IGC 2026 United Nations Security Council

Strait of Malacca Crisis: Tolls, Transit Rights, and Naval Escalation

Delegate Background Guide

Category	Details
Committee Type	United Nations Security Council crisis-capable committee
Format	Security Council debate with draft resolutions, presidential statements, amendments, and possible emergency briefings
Scenario Date	Fictional 2026 crisis scenario
Topic	Malaysia and Indonesia announce new tolls and control measures for certain vessels transiting the Strait of Malacca, triggering shipping delays, legal disputes, naval deployments, and emergency diplomacy.
Delegate Goal	Defend your state's security, legal, commercial, energy, and diplomatic interests while preventing military escalation in one of the world's busiest maritime chokepoints.

Note to Delegates

This guide presents a fictional 2026 Security Council scenario for educational Model UN use. The premise is invented: Malaysia and Indonesia have jointly announced tolling and control measures that begin to inhibit global shipping through the Strait of Malacca. The real-world background is grounded in maritime geography, the law of the sea, energy security, ASEAN diplomacy, and Security Council procedure.

The Strait of Malacca links the Indian Ocean to the South China Sea and Pacific routes through the narrow waters between the Malay Peninsula and Sumatra. The adjacent Singapore Strait is part of the same strategic route. Together, these waters connect the Middle East, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia, Australia, Europe, and the United States through one of the most important shipping corridors on earth.

Delegates should approach this committee as a Security Council matter, not a trade conference. The core question is whether a dispute over tolls, coastal-state rights, shipping safety, and burden-sharing has become a threat to international peace and security.

1. Committee Mandate and Agenda

The United Nations Security Council has primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. In this simulation, the Council is meeting because tolling and vessel-control measures in the Strait of Malacca have caused major commercial delays and prompted multiple states to send naval vessels, surveillance aircraft, coast guard ships, and maritime security advisers to the region.

Delegates must decide whether and how the Council should respond to the crisis. The Council may debate:

- whether the tolls constitute a lawful coastal-state safety measure, an unlawful restriction on transit passage, or a threat to international peace and security;
- whether Malaysia and Indonesia should suspend, revise, or internationalize the tolling system;
- whether foreign naval deployments are stabilizing, escalatory, or both;
- whether the Council should request action by the International Maritime Organization, the International Court of Justice, the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, ASEAN, or a regional maritime contact group;
- how to protect merchant shipping, energy flows, food shipments, seafarers, ports, and coastal communities;

- whether the Council should issue a presidential statement, adopt a binding or non-binding resolution, request reporting from the Secretary-General, or authorize a monitoring mission.

2. Security Council Membership and Simulation Structure

The core voting committee is the 15-member Security Council. The permanent members are China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. In the 2026 scenario used for this guide, the elected members are Bahrain, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Denmark, Greece, Latvia, Liberia, Pakistan, Panama, and Somalia.

Because the crisis directly affects states that are not all on the Council, this guide also includes invited briefers and stakeholder delegations. These non-Council delegates may speak, caucus, lobby, submit notes, and influence draft text, but the chair may decide whether they vote. For a class of up to 40 students, the recommended roster is 15 Council members plus 25 invited affected or interested states.

Group	Delegations
Permanent members	China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, United States
2026 elected members	Bahrain, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Denmark, Greece, Latvia, Liberia, Pakistan, Panama, Somalia
Directly affected states / invited briefers	Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, India, Japan, South Korea, Australia, Vietnam, Philippines, Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Iran, Oman, Egypt, South Africa, Kenya, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, European Union

3. Background: Why the Strait of Malacca Matters

3.1 Geography and chokepoint significance

The Strait of Malacca is the primary maritime link between the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea. Ships moving between the Gulf, South Asia, Europe, and East Asia often pass through Malacca and then the Singapore Strait. The route is narrow, congested, shallow in places, and bordered by sovereign coastal states with legitimate safety, environmental, and law-enforcement interests.

For shipping companies, the Strait is often the shortest and cheapest route between the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Rerouting around the Sunda or Lombok-Makassar routes can add distance, time, fuel cost, insurance exposure, and uncertainty. For energy importers in Northeast Asia, a prolonged disruption could affect crude oil, LNG, refined products, coal, and containerized goods. For coastal states, heavy traffic brings environmental risk, accidents, piracy concerns, illegal fishing, smuggling, and the cost of maintaining navigational safety.

