

STUDY GUIDE

SECURITY COUNCIL (HS)

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MUNLawS 2026

SECURITY COUNCIL (HS)

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EDITORS: ŽIVA SRŠE, ŽIVA ROZINA

From the Secretary General...

Dear Delegates,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to this year's MUNLawS!

After ten months of planning, organising, and probably overthinking every possible detail, the day has finally come! We have put a lot of ourselves into making this conference happen, and we hope that you will enjoy it as much as we have enjoyed creating it.

Having been part of the MUN community for a few years now, organising a conference of your own is definitely a different experience, one filled with equal parts excitement, stress, and the occasional crisis. A big thank you goes to my team, Živa Srše, Živa Rozina, Vito Vidmar, and Maks Novak, for everything they have done along the way. I truly could not have asked for a better team!

*As a law student with a particular interest in human rights, I find myself increasingly concerned by the ongoing conflicts and divisions across different regions of the world. This is one of the reasons why, this year, we have chosen **Strengthening Regional Cooperation** as our overall theme.*

While that might sound like a very diplomatic way of saying “let's get along”, there is much more to it. In a world that often seems too divided, cooperation can sometimes feel difficult but that is exactly why it matters. And what better place to promote cooperation among young people than an MUN, where people from different countries and backgrounds come together, ready to listen to one another and, sometimes, even let go of their own ideas for the sake of finding common ground?

Throughout this conference, I encourage you to challenge one another, question your own assumptions, and defend your positions but most importantly, remember to listen to one another. The goal is not to be the loudest person in the room, but rather to see what we can achieve when all those voices are heard.

And of course, do not forget to have fun. At the end of the day, we are not real diplomats (yet)!

I hope you have an unforgettable few days filled with great debates, questionable amounts of caffeine, and, hopefully, many new friendships.

See you in the committee!

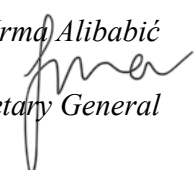
Irma Alibabić

Secretary General



Table of contents

INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMITTEE	1
Chairs' Welcome	1
About the UN Security Council.....	3
TOPIC A:	5
RISE OF ARMED NON-STATE ACTORS IN YEMEN	5
Introduction	7
Historical developments in Yemen and the subsequent rise of armed non-state actors	10
Actors involved in the conflict.....	11
The conflict since the 2000s	13
KEY ISSUE I: Applicability of international law to armed non-state actors	22
Defining armed non-state actors	22
Defining non-state armed groups.....	23
Why is it relevant whether armed non-state actors are considered as non-state armed groups engaged in a non-international armed conflict.....	24
Differences between international and non-international armed conflicts	24
Proxy warfare.....	27
KEY ISSUE II: Negotiating with non-state armed groups	28
Barriers to negotiating with NSAGs	28
The case of Yemen: Negotiating with the Houthis in Stockholm.....	29
KEY ISSUE III: Maritime security in the Red Sea	30
Background.....	30
States' right of self-defence in response to Houthi attacks	31
Questions to bear in mind	32
Points a resolution should address	33
Additional preparation materials	34
Bibliography	36
TOPIC B:	41
TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME.....	41
IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN	41
Introduction	43



Historical background	45
Legal instruments addressing transnational organized crime	47
United Nations.....	47
Organization of American States	48
Key forms of transnational organized crime	49
Drug trafficking	49
Financial crime and money laundering.....	51
Impact of criminal economies on state institutions	52
State capture	52
Criminal governance	53
Study case: Haiti	54
Human costs of transnational organized crime	57
Forced displacement.....	57
Human trafficking.....	59
Existing mechanisms.....	60
UNODC's Global Maritime Crime Programme.....	60
Latin America and Caribbean Alliance for Security, Justice and Development.....	61
Other	61
Points a resolution should address	62
Additional preparation materials	63
Bibliography.....	64

Table of figures

Figure 1: The UN Security Council	3
Figure 2: Yemen	5
Figure 3: Map of Yemen	10
Figure 4: Brief chronology of the Six Sa'da Wars (2004 - 2010).....	17
Figure 5: Who controls what in Yemen?.....	21
Figure 6: Crime scene	41
Figure 7: Map of Latin America and the Caribbean	43
Figure 8: Status of ratification of UNTOC	47



Figure 9: Membership of the Organization of American States.....	48
Figure 10: Cocaine production and consumption	50
Figure 11: Haiti on map	54
Figure 12: Port-au-Prince gang territories.....	55



INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMITTEE

Chairs' Welcome

Esteemed delegates,

We are thrilled to welcome you to the High School Security Council committee at MunlawS 2026, where we will have the privilege of serving as your Chairs.

The United Nations Security Council holds a unique place within the United Nations, as it is the only body whose resolutions can be legally binding on all Member States, giving the debate within this Council particular weight. Throughout the conference, as you embrace the role of delegates, you will be asked to weigh your delegation's national interest against collective security measures while working under pressure, with the aim of drafting precise and enforceable mechanisms.

For this edition of the High School Security Council committee, you will debate one of two legally challenging and complex topics that have been in need of decisive international action and regional cooperation for years. On one hand, ***The rise of armed non-state actors in Yemen*** (Topic A) and, on the other hand, ***Transnational organized crime in Latin America and the Caribbean*** (Topic B). As the issues you will have to tackle remain largely unresolved, we expect you to grasp the limits of the Council's tools and approach them with creativity.

Please note that this Study Guide is designed to give you a solid introduction to both topics, but it shall not constitute your sole research source. As you will tackle the two subjects, we encourage you to mainly conduct your research using official United Nations websites, UN documents (including their resolutions and the UN digital library), academic databases (jstor, oxford academic, directory of Open Access Journals...), government websites, and embassy websites.

When developing solution mechanisms, we suggest that you identify the flaws of those that have already been implemented by various States and international organisations, building

upon what works and discarding what doesn't, which will enable you to recommend realistic and innovative approaches.

While AI can be a useful tool to help you access certain specific documents and therefore broaden your understanding of the topic, it is strictly forbidden to use it to generate solutions, draft your documents, or write your speeches, as doing so undermines the diplomatic spirit you should aim to embody.

As representatives of your States, you are expected to always show respect for opposing views and a perpetual commitment to diplomacy. As the United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres reminded us on the 2024 International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace, *"No country can solve today's challenges alone. Dialogue, diplomacy and multilateral solutions provide the surest path to a peaceful and just world."*

The substance of the debates will depend on your ability to argue persuasively and collaborate with delegates whose positions differ from your delegation's.

Should you need clarification or support at any point, whether regarding procedure, research, or expectations, we remain fully available before and during the conference.

We wish you a productive and memorable experience and look forward to seeing the depth of your diplomacy.

Best regards,

Your Chairs of the High School United Nations Security Council Committee



About the UN Security Council



Figure 1: The UN Security Council¹

The United Nations Security Council (hereinafter referred to as the UNSC or the Council) holds the **primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security** within the UN system. It is one of the founding organs of the organization. It was established in 1945 under **the UN Charter**,² whose **Chapter V** defines its composition, election procedures, and prerogatives. The UNSC is the sole UN body whose **resolutions can be legally binding** on all UN Member States. The Council meets in continuous sessions, meaning it is considered permanently convened and can be called to meet at any time in response to an emerging crisis. Therefore, each Council member must always have a representative available at UN Headquarters in case an emergency meeting becomes necessary.³

The Council is made up of **15 members**. Ten of them serve as temporary members elected for two-year non-renewable terms by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). Currently, the following States serve as **non-permanent members** of the UNSC: Bahrain,

¹ CFR Education, 2024; photograph by Shannon Stapleton/Reuters.

² United Nations, *Charter of the United Nations*, 1 UNTS XVI, signed 26 June 1945, entered into force 24 October 1945.

³ United Nations Security Council, n. d.

Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Denmark, Greece, Latvia, Liberia, Pakistan, Panama and Somalia.⁴

The remaining five members of the UNSC, commonly known as **the permanent five (P5)**, hold permanent seats on the Council. They have the uniqueness of **possessing veto power**, which was **granted** to them **by the UN Charter**. This means that, although they have only one vote like all other Council members, they can also veto substantive decisions of the Council. The P5 is composed of China, the United States of America, France, the Russian Federation and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.⁵

As set out by **Chapters VI, VII and VII** of **the UN Charter**, the primary **mandate** of the United Nations Security Council is to maintain international peace and security, peacefully settle disputes and take actions, with respect, to threats to peace and violations of international law. Under these chapters of the UN Charter, the United Nations Security Council is granted the **authority to authorise mandatory measures** against States or non-state actors. These measures can include but are not limited to **economic sanctions** (**Article 41 of the UN Charter**), such as asset freezes, travel bans, arms embargoes, and trade restrictions; or, where non-military measures are considered inadequate, **the use of force** (**Article 42 of the UN Charter**), including the authorisation of multilateral military operations or peacekeeping missions.⁶

The Council's **decisions are issued as resolutions**, however, only those adopted under **Chapter VII of the UN Charter** are legally binding for Member States.⁷

⁴ United Nations Security Council, n. d.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.



Topic A:

RISE OF ARMED NON-STATE ACTORS IN YEMEN



Figure 2: Yemen⁸

⁸ ICRC, 2019; photograph by Karrar al-Moayyad.

KEY TERMS USED	THEIR DEFINITIONS
Common Article 3	Article 3, which is the same in all four Geneva Conventions of 1949. ⁹ It sets the essential, minimum rules for humane treatment during a <u>non-international</u> armed conflict. It is the only provision in the four Geneva Conventions that applies to a non-international armed conflict, as the Geneva Conventions generally apply only to international armed conflicts.
Customary International Humanitarian Law	Rules of international law that are established through a general practice of States which they accept as law. It is a source of international law that exists independently of treaty law. ¹⁰
De facto	As existing in practice, regardless of formal legal status.
International Criminal Court (ICC)	International court, which investigates and, where warranted, tries <u>individuals</u> charged with the gravest crimes of concern to the international community: genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and the crime of aggression. ¹¹
International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY)	International court established by the UNSC to deal with crimes that took place during armed conflicts in the Balkans in the 1990s. ¹²
International Humanitarian Law	A set of rules that seek to limit the effects of armed conflict on civilian population. They lay out the responsibilities of States and non-state armed groups during an armed conflict. ¹³
Status quo	The existing/current state of affairs.
Subjects of International Law	Actors in the international community with international legal personality, which is the prerequisite for them to be capable of

⁹ United Nations, *Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949*, 75 UNTS 31, 85, 135, 287, adopted 12 August 1949, entered into force 21 October 1950.

¹⁰ International committee of the Red Cross, n.d.

¹¹ International Criminal Court, n.d.a

¹² ICTY, n.d.

¹³ The European Commission, n.d.

	possessing rights and obligations imposed by international law. States are the most universally accepted subjects of international law. ¹⁴
The Rome Statute	International treaty, which established the International Criminal Court (ICC). The Statute sets out the Court's jurisdiction over genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and the crime of aggression. ¹⁵

Introduction

The Republic of Yemen is a country in the south of the Arabian Peninsula, with a **population of 41.8 million people**, according to the UN Population Fund.¹⁶ 99.1% of its population is Muslim, of whom **65% are Sunni** and **35% are Shia**, with most **Shia Muslims belonging to the Zaydism branch**.¹⁷ While almost all Yemenis are Muslims, the significant presence of both Sunni and Shia denominations has caused several social tensions in the past. Yemen has been under close observation by the United Nations for over two decades, as its **ongoing civil war**, with unique characteristics, has pushed the country into **one of the worst humanitarian crises** the world has witnessed. Several interconnected conflicts have continued since 2004 and have severely affected the economic situation of Yemenis. The World Monetary Fund estimated its GDP per capita at 401 USD in 2026.¹⁸

FOCUS OF THE TOPIC: While several MUN committees regularly address the humanitarian crisis in Yemen, this committee will face a specific challenge — **how to address the presence of armed non-state actors in the State.**

The rise of armed non-state actors has become one of the defining security challenges of the 21st century. In many contemporary conflicts, non-state armed groups no longer operate solely as insurgent or terrorist organisations but also **perform**

¹⁴ Walter, 2007.

¹⁵ International Criminal Court, n.d.b.

¹⁶ UNFPA, n.d.

¹⁷ CIA, 2020.

