important merchant ships. The past incidents simultaneously highlight the Red Sea's geopolitical importance and demonstrate the multifaceted outcomes of the Houthi attacks, including environmental pollution.

### *The Suez Crisis (1956)*

Following Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser's 1956 speech, Nasser declared Egypt's definite control and reign over the Suez Canal. This declaration was viewed as a challenge by the British Empire since such a pivotal shortcut from Asia to Europe was considered too critical to be nationalized by any state. In response the British Empire mobilized the Royal Navy, along with troops from France and Israel, initiated a military intervention in Egypt. This operation was targeted at reclaiming the Suez Canal and maintaining the rapid flow of British trade. As a follow-up response to the efforts of the British, Nasser ordered the sinking of several old ships at the entrance of the Suez Canal, blocking the access of not only the naval forces but also commercial ships. This blockage halted the flow of global trade, which was heavily criticized by the United States. The U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower, alarmed by the escalating conflict, swiftly intervened and demanded that British, French, and Israeli forces withdraw from Egypt. Eisenhower urged the British to retreat, in order for the canal to reopen and trade flow to proceed.

### *Galaxy Leader (2023)*

In November 2023, at the beginning of its Gaza War campaign, the Houthi movement seized control of Galaxy Leader with its 25 members of different nationalities. The Galaxy Leader was scheduled for a sail from Turkey to India, when a Houthi rebel group usurped the ship's administration by boarding with a helicopter (BBC, 2025). On January 23, 2025, all 25 crew members are hailed back to their nations with the Sultanate of Oman's efforts (U.S. Department of State, 2025).



### ***True Confidence (2024)***

According to US Central Command (Centcom, 2024), on 6 March in Yemen, a Houthi rebel group fired an anti-ship ballistic missile at True Confidence, a Liberian flagged bulk carrier (Seatrade Maritime News, 2024). As a result of the missile's strike, Centcom stated that the multinational crew of True Confidence reported three fatalities and four injuries, three of them being severe (Seatrade Maritime News, 2024). Because the missile's strike caused significant damage to the ship, the crew members were ordered to evacuate the ship through lifeboats.

### ***Rubymar (2024)***

On February 18, a Belize flagged and UK-owned carrier Rubymar was struck by a missile fired by a Houthi rebel group. Following the strike, Rubymar sank in the Red Sea on March 2. Vessel carried an approximate 21,000 metric tons of ammonium phosphate fertilizer, which poses a grandiose environmental risk for life underwater in the Red Sea and the surrounding countries (U.S. Central Command, 2024).

### ***The TUTOR (2024)***

The Tutor, a Liberian-flagged and Greek-owned bulk carrier was struck by an "explosive filled uncrewed surface vessel" by a Houthi rebel group located in Yemen (BBC, 2024). A Filipino crew member died on the spot and the ship rapidly took on water following the attack, which resulted in flooding inside the ship and irreparable damage to the ship's engine. Following the attack, crew members evacuated the ship and were rescued by a US Navy ship and helicopter (BBC, 2024).

### ***MV Sounion (2024)***

On 21 August 2024, and later on 23 August 2024, the Greek-registered MV Sounion that carried 150000 tons of crude oil was subjected to two separate assaults by the Houthi rebel groups. MV Sounion was not registered under the protection of EUNAVFOR Aspides; nevertheless, Aspides rescued all crew members by dispatching a vessel (EUNAVFOR Operation ASPIDES, 2024).



## Major Parties Involved

### *International Maritime Organization (IMO)*

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) is one of the United Nations specialized agencies, tasked with marine security and prevention of marine pollution. The Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations support the missions and operations of IMO. Acting as a specialized agency of the United Nations, IMO is responsible for standardizing the safety, security, and environmental conditions of international shipping. Maritime shipping is moderated by establishing regulatory frameworks that are adopted and globally implemented.

Concerning the piracy and maritime attacks in the Red Sea, the secretary-general of the International Maritime Organization Arsenio Dominguez has highlighted his strong denouncement. Dominguez reiterated the “strong commitment of the International Maritime Organization to protect seafarers, ships and cargoes”, drawing attention to how “seafarer safety is paramount” (International Maritime Organisation, 2024).

