



GimBMUN 2026

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Study Guide

GimBMUN 2026

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United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime – Study Guide

Written by Živa Primožič and Natan Vesnaver

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction of the chairs

Ms. Živa Primožič

Dear delegates,

I am thrilled to welcome all of you to the UNODC committee at the 2026 GimBMUN conference, where I will be one of your chairs.

I joined MUN in my first year of high school, hoping to improve my public speaking skills and my overall English. My experience with MUN has far surpassed my initial interests and expectations, becoming a fun way to spend my free time, get to know new people, and build precious bonds while expanding my horizons. This will be my first time chairing, and I am excited to experience this conference from a different perspective than usual, hoping for it to be memorable for both us chairs and you, the delegates.

I wish you the best of luck and look forward to meeting you!

Živa Primožič

Mr. Natan Vesnaver

Dear delegates,

I am very excited to accompany you as one of your chairs in the UNODC committee of GimBMUN 2026.

I joined MUN in my second year of high school, and it has since become one of the most valuable, fun, and interesting parts of my educational journey. This will be a new experience for me, as it will be my first time chairing as well, and I am very excited about it. I look forward to experiencing a conference from another point of view and can't wait to meet all of you, creating wonderful memories along the way. I hope you are as excited about this as we are, and I wish you the best of luck in preparing for the conference and the committee sessions themselves.

Natan Vesnaver

Introduction to the committee

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime was established in 1977 and has since then been a driving force in the battle against illicit drugs and international crime, developing the guidelines for tackling terrorism, corruption, and illegal trafficking.

Since combating drug-related crime is among the Office's primary goals, numerous initiatives have been launched in the past, aiming to educate people about the consequences of drug abuse.

UNODC advocates for stricter policies regarding drug production and trafficking, as well as offering alternatives to drug cultivation in affected areas. Throughout its work, it emphasizes the importance of international collaboration in addressing widespread problems that extend far beyond the borders of a single country.

ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES POSED BY MODERN-DAY PIRACY



Figure 1: Suspected pirate ship boarded by USS Winston S. Churchill

Introduction of the topic

Maritime piracy, long romanticized in literature and film, is in reality a violent and persistent threat that has evolved in tandem with the tides of global trade. From its ancient roots in the Mediterranean to its modern resurgence in the waters of Southeast Asia and the Horn of Africa, piracy has remained a disruptive force on the high seas. Once fueled by imperial ambitions and now driven by economic desperation, political instability, and even climate change, piracy today is more than just a relic of the past—it is a sophisticated, tech-enabled form of organized crime. This chapter of the study guide discusses the history of piracy,

explores its present-day hotspots and causes, and examines how technological advancement has simultaneously empowered pirates and those who combat them.

History of piracy

Maritime piracy has been a pervasive issue in our civilization ever since the beginning of trade. For more than two thousand years, ships, their crews, and passengers have been at risk of being attacked and robbed by raiders, later known as pirates.

The first mentions of piracy date back to ancient empires, where merchants were facing difficulties with sea transport due to the pillaging of their ships.

With the advancement of maritime trade and its expansion to the Atlantic Ocean in the Middle Ages, piracy experienced its golden age. Raids and piracy became more common, as well as increasingly acceptable and well-organized. What started out as a desire for raw materials and

goods soon expanded into political sabotage. European monarchs authorized or even hired pirates to rob foreign ships in order to weaken their opponents and gain an advantage in occupying new territories. Already then piracy was considered a profitable but dangerous business. With the conquest of the American continent, piracy found its new high point in the Caribbean Sea, which to this day remains one of the most targeted locations. Since then, pirates have been a subject of fiction rather than an existing menace for a long time. Only with the attacks of Somali pirates between the years 2005 and 2008 has the once ignorant public become aware of the threat they pose to international maritime trade.

