



Haileybury  
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Research Report

**Security Council**

**The Question of Security of Trade  
Routes**



Foundation

A THIMUN Affiliated Conference

## Background

Global trade routes spanning across land, sea and air are essential for commerce. However, they have faced persistent security challenges that disrupt their stability. Land routes such as the Silk Roads have historically been vulnerable to piracy and armed conflict. Routes through Central Asia, which faced political and logistical challenges since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, were reestablished as part of China's Belt and Road Initiative but have been hindered due to regulatory inconsistencies and political instability, slowing trade and raising costs for goods moving across these routes.

Sea routes are vulnerable in critical chokepoints. One such point is the Malacca Strait, connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Since the early 2000s, the route has seen increased piracy, targeting oil and bulk carriers. Efforts from surrounding nations have aided in reducing piracy but risks remain. Similarly, the Strait of Hormuz, crucial for the transport of oil from the Middle East, has experienced threats and attacks on oil tankers.

Air routes have also faced increased security concerns, especially since the attacks on the 11th of September 2001. Tight regulations and airspace restrictions over conflict zones have led to rerouting of flights for European and Asian carriers which has been costly. These challenges have impacted how cost effective and timely air cargo is, as companies prioritise safety over efficiency.

While many land and air routes exist, sea routes are currently the most dominant method of trade globally as approximately 80% of global trade is done through sea routes.

## Definition of Key Terms

**Belt and Road Initiative** - A development project led by China to build trade routes linking Asia with Africa and Europe to boost trade.

**Red Sea crisis** - After attacking Israel with missiles and armed drones, Houthis have been seizing and launching aerial attacks against ships in the Red Sea

**Chokepoints** - Narrow passages such as the Suez Canal and Strait of Hormuz which are vulnerable to congestion or blockades

**Maritime** - Activities, industries or navigation on the sea

**Gulf of Aden** - The Gulf of Aden is located between Yemen and Somalia and is a strategic waterway for global trade

# Overview of Current Issue

## Land Routes

**New Silk Road** - Part of the Belt and Road Initiative, the China-Europe railway, spanning Central Asia, allows for the transport of electronics, machinery and textiles. It faces frequent delays, however, due to inconsistent regulations at border crossings. Certain sections are also vulnerable to sabotage as they cross some regions with political unrest and military activity.

**North-South Transport Corridor (NSTC)** - The NSTC connects Russia, Iran and India. This land-sea route aims to facilitate the transport of goods across Central Asia, with the cargo primarily including industrial equipment, chemicals and textiles. Due to sanctions and the complex political landscape, the route faces challenges, increasing vulnerability to trade restrictions and regional disputes.

## Sea Routes

**Strait of Malacca** - The Strait of Malacca is an important trade route between the Pacific and Indian oceans through which about 30% of the world's sea trade passes. The strait is vulnerable to environmental risks, such as oil spills, and piracy due to the large number of ships passing through it. Nearby countries have made efforts to increase security. However, risks remain high due to environmental exposure and regional economic disparities.

**Suez Canal** - The Suez Canal connects the Mediterranean and Red Sea. This narrow waterway has been blocked in the past, most recently by the Ever Given in 2021 which halted for 6 days. These create chokepoints which increase security risks. It has also been revealed that in the first 2 months of 2024, trade volume through the Suez Canal dropped by 50% from the previous year. Following the Red Sea crisis, shipping companies have been diverting ships around the Cape of Good Hope, which can take up to 15 days longer than travelling through the Suez Canal.

**Strait of Hormuz** - The Strait of Hormuz connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman, serving as a primary route for oil tankers from the Middle East to Asia, Europe and North America. Around 30% of global oil passes through the strait, demonstrating how essential it is to global energy supplies. However, the area is sensitive to geopolitical tension among Gulf countries, including Iran, which has threatened to close the strait in the past. This creates vulnerability for the route, resulting in threats of mine placement or vessel attacks during periods of high tension.

## Air Routes

**Cargo routes** - The cargo route from North America to Europe is essential for the transport of high-value goods including electronics and pharmaceuticals. Due to ongoing conflict, including that between Russia and Ukraine, there are increased airspace restrictions over Eastern Europe, meaning airlines have to take longer alternative paths. Similarly, the Asia-North America cargo

route faces airspace restrictions due to geopolitical tensions. The route allows for the transport of electronics and fast-moving consumer goods from East Asia to North America.