3.2 Law of the sea: transit passage and coastal-state regulation

Under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, international straits used for navigation between one part of the high seas or an exclusive economic zone and another are generally governed by the right of transit passage. Transit passage protects continuous and expeditious navigation and overflight through such straits. Coastal states may adopt certain laws and regulations relating to safety, traffic separation, pollution prevention, fishing, customs, immigration, and similar matters, but they may not hamper transit passage or discriminate among ships.

This creates the legal tension at the heart of the simulation. Malaysia and Indonesia argue that they bear the costs of safety, pollution response, piracy suppression, vessel traffic management, and environmental protection. Major shipping and trading states argue that mandatory tolls and selective vessel-control measures interfere with transit passage and set a dangerous precedent for other chokepoints.

3.3 Security environment

The Strait has long required cooperation among littoral states. Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore have practical incentives to cooperate on safety and security, but they also guard sovereignty carefully. External powers want reliable transit but are often viewed cautiously when they deploy naval forces near Southeast Asian waters.

In this scenario, the toll dispute quickly becomes a naval issue. The United States, China, India, Japan, Australia, and several European navies increase presence or announce patrols, escorts, surveillance flights, or port calls. The littoral states insist that outside naval activity cannot override coastal sovereignty. Smaller ASEAN members worry that the Strait could become a theater for U.S.-China rivalry.

4. Fictional 2026 Crisis Scenario

At the start of committee, delegates should treat the following fictional facts as controlling:

- Malaysia and Indonesia announce a joint maritime sustainability and security levy on selected large commercial vessels transiting designated areas of the Strait of Malacca and approaches to the Singapore Strait.
- The toll applies first to very large crude carriers, LNG carriers, certain container ships, and vessels considered high-risk for pollution, hazardous cargo, or security concerns.
- The governments argue that the levy funds traffic separation enforcement, search and rescue, pollution response, pilotage support, anti-piracy patrols, cyber monitoring of port approaches, and coastal community protection.
- Shipping associations, several flag states, and major energy importers argue that the measure is effectively a toll on transit passage and cannot be imposed unilaterally.
- Singapore objects to any measure that slows or diverts traffic through the Singapore Strait and asks for emergency consultations.
- A backlog develops after several ships refuse to register for the toll system. Some vessels reroute. Insurance premiums rise. Energy and container markets react sharply.
- The United States, China, India, Japan, Australia, and several European states increase naval or coast guard attention in or near the region. Malaysia and Indonesia accuse outside powers of militarizing a legal and environmental dispute.
- ASEAN foreign ministers fail to agree on a common public statement. The Security Council is called into emergency session.

5. Key Issues Before the Council

Issue	Guiding Questions
Legal characterization	Is the levy a legitimate cost-recovery safety measure, an unlawful toll on transit, or a coercive restriction on global shipping?
Freedom of navigation and transit passage	How should the Council protect continuous and expeditious transit without dismissing coastal-state safety and environmental burdens?
Naval deployments	Should outside navies escort ships, stand back, coordinate through ASEAN, or operate under a UN reporting framework?
Economic and energy security	How should states manage delays affecting oil, gas, food, manufactured goods, insurance, and port congestion?
Environmental protection	Can the Council create a funding mechanism for pollution response and maritime safety that does not become a prohibited toll?
ASEAN centrality	Should ASEAN, the IMO, or the Security Council lead? How can the Council avoid overriding regional diplomacy?
Precedent for other chokepoints	Would accepting unilateral tolls encourage similar measures in Hormuz, Bab el-Mandeb, the Bosporus, Suez, Panama, Gibraltar, or Danish Straits?

Escalation prevention	What hotlines, notification measures, and rules of behavior are needed to prevent naval incidents?

6. Negotiating Blocs and Likely Alignments

Bloc	Description
Littoral sovereignty and cost-sharing bloc	Malaysia, Indonesia, and some sympathetic developing coastal states. They argue that coastal states carry real safety, environmental, and law-enforcement costs that distant shipping powers underpay.
Freedom of navigation / shipping continuity bloc	United States, United Kingdom, France, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Greece, Denmark, and many major trading states. They want toll suspension, transparency, and uninterrupted transit.
Strategic caution bloc	China, India, Russia, Pakistan, and some ASEAN states may resist Western-led maritime enforcement while still needing the Strait to remain open.
ASEAN mediation bloc	Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, Philippines, Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar may prioritize a regional mechanism, de-escalation, and avoiding great-power naval confrontation.
Energy and food security bloc	Gulf exporters, Northeast Asian importers, India, Egypt, Kenya, South Africa, and others will focus on costs, rerouting, supply contracts, and economic shock.
Legal-institutional bloc	States may push the IMO, ITLOS, ICJ, or an expert panel to clarify whether cost recovery can be designed consistently with transit passage.

