Introduction – to the DISEC committee

The Disarmament and International Security Committee (**DISEC**), also known as the First Committee, of the United Nations General Assembly. It focuses on issues related to international peace and security, especially disarmament, arms control, non-proliferation, and other threats to international security. **DISEC** also addresses challenges such as arms trafficking, nuclear proliferation, and emerging military technologies.

This committee is relevant to the topic because tensions in the **Strait of Hormuz** involve naval forces, military escalation, threats to commercial shipping, and disputes between regional and external powers.

DISEC provides a forum for countries to discuss cooperative security measures, **confidence-building measures**, communication between military forces, and other ways to reduce the risk of conflict and military escalation.

Introduction – The Strait of Hormuz

The Strait of Hormuz is a narrow maritime passage connecting the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman, and it is one of the most strategically important waterways in the world.

As a **maritime chokepoint**, oil flows through the Strait of Hormuz account for roughly one-fifth of global petroleum liquids consumption, while the strait is also an important route for liquefied natural gas, making it essential for international trade and global energy security.

Recent incidents-such as tanker seizures, attacks on commercial vessels, and rising tensions between regional and international naval forces, have raised concerns about **freedom of navigation** in the area.

The core problem is how the international community can protect this critical trade route while preventing military escalation and balancing coastal states´ security interests with the global need for stable, open maritime access.

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Context

Tensions surrounding the Strait of Hormuz began long before modern politics, but many of the modern security challenges developed during the twentieth century as the Persian Gulf became increasingly important to global oil exports.

The strait's strategic importance made it a recurring flashpoint, especially during the **Tanker War**, a phase of the Iran-Iraq War that intensified in 1987, when Iran and Iraq attacked commercial shipping and oil- related vessels across the Persian Gulf.

The Tanker War greatly increased international naval involvement in the region. In July 1987 the United States began Operation Earnest Will, under which reflagged Kuwaiti tankers were escorted by U.S. naval forces in an effort to protect commercial shipping.

Tensions between Iran and the United States increased further in April 1988, when the USS Samuel B. Roberts struck a mine and the United States responded with Operation Praying Mantis against Iranian targets.

Since then, several key events have shaped the issue: confrontations between Iranian and U.S. naval forces warnings by Iranian officials that shipping through the strait could be disrupted during disputes over sanctions and Iranian oil exports, and serval major maritime incidents in 2019 that heightened global concern.

On 12 May 2019, four commercial vessels were damaged near Fujairah in the United Arab Emirates, just outside the Strait of Hormuz. On 13 June 2019, two tankers were attacked in the Gulf of Oman. On 19 July 2019, Iranian forces seized the British-flagged tanker *Stena Impero* in the Strait of Hormuz.

These incidents demonstrated how quickly regional tensions can escalate and threaten commercial navigation, increase military tensions, and affects global energy security.

The main actors involved include Iran and Oman as coastal states, **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC**) members such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, and external powers like the United States, the United Kingdom, and European states. International organizations also play roles: **the International Maritime Organization (IMO)** develops international standards concerning the safety and security of international shipping, while coalitions such as EMASOH and the International Maritime Security Construct (IMSC) monitor threats and support safe navigation.

The United Nations has addressed the issue primarily through international law. The **UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)** defines rules for **innocent passage** and **transit passage** through straits used for international navigation.

Under UNCLOS, transit passage allows ships and aircraft to move continuously and expeditiously through straits used for international navigation. States bordering these straits must not hamper or suspend transit passage.

However, Iran has signed UNCLOS but has not ratified it, which adds complexity to disagreements over how maritime law applies in the Strait of Hormuz.

The Security Council has addressed threats to commercial navigation in the region through several resolutions. During the Iran–Iraq War, Security Council Resolution 552 (1984) addressed attacks on commercial vessels and reaffirmed navigation involving Gulf ports not participating in the hostilities. More recently, Security Council Resolution 2817 (2026) addressed attacks and threats affecting merchant and commercial vessels in and near the Strait of Hormuz.

More broadly, UN involvement has included promoting dialogue, supporting international maritime law, encouraging de-escalation, and addressing threats to commercial navigation.

Despite these efforts, several challenges remain unresolved. There remains no universally accepted international mechanism specifically dedicated to investigating every maritime attack in the Strait of Hormuz, and mistrust between key actors limits cooperation.

Disagreements over sovereignty, sanctions, and foreign military presence continue to fuel tension. The presence of multiple naval forces increases the risk of accidental escalation, while irregular or non-state maritime actors make **attribution** difficult.

As one of the world's most critical energy chokepoints, the strait remains vulnerable, making this issue highly relevant to DISEC's mandate of maintaining international peace and security.

Possible Actions and Discussion

Countries disagree on how to secure the **Strait of Hormuz**. Some support strong international naval patrols to protect shipping and deter attacks, while others argue that foreign military forces increase tension and prefer regional security arrangements led by coastal states.

Proposed approaches include creating a UN-supported investigation mechanism for tanker incidents, establishing communication hotlines between rival navies, improving information-sharing, and strengthening improving compliance with existing international law governing transit passage.

The main challenges are mistrust between key actors, disagreements over sovereignty and sanctions, and the difficulty of attributing responsibility for attacks involving irregular or non-state maritime forces.

These disagreements shape the debate and limit progress toward a unified security framework.

Key terms

- **Strait of Hormuz** - A narrow waterway connecting the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman. It is one of the world's most important routes for transporting oil and natural gas.
- **Maritime chokepoint** - A narrow passage where large amounts of global trade must pass, making it strategically important and vulnerable to disruption.
- **Freedom of navigation** - The principle that ships enjoy certain rights of navigation under international law.
- **Innocent passage** - The right of ships to pass through another state's territorial waters as long as the passage is continuous and does not threaten the peace, security, or order of the coastal state.
- **Transit passage** - A special UNCLOS provision that allows ships and aircraft to move continuously and quickly through straits used for international navigation.
- **Attribution** - The process of determining which state, organization, or group is responsible for an attack or other incident.
- **Tanker War** - A phase of the Iran-Iraq War, particularly from 1984 onward, during which Iran and Iraq attacked commercial shipping and oil-related targets in the Persian Gulf.
- **UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea)** - An international treaty that establishes rules concerning the use of the oceans, maritime boundaries, navigation rights, and the responsibilities of states at sea.
- **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)** - A regional organization of Gulf states (including Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Oman) involved in security issues around the strait.

- **International Maritime Organization (IMO)** - A specialized agency of the United Nations responsible for developing international rules and standards for the safety and security of shipping and the prevention of marine pollution.

Key Questions

- How can the international community ensure freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz without escalating military tensions?
- What role should regional actors (such as Iran, Oman, and GCC states) play compared to international coalitions?
- Is there a need for a UN-supported mechanism to investigate attacks on commercial vessels, and how could it remain neutral?
- How can communication and coordination between rival naval forces be improved to prevent accidental clashes?
- How can states improve compliance with and implementation of international law governing transit passage through heavily militarized straits?
- How can states address the challenge of attributing responsibility for attacks involving irregular or non-state maritime forces?
- What balance should be struck between coastal-state security concerns and the global need for uninterrupted energy trade?
- What role should the United Nations, IMO, and regional organizations play in protecting commercial shipping?
- How can security measures protect commercial vessels without contributing to further militarization of the Strait of Hormuz?

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