Modern-day piracy resembles its predecessor in that it originates from a lack of economic opportunity and deficient legislation. It has far surpassed simple theft or smuggling, often including not only terrorism and hijacking but also acts of inhumane violence like kidnapping, torture, and murder.

Contrary to a widespread conception, piracy is nowadays precisely organized and technically well provisioned. The rise and progress of new technologies have become a double-edged sword in this field: while they provide new methods for combating and preventing raids, they also serve as a significant advantage to the pirates. Piracy is also no longer something countries would openly support or use to overcome their competitors, at least in the vast majority of cases.

Tackling modern-day piracy, which continues to disrupt maritime trade routes, remains one of UNODC's primary aims.

Current situation

Today, piracy refers to any violent attack against a ship on the high seas, including theft of property, destruction of goods, and illegal detention of the crew or passengers. The 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) defines acts of piracy as a threat to maritime security by endangering the welfare of seafarers and the security of navigation and commerce.

Modern-day hotspots of piracy and its origins

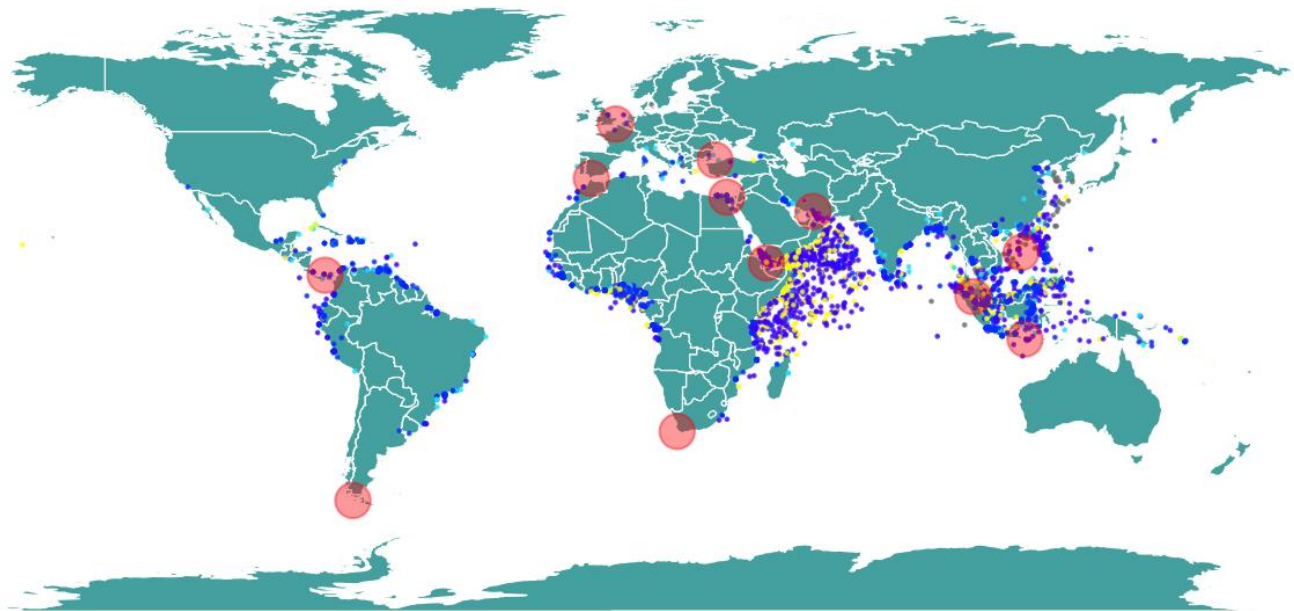


Figure 2: Pirate attacks between 1993 and 2024 (blue and yellow dots) compared to important maritime trade straits and canals (red areas)

As depicted on the map above, the vast majority of piracy-related incidents are concentrated in Southeast Asia, the Horn of Africa, and the Red Sea. 46.9% of all pirate raids happened in East Asia and the Pacific, followed by Sub-Saharan Africa with 21.2%. Latin America, for its part, accounted for just 10.3% of all piracy inspected, the vast majority concentrated in the northern part of South America, with the Gulf of Mexico at the forefront (“Modern Day Pirates: Attack Numbers and Types - Desteia”).

