

# BACKGROUND GUIDE



## UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL

**Agenda:** Addressing Regional and Global Security Threats Arising from Iran's Naval Activity in the Persian Gulf.



**LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE BOARD**

On behalf of the Executive Board, we extend a warm welcome to all of you and congratulate you on being a part of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) at Nath Valley Model United Nations. We are sure that this background guide will give you a perfect launching pad as it encompasses a plethora of information that we believe will help you kickstart your research.

This being clear, kindly do not limit your research to the areas highlighted, but ensure that you logically deduce and push your research to areas associated with the issues mentioned. The Executive Board wants to make it clear that we are not looking for a repetition of existing solutions but adaptations and undeployed solutions presented in a practical manner are fair play.

Your goal should not be to recite your research and existing solutions but to put your minds to use for developing your own analysis of subject matters and bring forth novel solutions if possible. You can choose to learn more about it through the delegate resources provided and we will also conduct a session at the start of Day 1 to explain everything in detail. At no point during the debate will points be deducted for not knowing the procedure but it is encouraged to keep note of how Model UNs under this procedure work for a smooth discourse. We look forward to engaging with your diverse perspectives and contributing to the efforts of the UNSC during this simulation at Nath Valley Model UN. All the best!

Regards

President, Aryan Rakhe

Vice President, Arvika Patil

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## **INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMITTEE**

### **COMMITTEE: UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL**

#### **Mandate**

The United Nations Charter established six main organs of the United Nations, including the Security Council. It gives primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security to the Security Council, which may meet whenever peace is threatened. According to the Charter, the United Nations has four purposes:

- to maintain international peace and security;
- to develop friendly relations among nations;
- to cooperate in solving international problems and in promoting respect for human rights;
- and to be a center for harmonizing the actions of nations.

All members of the United Nations agree to accept and carry out the decisions of the Security Council. While other organs of the United Nations make recommendations to member states, only the Security Council has the power to make decisions that member states are then obligated to implement under the Charter. Maintaining International Peace and Security When a complaint concerning a threat to peace is brought before it, the Council's first action is usually to recommend that the parties try to reach agreement by peaceful means. The Council may:

- set forth principles for such an agreement;
- undertake investigation and mediation, in some cases;
- dispatch a mission;
- appoint special envoys; or request the Secretary-General to use his good offices to achieve a pacific settlement of the dispute.

When a dispute leads to hostilities, the Council's primary concern is to bring them to an end as soon as possible. In that case, the Council may:

- issue ceasefire directives that can help prevent an escalation of the conflict;

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- dispatch military observers or a peacekeeping force to help reduce tensions, separate opposing forces and establish a calm in which peaceful settlements may be sought. Beyond this, the Council may opt for enforcement measures, including:
- economic sanctions, arms embargoes, financial penalties and restrictions, and travel bans;
- severance of diplomatic relations;
- blockade;
- or even collective military action.

A chief concern is to focus action on those responsible for the policies or practices condemned by the international community, while minimizing the impact of the measures taken on other parts of the population and economy. Sanctions: The Security Council can take action to maintain or restore international peace and security under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter. Sanctions measures, under Article 41, encompass a broad range of enforcement options that do not involve the use of armed force. Since 1966, the Security Council has established 30 sanctions regimes, in Southern Rhodesia, South Africa, the former Yugoslavia (2), Haiti, Iraq (2), Angola, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia and Eritrea, Eritrea and Ethiopia, Liberia (3), DRC, Côte d'Ivoire, Sudan, Lebanon, DPRK, Iran, Libya (2), Guinea-Bissau, CAR, Yemen, South Sudan and Mali, as well as against ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida and the Taliban. Security Council sanctions have taken a number of different forms, in pursuit of a variety of goals. The measures have ranged from comprehensive economic and trade sanctions to more targeted measures such as arms embargoes, travel bans, and financial or commodity restrictions. The Security Council has applied sanctions to support peaceful transitions, deter no constitutional changes, constrain terrorism, protect human rights and promote non-proliferation. Sanctions do not operate, succeed or fail in a vacuum. The measures are most effective at maintaining or restoring international peace and security when applied as part of a comprehensive strategy encompassing peacekeeping, peacebuilding and peacemaking. Contrary to the assumption that sanctions are punitive, many regimes are designed to support governments and regions working towards peaceful transition. The Libyan and GuineaBissau sanctions regimes all exemplify this approach. Today, there are 14 ongoing sanctions regimes which focus on supporting political settlement of conflicts, nuclear non-proliferation, and counter-terrorism. Each regime is administered by a sanctions committee chaired by a non-permanent member of the Security Council. There are 10 monitoring groups, teams and

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panels that support the work of 11 of the 14 sanctions committees. The Council applies sanctions with ever-increasing cognizance of the rights of those targeted. In the 2005 World Summit declaration, the General Assembly called on the Security Council, with the support of the Secretary-General, to ensure that fair and clear procedures are in place for the imposition and lifting of sanctions measures.