7. Resolution-Building Guidance

A strong Security Council product should be specific enough to reduce risk but broad enough to avoid a veto. Delegates may negotiate one or more of the following outputs:

- Presidential statement urging restraint, uninterrupted transit, and emergency consultations among littoral states, shipping states, and ASEAN.
- Resolution requesting immediate suspension or modification of toll measures pending legal review and regional consultation.
- Resolution creating a UN-IMO technical assessment mission on maritime safety funding, traffic management, and environmental cost-sharing.
- Call for a Malacca Maritime Contact Group including Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, ASEAN, IMO, major user states, and shipping industry observers.
- Hotline and incident-prevention measures for naval and coast guard forces operating near the Strait.
- Voluntary international maritime safety fund that supports littoral states without conditioning transit passage on payment.
- Request for Secretary-General reporting on shipping disruption, naval incidents, humanitarian impact, and economic risk.

Possible compromise formula: affirm transit passage and uninterrupted shipping while recognizing the legitimate safety, environmental, and search-and-rescue costs borne by littoral states.

8. Country Assignments and Research Bios

The following 40 assignments are designed for a full-class simulation. The first 15 are Security Council members. The remaining 25 are invited briefers, directly affected states, or major stakeholders. Chairs may make all 40 voting delegations for educational purposes or reserve formal votes for the 15 Security Council members.

1. China

Permanent UNSC member and one of the largest users of Malacca-bound trade routes. China will oppose disruption to energy and container shipping, but it will resist a U.S.-led naval solution that expands American military influence near the South China Sea. Research China's "Malacca dilemma," Belt and Road ports, energy import routes, and position on freedom of navigation.

2. France

Permanent UNSC member with Indo-Pacific territories, naval deployments, and a strong interest in international law and maritime order. France may support transit rights, EU shipping interests, and a technical IMO role while avoiding escalation with ASEAN states. Research France's Indo-Pacific strategy and naval presence.

3. Russia

Permanent UNSC member likely to criticize Western naval pressure and defend sovereign equality, while also caring about energy markets and precedent for chokepoints. Russia may use the debate to challenge U.S. maritime dominance. Research Russia's approach to UNCLOS, naval diplomacy, and sanctions politics.

4. United Kingdom

Permanent UNSC member and major maritime trading state. The UK is likely to defend freedom of navigation, insurance stability, and legal clarity. It may support a Council statement, IMO review, and de-escalation measures while coordinating with the U.S., France, Singapore, and Commonwealth partners.

5. United States

Permanent UNSC member with global naval reach and strong interest in freedom of navigation. The U.S. will oppose tolls that inhibit transit and may advocate naval presence, escorts, or a contact group. It must balance deterrence against accusations of militarizing Southeast Asia.

6. Bahrain

2026 elected UNSC member and Gulf maritime state. Bahrain will be attentive to precedent for Hormuz and to shipping and energy security. It may favor firm language against tolls and interference with chokepoints while supporting consultation with coastal states.

7. Colombia

2026 elected UNSC member with experience as a maritime and canal-adjacent trading state in the wider Panama Canal region. Colombia may focus on international trade, law, and peaceful settlement rather than naval escalation. Research Latin American positions on sovereignty and trade routes.

8. Democratic Republic of the Congo

2026 elected UNSC member representing a major African state with limited direct shipping stake but strong interest in sovereignty, development, and non-alignment. It may support a compromise funding mechanism for coastal-state burdens while opposing coercion by great powers.

9. Denmark

2025-2026 elected UNSC member and major shipping nation through Maersk and broader maritime services. Denmark is likely to prioritize freedom of navigation, insurance, seafarer safety, and clear legal rules. Research Danish maritime commerce and EU shipping positions.

10. Greece

2025-2026 elected UNSC member and one of the world's major shipping nations. Greece will strongly care about tanker and merchant shipping, rerouting costs, and the legality of tolls. It may push for immediate suspension of restrictive measures and support shipowner concerns.

11. Latvia
2026 elected UNSC member and EU/NATO state. Latvia will likely align with EU and transatlantic positions on international law, free navigation, and resistance to coercive precedent. It may also raise concerns about hybrid threats, cyber disruption, and maritime infrastructure security.

12. Liberia
2026 elected UNSC member and one of the world's major flag states through its ship registry. Liberia has direct interest in how tolls affect flagged vessels, seafarers, insurance, and maritime legal precedent. It can play a unique technical role despite being a smaller state.