¹⁸ IMF, 2025.



functions usually ascribed to a sovereign State. They control territory, exercise administrative power over the population, collect taxes, and conduct military and diplomatic activities while remaining outside the framework of internationally recognised State authority. As a result, **they challenge conventional understandings of sovereignty, governance, and international law,** on which much of the modern international system and the United Nations framework are based.¹⁹

Yemen represents one of the most significant contemporary examples of this phenomenon. Over the course of the conflict, multiple armed non-state actors have emerged as central political and military forces within the State. The weakening and fragmentation of state institutions created conditions in which these groups were able to expand their territorial influence and establish what we could call a parallel state authority. Consequently, **authority in Yemen is no longer concentrated within a single internationally recognised government but is divided among various actors** exercising control over different regions and populations. Thus, the United Nations' efforts to establish lasting peace and respect for human rights solely through the UN-recognised state authority – the official government – might not be sufficient, as **several armed non-state actors hold significant power in various parts of Yemen.**²⁰

Among these actors, **the Houthis**, formally known as Ansar Allah, **occupy a particularly significant position.** Initially emerging as a theological movement with summer camps, which later developed into an insurgent movement, the group has evolved into a powerful actor exercising *de facto* governmental authority over large parts of northern and north-western Yemen and millions of civilians.²¹

Meanwhile, other organisations, including **the Southern Transitional Council (STC)**, tribal militias, and extremist groups such as **Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)**, continue to shape the country's political and security landscape. The coexistence, rivalry,

¹⁹ Khwaileh, 2026.

²⁰ Salmoni et al., 2010.

²¹ Ibid.

and conflict among these actors have contributed to prolonged instability, competing claims to legitimacy, and the erosion of centralised governance.²²

The growing influence of armed non-state actors in Yemen **extends beyond the country's domestic political situation and increasingly affects regional and international security**. In recent years, attacks on neighbouring states and commercial shipping routes in the Red Sea have demonstrated the ability of non-state actors to project power and disrupt international systems. Such developments have **elevated the conflict from a primarily domestic crisis to an international concern**, particularly due to the strategic importance of maritime trade routes and regional stability in the Middle East.²³

In Yemen, **external involvement by regional and international powers** has further complicated the conflict and **contributed to the durability of armed groups** operating within the country. For example, Iran has been widely accused by the United Nations Panel of Experts and several governments of providing the Houthis with military assistance, including missile and drone technology, training, and financial support, despite the arms embargo imposed by UNSC.²⁴ This has raised important questions regarding foreign intervention, State sovereignty, enforcement of international law, and the effectiveness of United Nations mechanisms in responding to fragmented conflicts involving multiple non-state actors.²⁵

For the UNSC, Yemen presents a particularly difficult challenge because traditional diplomatic and legal tools are largely designed for interactions between sovereign States. Armed non-state actors, however, often operate outside these frameworks while simultaneously exercising significant political and military influence.²⁶

²² Kwaileh, 2020.

²³ UN Panel of Experts Report on Yemen, S/2023/833.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ferreira Gomes Lopes Genésio, 2023.

²⁶ Ibid.

Historical developments in Yemen and the subsequent rise of armed non-state actors

The historical roots of the conflict **date back to 1970** and have involved several armed and unarmed developments in the 20th century. The historical context includes geographical, social, and religious divisions within Yemeni society. **Geographically**, a serious **core-periphery developmental divide** exists between the centre-north region of the Sana'a capital and the northern highlands, which have been neglected for decades, significantly affecting the region's development.²⁷ **Religiously**, the **divide between branches of Islam** has had a notable impact: the northern Yemeni highlands are largely Zaydi (a branch of Shiism), and the Sa'da governorate (a region at the Saudi-Yemeni northwest border) is the epicentre of Zaydism, while parts of the centre-north and the entire south are historically Shafi'i Sunni.²⁸ Although Zaydi-Shafi'i relations are by no means always strained, sectarian tensions have emerged at several points over the past two centuries.²⁹



Figure 3: Map of Yemen³⁰

²⁷ Salmoni et al., 2010.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ World Atlas, 2022.

In 1978, **Ali Abdullah Saleh** became president of Yemen, and the rough balance between highlands and lowlands interests emerged. President Saleh **reintroduced an exploitative taxation system** with the citizens in the midlands region (Sunni) being taxed at a rate roughly double that of the highlands population (Zaydi)³¹. Saleh's system was characterised by corruption, the narrow rule of the political and commercial elite, the weakening strength of the central government's strength, escalating economic woes, and widespread poverty.³² Many unresolved issues from post-1960s developments, particularly during Saleh's rule, contributed to the emergence of the group we know today as the Houthis.

NOTE FROM THE CHAIRS: The pre-context of the conflict is extensive and complex. The book *Regime and Periphery in Northern Yemen: The Houthi Phenomenon* by Barak A. Salmoni, Bryce Loidolt, and Madeleine Wells offers an excellent overview of the conflict from its origins. We have therefore added it to the Further Reading list and strongly encourage delegates seeking a more comprehensive understanding of the situation to consult this book, as we can only present a limited chronology of the conflict.

Actors involved in the conflict

1. The Houthis

The Houthi movement is based on the family of the same name and its **founder, Husayn al-Houthi**, native to the Sa'da governorate north of San'a. The Houthi family is **part of the Zaydi (Shi'a) branch of Islam**, which considers political legitimacy to derive from descent from the family of the Prophet Muhammad.³³ The **Zaydis (Shi'as) make up the majority in the far north but they're a minority in Yemen**. Starting in the 1980s, Sunni Muslim Salafi religious institutes implanted themselves in these traditionally Zaydi (Shi'a) areas with State support.³⁴

Although the Houthi movement initially sought to end what it saw as Saudi-backed efforts to marginalize Zaydi (Shi'a) communities and beliefs, in the aftermath of the 2011 uprising

³¹ Feierstein, 2019, pp. 2-4.

³² Ferreira Gomes Lopes Genésio, 2023.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Longley Alley, 2015.

and government collapse, its goals expanded in scope and ambition to embrace a broader populist, anti-establishment message.³⁵ It is largely believed that the Houthis are ideologically and logistically supported by Iran, while there exist conflicting views on the situation.

NOTE FROM THE CHAIRS: To better understand **the Shia-Sunni divide**, we encourage you to refer to our reading list; however, we've prepared a small table of differences below.³⁶

Table 1: Comparison of Sunni and Shi'a branches of Islam

	Sunni Islam	Shia Islam
Leadership	Caliphs provide political and religious leadership.	Led by Imams, descendants of Muhammad with God-given spiritual authority.
Succession	A Caliph is chosen by the Muslim community or its leaders. There is no requirement that the position stay within one family, although many Caliphs came from Muhammad's tribe.	An Imam is appointed by the previous Imam through God's guidance. Imams must be direct descendants of Muhammad through his daughter Fatimah and Ali.
View of Ali	Respected as an important companion and the fourth Caliph.	Considered the first rightful leader after Muhammad.
Size	Largest branch of Islam.	Second-largest branch of Islam.

2. Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula

Al-Qaida is an **international terrorist network** that was **created by Sheikh Abdullah Azzam** as an organization **to fund fighters in Afghanistan**. Al-Qaida, its affiliates, and those inspired by the group have been involved in planning and executing attacks in Africa,

³⁵ Ferreira Gomes Lopes Genésio, 2023.

³⁶ BBC, 2026.

Asia, Europe and North America.³⁷ In the context of Yemen's conflict, Al Qaeda's **presence began in the early 1990s**, during which the first training camps were established by mujahideen fighters returning from Afghanistan in the eastern Hadhramaut province of Yemen, the homeland of Osama bin Laden's father.³⁸

3. Southern Transitional Council

The Southern Transitional Council (STC) **emerged in 2017 as a separatist organization** in Yemen, following the discontent of the United Arab Emirates with the Saudi-led coalition and prolonged fighting, with the goal to establish a new political reality in Aden and **achieve independence for southern Yemen**, as it existed before the unification of Yemen in 1990.³⁹

4. The Government of Yemen and the Yemeni Armed Forces

The Government of Yemen (GoY) is the **internationally recognized government of Yemen**. Since the outbreak of the Yemeni Civil War, it has received significant **political and military support from Saudi Arabia and the Saudi-led coalition**.⁴⁰ Following the unification of Yemen in 1990, the country was governed by several presidents, most notably Ali Abdullah Saleh from 1990 until his resignation in 2012, followed by Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi until the transfer of presidential powers in 2022. Since then, **executive authority** has formally been **exercised by the Presidential Leadership Council (PLC)**.

The conflict since the 2000s

While tensions have existed since the second half of the twentieth century, **2004 marks a significant milestone in the conflict**, as **armed combat between the groups** (primarily the Houthis and the Government of Yemen with the Yemeni Armed Forces) **has continued ever since**, apart from several short breaks. By 2004, both Husayn Badr al-Din al-Houthi and the GoY were in positions of perceived power. Husayn had managed to capitalize on anti-

³⁷ UNSC, n.d.

³⁸ Ferreira Gomes Lopes Genésio, 2023.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

U.S. sentiment to mobilize supporters and had created, to some extent, a Houthi rallying call that began to take on an anti-GoY dimension as the government moved to clamp down on it. The GoY considered itself an ally of the United States and attempted to encourage increased foreign aid by arguing that Husayn al-Houthi's lectures were inciting terrorism.⁴¹

1. The six Sa'da wars (2004 – 2010) ⁴²

The first phase of the Sa'da conflict began when a government police or military convoy was sent to arrest or kill Husayn al-Houthi in June 2004. Fighting continued for approximately three and a half months, mostly in the mountainous terrain of Marran. The conflict subsided when **the GoY announced it had killed Husayn al-Houthi**, printing images in state-sponsored newspapers of his dead body being dragged through the street.⁴³

The second phase was marked by **the return of al-Houthi's father, Badr al-Din al-Houthi, to politics** and a month of fighting, during which the GoY was primarily concerned with dismantling what it perceived as Houthi leadership, concentrating on areas where members of the Houthi leadership were alleged to be hiding.⁴⁴

In late December 2005, the **third Sa'da war** started when **Houthi fighters attacked a military checkpoint in the al-Khafji region**, prompting GoY forces to attack civilian homes on the suspicion that Houthis were hiding in them.⁴⁵ Furthermore, the Houthis continued their assassinations, targeting government officials.⁴⁶

In the time preceding the fourth war (February 2006 – February 2007), the Houthis attacked several GoY troop locations and convoys in dispersed locations while also attempting to assassinate GoY notables, among them the head of political security in Sa'da, Yahya al-Murani. Houthi supporters also detonated explosives that destroyed an artesian water

⁴¹ Salmoni et al., 2010, p. 131.

⁴² They are referred to as 'the six Sa'da wars' because they were a series of six distinct military conflicts fought between the Yemeni government and Houthi rebels. In simple terms, it was a conflict with interim phases of peace, and the two sides fought in six separate, non-continuous phases.

⁴³ Salmoni et al., 2010, p. 132.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 136.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 139.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 141.

pump.⁴⁷ **The fourth phase** officially started in early 2007, leading to what would become the **most intense phase of the fighting**.

Salmoni et al.⁴⁸ described the 4th Sa'da war as following:

“The 11 months of armed conflict included the GoY’s sustained use of air support, heavy artillery, and mechanized units conducting continuing bombing campaigns on suspected Houthi locations. Throughout Phase 4, the GoY appeared unrestrained, mercilessly attacking Houthi locations and staying on the offensive throughout the conflict’s duration. During this phase, significant reports emerged of the GoY using “volunteer” forces to fight the Houthis. For their part, the Houthis appeared resilient during this period, fighting in both urban and rural environments and managing to surround and trap GoY forces. They also continued to raid military convoys and outposts and ambush suspected GoY supporters. After a lull in the summer of 2007, likely due to Qatari mediation efforts, combat in this phase renewed. [...] The Houthis also held GoY volunteer forces captive in a school, despite sustained GoY air strikes on the city. [...] While clashes in the area had subsided by November 2007, it is unclear whether this was due to GoY control over the area or the Houthis’ ability to repel GoY forces. [...] Phase 4 ended in January 2008, but GoY objectives were not achieved. [...] the GoY seemed unable to dismantle the Houthi leadership or destroy the group’s popular base. Thus, although the Houthis probably sustained greater casualties, they essentially emerged victorious from the fourth phase of the conflict. The GoY had used every means at its disposal and, in doing so, probably wreaked untold damage on the governorate’s physical and social base—as well as on its own international image.”

The fifth phase (May 2008 – July 2008) was significantly less intense than the fourth one. Despite the unilateral ceasefire declared by the GoY and President Saleh on July 17, 2008, both the GoY and the Houthis seemed dissatisfied with the *status quo*. Nevertheless, late 2008 and early 2009 saw several good-faith efforts to ease tensions by the GoY and the

⁴⁷ Salmoni et al., 2010, p. 141.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 143 -148.