## **INTRODUCTION TO THE AGENDA**

The Persian Gulf remains one of the most strategically vital waterways in the world, serving as a critical artery for global energy supplies. Approximately one-fifth of the world's traded crude oil passes through the Strait of Hormuz, making the security of this region a matter of international concern. The stability of these waters directly impacts global energy markets, economic security, and the livelihoods of millions who depend on uninterrupted maritime transit.

Recent years have seen a marked increase in naval activity by Iran, particularly through its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Navy and the regular Artesh Navy. These forces have been reinforced with advanced missile systems, fast-attack craft, and new warships, many of which are now stationed on strategically positioned islands such as Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb, and Abu Musa. Military exercises and live-fire drills have become more frequent, signaling Tehran's intent to project power and deter perceived threats in the region.

Alongside these military developments, there have been numerous reported incidents involving Iranian naval vessels and commercial shipping. Between 2023 and early 2024, international monitors documented over 55 attacks on vessels attributed to Iran-backed groups, as well as dozens of instances of harassment, interdiction, and seizure of merchant ships in the Persian Gulf and adjacent waters. These actions have heightened tensions and raised concerns about the safety and freedom of navigation for international shipping.

The international community has responded to these developments with heightened naval presence and diplomatic engagement. The United States and its allies have deployed additional warships, including aircraft carrier strike groups, to the region to ensure the free flow of commerce and to deter potential disruptions. Meanwhile, Iran has conducted joint naval exercises with partners such as Russia and China, underscoring the complex geopolitical landscape and the evolving security dynamics in the Persian Gulf.

The international legal framework governing maritime conduct in the Gulf — particularly the **United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)** — provides a basis for defining territorial waters, freedom of navigation, and the rights of coastal and non-coastal states. However,



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overlapping claims, differing interpretations of legal rights in straits used for international navigation, and the absence of some state parties from UNCLOS (notably the United States) have complicated enforcement and dispute resolution. In the Persian Gulf's narrow waterways, where military and commercial traffic converge, even minor confrontations can escalate rapidly, making diplomacy and rules-based dialogue especially crucial.

Against this backdrop, the UN Security Council is called upon to address the multifaceted security threats arising from Iran's naval activity. The challenge lies in balancing the need to uphold international law, protect freedom of navigation, and prevent escalation, while also considering the legitimate security concerns of all regional actors. The Council's deliberations must take into account the broader implications for global energy security, regional stability, and the risk of unintended conflict.





## **KEY ISSUES**

### ***1. Freedom of Navigation & Maritime Security***

The Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz remain key maritime transport routes of international energy trade. Increased naval activity in these waters—intercepts, close-in manoeuvres, and military exercises being the most notable—has created concerns over accidental confrontations and freedom of navigation. Because over 20% of world crude oil is transported through the Strait, even brief disruptions would have possible significant implications for world supply chains, energy markets, and regional economic stability.

### ***2. Escalation Risks & Military Buildup***

Growing naval deployments by external and regional players—i.e., Iran, the United States, the United Kingdom, and members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)—have led to further militarisation of the sea spaces. With several actors having overlapping security interests, the risk of miscalculation, miscommunication, or unintended contacts is higher, and these could spill over into broader regional conflict. The tensions are also heightened with no one conflict de-escalation mechanism in operation for the Persian Gulf.

### ***3. Asymmetric Naval Strategy & Utilizing Non-Traditional Resources***

Iran's claimed use of fast-attack craft, sea mines, unmanned aerial systems, and unmanned surface systems in naval operations produces uncertainty and asymmetry in the naval environment. While these weapons are usually justified as part of Iran's defensive posture, their employment in contested or limited waters produces legitimate concerns about the safety of civilian vessels, merchant shipping routes, and adherence to the law of the sea, especially in times of peace.

### ***4. Legal Uncertainties & Different Interpretations of UNCLOS***

Application of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) is also uneven in the region. While Iran is a signatory to UNCLOS, not everyone who is interested is (the most significant exception being the U.S.), and consequently, a range of interpretations of territorial waters, innocent passage, and right of transit is in place. This

complicates the resolution of dispute and precludes the institution of a widely accepted legal regime for transit through international straits and semi-enclosed seas like the Persian Gulf.