### *The Maritime Security Centre Horn of Africa (MSCHOA)*

Located in Brest, The Maritime Security Centre Horn of Africa (MSCHOA) is an initiative established by the European Union Naval Forces (EU NAVFOR) to maintain cooperation with the maritime industry. MSCHOA assists EU NAVFOR in the voluntary registration scheme to track the vessels transiting the area, and also administers an interactive website that enables EU NAVFOR to communicate the latest counter-piracy guidance, and for shipping companies and operators to register their vessels' movements through the region.

### *The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)*

Concerning the regulation of international trade and global development, The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UN Trade and Development, 2025) is the leading sub-organization of the United Nations (UN Trade and Development, 2025). Founded



in 1964, UNCTAD analyzes the incidents happening in the Red Sea, and reports their implications for global trade in the long run. Thus, UNCTAD takes precautions against disruptions to global trade and works for a safer environment around the Red Sea.

## Yemen

Following the Yemeni Civil War in 2015, the number of Yemeni groups that partake in hostile activities increased significantly. These groups took advantage of the instability in the region, ultimately exacerbating the lengths of the piracy activities in the Red Sea. The principal example of these aggressive groups is the Houthis. Houthis reside in the northern coastline of Yemen, reigning Sanaa and the majority of the western and northern Yemen. The Houthi movement appears to be one of the initiating piracy attacks in the Red Sea.

## United States and United Kingdom

As a response to Houthi attacks on commercial ships in the Red Sea, the United States and the United Kingdom formed a military alliance and retaliated against Iran-backed Houthi rebels (ABC News In-Depth, 2024). The principal concern of the United States and the United Kingdom aligns, maintaining the security of the Red Sea, one of the most important trade routes for cargo. Therefore, the United States orchestrated Operation Guardian Prosperity, a military intervention to grant stability in the region. Starting from November 28, 2024, there have been multiple reported incidents of US and UK tomahawk missiles targeting the Al Hudaydah district of Yemen, as a last resort to discourage the piracy attacks in the region.

## Chronology of Important Events

Date	<i>Description of Event</i>
Late 2008	The increased threats and instability in the Horn of Africa prompted the EU to





	launch Operation Atalanta, a naval mission with the objectives of countering piracy, fighting drug and weapon trafficking, and protecting World Food Programme deliveries and other vulnerable shipping.
<b>January 2009</b>	Pursuant to United Nations Security Council Resolutions, Combined Task Force 151, a multinational task force, is established to counter piracy attacks.
<b>August 17, 2009</b>	NATO initiated Operation Ocean Shield by providing naval escorts to the Red Sea aiming to assist international efforts in combating piracy.
<b>February 19, 2023</b>	The European Union Naval Force launched a new maritime mission to address instability in the Red Sea and aid ongoing U.S.-led operations.
<b>October 2023</b>	Houthi attacks against Israeli and international commercial ships are initiated following the Gaza war.
<b>November 19, 2023</b>	With a helicopter, armed Houthis boarded Galaxy Leader, a vehicle carrier leased by the Japanese shipping corporation NYK. The 25-member crew was held hostage.
<b>December 18, 2023</b>	Operation Guardian Prosperity, an operation to maintain peace in the Red



	Sea, was initiated as a collective effort of multiple countries that include the United Kingdom, Bahrain, Canada, France, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Seychelles, and Spain.
<b>January 11, 2024</b>	The United States, the United Kingdom, and France launched air strikes targeted at Yemen.
<b>December 20, 2024</b>	US Navy F/A-18 Hornet, an American fighter jet, was shot down over the Red Sea.
<b>December 26, 2024</b>	US aircraft carrier USS Harry S. Truman was forced to retreat to the north in the Red Sea directed to Egypt's Suez Canal.
<b>January 23, 2025</b>	25 crew members of Galaxy Leader are released with the efforts of the Sultanate of Oman.