Houthis.⁴⁹ Still, the GoY's believed that the Houthis had continued to be uncooperative and were refusing to abide by the conditions of the ceasefire. President Saleh and his authoritarian regime were further challenged by restless southern movement calling for independence, as well as a resurgent al-Qaeda presence, prompting him to deal with one of these three threats "in a decisive manner".⁵⁰ He called for a meeting of the High Security Committee, which concluded, it would strike the rebellion "with an iron fist,"⁵¹ starting **the sixth and the last Sa'da war**. While this stage of conflict resembled the earlier ones, with less heavy artillery and notorious fighting, it may be viewed as the most important, because **it made the conflict international**.

Salmoni et al.⁵² offer an excellent recount of the developments regarding **the involvement of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the conflict**:

*"[...] the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia employed air assets, artillery, and ground forces against Houthi fighters. The events leading up to Saudi involvement [...] remain difficult to determine. From **the Houthi perspective**, the Saudi military had permitted GoY forces to use a strategic mountain in Saudi Arabia—Jabal Dukhan—to attack Houthi units from the rear. The Houthis claim that they warned the Saudis about allowing GoY forces to attack them from Saudi territory but received no response. Therefore, Houthi units crossed the border on November 4, entering into a skirmish with Saudi border guards, who the Houthis claim fired first. [...] From **the Saudi perspective**, Houthi fighters had "infiltrated" Saudi territory and fired on border guards, necessitating a response from the country's armed forces. [...] Notably, Houthi fighters captured Saudi soldiers and aired videotaped confessions while also pilfering Saudi military equipment. [...] Saudi involvement [...] prompted a number of ominous **condemnations from Iranian officials** [...] Although the GoY indeed killed many Houthi fighters, it did not decapitate Houthi leadership. Further, [concerns rose] about the al-Qa'ida presence in Yemen. Such concern turned into pressure on San'a after the*

⁴⁹ Salmoni et al., 2010, pp. 149 -150.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 153.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., pp. 155 -157.

December 25, 2009, attempted bombing of a U.S. airliner by a Nigerian Muslim who had obtained training and spiritual guidance from the Yemeni al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). [...]"

In early 2010, the Houthis made several statements indicating their willingness to agree to a peaceful resolution of the conflict, and on 11 February 2010, the Government of Yemen announced the end of its military campaign in Sa'da, **concluding the cycle of the Six Sa'da Wars from 2004 to 2010**.⁵³

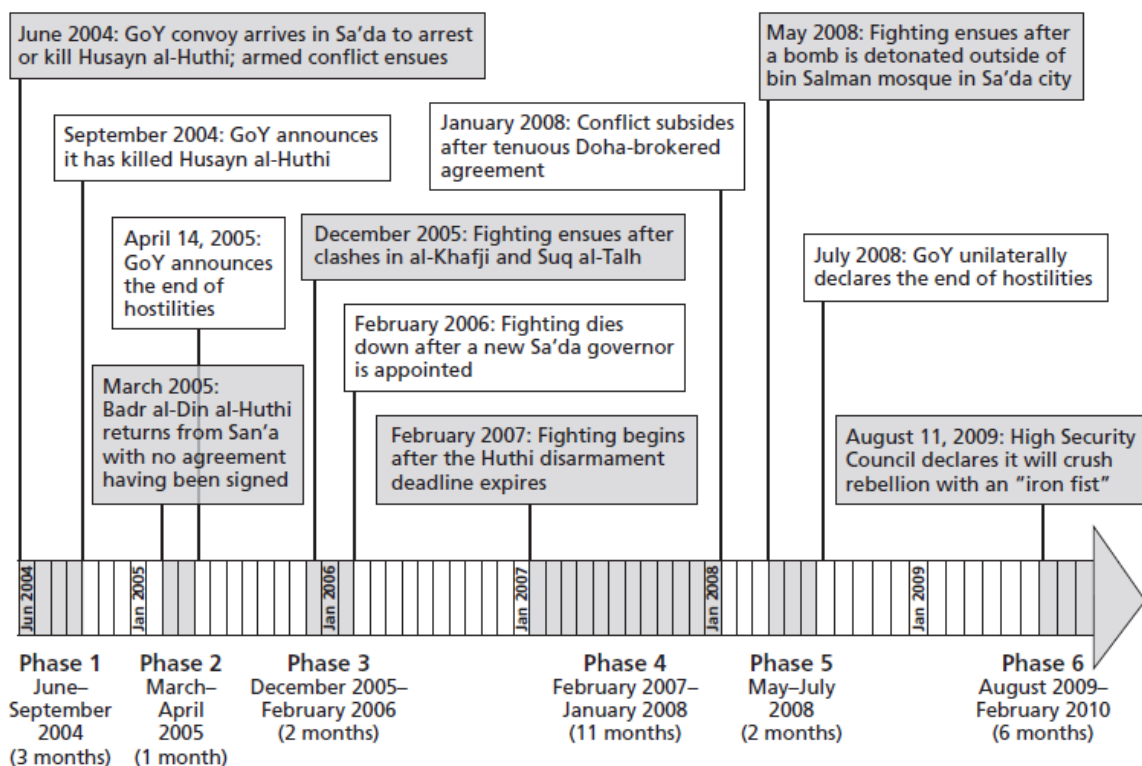


Figure 4: Brief chronology of the Six Sa'da Wars (2004 - 2010)⁵⁴

2. From Sa'da wars to the Civil War (2010 - 2014)

Unfortunately, the end of the six Sa'da wars did not bring lasting peace to Yemen. The **conflict resumed in 2011** during the Arab Spring, when **Yemenis** took to the streets, **demanding that President Saleh resign** after more than 30 years in power, amid growing discontent with Saleh's corrupt system. The **protests resulted in Yemen's transition plan**, under which Saleh stepped down but was granted immunity from prosecution for any

⁵³ Salmoni et al., 2010, pp. 155 -157.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 133.

actions committed during his tenure, and the **acting Vice-President, Abd Rabbu Mansour al-Hadi, became president.**⁵⁵ In 2011, the **UNSC** adopted **Resolution 2014**,⁵⁶ supporting efforts to resolve the political crisis in Yemen.

3. Civil War (2014 - present)

Despite the efforts of both the international community and the Yemeni public, **Saleh remained a highly influential political figure in Yemen**, despite not holding official power. As a result of his 30 years in office, the Yemeni Armed Forces and their leadership were still significantly influenced by his orders. Former president Saleh, that has spent years fighting against the Houthis, then **formed a pragmatic alliance with the rebels**, seeking to remove Hadi, the then president, from office.⁵⁷ The **Houthis took control over the presidential palace with the help of military unites loyal to the former president Saleh**. Acting president Hadi was put into the house arrest and a few days later he stepped down with other government officials including prime minister and cabinet members.⁵⁸ The **Houthis** used their militias to **seize control of key city institutions**, installed their own people in major positions, and issued a constitutional declaration.⁵⁹ The Houthis later **seized Hodeidah, Yemen's main cargo port**, which provided them with access to the Red Sea for the mostly landlocked northern Houthi-controlled areas. As will be discussed later, several shipments of armour and goods reached the Houthis via Hodeidah's port, enabling them to continue fighting and offering greater resistance.⁶⁰

After one month, **Hadi escaped** from house arrest and **fled to Aden, making it the *de facto* Yemeni capital** at the time, where he **withdrew his resignation**, claiming it had been made under pressure.⁶¹ In March 2015, the situation in Yemen entered a new phase of violence, leading the country into war. Following the attack on Hadi's house in Aden and a deadly

⁵⁵ Ferreira Gomes Lopes Genésio, 2023.

⁵⁶ United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 2014 (2011)*, S/RES/2014 (2011), adopted 21 October 2011. This resolution is one of the most significant in the context of the conflict, covering several points, including terrorist groups, the Yemeni government, human rights violations, and the use of child soldiers.

⁵⁷ Al Dosari and George, 2020.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ferreira Gomes Lopes Genésio, 2023.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Security Council Report in Al Dosari and George, 2020.

suicide attack in Sana'a by ISIS, **the Houthis launched a large-scale armed campaign in the name of fighting Al-Qaeda and ISIS in the south**,⁶² essentially **constituting combat between several armed non-state actors** in the country. Fearing the Houthis' advances, **Hadi left the country and took refuge in Saudi Arabia**. Consequently, Hadi **asked the Gulf countries for military intervention** to protect the country.⁶³ Shortly after the Yemeni government's request, **the Saudi-led alliance**, consisting of Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Morocco, Bahrain, Qatar, Egypt, and Jordan, with logistical and material support from the US and involvement of the UK and France,⁶⁴ **announced a military operation to restore Hadi's rule and counter the Houthis in Yemen**.⁶⁵ Despite the Saudi-led airstrikes, the Houthi alliance made significant gains on the ground. Besides Hadi's forces, **tribal groups and local militias also fought against the Houthis**.⁶⁶

In April 2015, the **UNSC reaffirmed its support for the Yemeni government** through **Resolution 2216**,⁶⁷ arguably the most important resolution in the context of this conflict. In it, the UNSC also **demanding that the Houthis withdraw from the areas they seized**. Most importantly, it **imposed sanctions** against the head of the Houthis and Saleh's son, as well as **established an arms embargo** against the forces fighting the Hadi government. Meanwhile, with the support of Saudi-led ground forces, **Hadi managed to retake control of Aden city**.⁶⁸

The relationship between former President Saleh and the Houthis seriously deteriorated by 2017,⁶⁹ resulting in **the Houthis executing Saleh** that year. This marked a significant turning point in the conflict, as **the UAE decided to withdraw from the Saudi-led coalition** and made its primary objective the establishment of separate military units, thereby weakening both the Yemeni government and the Arab Alliance's position. **The Southern**

⁶² Al Dosari and George, 2020.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Taves, 2019.

⁶⁵ Al Dosari and George, 2020.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 2216 (2015)*, S/RES/2216(2015), adopted 14 April 2015.

⁶⁸ Al Dosari and George, 2020.

⁶⁹ A useful article about their relationship and its collapse: Edroos, 2017, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/12/4/how-did-yemens-houthi-saleh-alliance-collapse>.

Transitional Council (STC) emerged, presenting itself as a third bloc, **neither pro-Houthi nor pro-Saudi**, operating within the framework of the UAE agenda and **fighting for independence for southern Yemen**, as it existed before the unification of Yemen in 1990.⁷⁰ Consequently, Aden became a battleground between Yemeni forces backed by the Saudi-led coalition (now without the UAE) and the STC.

In 2018, the Houthis and the GoY met in Stockholm, where they signed **the Stockholm Agreement** (which will be thoroughly examined later);⁷¹ however, it didn't yield the aspired results.⁷² In February 2021, the Houthis launched an attack on Ma'rib Governorate, which caused large waves of displacement, and in the beginning of 2022, the conflict between the Houthis and the Saudi-led coalition escalated with the Saudi-led military coalition becoming more cohesive, and the Houthis losing territory they had captured in 2020-21.⁷³ January 2022 was considered the deadliest month in seven years of war, as **the Houthis launched several drone and missile attacks on the UAE and Saudi Arabia's territory**, and because of that, **the Saudi-led coalition launched a series of airstrikes on Houthi-led territory**.⁷⁴

The Saudi-led military coalition and the Houthis announced a **two-month truce in April 2022**. It was seen as a pathway to peace, representing the best opportunity Yemenis had for peace in years. It was **renewed twice** for two months each time but **ended on October 2022**.

As of today, the Council on Foreign Relations and its Global Conflict Tracker⁷⁵ summarise the situation as follows:

*“Fighting between Houthi rebels and the Saudi coalition that backs Yemen's internationally recognized government has largely subsided, but **Houthis have repeatedly attacked ships transiting the Red Sea** in response to Israel's war on*

⁷⁰ Ferreira Gomes Lopes Genésio, 2023.

⁷¹ United Nations, *Stockholm Agreement*, adopted 13 December 2018, S/2018/1134.

⁷² Ferreira Gomes Lopes Genésio, 2023.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Global Conflict Tracker, n. d.