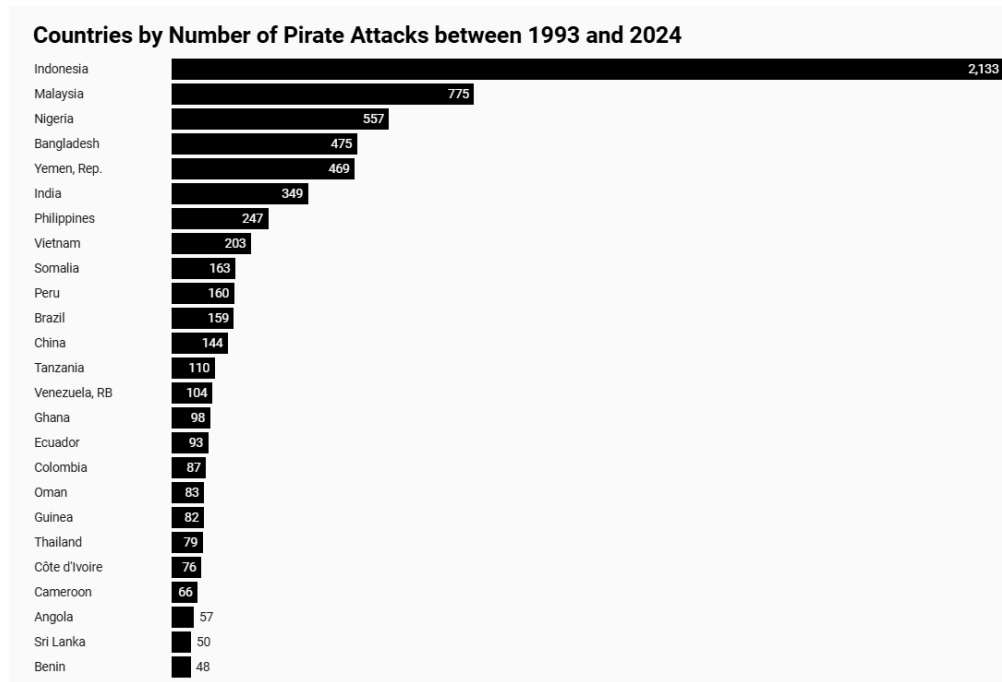


Figure 3: Number of pirate attacks between 1993 and 2024 by country

The general misconception that piracy occurs in poor and underdeveloped countries, therefore, cannot be true. Although some countries like Somalia, Nigeria, Yemen, and Bangladesh, all among the poorest nations, present a notable percentage of the total number of pirate attacks, the situation in wealthier and more developed countries cannot be ignored. Indonesia, considered a highly developed country, recorded the most pirate attacks, with more than 2000 recorded over 30 years. It is closely followed by its neighboring countries, Malaysia and Singapore (Singapore Strait), neither of which is considered particularly prone to poverty.

Though undoubtedly related, rather than from poverty, sea piracy originates from a nation's proximity to crucial points for maritime trade. Political instability, weak economies, territorial disputes, little chances of employment, and deficient legislation, often present in poorer countries, further enhance the possibility for piracy as an alternative, and sometimes only reliable source of income.

Interestingly, researchers have found a surprising connection between modern-day piracy and climate change, as one of the indirect reasons for its upsurge in the past. Climate change has caused water temperatures to rise, forcing numerous fish species to migrate into colder areas. This presents a threat to local fishermen who lose their primary source of income and are therefore often forced to find alternative ways to earn money (Kornei, 2023). Environmental crises such as droughts further exacerbated income insecurity and poverty. In such circumstances, residents of coastal areas, especially the unemployed youth, often turn to piracy.

This pattern has been recognized in the Gulf of Guinea, Somali waters, and the waters of the Ivory Coast.