### **5. *Commercial Shipping and Energy Infrastructure Security***

A series of high-profile incidents in the last few years—2019 tankers sabotage, hijacking of oil tankers, and mysterious drone attacks against the energy infrastructure—have posed threats to energy and commercial infrastructure. The incidents have set off maritime insurance premiums, increased naval escorts, and increased alert levels, affecting economic confidence and efficiency of maritime trade. Lack of accountability in activities in the grey area also makes it challenging to attain a seamless commerce.

### **6. *Absence of a Multilateral Security Framework in the Gulf***

Even though it is a core region, there is no clearly defined, comprehensive, multilateral maritime security framework in the Persian Gulf. Policies are currently mostly ad hoc and bilateral, i.e., the International Maritime Security Construct (IMSC) or US-led coalitions, which are not necessarily inclusive of all regional players, especially Iran. The absence of a mutually agreed platform for maritime communication, transparency, and coordination further scatters the region and compromises collective maritime management.

### **7. *Humanitarian and Civilian Risk Factors***

Escalated military activity and restricted navigation create strategic threats but also threaten civilian mariners and commercial crew, especially in congested areas such as the Strait of Hormuz. Additionally, in tanker impoundment or ship damage situations, there are threats to the marine environment as well as possible contraventions of maritime labour rights, which are part of wider human rights obligations. Safety for all non-combatant parties continues to be a top priority.

## **MAJOR PARTIES**

Certainly. Here are five of the most important key players involved in the regional and global security dynamics related to Iran's naval activity in the Persian Gulf, presented in detailed paragraphs with supporting data and context:

### **Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Navy**

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy, or IRGCN, stands as the most prominent Iranian entity shaping the security environment in the Persian Gulf. The IRGCN has significantly expanded its military presence on contested islands such as Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb, and Abu Musa, equipping them with advanced missile defense and air defense systems in recent months. Rear Admiral Alireza Tangsiri, commander of the IRGCN, has publicly emphasized the strategic imperative of militarizing these islands, stating that Iran's fast-attack and assault vessels are now armed with new cruise missiles and are fully operational. The IRGCN has conducted large-scale military exercises, such as "Great Prophet Authority 19," which included simulated combat scenarios and live-fire drills to test defensive and offensive capabilities. In 2023 and 2024, the IRGCN was implicated in dozens of incidents involving the harassment, interdiction, and seizure of commercial vessels, actions that have raised international concerns about the safety and freedom of navigation in the region. The IRGCN's activities are not limited to the Persian Gulf; its influence extends to the Red Sea and beyond, where it supports allied groups such as the Houthis in Yemen, further complicating regional security dynamics.

### **United States Navy**

The United States Navy is a central actor in countering Iran's naval assertiveness and ensuring the free flow of commerce through the Persian Gulf. In response to Iran's increasing militarization and frequent harassment of commercial shipping, the U.S. has reinforced its naval presence in the region, including the deployment of aircraft carrier strike groups such as the USS Harry S. Truman and the anticipated arrival of the USS Carl Vinson. The U.S. Navy maintains a fleet stationed in Bahrain, which serves as a hub for operations aimed at deterring Iranian threats and protecting international shipping lanes. The U.S. has also led multinational coalitions, such as the ten-nation group announced in December 2023 to address Houthi aggressions in the Red Sea, which are often

linked to Iranian support. U.S. naval forces have directly intervened to prevent Iranian seizures of commercial vessels, as seen in June 2023 when the USS McFaul responded to an attempted Iranian seizure of the Marshall Island-flagged oil tanker T.R.F. Moss. The U.S. Navy's actions are critical in maintaining the stability of a region through which over 20% of the world's traded crude oil passes.

### **Islamic Republic of Iran Navy (Artesh Navy)**

The Artesh Navy, or the regular Iranian Navy, operates alongside the IRGCN and plays a significant role in Iran's maritime strategy. The Artesh Navy is responsible for escorting oil and commercial shipments, not only within the Persian Gulf but also to destinations as far as Venezuela, Europe, and Africa. Rear Admiral Shahram Irani, commander of the Artesh Navy, has publicly stated that Iran has the capability to monitor and surveil foreign naval forces, including U.S. aircraft carriers and destroyers, using reconnaissance drones that are visible to the naked eye. This capability is intended to send a clear message about Iran's vigilance and readiness to respond to perceived threats. The Artesh Navy has also been involved in high-profile incidents, such as the seizure and subsequent recapture of the Marshall Islands-flagged oil tanker Suez Rajan, which was confiscated by the United States in 2023 and later reclaimed by Iran in the Gulf of Oman. The Artesh Navy's activities, combined with those of the IRGCN, underscore Iran's determination to project power and protect its interests in strategic waterways.