*Hamas. Dialogue between the Houthis and Saudi Arabia, along with Iranian-Saudi normalization, has provided hope for a negotiated solution. However, talks have yielded little progress and have been punctuated by violence. **The Southern Transitional Council (STC) has also renewed calls for an independent southern Yemeni state, complicating peace prospects, and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) attacks have surged.***

As we conclude the chapter on the history of the conflict, it is useful to view the visual representation of territorial control in Yemen as of 2022:

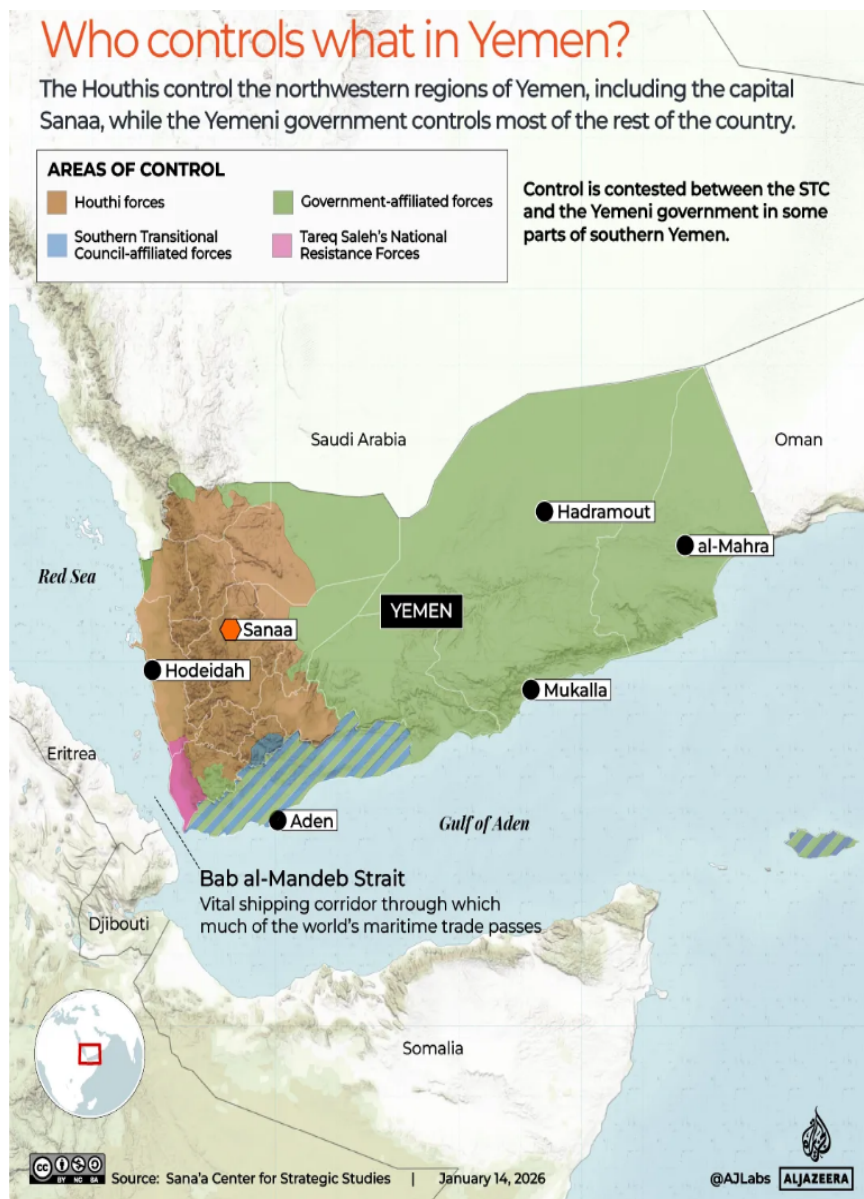


Figure 5: Who controls what in Yemen?⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Al Jazeera, 2026.

KEY ISSUE I: Applicability of international law to armed non-state actors

We have seen that the conflict in Yemen is unlike any other ongoing armed conflict in the world. What is striking is that the **conflict is largely between the Saudi-backed and internationally recognised Yemeni government and the Houthis**, an ideological armed group that has attained several levels of power while not being an official authority. It is essential to explore the dynamics between the actors involved in this conflict and examine how international law regulates such situations.

Defining armed non-state actors

“Armed non-state actors (ANSAs) can be defined as groups that have the potential to employ arms in the use of force to achieve political, ideological, or economic objectives; are not part of the formal military structures of States, State alliances, or intergovernmental organizations; and are not under the control of the State or States in which they operate”.⁷⁷

ANSA is a broad term, and there is **no universally accepted definition** of this term, so for the purpose of this study guide, we will use this one. While the above definition of ANSAs is useful for understanding the broad concept of these groups, it is important to **distinguish:**

- the descriptive notion of an ANSA

FROM

- the legal concept of a **non-state armed group (NSAG)** under International Humanitarian Law (IHL). Unlike the broader term "ANSA," the concept of an NSAG carries specific legal significance, which will be discussed in detail in the section below.

ESSENTIAL: Once a group fulfils the criteria of an NSAG, **it becomes subject to the rules of international law applicable to non-international armed conflicts**, thereby giving rise to both rights and obligations under international law.

⁷⁷ UNICEF, n.d.

Defining non-state armed groups

Defining a NSAG is far from straightforward. It should be noted that International Humanitarian Law (IHL) does not provide a formal definition of an NSAG. Instead, it defines a **Non-International Armed Conflict (NIAC)**, and one of the criteria for determining whether a situation qualifies as a NIAC is the existence of an organised armed group – and this is the concept described by legal scholars as an NSAG.⁷⁸

ESSENTIAL: According to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), **a NIAC exists** when two conditions are met:

- 1.) protracted armed violence, and
- 2.) the non-state actor must possess sufficient level of organization to be characterized as an organized armed groups.⁷⁹

We will explore how the above conditions apply to the situation in Yemen.

1. Criteria of intensity

Factors relevant for determining whether the situation in Yemen can be considered as a situation of protracted armed violence, have been provided in the Introduction of the Study Guide, which described the nature and the time frame of armed confrontations. Therefore, this part of the Study Guide will focus on examining the second condition, which is connected to the concept of NSAGs.

2. Criteria of organization

The famous **case of Prosecutor v. Haradinaj** before the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in 2008 established that “**a non-international armed conflict can exist only between parties that are sufficiently organized to confront each other with military means**”.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Ferreira Gomes Lopes Genésio, 2023, p. 22.

⁷⁹ Prosecutor v. Dusko Tadic a/k/a "Dule" (ICTY AC), 1995, para. 70.

⁸⁰ Prosecutor v. Ramush Haradinaj, Idriz Balaj, and Lahi Brahimagj (ICTY AC), 2010; Ferreira Gomes Lopes Genésio, 2023, pp. 25-26.

In the case of Yemen, Ferreira Gomes Lopes Génesio concludes that:

*»the Houthis control significant parts of the territory in Yemen, including the capital Sana'a since September 2014, they have the military capacity to be engaged in war, have a high level of organisation and even have a "parliamentary" system and therefore we can say that they are sufficiently organized to sustain military operations over a long period and to act as **de facto** authorities. **Thus, according to the definition we used and provided above, the Houthis are NSAG.**«⁸¹*

Therefore, we will from now on regard the Houthis as an NSAG. Since we have spent considerable time defining NSAGs, it is reasonable to ask why this is so important. As you'll see in the section below, it's very significant.

Why is it relevant whether armed non-state actors are considered as non-state armed groups engaged in a non-international armed conflict

States have traditionally been reluctant to recognise that violence on their territory involving non-state actors can become an armed conflict under international law. The main reason behind this is **the issue of the applicable legal framework**.⁸²

ESSENTIAL:

Internal or domestic conflict situations, such as riots, are **governed by domestic law**.

Situations that qualify as an armed conflict (both international or non-international) are **regulated by international law**, specifically International Humanitarian Law (IHL), thereby imposing additional legal obligations on both States and, in the case of non-international armed conflict, also on non-state armed groups.⁸³

Differences between international and non-international armed conflicts

We distinguish two types of armed conflicts: an international and a non-international one.

⁸¹ Ferreira Gomes Lopes Genésio, 2023, p. 28.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

As noted by International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), an **International Armed Conflict (IAC)** occurs when “one or more States have recourse to armed force against another State, regardless of the reasons or the intensity of this confrontation. No formal declaration of war or recognition of the situation is required”.⁸⁴ IACs are relatively easier to regulate *legally* given that States are subjects of international law. It’s important to acknowledge that the legal framework governing IACs are extensive and well-developed. IACs are primarily regulated through the **four Geneva Conventions of 1949** and **Additional Protocol I⁸⁵ to the Geneva Conventions**.⁸⁶

However, quite the opposite is the case with a **Non-International Armed Conflict (NIAC)**. In the landmark **Tadić case**, the ICTY established that a NIAC exists when there is “protracted armed violence between governmental authorities and armed groups or between such groups within a State”.⁸⁷ NIACs are significantly more difficult to regulate because non-state armed groups are not sovereign States and are not subjects of international law in the same way as States are.⁸⁸ Paradoxically, NSAGs can hold substantial *de facto* power and may even govern parts of territory and civilian populations, as is the case with the Houthis in Yemen.

And while one might think that, as a result, NIACs are fought without any rules, the minimum legal protections applicable to NIACs are established by **Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions**, as well as **Additional Protocol II⁸⁹ to the Geneva Conventions**.⁹⁰ These rules prohibit acts such as torture, hostage-taking, and attacks against civilians.⁹¹

⁸⁴ ICRC, n.d.

⁸⁵ United Nations, *Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I)*, 1125 UNTS 3, adopted 8 June 1977, entered into force 7 December 1978.

⁸⁶ ICRC, 2024.

⁸⁷ Prosecutor v. Dusko Tadic a/k/a "Dule" (ICTY AC), 1995, para 70; Ferreira Gomes Lopes Genésio, 2023.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ United Nations, *Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Protocol II)*, 1125 UNTS 609, adopted 8 June 1977, entered into force 7 December 1978.

⁹⁰ Ferreira Gomes Lopes Genésio, 2023.

⁹¹ ICRC, 1949.

ESSENTIAL: Nevertheless, **rules of international law governing NIACs are difficult to enforce**. After all, States can be pressured to comply with international law through diplomacy, sanctions, or international institutions, while non-state armed groups often operate outside these frameworks. This presents a core issue that the delegates should address throughout the conference.

We've compacted the information above into a useful table:

Table 2: Comparison of IACs and NIACs

	International Armed Conflict (IAC)	Non-International Armed Conflict (NIAC)
Definition	An armed conflict between two or more States	An armed conflict occurring a) between a State and a non-state armed group, or b) between non-state armed groups within the territory of a State
Key Elements	Use of armed force between States	1. Intensity required: protracted armed violence 2. Sufficient organization of the non-state armed group(s)
Parties to the Conflict	States	State and non-state armed group, or multiple non-state armed groups fighting each other
Applicable Legal Framework	- Four Geneva Conventions - Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions - Customary International Humanitarian Law	- Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions - Additional Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions - Customary International Humanitarian Law

Proxy warfare

“The use of proxies in warfare is typically understood as a State sponsor’s reliance on military surrogates that are outside the purview of the State’s conventional armed or security forces”.⁹² Essentially, this means that, rather than directly engaging in a conflict, **the State provides financial, military, and organisational support to a non-state armed group fighting against a different State on the territory of that State.** Some widely recognised proxies of Iran are Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Palestine,⁹³ while there are some scholars arguing against such conclusions.

ESSENTIAL: In the groundbreaking **case of Tadić**, the ICTY established **the overall control test**. The court determined that “when one State exercises overall control over an NSAG fighting against another State, **the conflict is classified as an international armed conflict between the two States**”.⁹⁴ As a result, the four Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocol I become the applicable legal framework, making the rules of the conflict much stricter.

The status of the Houthis is ambiguous. Some States, especially the US, Israel, and Saudi Arabia, **recognize them as an Iranian proxy**, and UN reports and official statements frequently use the term "Iran-backed".⁹⁵

However, there are several figures, including a University College Dublin lecturer, Vincent Durac, who **question the designation of the Houthis as mere Iranian proxies**, arguing that they have an independent interest in becoming a state authority and maintain decision-making autonomy.⁹⁶

⁹² Hughes, 2013; Mumford, 2013; Groh, 2019; Moghadam and Wyss, 2020.

⁹³ Moghadam and Wyss, 2020.

⁹⁴ ICRC, 2024.