## Relevant Countries and Organisations

**Combined Maritime Forces (CMF)** - The CMF is a coalition of 34 nations, mostly from Europe, North America and Asia, under the leadership of the United States. The CMF patrols the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Aden to prevent terrorism, smuggling, and piracy as part of its commitment to maritime security.

**International Maritime Security Construct (IMSC)** - The main objective of the IMSC is the protection of the Strait of Hormuz. This is headed by the United States and includes allies from Europe and the Gulf. By preventing Iranian threats and handling events, the IMSC strives to guarantee the secure passage of commercial vessels.

**International Maritime Organisation (IMO)** - By enforcing regulations such as the International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code, the IMO aims to improve security against terrorism and piracy in ports globally. Nations in the organisation can therefore use these guidelines to improve infrastructure and their ability to respond in case of incidents. The IMO also focuses on strengthening coast guards and increasing patrols in the Gulf of Guinea and around Somalia. Through this, it aims to deter piracy.

**INTERPOL** - INTERPOL shares intelligence and assists with investigations into cargo theft, piracy and smuggling to support international cooperation to prevent organised crime that targets sea trade. The investigations take place to find smuggling networks across multiple regions throughout Europe, Asia and Africa.

**European Union (EU)** - Operation Atalanta has been established by the EU to combat piracy in the Gulf of Aden. The protection of vessels transporting goods and humanitarian aid to East Africa is the objective of this operation. EU naval forces have been deployed to safeguard both European and global shipping. The EU also partners with INTERPOL to enhance the prevention of maritime crime.

**China** - China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has made investments in infrastructure to secure and expand trade routes across Asia, Africa and Europe. China has also stationed naval forces near the Strait of Malacca to protect the route and mitigate risks.

**India** - India enhances cooperation on maritime security with other Indian Ocean nations through participating in the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS). India also collaborates with Japan, the United States and Australia in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, an alliance to address shared security challenges in the Indo-Pacific region. Through this, India secures trade routes against piracy and cyber threats. India, Russia and Iran also created the NSTC to bypass chokepoints like the Suez Canal.

**Japan** - Japan's Maritime Self-Defence Force conducts operations to prevent piracy in regions such as the Gulf of Aden. Japan also invests in advanced surveillance technologies for ports, particularly in Southeast Asia.

## Possible Solutions

**Enhance naval presence** - Increase naval patrols especially in high-risk areas like the Gulf of Aden, the Strait of Hormuz and the Strait of Malacca. Doing so can deter piracy and other illegal activities.

**Invest in advanced surveillance technology** - By using satellite surveillance and drones, ships can be monitored in real time and suspicious activities and threats can be detected early on.

**Infrastructure development** - Enhancing routes like the NSTC would mean that reliance on chokepoints like the Suez Canal would be reduced. Expanding these routes can provide secure alternatives for trade.

**Developing crisis response units** - creating crisis response units that can quickly respond to security threats in trade zones can reduce disruptions. These could be created as a joint effort by multiple nations.

**Establishing early warning systems** - providing real time alerts of potential threats to cargo ships would ensure operators have enough time to reroute or prepare their response to the threat.

## Relevant Websites and Articles

### Maritime Security

The article provides an overview of maritime crime and security. It discusses the role of the EU in the protection of ships and its efforts towards better security.

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/maritime-security/>

### Applying the Law of the Sea to Protect International Shipping

The article discusses the importance of using international law to safeguard ships from illegal activities. It highlights the role the IMO plays in regulating trade routes

<https://www.un.org/en/un-chronicle/applying-law-sea-protect-international-shipping#:~:text=On%2010%20January%202024%2C%20the,Sea%3B%20and%20taking%20note%20of>

## The new corridors of global trade

The article discusses trade corridors that are emerging due to recent geopolitical tension across Eurasia. It highlights the Middle and Southern Corridors and provides solutions to use the corridors more effectively.

<https://unctad.org/news/new-corridors-global-trade>

## Maritime Security and Trade Routes Challenges in the 21st Century: Future Recommendations

The article analyses current threats to maritime trade and provides recommendations for the future, including international cooperation and technological advancements to enhance security along sea routes.

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/383704341\\_Maritime\\_Security\\_and\\_Trade\\_Routes\\_Challenges\\_in\\_the\\_21st\\_Century\\_Future\\_Recommendations](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/383704341_Maritime_Security_and_Trade_Routes_Challenges_in_the_21st_Century_Future_Recommendations)



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