## Relevant International Documents

- Adopted by the Security Council at its 9672<sup>nd</sup> meeting, 26 June 2024 (**S/RES/2739**)
- Adopted by the Security Council at its 7382<sup>nd</sup> meeting, 15 February 2015 (**S/RES/2201**)
- Adopted by the Security Council at its 8981<sup>st</sup> meeting, 28 February 2022 (**S/RES/2624**)
- Adopted by the Security Council at its 9527<sup>th</sup> meeting, 10 January 2024 (**S/RES/2722**)
- Adopted by the Security Council at its 8372<sup>nd</sup> meeting, 25 February 2020 (**S/RES/2511**)
- Security Council 9525<sup>th</sup> meeting on Wednesday, 3 January 2024, 3 p.m. New York



**(S/PV.9525)**

- Djibouti Code of Conduct, 2009
- Jeddah Amendment, 2017
- United Nations Convention on the Law of Sea, December 10, 1982
- Convention on the Suppression of Unlawful Acts Against the Safety of Maritime Navigation, March 10, 1988

## **Past Attempts to Resolve the Issue**

Throughout the past, both military and non-military multinational efforts were dedicated to counter maritime attacks and piracy in the Red Sea. These efforts include the creation of task forces, organizing and conducting naval operations, and tackling the threats to maritime security and its causes. As primary examples of collaborative action to combat maritime piracy, Operation Atalanta, EU NAVFOR, Operation Guardian Prosperity, and Operation Ocean Shield could be given. Although these operations rely on responding with military action against the Houthi attacks in the Red Sea, they were efficient only for a limited amount of time, primarily due to lack of correspondence between states. Dissemination of intelligence and data is commonly viewed as a breach to national sovereignty, which limits the alignment of global strategies and collective action. Thus, similar operations with substantial budgets fail to eradicate maritime piracy in the Red Sea, resulting in multifaceted deficiencies in global security.

In addition to states' efforts, sub-agencies of the United Nations, including International Maritime Organization and United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime, collaboratively proposed legislations and international frameworks to maintain maritime security against piracy. United Nations Convention on the Law of Sea, Maritime Security Center Horn of Africa, Djibouti Code of Conduct, and Jeddah Amendment (2017) are primary examples of proposed frameworks that aim to provide a standardized legal basis in the act of combating maritime crimes. However, such legislations are faced with hindrances as many countries are yet to ratify or implement them into their national laws. Therefore, maritime crimes remain one of the principal perils against maritime security and international trade.



## Solution Alternatives

It is integral for nations to view the safety of the Red Sea as a global concern instead of a regional issue. As demonstrated by the Suez Canal Crisis of 1956, the Red Sea has been a key location both for economic and political aspects. Therefore, it should be nations' collective effort to combat piracy and maritime attacks in the Red Sea. To maintain the safe environment for global trade, the presence of international and regional naval coalitions -similar to examples from the past- that monitor and ensure the safety of key shipping lanes should be increased. While forming such coalitions and monitoring the lanes, utilizing the latest technological advancements -such as surveillance drones, radar systems and real-time tracking methods- to monitor pirate attacks is also crucial.

For the aforementioned coalitions to operate efficiently, enforcing the necessary legal framework is also necessary. Although anti-piracy legislations such as Djibouti Code of Conduct, the Jeddah Amendment, and United Nations Convention on the Law of Sea are currently in practice to establish the legal framework in the sea, many signatories fail to integrate the legal framework presented in such documents into practice. Therefore, although the legal framework in theory appears to be sufficient, available legislations do not contribute to the resolutions of regional or global concerns due to hindrances in practice. To address such discrepancies, nations may be provided with adequate incentives, depending on the nations' concerns against complete implementation of available legislations.

As an alternative, punitive legislations may be enforced to dissuade pirates or marine attackers from perpetuating previous crimes. However, considering the political motivation of the Houthi rebel groups, this solution will be applicable for other pirate attacks that are motivated by financial gains from the raids.

## Useful Links

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- <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/piracy/GARS.html>
- <https://cilj.co.uk/2024/02/25/crisis-in-the-red-sea-does-the-international-law-protect-ag>



- [ainst-uav-attacks-other-forms-of-maritime-terrorism-in-the-high-seas/](#)
- <https://www.imo.org/en/MediaCentre/HotTopics/Pages/Red-Sea.aspx>
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