⁹⁵ Durac, 2019.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

KEY ISSUE II: Negotiating with non-state armed groups

Barriers to negotiating with NSAGs

Following 9/11 and the War on Terror, the “*we do not negotiate with terrorists*” approach has become entrenched in the international policy and practice of peace-making.⁹⁷

While **designating an NSAG as a terrorist group** may appear to be a strong statement intended to assert dominance over them, Audrey Palama establishes in his article that such designations ultimately have the most **severe impact on the civilian population under the group’s control**.⁹⁸ Specifically, when an NSAG is designated as a terrorist organisation, providing any form of assistance to the group — including humanitarian aid, medical care, or even dialogue — may be criminalised under domestic counter-terrorism laws. This also **makes it difficult or impossible for States and international organisations to engage with them**, even for legitimate humanitarian purposes such as negotiating access, discussing compliance with International Humanitarian Law (IHL), or arranging prisoner exchanges.⁹⁹

Traditionally, **States have been reluctant to engage with NSAGs** due to the fear of legitimisation of (terrorist) violence and the possibility of the exploitation of negotiations, or any accompanying ceasefire, by NSAGs to gain military leverage on the ground.¹⁰⁰

ESSENTIAL: From a legal perspective, **negotiations with armed non-state groups (NSAGs) can become complicated in two main situations**.¹⁰¹

- 1.) The first one – **when designated as a terrorist organization** – has been discussed above.
- 2.) Second, challenges emerge **when individuals involved in negotiations are subject to arrest warrants** issued by the International Criminal Court (ICC). In these cases, formal negotiations with indicted individuals often take place outside

⁹⁷ Ozcelik Olcay, 2020.

⁹⁸ Palama, 2022.

⁹⁹ Summarized in Khwaileh, 2026.

¹⁰⁰ Ozcelik Olcay, 2020.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

the territories of States Parties to the Rome Statute, as State Parties to the Rome State have legal obligations related to arrest if such individuals are located on their territories.¹⁰²

The case of Yemen: Negotiating with the Houthis in Stockholm

Given that the Houthis control the capital, Sana'a, and exercise *de facto* governing power over 70% of the Yemen's population,¹⁰³ it is reasonable to assume that **attempting to reach an agreement to establish lasting peace without including the Houthis in the negotiations would have limited prospects of success.**

After imposing sanctions on the Houthis and condemning them several times, the UN engaged in negotiations with them in 2018 to bring peace to Yemen, which was on the brink of famine at the time.¹⁰⁴ This demonstrates that, when the situation is dire enough, negotiations with actors capable of contributing to its improvement may become necessary.

In December 2018, the Houthis and the internationally recognized Government of Yemen (GoY) met **in Stockholm for peace negotiations** brokered by UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths. The report on **the Stockholm Agreement** by the International Crisis Group notes that both parties were under *"mounting international pressure to reach an agreement. [There was] pressure from Riyadh on the Hadi government [GoY] to accept a compromise [...]* In the end, the agreement was so rushed that the parties did not actually sign it. They also left the deal's language vague [...]"¹⁰⁵

The agreement required the **release of 15,000 prisoners**, but both sides missed the deadline and failed to meet the target. In addition, **a ceasefire and redeployment around the strategic port city of Hodeidah** were included, yet both sides repeatedly accused each other of violations, and planned troop redeployments were never fully implemented.

¹⁰² Ozcelik Olcay, 2020.

¹⁰³ Khwaileh, 2026.

¹⁰⁴ International Crisis Group, 2019.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

Finally, the two parties and the UN attempted to achieve significant **improvements in the governorate of Taiz**; however, the UN did not apply “sufficient pressure” to lift the siege on Taiz and improve the humanitarian situation and harsh conditions there.¹⁰⁶ Ibrahim Jalal notes that Taiz “remains the deadliest governorate in Yemen and has been the most overlooked long before negotiations were held in Sweden,” adding that “the Stockholm Agreement achieved far less than what the UN reported and what many Western observers had anticipated”.¹⁰⁷

ESSENTIAL: Several important lessons can be drawn from **the Stockholm Agreement** regarding negotiations with NSAGs:

- **Concluding an agreement is often much easier than implementing one**, particularly in fragmented conflicts where armed groups have independent military and political objectives.¹⁰⁸
- The case demonstrated that **the United Nations often has limited leverage over NSAGs**, especially when those actors control territory and are receiving external support.¹⁰⁹
- The Stockholm Agreement ultimately illustrated that while engaging with NSAGs may be necessary to reduce conflict, such negotiations do not automatically lead to lasting peace if other dimensions of the conflict and the complexities of the political situation are not taken into consideration.

KEY ISSUE III: Maritime security in the Red Sea

Background

While the Houthis are actively engaged in conflict with the Yemeni authorities, the group has attracted international attention for their **attacks on commercial shipping in the Red Sea, particularly in the Strait of Bab el-Mandeb** (see Figure 4).

¹⁰⁶ Jalal, 2020.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights, 2011.

¹⁰⁹ International Crisis Group, 2019.

NOTE FROM THE CHAIRS: The aim of this section of the Study Guide is to provide background on the issue and outline possible questions for the delegates. However, as this topic has been extensively reported in the international media, delegates are strongly encouraged to follow the story themselves, researching other attacks by the group in the Red Sea, their implications, and the defensive measures taken by the international community.

The Houthis possess and have used ballistic missiles and cruise missiles to **strike targets in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates**, including civilian infrastructure, airports, and oil facilities.¹¹⁰ They also operate armed drones that have been previously used for attacks on ground targets and maritime operations. For example, in September 2019, drone and missile attacks were launched towards Saudi Arabia's Abqaiq and Khurais oil facilities, resulting in a significant negative impact on Saudi oil production.

ESSENTIAL: The Houthis' cross-border operations, particularly attacks on Saudi Arabia and maritime operations in the Red Sea, raise **complex questions about the applicability of self-defence**.

States' right of self-defence in response to Houthi attacks

Beginning in November 2023, the Houthis launched a campaign of **attacks against commercial and military vessels in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, claiming these attacks were in support of Palestinians and in response to the Gaza conflict**. These attacks included, but were not limited to, missile strikes against commercial vessels, armed drone attacks on ships, attempted hijackings of vessels, and threats to ships associated with Israel or heading to Israeli ports.¹¹¹

The attacks prompted significant international responses. The **United States and United Kingdom launched airstrikes against Houthi military targets in Yemen** in January 2024,

¹¹⁰ Fernandes, 2024.

¹¹¹ Khwaileh, 2026.

and **justified them as collective self-defence** in response to attacks on international shipping.¹¹² For reference, **Article 51 of the UN Charter** states:

*“Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the **inherent right of individual or collective self-defence** if an **armed attack** occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security. Measures taken by Members in the exercise of this right of self-defence shall be **immediately reported to the Security Council** and shall not in any way affect the authority and responsibility of the Security Council under the present Charter to take at any time such action as it deems necessary in order to maintain or restore international peace and security”.*

Fernandes argues that these attacks prompted lawful self-defence responses by affected States.¹¹³ However, the situation is considerably more complex as the Houthis are situated in the inland territory of Yemen, raising questions about the exercise of self-defence against non-state actors without affecting the State where they operate.¹¹⁴

Questions to bear in mind

We found that Khaled Mohammad Khwaileh¹¹⁵ posed some very good questions regarding the situation in the Red Sea. You shall not be expected to have an answer to them, as this is an active field of discussion even for international law specialists; however, we believe that they effectively present the multidimensional complexities of the conflict between NSAGs, the State they are located in, and other sovereign States:

- Do the Houthi attacks on international shipping and the subsequent US/UK airstrikes **constitute a separate armed conflict** distinct from the ongoing conflict in Yemen? If so, how should this conflict be classified – as a NIAC or an IAC, or an internationalized NIAC?

¹¹² Khwaileh, 2026.

¹¹³ Fernandes, 2024; Khwaileh, 2026.

¹¹⁴ Khwaileh, 2026.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

- To what extent does **the right of self-defence** under Article 51 of the UN Charter **apply to armed attacks by non-state actors**? Can states lawfully conduct strikes against NSAG targets in third States (in the case at hand, Yemen) in response to attacks on the high seas?
- Do the airstrikes against Houthi targets in Yemen satisfy **the requirements of necessity and proportionality of self-defence**?

Points a resolution should address

- How can the UNSC ensure de-escalation and lasting stability in the region?
- How can the end of the conflict be achieved as soon as possible?
- How can wider escalation of the conflict be prevented?
- What mechanisms can be put in place to prevent renewed hostilities between the Houthis and the Armed Forces of the Government of Yemen?
- How would safe passage through the Red Sea and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait be assured, and who would control it?
- Should the UN deploy a mission to the region? What could its scope be?
- How should the dire humanitarian crisis be addressed in this context?
- How can humanitarian access and civilian protection be guaranteed in areas controlled by armed non-state actors?
- What should the mechanism for withdrawing from the agreement be like for NSAGs?
- What role should regional actors such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the Gulf States play in resolving the Yemeni conflict?
- What measures can be taken to prevent further fragmentation of authority and promote a sustainable political settlement in Yemen?

Additional preparation materials

VIDEO RESOURCES:

We encourage you to start by watching this short YouTube video before reading the study guide as it visually maps the conflict:

- Harris. (2024). *The War in Yemen, Mapped*. Available at:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qsO-rULEfrk>.

NECESSARY READING:

To learn more about how international law applies to the Houthis (and to Hezbollah), we encourage you to read Khwaileh's comparative analysis, which we partially used for this Study Guide:

- Khwaileh, K., M. (2026). *The limits of law in a post-Westphalian world: the legal and political status of powerful non-state armed actors—a comparative study of Hezbollah and the Houthis*. *Frontiers in Political Science*. Available at:
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2026.1754918>.

To better understand Yemen's economic challenges that the delegates shall keep in mind when drafting the resolution, refer to:

- Al-Aghbari, Areeg & Nugroho, Rino & Kartono, Drajat. (2024). *The Problems of Development and Economic Security in Yemen*. *Proceedings of Sunan Ampel International Conference of Political and Social Sciences*. Available at:
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/393602587_The_Problems_of_Development_and_Economic_Security_in_Yemen.

Gerald M. Feierstein from the Middle East Institute (whose work we've used as a source for the Study Guide) published a paper on possible solutions to the Yemeni crisis:

- Feierstein. (2022). *Yemen: ending the war, building a sustainable peace*. Middle East Institute Policy Memo. Available at:

<https://mei.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Yemen-Ending-the-War-Building-a-Sustainable-Peace.pdf>.

FURTHER READING:

We have gathered some material we recommend for further reading. Some delegates may notice that some of these sources have been widely used in writing this Study Guide. We encourage you to read these sources in full (or at least to some extent), as we have drawn from only a few of their chapters. The entire works covers much more than that, and they are extremely valuable for developing a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

While using it for a summarized history of the conflict, the book *Regime and Periphery in Northern Yemen: The Houthi Phenomenon* by Salmoni et al. offers an extensive overview of the conflict prior to 2010, tracing it back to its roots. We don't expect you to read it in full, but you can access it via:

- https://www.jstor.org/content/oa_book_monograph/10.7249/mg962dia.

If you're interested in how the Houthis gained their military power and which military strategies they used, you should refer to:

- Novita Hariyani, Haque, Wargadinata & Ulya. (2022). The strategy of Houthis to seize control of Yemen's territory: distortion of social norms in conflict. Jurnal CMES 15(2):119. Available at:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/370751410_THE_STRATEGY_OF_HOUTHIS_TO_SEIZE_CONTROL_OF_YEMEN'S_TERRITORY_DISTORTION_OF_SOCIAL_NORMS_IN_CONFLICT.

The book *Rules of Engagement* by the Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights includes several case studies of how historic negotiations with NSAGs went. We encourage you to skim through the red boxes. The book is available at:

- <https://geneva-academy.ch/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Rules-of-Engagement-EN.pdf>.

You can also refer to the UNSC 2023 report on the situation in Yemen (S/2023/833), which is available at:

- <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/document/s-2023-833.php>.

To better understand the Shia-Sunni divide, we encourage you to check:

- Manan, Abdul & Paran, Jovial. (2020). *The Sunni-Shia Conflict in the History of Islam: An Analytical Descriptive Study*. Palita: Journal of Social Religion Research. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/346246418_The_Sunni-Shia_Conflict_in_the_History_of_Islam_An_Analytical_Descriptive_Study
Anyhow, you're encouraged additional sources of your own.

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Topic B:

TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

As noted in 'Organized Crime: A growing threat to democracy, prepared by the General Secretariat of the Council of the EU (2025):

“What was once a largely localised threat has evolved into a global, highly networked system.”



Figure 6: Crime scene¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ Photograph credited to ULAN/Pool / Latin America News Agency.