### **China and Russia**

China and Russia have emerged as increasingly important external actors in the Persian Gulf through their joint naval exercises with Iran. Since 2021, the three countries have conducted annual military drills in the Gulf of Oman and the Strait of Hormuz, with the most recent being the Maritime Security Belt 2025 exercise. These exercises, which include operations such as striking maritime targets, damage control, and coordinated search and rescue missions, are designed to strengthen cooperation among the participating navies and signal a united front against perceived Western dominance. The 2025 drills saw the participation of naval contingents from several countries as observers, highlighting the broader geopolitical significance of these maneuvers. China and Russia do not generally patrol Middle Eastern waters, but their increasing military collaboration with Iran has added a new dimension to regional security dynamics, complicating

the efforts of the U.S.-led coalitions to maintain stability and deter Iranian threats. The presence of these major powers in the region also reflects shifting global alliances and the growing influence of non-Western actors in critical maritime corridors.

### **International Shipping Industry and Flag States**

The international shipping industry and the flag states under which commercial vessels operate are crucial but often overlooked stakeholders in the security of the Persian Gulf. Over 20% of the world's traded crude oil passes through the Strait of Hormuz, making the region indispensable to global energy markets<sup>5</sup>. The industry has been directly affected by Iran's naval activities, with dozens of incidents involving harassment, interdiction, and seizure of merchant ships reported between 2023 and 2024. Flag states such as the Marshall Islands and Panama, which register a significant portion of the world's commercial fleet, have seen their vessels targeted by Iranian forces. The shipping industry has responded by increasing insurance premiums, rerouting vessels, and calling for greater international protection of maritime trade routes. The actions of flag states and shipping companies, while primarily economic in nature, have significant implications for regional security, as they influence the willingness of commercial operators to transit the Persian Gulf and the broader international response to Iranian actions.

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**PAST ACTIONS**

The United Nations Security Council has a long history of engagement with maritime security issues in the Persian Gulf, particularly concerning the risks posed by heightened naval activity. One of the earliest and most significant milestones was the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 598 in July 1987, which called for an immediate ceasefire between Iran and Iraq, the repatriation of prisoners of war, and the withdrawal of both sides to the international border. This resolution was crucial in ending the so-called “Tanker War,” during which both Iran and Iraq targeted neutral shipping, resulting in hundreds of attacks on merchant vessels and a significant threat to international maritime security. The enforcement of Resolution 598 saw the deployment of multinational naval forces, including those of the United States, France, and the United Kingdom, to ensure the protection of neutral shipping and the safety of the vital sea lane

Following the implementation of Resolution 598, the United Nations Iran-Iraq Military Observer Group (UNIIMOG) was established to monitor the ceasefire and support the peace process. UNIIMOG’s advance parties arrived in Iran and Iraq on 10 August 1988, marking a new phase of international oversight and confidence-building measures in the region. Throughout this period, intense diplomatic activity was undertaken by the UN Secretary-General, who traveled to Tehran and Baghdad and facilitated negotiations both in the region and at UN Headquarters in New York. These efforts were essential in mitigating the risk of renewed hostilities and ensuring the continued flow of maritime commerce through the Persian Gulf.

In the decades that followed, the Security Council continued to address new challenges in the region, including Iran’s nuclear program and its implications for regional security. Between 2006 and 2010, the Council adopted six resolutions imposing sanctions on Iran for its nuclear activities, reflecting the international community’s concern over potential proliferation risks. These measures were designed to pressure Iran to comply with its non-proliferation obligations and to reduce tensions in the region. The resolutions included provisions targeting Iran’s military and technological capabilities, as well as restrictions on arms transfers and ballistic missile development.



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A significant turning point occurred in July 2015, when the Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2231, endorsing the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and lifting nuclear-related sanctions on Iran. Resolution 2231 retained restrictions on Iranian arms sales for five years and ballistic missile transfers for eight years, underscoring the international community's ongoing vigilance regarding Iran's military activities. The adoption of the JCPOA was intended to moderate Iran's behavior and to foster greater regional stability, but concerns persisted regarding Iran's naval posture and its impact on maritime security.