Currently, the most affected areas with the most examined cases of piracy include the Gulf of Aden and the Strait between Malaysia and Indonesia, known as the Malacca Strait. This comes as no surprise, as these are locations of the world's most important maritime trade routes, about 20,000 commercial ships passing the Gulf of Aden and approximately 94,000 crossing the Malacca Strait each year (Rowland-George, 2024; Feingold and Willige, 2024). Representing an essential bond between Europe and China, almost all payloads of crude oil and natural gas pass through these waterways on their way. The previously infamous hotspot of piracy, the waters off Somalia, with its notorious Somali pirates, alongside other areas off the African continent, like the Gulf of Guinea, have experienced a decline in the number of attacked vessels due to extensive attention devoted to the problem and the combined effort of the local authorities and the international community.

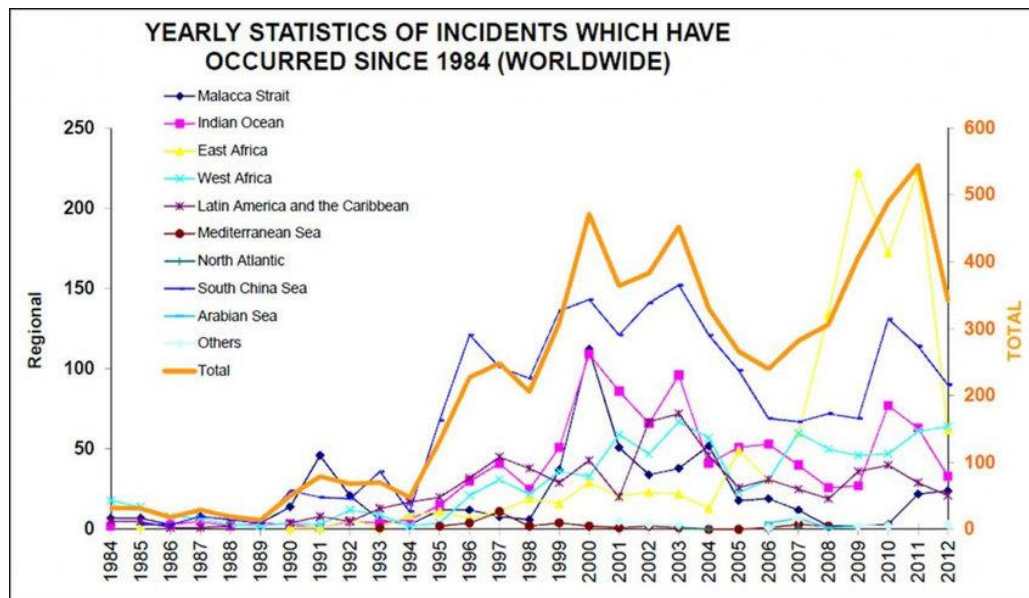


Figure 4: Yearly statistics of incidents worldwide since 1984

Implications of piracy

The International Maritime Bureau (IMB) and the International Criminal Court (ICC) recorded 116 incidents against ships in 2024, compared to 120 in 2023 and 115 in 2022. Although data shows a steady decrease in the number of yearly incidents since 2010, there has been an upsurge in violent acts against the ship's workforce. Other forms of human rights violations, such as physical and psychological abuse in the form of torture or food deprivation, often accompany kidnapping. Among the total of 1,090 seafarers who were taken hostage in 2010 for an average duration of 5 months, 488 suffered further abuse (ICCBWO, 2025).

Types of Violence	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Hostage	2	23	2	35	37
Injured					1
Kidnap/Ransom	40		6	9	13
Killed	1				
Threatened	2	4	2	1	2
Assaulted			1		
Sub total	45	27	11	45	53
Total at year end	82	55	102	151	

Figure 5: Types of violence present in pirate attacks over recent years

As these statistics once again prove, piracy has become more of a profitable form of extortion and human trafficking than just simple theft. Modern pirates usually focus on attacking cargo ships with large shipping containers or take over entire vessels and charge a ransom for their return.