KEY TERMS USED	THEIR DEFINITIONS
Corruption	The abuse of entrusted power by persons in a position of power for private gain.
Drug trafficking	According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), drug trafficking is a global illicit trade involving the cultivation, manufacture, distribution, and sale of substances that are subject to drug prohibition laws.
Human smuggling	According to UNODC, human smuggling consists of assisting migrants to enter or stay in a country illegally for a financial or material gain.
Illicit, criminal economy	The illicit global economy encompasses cross-border flows of goods, people, money, and information that are unauthorized by either the sending or receiving State.
Latin America	Latin America is a geopolitical and cultural concept referring to the States in the Americas where Romance languages (primarily Spanish, Portuguese, and French) are spoken, as a legacy of the colonisation by European Latin nations (mainly Spain, Portugal, and France).
Money laundering	The process of concealing the origins of illegally obtained money, typically by passing it through a complex sequence of banking transfers or commercial transactions.
Organized crime	According to UNODC, organized crime is a continuing criminal enterprise that rationally works to profit from illicit activities that are often in great public demand. Its existence is maintained through the corruption of public officials and the use of intimidation, threats, or force to protect its operations.
The Caribbean	A region in the middle of the Americas centered around the Caribbean Sea in the North Atlantic Ocean, mostly overlapping with the West Indies.

Transnational organised crime

According to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC), transnational organized crime refers to crime that is coordinated across national borders involving groups or markets of individuals working in more than one State to plan and execute illegal business ventures.

Introduction



Figure 7: Map of Latin America and the Caribbean¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ Photograph retrieved from Britannica, 2026.

OUTLINE OF THE TOPIC: This Study Guide examines the multifaceted challenge of addressing transnational organised crime in Latin America and the Caribbean within the framework of the UNSC. It provides an in-depth overview of the criminal landscape, the relevant international legal framework, and the central questions that any resolution adopted by this committee must seek to answer.

Latin America and the Caribbean (see the map above), a region home to 8% of the world's population, **has become a major centre of criminal activity**. The region accounts for approximately **33% of the world's homicides**, reflecting the cost of this criminal landscape. In countries such as Honduras, Jamaica, Ecuador, and Haiti, homicide rates have reached levels comparable to, or exceeding, those recorded in some active conflict zones elsewhere in the world.¹¹⁸

Much of this violence is caused by the **free movement of illegal weapons** in Brazil and neighbouring countries. **Drug trafficking cartels**, **human smuggling networks**, and large-scale **money laundering schemes** are also to blame. These activities prosper due to their high financial returns. In fact, they generate an estimated one hundred billion dollars annually in illicit revenues.¹¹⁹ **Drug trafficking is at the forefront**, as the region is home to three of the world's largest cocaine producing countries: Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia.

The **consequences of this crisis extend beyond the borders of this region**. At the same time, consumer demand for illicit drugs in North America and Europe sustains the economic foundations of the region's criminal economies. Therefore, tackling **transnational organized crime** in Latin America and the Caribbean is **a matter of international cooperation**.¹²⁰ However, many Latin American and Caribbean States today also seek to strengthen **regional cooperation**.

NOTE FROM THE CHAIRS: Delegates are invited to **consider regional responses** while simultaneously evaluating how to **reduce international trade** in illicit goods.

¹¹⁸ Cavalari, Manjarrés & Newton, 2025; Maloney, Melendez & Morales, 2025.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Global Financial Integrity, 2025.

The fight against organized crime must adopt a **comprehensive approach** that combines **criminal prosecution** measures with **social prevention** policies. This involves addressing the underlying causes of crime, such as poverty, inequality, and lack of opportunity. Investing in social and economic development programs can help reduce communities' vulnerability to the influence of organized crime.¹²¹

The region is characterized by **weak democratic institutions**, despite significant progress having been made by certain States in strengthening them.¹²² Moreover, the Latin American and Caribbean States that experience high levels of **corruption** are particularly vulnerable to the **laundering of criminal proceeds**. Corruption erodes governance and institutions, enabling weak oversight mechanisms that fail to prevent and counter financial crimes. Furthermore, corruption facilitates the entry of illicit financial flows into the financial system and degrades sectors of the economy, creating an ideal ecosystem for laundering money and assets.¹²³

NOTE FROM THE CHAIRS: Delegates are advised to **address the structural causes underlying the prevalence of transnational organized crime** in Latin America and the Caribbean, as they are the cornerstone of this issue.

Historical background

Organized crime in Latin America and the Caribbean dates to the 1970s, a time during which the trade of cocaine expanded rapidly, which led to criminal activities becoming deeply involved in politics and governance.

In the 1970s, the **demand for psychoactive drugs increased** massively, and therefore, the production of coca in Colombia increased rapidly. **The Medellín Cartel** (a loose coalition of Colombian drug trafficking organizations based primarily in Medellín, Colombia; it was the first major drug cartel in Colombia) rose in the mid-1970s, when Colombian marijuana

¹²¹ UNDP, 2025.

¹²² Georgetown Americas Institute, 2025.

¹²³ Global Financial Integrity, 2025.

traffickers started to smuggle cocaine into the United States of America (US). As the demand kept on growing, **traffickers began to expand their operations** by purchasing private planes and building modern drug laboratories.¹²⁴

In 1973, during the Nixon era, the US established the Drug Enforcement Administration, which marked **the beginning of what Americans call a “war on drugs”**. In fact, in 1971, former US President Richard Nixon declared drug abuse to be “public enemy number one”. Under US President Ronald Reagan, the war on drugs expanded and prioritized criminal punishment over treatment, which led to a **significant rise in incarceration for nonviolent drug offenses**. US First Lady Nancy Reagan also launched **the "Just Say No" campaign** to educate children about the dangers of drug use. **The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986**¹²⁵ allocated \$1.7 billion to the war on drugs and established mandatory minimum prison sentences for drug offenses.¹²⁶

During the 1980s, the **Colombian cartels reached their peak**, as the Medellín Cartel brought in up to \$60 million a day in drug profits. The **fall of these organizations in the early 1990s** did not dismantle the underlying market. As Colombian trafficking groups were weakened through law enforcement pressure, **Mexican organizations progressively assumed control** of most of the trafficking chain.¹²⁷

Criminal organizations didn't limit their scope of action to drug trafficking, they **extended their markets to other illicit activities** such as human smuggling, money laundering, contraband, and illegal mining.

More recently, the criminal networks that were primarily concentrated in Mexico and Colombia have **expanded into new regions such as Ecuador, Peru, and Chile**. Structural factors such as political instability, limited State control over borders, and ineffective law

¹²⁴ Britannica, 2026.

¹²⁵ *Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986*, Pub. L. No. 99-570, 100 Stat. 3207 (1986).

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ Krupp, 2010.

enforcement, have enabled criminal actors to consolidate power and **infiltrate state institutions**.¹²⁸

Legal instruments addressing transnational organized crime

United Nations

To counter transnational organized crime, **the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime** (also known as **the Palermo Convention**)¹²⁹ was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) on 15 November 2000. This convention became the **principal international instrument** for combating transnational organized crime, as it provides a framework through which States can strengthen international cooperation against organized criminal activity. The convention is **a legally binding instrument** through which governments commit to act and cooperate against organized crime. With 195 States Parties,¹³⁰ it is one of the world's most widely ratified conventions. The **UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)** serves as the Secretariat of the convention.¹³¹

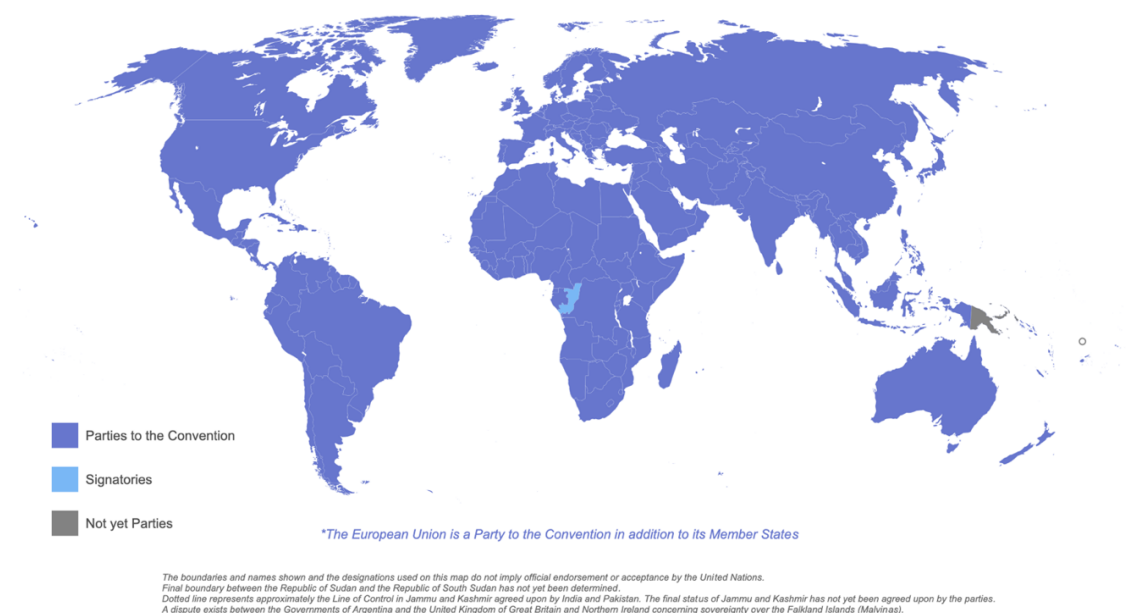


Figure 8: Status of ratification of UNTOC¹³²

¹²⁸ Hecimovich, 2025.

¹²⁹ United Nations, *United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime*, 15 November 2000, 2225 U.N.T.S. 209.

¹³⁰ As of 27 August 2026.

¹³¹ UNODC, n.d.a.

¹³² Photograph retrieved from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

There are three protocols supplementary to UNTOC (also known as **the Palermo Protocols**):¹³³

- 1.) **Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children;**¹³⁴
- 2.) **Protocol Against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air;**¹³⁵ and
- 3.) **Protocol Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition.**¹³⁶

Organization of American States

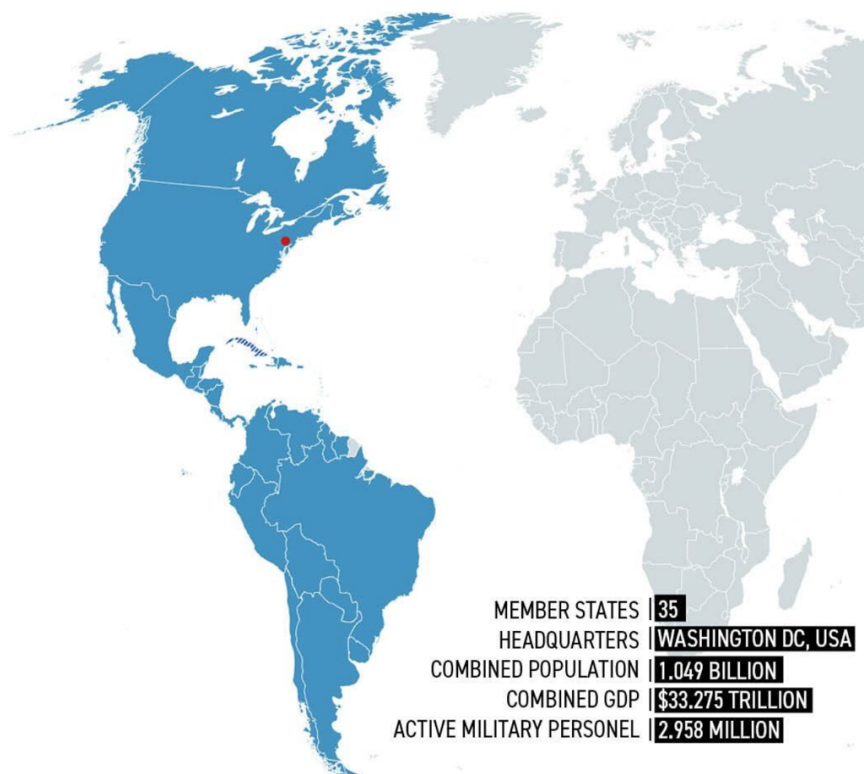


Figure 9: Membership of the Organization of American States¹³⁷

¹³³ UNODC, n.d.a.

¹³⁴ United Nations, *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime*, 15 November 2000, 2237 U.N.T.S. 319.