13. Pakistan
2025-2026 elected UNSC member with Indian Ocean interests, Gwadar port, relations with China, and rivalry with India. Pakistan may support transit rights and energy security while resisting any framework that gives India a dominant regional maritime role.

14. Panama
2025-2026 elected UNSC member and home of the Panama Canal and a major ship registry. Panama understands tolls as canal revenue but must distinguish a canal from an international strait. It may propose legal review, transparency, and lessons from managed waterways.

15. Somalia
2025-2026 elected UNSC member with maritime security experience related to piracy, shipping protection, and coastal-state capacity. Somalia may sympathize with coastal burden-sharing but also understands the global consequences of insecurity along sea lanes.

9. Questions for Delegate Research
1. How dependent is your country on trade or energy flows through Malacca and Singapore Straits?
2. Does your country emphasize freedom of navigation, coastal-state burden-sharing, sovereignty, environmental protection, or naval deterrence?
3. Would your country support mandatory toll suspension, legal arbitration, voluntary funding, or continued negotiation?
4. How should the Council address naval deployments without increasing the risk of an incident?
5. Should the IMO or ASEAN lead the technical process, with the Security Council focusing only on peace and security?
6. What language would your country accept on transit passage, tolls, and coastal-state rights?
7. What concessions could persuade Malaysia and Indonesia to revise or suspend tolls?
8. What measures are needed to protect seafarers, food shipments, energy cargoes, and critical ports?
9. How might this crisis affect other chokepoints, including Hormuz, Bab el-Mandeb, Suez, Panama, and Gibraltar?
10. What final product would your delegation prioritize: a resolution, presidential statement, contact group, legal referral, or monitoring mechanism?

10. Suggested Resolution Architecture

Section	Possible Content
A. Legal and political principles	Affirm continuous and expeditious transit through international straits; recognize coastal-state interests in safety, environmental protection, and law enforcement; call for measures consistent with international law.
B. Immediate de-escalation	Urge all states to avoid provocative naval maneuvers, refrain from obstructing commercial transit, and establish hotlines among littoral and user states.

C. Toll and cost-sharing framework	Call for suspension or modification of mandatory tolls while creating a voluntary or multilateral Malacca Maritime Safety and Environmental Fund.
D. Technical mechanism	Request IMO, ASEAN, and relevant coastal states to develop a transparent, non-discriminatory system for safety funding, traffic management, and pollution response.
E. Economic and humanitarian protections	Prioritize food, fuel, medical cargoes, and seafarer welfare; discourage discriminatory restrictions by flag, owner, cargo, or destination.
F. Reporting and follow-up	Request a Secretary-General report within a defined period on transit delays, naval incidents, economic impact, and progress in regional negotiations.

11. Glossary

Term	Meaning
Strait of Malacca	A narrow maritime passage between the Malay Peninsula and Sumatra linking the Indian Ocean and South China Sea routes.
Singapore Strait	A heavily trafficked waterway east of Malacca, adjacent to Singapore, linking the Malacca route with the South China Sea.
Transit passage	A law-of-the-sea concept protecting continuous and expeditious navigation and overflight through certain international straits.
Littoral state	A state located along the shore of a sea, strait, or ocean.
Traffic Separation Scheme	An internationally recognized routing system that separates opposing vessel traffic to reduce collision risk.
Flag state	The state under whose laws a vessel is registered and whose flag it flies.
Coastal-state burden-sharing	The argument that states bordering major routes bear costs for safety, environment, and security that benefit global users.
Freedom of navigation	The principle that ships and aircraft may move through lawful maritime spaces without improper interference.
Presidential statement	A formal Security Council statement adopted by consensus, usually less forceful than a resolution.
Chapter VII	UN Charter authority for the Security Council to respond to threats to peace, breaches of peace, or acts of aggression; can create binding obligations.

12. Source Note for Delegate Research

This simulation is fictional, but delegates should ground their research in real-world sources. Recommended starting points include: the United Nations Charter and Security Council membership materials; the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, especially Part III on straits used for international navigation; International Maritime Organization materials on ships' routeing and traffic separation; U.S. Energy Information Administration materials on global energy chokepoints; ASEAN and national foreign ministry statements on maritime security; and reputable shipping, insurance, and energy market reporting.

Selected source anchors used in preparing this guide:

- United Nations Security Council overview and 2026 membership materials.
- United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, especially provisions on transit passage and coastal-state regulations in international straits.

- International Maritime Organization materials on traffic separation schemes and maritime safety cooperation.
- U.S. Energy Information Administration materials on maritime chokepoints and global energy flows.
- Public research on the Strait of Malacca as a major shipping, energy, and strategic chokepoint.