Despite these diplomatic efforts, incidents involving Iranian naval forces and commercial shipping have continued to occur. In June 2019, the Security Council held meetings to discuss attacks on commercial ships in the Gulf of Oman, following allegations by the United States that Iran was responsible for several incidents. The Council was briefed on these developments, but consensus on attribution and appropriate responses proved elusive. These discussions highlighted the ongoing challenges of ensuring maritime security and the complexities of addressing allegations of state-sponsored attacks in international waters. The Security Council's engagement on this issue has thus remained a mix of formal resolutions, informal consultations, and ongoing diplomatic efforts to prevent escalation.

A condensed timeline of key actions and events provides further clarity: In 1987, the Security Council adopted Resolution 598 to end the Iran-Iraq War and protect neutral shipping. In 1988, UNIIMOG was deployed to monitor the ceasefire. Between 2006 and 2010, the Council imposed a series of sanctions on Iran related to its nuclear program. In July 2015, Resolution 2231 endorsed the JCPOA and lifted nuclear-related sanctions. In June 2019, the Council held meetings to address attacks on commercial ships in the Gulf of Oman. Throughout this period, international naval forces have remained present in the region to deter threats and ensure the safety of maritime trade, reflecting the enduring importance of the Persian Gulf to global security and the economy.



## **POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS**

### ***Enhanced Multilateral Maritime Security Frameworks***

Strengthening existing multilateral coalitions, such as the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), could deter Iranian aggression while ensuring collective responsibility for safeguarding shipping lanes. The CMF, which includes 34 member nations, has historically focused on counter-piracy and counter-terrorism operations but lacks a dedicated mandate for the Persian Gulf. Expanding its scope to include real-time intelligence sharing and coordinated patrols in the Strait of Hormuz, coupled with contributions from regional states like Oman and Kuwait, could improve responsiveness to incidents. For instance, the European-led EMASoH mission, operational since 2020, demonstrates the potential for multinational collaboration, having deployed frigates and surveillance aircraft to monitor Iranian activity. A UN Security Council resolution formalizing such efforts—as proposed in 2019—could legitimize operations and encourage broader participation, reducing reliance on unilateral U.S. deployments.

### ***Confidence-Building Measures and Diplomatic Channels***

Reviving diplomatic engagement through platforms like the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) could address underlying tensions. Historical precedents, such as the UNIMOG ceasefire monitoring mechanism during the Iran-Iraq War, highlight the value of third-party mediation and transparency. Establishing a bilateral U.S.-Iran maritime communication channel, modeled on the 2014 Incidents at Sea Agreement, could mitigate misunderstandings during naval encounters. The Middle East Institute (MEI) has advocated for joint search-and-rescue exercises and counter-piracy initiatives, which could build trust while adhering to international maritime law. Such measures would require reciprocal commitments, including Iran halting vessel seizures and the U.S. easing sanctions on civilian maritime trade, as seen during temporary waivers in 2018.

### ***Technological Deterrence and Asymmetric Countermeasures***

Deploying advanced surveillance systems, such as autonomous drones and AI-enhanced radar networks, could neutralize Iran's asymmetric tactics. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy (IRGCN) relies on swarms of fast-attack craft and hidden coastal bunkers, tactics developed

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during the 1980s Tanker War<sup>5</sup>. Modern sensor arrays, capable of detecting small vessels up to 100 nautical miles away, would enable preemptive identification of threats. The U.S. Navy's NAVCENT has already begun integrating uncrewed surface vessels (USVs) in the Gulf, but scaling these efforts—with NATO or EU support—could reduce the physical presence of manned warships, which often escalate tensions. Concurrently, leveraging Iran's own drone technology (reportedly with 2,000 km ranges) for mutual monitoring agreements could create a framework for de-escalation while addressing Tehran's security concerns.



**QUESTIONS A RESOLUTION MUST ANSWER (QARMAs)**

1. How can the international community ensure the safety and freedom of navigation for commercial shipping in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz, given the persistent risks posed by recent Iranian naval activities?
2. What mechanisms can be established to prevent miscalculations and unintended escalation between Iran and foreign naval forces operating in the region?
3. How should the United Nations Security Council respond to allegations of state-sponsored attacks, harassment, or seizures of commercial vessels, and what evidentiary standards or investigative procedures should be adopted?
4. What role can regional states and international coalitions play in supporting or supplementing the efforts of the UN Security Council to maintain maritime security and stability in the Persian Gulf?
5. How can the resolution balance the legitimate security concerns of all parties, including Iran, while upholding international law and the rights of neutral states and commercial interests?

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