¹³⁵ United Nations, *Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime*, 15 November 2000, 2241 U.N.T.S. 507.

¹³⁶ United Nations, *Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime*, 31 May 2001, 2326 U.N.T.S. 208.

¹³⁷ Photograph retrieved from atlas.emp1re.

The Organization of American States (OAS) is a regional multilateral organization that comprises 35 States of the Western Hemisphere, bringing together the States of North, South and Central America. It aims to promote respect for human rights and social and economic development among its Member States.¹³⁸

Important legal instruments, negotiated under the auspice of the OAS are:

- **The Inter-American Convention Against Corruption (IACAC)**¹³⁹ aims to enhance cooperation among the nations of the hemisphere in the battle against domestic and transnational acts of corruption.¹⁴⁰
- **The Inter-American Convention Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives, and Other Related Materials (CIFTA)**¹⁴¹ establishes a framework for tracing and suppressing the illegal arms trade, which heavily contributes to the region's elevated homicide rates.¹⁴²

Key forms of transnational organized crime

Drug trafficking

Drug trafficking stands as the defining feature of the organised crime landscape in Latin America and the Caribbean. It is the primary source of revenue on which the region's most powerful criminal organisations rely.¹⁴³

The region is home to **three of the world's largest cocaine-producing States: Colombia, Bolivia, and Peru**, and serves as the **principal transit corridor** for cocaine destined for North American and European markets (*see figure below*).

¹³⁸ Meyer, 2026.

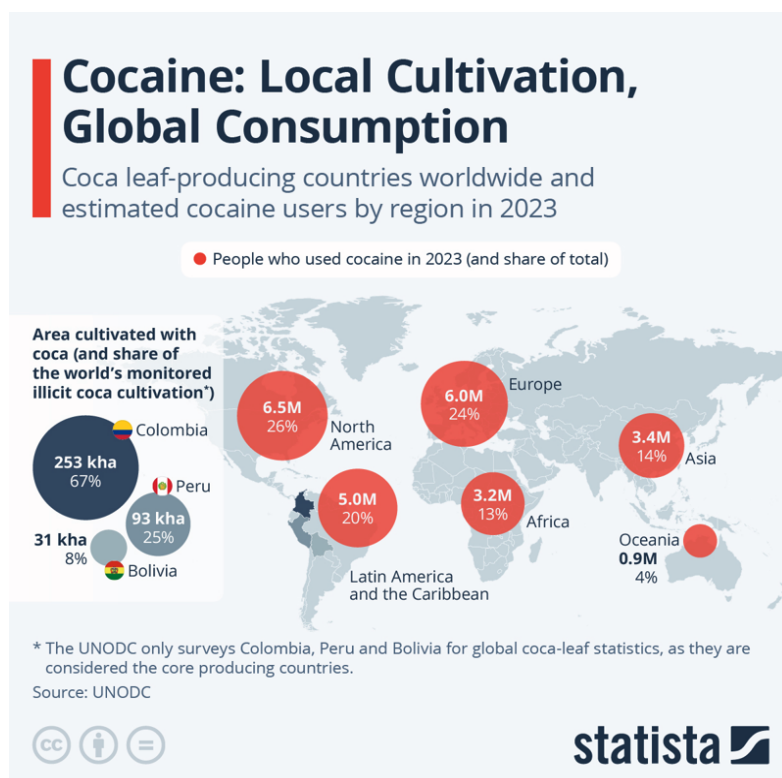
¹³⁹ Organization of American States, *Inter-American Convention against Corruption*, 29 March 1996, OAS Treaty Series No. B-58.

¹⁴⁰ U.S. Department of State, 1998.

¹⁴¹ Organization of American States, *Inter-American Convention Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives, and Other Related Materials*, 14 November 1997, OAS Treaty Series No. A-63.

¹⁴² OAS, n.d.

¹⁴³ International Crisis Group, n.d.

Figure 10: Cocaine production and consumption¹⁴⁴

Colombia alone accounted for about 90% of the cocaine seized in the United States in recent years. The total value of the cocaine market is estimated at over \$100 billion annually. However, the majority of these revenues are captured by criminal organisations rather than the farmers who cultivate the coca leaf.¹⁴⁵

The two most powerful drug trafficking organisations operating in the region are from Mexico, namely the **Sinaloa Cartel** and the **Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG)**. Both organisations have diversified their activities beyond cocaine trafficking by undertaking operations in the production and distribution of synthetic opioids, especially fentanyl, which has driven a dramatic escalation in drug overdose deaths in the United States. Over a quarter of a million Americans have died from fentanyl overdoses since 2021.¹⁴⁶

Beyond Mexico, Brazil is home to one of the most powerful and dangerous criminal organizations in the world: the **Brazilian Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC)**, which also engages in drug trafficking. Originally, this organisation was a prison gang in São Paulo

¹⁴⁴ Retrieved from Statista, 2025.

¹⁴⁵ US Drug Enforcement Administration, 2025, p. 44.

¹⁴⁶ Council on Foreign Relations, 2026.

during the early 1990s, but it later extended its reach across Brazil and into neighbouring States. It is known to primarily employ guerrilla tactics and terrorist attacks as means of achieving its goals. With its evolving sophistication, transnationalization, and presence not only in all South American states but also on other continents, the PCC has generated considerable debate regarding the best way to classify the group.¹⁴⁷

Financial crime and money laundering

The financial dimensions of the criminal economy are of particular relevance to the UNSC. Criminal organisations operating in the region generate revenues that exceed the public budgets of many of the States in which they operate. These profits are laundered through real estate investment, front companies, trade-based money laundering, and sometimes, cryptocurrency. The money is then integrated into the formal financial system in ways that are difficult to detect and disrupt. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates that money laundering globally represents between two and five percent of global GDP annually.¹⁴⁸

UNODC implements **the Regional Corruption and Financial Crime Hub for Latin America and the Caribbean**, a regional initiative aimed at providing **anti-corruption and financial crime advisory services and technical assistance** to States in the region in order to fast-track implementation of **the United Nations Convention against Corruption**. The Hub supports the three regional platforms established in Latin America and the Caribbean, namely: South America and Mexico (2019), Central America (2023) and the Caribbean (2023), and the implementation of their respective roadmaps. An important extension of the Hub is **the Regional Illicit Finance Fusion Center**, which focuses specifically on combating money laundering, illicit financial flows, and terrorism financing. The Fusion Center helps Member States improve their anti-money-laundering and counter-terrorism financing capacities by enhancing information-sharing and regional cooperation.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Fonseca, 2020.

¹⁴⁸ IMF, 2001.

¹⁴⁹ UNODC, n.d.b.

Impact of criminal economies on state institutions

State capture

State capture is the exercise of power by private actors — through control over resources, threat of violence, or other forms of influence — to shape policies or implementation in service of their narrow interests.

State capture, or political corruption, **enables the rapid development of transnational organized crime** as it is one of its direct components. Corruption is a consequence of the functioning of government, as it is often used to cover up actions and protect individual interests rather than the common good. It undermines the principles on which democratic regimes are built, such as the rule of law and fair elections. Political corruption thrives on weak legal frameworks and weak legal capacities to punish and prevent it.¹⁵⁰

This phenomenon has a destructive impact on many fronts. On the one hand, large amounts of money are diverted from the formal economy, fuelling the growth of the informal economy. This, in turn, complicates the implementation of effective economic policies and undermines citizens' trust in their authorities. State capture can be characterized as the long-term destructive consequence of the drug economy, as **criminal interests systematically manage to infiltrate state institutions**. Criminal organizations mostly use threats and violence to achieve their objectives but often resort to bribery and the abuse of state officials as well.¹⁵¹

EXAMPLE 1: The case of former Honduran president Juan Orlando Hernández

Juan Orlando Hernández was extradited to the United States in 2022, and convicted of three counts of drug trafficking and weapons conspiracy. He had been Honduras' most powerful political figure for more than two decades, but his presidency was plagued by allegations of corruption. Hondurans had been protesting against the alleged corruption within the Hernández government, the judiciary, the military, the police, and other public administration entities for years, demanding that the embezzlement of public funds come

¹⁵⁰ Fiebelkorn, 2019.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

to an end. Juan Orlando Hernández had used his presidential power to protect the activities of drug traffickers, including his brother Tony Hernández, in exchange for bribes.¹⁵²

EXAMPLE 2: The case of former Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro

On 3 January 2026, the United States carried out an operation aimed at capturing former Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro and his wife. The former Venezuelan president had been accused of conspiring with Colombian guerrilla groups to traffic cocaine into the United States, as part of what U.S. authorities described as narcoterrorism conspiracy.¹⁵³

Both above examples illustrate how criminal actors create conditions of institutional instability and demonstrate the power that criminal organizations hold to establish corrupt ties with public officials.

Democratic political institutions are essential in the fight against state capture and corruption as a whole. They are crucial for ensuring accountability, as they enable checks and balances – a principle of government under which separate branches of power are empowered to prevent actions by other branches and are required to share power – as well as greater transparency within the system overall.

Criminal governance

Criminal governance can be defined as the imposition of rules or restrictions on behaviour by a criminal organization.

NOTE: State capture and criminal governance are two different concepts! State capture refers to the infiltration and corruption from within, whereas criminal governance refers to a situation in which the State is too weak to function, therefore letting a criminal organization step in and take on the functions of the State.

¹⁵² U.S. Department of Justice, 2022.

¹⁵³ United States v. Nicolás Maduro Moros et al., No. 1:11-cr-205 (S.D.N.Y. Superseding Indictment, 26 March 2020), p. 2, para. 3-4.

There are many issues linked to criminal governance, as it has become a form of political technology, thereby reshaping democracy itself.

When criminal organizations establish parallel authority structures within States, they create ungoverned spaces that become hubs for transnational threats such as, but not limited to, arms trafficking, human smuggling, money laundering and the movement of terrorist financing across borders with little effective State interference.¹⁵⁴

The transnational nature of criminal networks highlights the idea that criminal governance and/or state capture in a particular state can rapidly destabilize its neighbours.

EXAMPLE: Ecuador

Ecuador has been enduring a severe criminal crisis resulting from the ongoing conflicts between criminal organizations involved in drug trafficking. Ecuador is located between two of the biggest cocaine producing States in Latin America, Peru and Colombia, placing it at the core of the regional drug trade, as drug supply routes run through the State. Ecuadorian criminal groups (Los Choneros and Los Lobos) have seized control of the national prison system and port infrastructures by establishing parallel structures of authority in territories where the State had withdrawn and/or lost most of its authority.¹⁵⁵

Study case: Haiti



Figure 11: Haiti on map¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Feldmann & Luna, 2022.

¹⁵⁵ Rhon, 2025.

¹⁵⁶ Retrieved from Britannica, 2026.

In Haiti, a country located in the Caribbean on the island of Hispaniola, armed gangs have been controlling large areas of territory, and violence has spread well beyond the capital Port-au-Prince, weakening the State's ability to govern and deliver basic services. Today, Haiti is one of the poorest countries in the world with a 2.99 GDP per capita, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF).¹⁵⁷

The Haitian crisis can be traced back to 1957, when, under former dictator François Duvalier, Haiti experienced growing international isolation and corruption. From then, criminal organisations, especially gangs, grew and undermined democratic stability. In fact, from 2004 to 2017, Haiti was subject to international peacekeeping efforts through **the United Nations Stabilisation Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH)**.¹⁵⁸



Figure 12: Port-au-Prince gang territories¹⁵⁹

As the Haitian state has lost much of its authority, armed gangs now operate as parallel authorities in large areas of the State. By 2024, armed gangs exercised control over about 80% of Port-au-Prince, including key infrastructures such as the main seaport and fuel

¹⁵⁷ IMF, 2026.

¹⁵⁸ Sillah, 2024.

¹⁵⁹ Photograph retrieved from Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2022.

deports.¹⁶⁰ According to a report by Amnesty International, more than 5,600 people were killed in gang-related violence in 2024.¹⁶¹

It should be noted, that in addition to this security crisis, Haiti has long been vulnerable to natural disasters, which have exacerbated the parallel humanitarian crisis. To illustrate, Hurricane Melissa, in October 2025, killed at least 46 people, destroyed or damaged nearly 842,400 homes and critical infrastructure, and severely disrupted livelihoods.¹⁶²

In response to both the security and humanitarian crisis, the UNSC authorised **the Multinational Security Support Mission (MSS)** under **Resolution 2699**, adopted in October 2023. The resolution was adopted under **Chapter VII of the UN Charter**, reflecting the Council's determination that the situation in Haiti constituted a threat to international peace and security rather than solely a regional issue.¹⁶³

The MSS, led by Kenya, was mandated to support the Haitian National Police in restoring security and public order. The UNSC had formally determined that the displacement of State authority by criminal gangs, as well as the mass atrocities associated with it, constituted a threat to international peace and security within the meaning of Article 39 of the Charter.¹⁶⁴

The most important UNSC resolutions on the Haitian crisis since 2017 are the following:

- **Resolution 2814**,¹⁶⁵ renewing the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti mandate for a year, until 31 January 2027.
- **Resolution 2793**,¹⁶⁶ authorising UN Member States to transition the MSS mission in Haiti into a **Gang Suppression Force (GSF)**.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁰ UNODC, n.d.c.