From a different, but still essential, point of view, piracy exerts a profound economic impact not only on the maritime industry but also on the global economy. Its implications regarding the economy can be divided into:

- direct costs: These include ransoms, demanded by pirates in exchange for hijacked vessels or kidnapped personnel, as well as the cost of reparation for damages, caused by violent attacks. Investments in equipment to defend against potential further attacks, representing a considerable capital outlay, also fall under this category.
- indirect costs: Vessel-insurance providers raise insurance premiums due to the risk caused by piracy. Increased costs also force some companies to reroute their ships to avoid piracy hotspots, resulting in higher fuel expenses, which further impacts the economy of maritime-dependent economies (cities or countries relying on revenue related

to sea trade lose their source of income). Attacks and especially their investigations can often cause delays and disrupt supply chains.

Pirate attacks also have an undeniable environmental cost. Damage to vessels is almost always accompanied by significant environmental degradation, such as vast fuel spills or enormous amounts of debris that end up in oceans.

Role of technology in the development and prevention of modern-day piracy

Piracy experienced a noteworthy surge at the turn of the 21st century, precisely at the time of the greatest technological progress. As mentioned before, technology still presents a necessary component of the strategy for tackling piracy, while on the other hand, making most of these attacks possible in the first place. Organized pirate groups have more opportunities than ever before to meticulously choose their targets, plan, and schedule attacks.

In the first phases of attacks, pirates began to use various GPS devices to disable navigation systems, allowing them to redirect the vessel from established routes and making it a vulnerable target. While technologies like Automatic Identification Systems (AIS) are meant to provide real-time vessel tracking information, necessary for outer supervision of the movement of a ship, criminal organizations often use them to identify target-rich locations. In recent times, authorities have also recorded an upsurge in the number of cyber-attacks related to piracy. Communication interception, once again playing an important role in scheduling attacks, has also become easier with the growing accessibility of technology.

Technology being key to tracking, discovering, and later preventing piracy, it is beyond necessary to find a way to prevent our technologies from being used against us.

What can be done to reduce modern-day piracy?

Even though piracy is far from being a newly discovered problem, there was long a lack of legal recognition of it, which enabled, and in some cases still does, such incidents to slip through cracks in a country's inadequate legislation. As Antonio Maria Costa, former Executive Director of the UNODC has said, piracy must be defeated in courts, ports, and banks, not just at sea. Therefore, the first step on our way to resolving the problem of modern-day piracy has to be strengthening national and international frameworks that tackle it. In the last decades, the UN and its organizations have addressed modern-day piracy in numerous acts and declarations (stated and explained in the next chapter) that have had a significant impact, not only precisely defining what piracy was, but establishing new legal frameworks. This was a necessary prerequisite for any further actions; however, improvements can still be made, especially

regarding the prosecution of captured pirates. For this exact purpose, the Global Maritime Crime Programme was established in 2010 and has ever since played a crucial role in the establishment of a regional prosecution model. It supplies member countries with technical, material, and infrastructural support regarding law enforcement, prosecution, and detention in the form of training prosecutors, supporting detention arrangements, etc. This programme has been especially successful in the Seychelles, which has become a pioneer in moder-day piracy prosecution and has since shared its practices and strategies with affected West African countries.

The previously mentioned case also highlights the importance of international cooperation, including regional agreements, joint protocols, and information-sharing centers. An example of this has been the Djibouti Code of Conduct, adopted in 2009, which unites 20 countries that cooperate in the repression of piracy and maritime crime, with the emphasis on information and practice sharing. It also includes a multi-donor voluntary fund that supports counter-piracy capacity building. Another similarly targeted action has been the establishment of the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP), which aims to enhance regional cooperation through information sharing, capacity building, and cooperative arrangements.

