



UN Security Council Arria-Formula Meeting

Organized by the Kingdom of Bahrain

Safe Seas, Shared Security: Protecting Freedom of Navigation in an Evolving Security Environment

Thursday, 17 September, 2026, 15:00-18:00, Conference Room 12

Background

Recent disruptions to commercial shipping in the Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz, Bab al-Mandab, the Gulf of Oman and the Red Sea have demonstrated the vulnerability of critical maritime routes and their direct relevance to international peace and security.

Attacks and threats against merchant and commercial vessels, the laying of sea mines, interference with navigational rights and freedoms, and risks to seafarers have demonstrated how rapidly insecurity at a maritime chokepoint can affect global energy flows, international trade, food supply chains and humanitarian operations.

These developments have also highlighted a broader challenge: disruption affecting one critical maritime route can generate cascading consequences across interconnected waterways and the global trading system. In an increasingly interconnected maritime environment, the security and resilience of international shipping routes cannot be considered in isolation.

At the Security Council's High-Level Open Debate on maritime security convened by the Kingdom of Bahrain during its Presidency in April 2026, Member States emphasized that maritime security challenges transcend national boundaries and cannot be effectively addressed by any State acting alone.

Security Council resolution 2817 (2026) further reaffirmed the importance of navigational rights and freedoms in the Strait of Hormuz and its relevance to international peace and security.

In accordance with international law, vessels exercising the right of transit passage through straits used for international navigation must not be unlawfully impeded, including through the laying of sea mines, the exaction of tolls or illegal charges, or the imposition of unlawful authorization requirements. Recent developments have shown, however, that these legal protections alone are not always sufficient: threats, attacks and coercive measures can still deter commercial operators from exercising navigational rights, with consequences extending far beyond the immediate region.

The human consequences are equally significant. Seafarers are often among the first affected by maritime insecurity, facing risks to their lives and safety, prolonged periods aboard stranded

vessels, difficulties in crew changes and repatriation, and limited access to medical or humanitarian assistance.

Disruptions also carry significant economic and environmental risks. The Strait of Hormuz alone facilitates around 20 million barrels of crude oil and petroleum products per day – some 25 per cent of global seaborne oil trade and 19 per cent of global LNG trade – while insecurity in the Red Sea and Bab al-Mandab has separately driven up shipping costs, insurance premiums and transit times. Given the limited availability of alternative routes, simultaneous or sequential disruptions across multiple chokepoints can compound these effects and expose vulnerabilities in global energy, food and humanitarian supply chains. These effects fall disproportionately on developing countries, which often face higher freight costs, fewer alternative routes and greater exposure to food and energy price volatility.

Contemporary maritime threats are also evolving. In addition to conventional attacks against vessels, maritime security is increasingly affected by unmanned systems, cyber threats, interference with navigation and communications systems, and other emerging technologies. These developments reinforce the need for effective maritime domain awareness, reliable information-sharing and strengthened international preparedness.

The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea provides the overarching legal framework governing activities at sea, with the International Maritime Organization playing a central role in shipping safety and security, alongside other UN entities, regional organizations and private-sector actors. While this framework provides a strong foundation, recent experience has highlighted the need to examine whether existing arrangements offer sufficient coordination and preparedness when a critical maritime route faces major or prolonged disruption.

Objectives

Against this backdrop, the Kingdom of Bahrain will convene this Arria-formula meeting to provide an opportunity for Member States and relevant stakeholders to:

- **Draw lessons from recent maritime disruptions**, particularly those affecting the Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz, Bab al-Mandab, the Gulf of Oman and the Red Sea, including identifying operational and institutional gaps exposed during these crises;
- **Identify practical measures to safeguard navigational rights and freedoms**, protect commercial shipping and seafarers, and maintain or restore safe and commercially viable navigation during periods of heightened insecurity;
- **Examine options for strengthening international preparedness and coordination**, including information-sharing, maritime domain awareness, early warning, incident response, humanitarian assistance and cooperation among the United Nations, IMO, Member States, regional organizations and the maritime industry;
- **Consider measures to strengthen accountability** for attacks, threats and other unlawful interference with merchant and commercial shipping and navigational rights and freedoms, in accordance with international law;
- **Strengthen the resilience of critical maritime routes**, including preparedness for simultaneous or cascading disruptions affecting multiple maritime chokepoints and their implications for global energy, food and humanitarian supply chains; and

- **Explore longer-term options for strengthening the international framework** for the protection of critical maritime routes.

Guiding Questions

Participants are encouraged to consider the following questions:

1. What operational and institutional lessons can be drawn from recent disruptions affecting the Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz, Bab al-Mandab, the Gulf of Oman and the Red Sea, particularly with respect to international peace and security and the stability of the global economy – what mechanisms worked, where were the principal gaps, and how should the international community prepare for cascading or simultaneous disruptions across interconnected chokepoints?
2. What practical measures are required to ensure that navigational rights and freedoms – including the right of transit passage – are upheld, enabling safe, secure and commercially viable passage during periods of heightened maritime insecurity?
3. How would Member States, the United Nations, IMO, regional organizations and the maritime industry strengthen information-sharing, early warning and coordination – and would stronger standing or rapidly deployable coordination arrangements improve preparedness and response, and contribute to regional and international peace and security?
4. How can the international community strengthen protection and assistance for seafarers during maritime crises, including evacuation, repatriation, crew changes and medical and humanitarian support?
5. How can accountability for attacks and unlawful interference with commercial shipping be strengthened, and what elements could inform a broader international framework for the resilience and protection of critical maritime routes?

Briefers

- H.E. Dr. Rania Al-Mashat, UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)
- H.E. Pedro Manuel Moreno, Deputy Secretary-General and Acting Secretary-General of UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD)
- H.E. Mr. Thomas Kazakos, Secretary-General International Chamber of Shipping
- Professor Christian Bueger, Fellow, United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), and Professor of International Relations, University of Copenhagen
- Additional briefers will be announced once confirmed

Format

UNSC Members; interested Member States are invited to attend.

Interventions are encouraged to be limited to 3 minutes.

Delegations wishing to take the floor are kindly requested to inscribe on the speaker's list in advance by email (bahrain.sc@mofa.gov.bh) by the end of day Tuesday, 15 September.

For any questions, please reach out to Ali Al-Khalifa (alkhalifaa@mofa.gov.bh) or Ali Abdul Hameed Fadulalla (afadulalla@mofa.gov.bh).

Interpretation will be provided. The meeting will be webcast on the UN Web TV.

Expected Outcome

A Chair's Summary will be circulated to all Member States following the meeting.