¹⁶¹ Amnesty International, 2021.

¹⁶² UNICEF, 2026, p. 2, para. 11.

¹⁶³ United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 2699 (2023)*, S/RES/2699 (2023), 2 October 2023.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 2814 (2026)*, S/RES/2814 (2026), 29 January 2026.

¹⁶⁶ United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 2793 (2025)*, S/RES/2793 (2025), 30 September 2025.

¹⁶⁷ For all United Nations documents concerning Haiti, see the following website: <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/haiti/>.

Human costs of transnational organized crime

Secretary-General António Guterres in his remarks to the UNSC on Transnational Organized Crime, Growing Challenges and New Threats, 7 December 2023.¹⁶⁸

“The activities of transnational organized crime take many forms, but the ramifications are the same: weakened governance, corruption and lawlessness, open violence, death, and destruction. [...] Human trafficking – a heinous violation of fundamental human rights that preys on the most vulnerable – continues with impunity.”

Transnational organized crime has consequences that go beyond security challenges. Today, violence linked to organized crime is responsible for more deaths globally than wars, civil conflicts, and terrorism combined. Latin America and the Caribbean comprise only 9% of the global population, yet they **account for nearly one-third of all global homicides**, primarily driven by the drug trade. Criminal organizations often fight to seize control of drug routes, turning the neighbouring areas into conflict zones that force people to flee either to nearby cities or States.¹⁶⁹

Forced displacement

In Latin America and the Caribbean, **more than 21 million people are forcibly displaced** across the region.¹⁷⁰ Among these 21 million displaced people, **9.5 million are internally displaced**. According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), internally displaced persons (also known as IDPs) are people who have been forced to flee their homes due to conflict, violence, persecution or disasters, but who remain within their own State.¹⁷¹ The Norwegian Refugee Council has described neighbourhoods controlled by gangs as “hidden frontlines”, referring to the frontlines of a war, even though there is no officially recognized armed conflict.¹⁷²

EXAMPLE 1: Mexico

¹⁶⁸ CEB, n.d.

¹⁶⁹ UNODC Regional Office for Central America and the Caribbean, n.d.; Bisca et al., 2024.

¹⁷⁰ UNHCR, n.d.a.

¹⁷¹ UNHCR, n.d.b.

¹⁷² Ochoal, 2026.

Many families flee because of threats of kidnapping, death, forced recruitment of children, and extortion. To illustrate, in Mexico alone, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre estimated that about 28,000 people were internally displaced in 2024 due to mass violence-related events, representing an increase of 120% compared to 2023. In addition, more than 320,000 families were estimated to have changed homes in 2023 alone to escape criminal threats.¹⁷³

EXAMPLE 1: Venezuela

Criminal networks often view migration flows as profitable. According to the UNHCR, nearly 8 million Venezuelans are displaced globally, with the majority — more than 6.5 million — currently residing in Latin America and the Caribbean as a result of rampant violence, inflation, gang warfare, soaring crime rates, and shortages of food, medicine and essential services.¹⁷⁴

This humanitarian crisis has contributed to the growth of the **transnational criminal organization Tren de Aragua** (Venezuelan gang that evolved from a prison group into a powerful international criminal network). This criminal organization has seized control of parts of the 1,300-mile Colombian-Venezuelan border and taken advantage of more than 40 illegal crossing points. By controlling these corridors, the gang has established a highly profitable system of migrant smuggling and human trafficking, specifically targeting vulnerable women through debt bondage, and forcing them into sexual slavery to repay arbitrary "travel debts".¹⁷⁵

According to the R4V Inter-Agency Coordination Platform, over 4.1 million Venezuelan migrants in destination countries lack regular status or legal residency. This legal limbo creates vulnerabilities that criminal networks exploit, as undocumented migrants cannot report extortion or trafficking to local police for fear of immediate deportation.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ UNHCR, n.d.c.

¹⁷⁴ UNHCR, n.d.d.

¹⁷⁵ Arocha, 2025.

¹⁷⁶ R4V, 2026.

Human trafficking

UNODC found that, in 2022, 4300 people were victims of human trafficking.¹⁷⁷ Human trafficking refers to the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of people through force, fraud or deception, with the aim of exploiting them for profit. Thus, human trafficking is considered one of the most serious forms of transnational organized crime (TOC). It is also one the main revenue streams of TOC.¹⁷⁸

According to UNODC, the share of victims trafficked for forced labour outside the commercial sex industry in Latin America (44%) is higher than in Europe and Central Asia. The two States in Latin America and the Caribbean with the largest percentages of their populations subjected to “modern slavery, are Haiti and the Dominican Republic, according to the Walk Free Foundation.¹⁷⁹

In 2018, International Criminal Police Organization (NITERPOL), rescued about 350 victims of sexual exploitation and forced labour in a coordinated operation targeting human trafficking in the Caribbean, Central and South America. Known as **Operation Libertad**, the operation was an international law enforcement action coordinated by INTERPOL. It resulted in the rescue of hundreds of victims and 22 arrests across 13 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.¹⁸⁰

NOTE FROM THE CHAIRS:

Keep in mind that displacement and killings are not the only humanitarian issues that arise from transnational organized crime. Delegates are advised and invited to look into the broader consequences of transnational organized crime such as, but not limited to, **sex trafficking, migrant smuggling**, and the **environmental impact of criminal activities** (for example through deforestation), and how it affects Indigenous peoples. Delegates are also invited to investigate how transnational organized crime contributes to the **growth of cybercrime** in Latin America and the Caribbean.

¹⁷⁷ UNODC, n.d.d.

¹⁷⁸ UNODC, n.d.e.

¹⁷⁹ UNODC, n.d.d.; Seelke, 2016.

¹⁸⁰ INTERPOL, 2018.

Existing mechanisms

This section will examine some of the measures that the international community has taken in response to the expansion and impacts of transnational organized crime in Latin America and the Caribbean.

UNODC's Global Maritime Crime Programme

Maritime crime is another aspect of transnational organized crime, as **the sea is used as a channel for traditional transnational organized crime activities**, such as drug trafficking. A large amount of illicit goods is moved by sea. The UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime is the key legal framework applied to maritime crime when it involves an organized criminal group.¹⁸¹

Therefore, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime implemented **the Global Maritime Crime Program (GMCP)** to help Member States improve and coordinate their efforts against maritime crime. This programme **operates in 90 States** across Latin America and the Caribbean and works to enhance regional cooperation, mostly through the improved use of technologies.¹⁸²

In 2025, the GMCP trained 565 officers across 39 sessions and supported many initiatives including joint naval exercises such as **Exercise Event Horizon** (uniting 13 Caribbean nations) and the **Osprey Nexus Initiative** (piloting unmanned surveillance systems), as well as law enforcement operations like **Operación Poseidón** led by the Dominican Republic Navy.¹⁸³

In Latin America, the programme focused mainly on the Amazon corridor, donating remotely operated vehicle (ROV) technology to Brazil. ROVs are unoccupied, highly manoeuvrable underwater machines that can be used to explore ocean depths while being operated by someone at the water surface. The technology was used for hull inspections

¹⁸¹ UNODC, n.d.f.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ UNODC, n.d.g.

targeting drug trafficking. The programme further promoted intelligence-sharing agreements across the Brazil-Colombia-Peru border area and delivered geospatial and drone imagery training to counter environmental and organized crime.¹⁸⁴

Latin America and Caribbean Alliance for Security, Justice and Development

On 12 December 2024, during the Regional Security and Justice Summit in Barbados, **the Alliance for Security, Justice and Development** was launched. Established in December 2024 **with the support of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB)**, the Alliance is composed of and led by **23 borrowing Member Countries** of the Bank, which together account for 90% of the region's population, 95% of LAC's GDP, and 92% of the counts of homicide that take place in the region every year. 14 strategic partners also support the initiative, including the OAS, INTERPOL, the World Bank, and the UN Development Program (UNDP). The alliance has three pillars:

- 1.) protection of the most vulnerable populations and communities;
- 2.) strengthening security and justice institutions;
- 3.) reducing illicit markets.¹⁸⁵

Other

Delegates are also encouraged to explore other existing mechanisms, including, but not limited to:

- the **Implementation Agency for Crime and Security (IMPACS)**,¹⁸⁶
- the **Financial Action Task Force of Latin America (GAFILAT)**,¹⁸⁷
- the **Caribbean Financial Action Task Force (CFATF)**.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁴ UNODC, n.d.h.

¹⁸⁵ IDB, n.d.

¹⁸⁶ For further information, visit: CARICOM Implementation Agency for Crime and Security (IMPACS), n.d., <<https://www.caricomimpacs.org/>>.

¹⁸⁷ For further information, visit: GAFILAT, n.d., <<https://www.gafilat.org/index.php/es/espanol/18-inicio/gafilat/157-what-is-gafilat-3>>.

¹⁸⁸ For further information, visit: CARICOM, n.d., <<https://caricom.org/institutions/caribbean-financial-action-task-force/>>.

Points a resolution should address

- What mechanisms can the Council encourage or mandate to improve cooperation among regional States?
- What measures can the Council take to protect civilian populations living under criminal control in Haiti?
- How can the Council ensure that no breaches of international law occur with regard to State intervention?
- How should the Council handle situations where the very governments it must work with are themselves implicated in criminal networks (as illustrated by the Honduras and Venezuela cases)?
- How can the Council ensure that counter-crime measures do not disproportionately harm vulnerable populations?
- Through which mechanisms can money laundering be countered?
- How can maritime security and maritime routes be more secure and better supervised regarding illegal maritime drug flows?
- Are the existing legal instruments, including UNTOC and its Protocols, sufficient to address the current scale of transnational organized crime?

Additional preparation materials

VIDEO RESOURCES:

We encourage you to start by watching this short YouTube video before reading the study guide as it visually maps the conflict:

- UNICRIHQ. (2024). *The Nexus between Transnational Organized Crime and Terrorism in Latin America*. Available at:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1mswAaSjmy4>.

NECESSARY READING:

The following sources are considered necessary reading, as they will help you develop a broader understanding of the topic as a whole.

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<https://revistas.rcaap.pt/sociologiapp/article/view/2333/2220>.
- Bergman, Marcelo. (2018). "Illegal Drugs, Drug Trafficking and Violence in Latin America". *Springer International Publishing*. Available at:
https://www.academia.edu/84713499/Illegal_Drugs_Drug_Trafficking_and_Violence_in_Latin_America.
- Dammert, Lucía & Sampó, Carolina. (2025). "What do we know about organized crime in Latin America and the Caribbean? Trends, definitions and risks for democracy". *Regional Human Development Report 2025 Background Paper*. Available at:
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/397174528_What_do_we_know_about_organized_crime_in_Latin_America_and_the_Caribbean_Trends_definitions_and_risks_for_democracy_Lucia_Dammert_Carolina_Sampo_Regional_Human_Development_Report_2025_Background_Paper.

FURTHER READING:

If you wish to obtain more detailed information on specific points that are addressed in the Study Guide, we suggest that you consult the additional resources provided below.

On financial crime and money laundering:

- Schneider, Friedrich. (2011). “The Financial Flows of the Transnational Crime: Some Preliminary Empirical Results”. Economics of Security Working Paper Series 53, DIW Berlin, German Institute for Economic Research. Available at:
<https://ideas.repec.org/p/diw/diweos/diweos53.html>

On state capture:

- Rosen, Jonathan D. & Chabat, Jorge & Bagley, Bruce. (2019). “The Criminalization of States: The Relationship between States and Organized Crime”. Lanham: Lexington. Available at:
<https://www.inlibra.com/en/document/view/detail/uuid/8af18703-28a7-3a9d-a9ec-6ea379a8a57d>

On the Haitian crisis:

- Government of Haiti, European Union, IDB, United Nations & World Bank. (2024). “Haiti Rapid Crisis Impact Assessment”. Available at:
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