From a more practical point of view, surveillance is key for the prevention as well as detection of pirate attacks. In a majority of the world's most important maritime canals, security patrols on sea and land have already been established. An exceptionally successful measure in this field has been Operation ATALANTA by the EU Naval Force, which strives to prevent piracy as well as illegal trade and unregulated fishing. It mainly focuses on the protection of vessels, especially those carrying humanitarian aid. This way, attacks at the Somali coast fell from a peak of 237 in 2011 to just nine in 2017 (Winchester, 2017). Better control of piracy hotspots can also be achieved by satellite monitoring systems that help track vessels and their routes, improved identification systems, and duty watches, which are all already enforced by operations as the one mentioned above.

Since piracy represents a substantial source of income for many legally unemployed civilians, it is crucial to provide alternative ways for them to earn money by developing local infrastructure, investing in education and industry, preferably one that is sustainable and environmentally friendly. An important step in this field has been taken by the International Labour Organization (ILO), which has initiated a job-creating programme in Somalia, exactly for this purpose. It has already established nearly 150,000 worker days across Somalia, improved road infrastructure, and aims to further develop sustainable jobs in terms of providing skills and entrepreneurship capacities, which can be used after the initial period when donor funds are flowing in.



Figure 6: Surveillance against piracy in the Gulf of Aden

Past UN actions and resolutions

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1816 (2008) was the first UN authorization, addressing the surge in piracy off Somalia's coast. It enabled foreign naval forces to enter Somalia's territorial waters in cooperation with local authorities.

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1851 (2008) expanded operations onto Somali territory, not just at sea, paving the way for land-based anti-piracy operations. It led to the creation of the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS), which remains one of the most important organizations for battling against piracy.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Regional Prosecution Support (2010 onward) tackled the issue of impunity for pirates and urged countries to expand prosecution and prison capacities in affected areas so pirates could be tried and jailed legally and locally.

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1918 (2010) urged countries to criminalize piracy and helped standardize anti-piracy law enforcement globally. It eradicated many legal loopholes that previously mainly accounted for the number of pirates that managed to escape prosecution.

United Nations Security Council Resolution 2634 (2022) addressed newly established hotspots of piracy, like the Gulf of Guinea, and urged nearby countries to pass laws against piracy as well as to develop and modernize national maritime strategies.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Piracy Impact Workshop (2023) focused on intelligence-sharing and international collaboration in the battle against piracy. It brought together experts to update strategies and responses to emerging piracy attacks, especially in East Africa and the Gulf of Aden.

Summary

Piracy has posed a persistent threat to maritime trade for centuries and continues to jeopardize global shipping, particularly along critical routes such as the Gulf of Aden and the Malacca Strait. Although the number of reported incidents has decreased since 2010, modern piracy remains a highly organized and technologically advanced crime, often accompanied by acts of violence, with significant human, economic, and environmental repercussions. Effectively addressing this issue requires a multifaceted approach: reinforcing legal frameworks, fostering international and regional cooperation, maintaining naval patrols and advanced surveillance

systems, and addressing underlying causes by creating sustainable employment opportunities and improving infrastructure in coastal regions most affected by piracy.

Useful links and further reading

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Key terms and guiding questions

KEY TERMS: modern-day piracy, trade routes, maritime trade, Somali Pirates, maritime trade, human trafficking, maritime industry, prosecution, legal framework

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

1. How effective are international legal frameworks and regional cooperation in addressing piracy, and where do they fall short?

2. Should modern-day piracy be primarily tackled as a military or as a socio-economic issue?
3. Can environmental policies be part of anti-piracy strategies?
4. In what ways do technological advancements both empower pirates and help law enforcement, and how can we balance these opposing effects?
5. Can sustainable development and job creation realistically provide long-term solutions to piracy?
6. Can changing global trade patterns be a possible solution to piracy?
7. Do all affected areas share the same cause for piracy? Do implemented policies reflect differences between piracy hotspots?

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