



# SciMUNC XVII

*HISTORICAL CRISIS COMMITTEE*

# Piracy on the Malacca Strait

BACKGROUND GUIDE

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## Letter from the Dais

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Dear Delegates,

Welcome to SCIMUNC XVII! I am Jasmine, a senior at the Bronx High School of Science. I know that for many this may be your first Crisis Committee- it may even be your first conference- no matter what stage in your MUN journey you are in, I hope that during the preparation for this Committee that we as your dias can help you. We are here to support you and to ensure that what occurs within the Committee remains diplomatic, all in the good spirit of exploration and personal growth. Your positions may not all be chronologically accurate and that is with good reason. What we hope to conduct here is a tapestry- a framework understanding of a period and a region which may often be underlooked through an intriguing perspective historically mythologized in the public consciousness: piracy. There is a common western perspective of piracy as swashbuckling rogues who pillage indiscriminately and I hope we can deconstruct this image together! It's a conference, let's all have fun. If you have any questions about anything at all, feel free to contact us and I hope you gain an experience and some perspective you didn't have before.

I am Michelle, a senior at the Bronx High School of Science and one of your chairs for this crisis committee. I joined our Model United Nations team in my sophomore year. My long-term passion for history has been further cultivated after joining Model UN as I debate with delegates from around the world at conferences across the nation on historical and current events. Not only have I expanded my love for history, I have also developed confidence in my public speaking and communication skills, which are vital for advocacy in our changing world. Whether this is your first Model UN conference or your last, I am beyond excited to be able to oversee this committee we have put immense effort into creating. As you negotiate with other delegates and challenge yourselves with the issue of piracy in the conflict amongst the countries lining the Malacca Strait, I hope you all cultivate not only your debate and public speech skills but also your confidence and ability to collaborate with others. If you have any questions regarding the committee, feedback on position papers, or general inquiries, please feel free to email me at [michelle1277@nycstudents.net](mailto:michelle1277@nycstudents.net).

Best,

Michelle Li (she/her) and Jasmine Chen (she/her)

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## Committee Description

The committee's focus is on the events directly preceding the Portuguese capture of Malacca in 1511, which marked the beginning of European confluence in the Southeast Asia region and a drastic rise in piracy. The committee will consist of major political actors from the time period of the crumbling Malaccan Sultanate, the Ming Dynasty, the Portuguese Crown, and other international diplomats in the region.

Delegates will be tasked with reenacting the delicate political environment and diverse interests that characterized this historical period. In the wake of the fall of Malacca, representatives will face the challenge of navigating a region fraught with escalating tensions while fighting for the common goal of mercantilism.

The primary objective of this committee will be to foster dialogue, cooperation, and conflict resolution among the diverse factions while safeguarding their respective national interests. Committee members representing the Malaccan Sultanate will strive to find a path toward stability amidst the chaos, seeking support from neighboring states and potential allies. They will aim to preserve what remains of

their sovereignty and cultural heritage in the face of European encroachment and piracy threats. Conversely, the Portuguese delegates will embrace their role as ambitious colonial powers, determined to establish their dominance in the region and exploit its vast economic potential. They will have to confront the challenge of balancing their expansionist objectives with maintaining regional stability to safeguard their trade routes. The Ming Dynasty representatives will grapple with preserving their regional influence, seeking to counter the Portuguese expansion while maintaining their valuable tributary system with neighboring states. Additionally, international diplomats in the region will play a crucial role in mediating between competing interests and working toward diplomatic resolutions to prevent open conflicts.

The committee's success will hinge on the ability of delegates to empathize with the historical context and act in a manner that reflects the motivations and constraints of the 16th-century actors they represent. By working together to find common ground, delegates strike a delicate balance between

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promoting their national interests while seeking to rid the virulent piracy which foments within their waters.

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## Background Information



What should first be of note is the uniqueness of the strait which made it so distinctive- the narrow, funnel-shaped passage between the Malay Peninsula and Sumatra- created a sense of a defined maritime corridor that once entered, allowed for no detours. Sea faring people were practically endemic to the area, with the Orang Laut being of particular prominence in the southern coast of the Malay Peninsula and eastern Sumatra.

Historians believe that these seafaring people, who could not subsist entirely by sea, would initially collect valuable objects like ceramics through salvage and trade with land communities. However, they eventually began attacking passing vessels- being outright referred to as pirates- especially during the 5th century when the sea route between China and India.

As trade with China grew, the supply of items like rare seaweeds and shells became crucial, leading to competition among rulers along the Strait. The Orang Laut, with their local knowledge, acted as pilots to guide or pressure ships into specific harbors. Rulers encouraged the harassment of rival shipping lanes, and the Orang Laut's loyalty was reinforced through a share of captured loot and court titles. The focus was on obtaining valuable items, and human captives seemed less important. Their reputation continued to escalate through the 9th century and the reputation for the Malacca Strait as a cove for pirates was adopted.

The partnership between the Orang Laut and coastal rulers was well-established by the time Melaka emerged as a major trading hub around 1403. The Orang Laut, with their large numbers and maritime skills, became crucial allies for Melaka's kings. Their sea products attracted traders, contributing significantly to its economy and the intermarriages between the Orang Laut and Malay leaders were common. They remained loyal friends of Melaka rulers for centuries and played a pivotal role by patrolling the seas, warning of threats, bringing traders to port, and interfering with the shipping of Melaka's rivals. Essentially,

these sea-going communities acted as an extension of the state, conducting approved attacks on trade vessels and delivering captured cargoes to the center, a practice described as 'piracy' by later European explorers.

Since antiquity, the Straits of Malacca have long been the vital shipping lane for trade from China to India and the Middle East, the receiver and transmitter of ideas and changes on a large scale. It was at the perfect confluence and midpoint between India and China. From the seventh to the eleventh century, the Srivijaya empire controlled them. The state of Malacca, founded by Parameswara in 1399 AD, was an important trading and shipping center that grew rapidly after its ruler converted to Islam. Muslim traders from the Middle East, India, China, Persia, Turkey, Armenia, and others came to Malacca to do business. By the 15th century, Malacca had grown into an international trade center to replace Srivijaya, achieving greater success due to rapidly growing trade factors. The Malacca Sultanate, which initially was a small kingdom, had grown into an empire and took over the role of the former trade center held by Srivijaya.

The success of Malacca in attracting commercial attention proved its ability to handle the trade center and provide modern infrastructure facilities efficiently. Chinese trade had been spurred by Emperor Yung Loh at approximately 1403, sending a delegation around the approximate founding of Malacca. He had an interest in establishing diplomatic relations across South East Asia to ensure the growth and widening influence within the region. With that, a diplomatic relationship was created between the two states through Ying Chin, a messenger. So throughout history, the Malacca Sultanate would call upon the Ming Empire for protection against their rival Ayudah. From 1405-1435, China's protection and support of the trading port helped it grow into an international trading port while Chinese merchants reaped the benefit of special privileges. As the Chinese immigrants who came to Malacca consisted largely of men, this resulted largely in the intermarriage between the Chinese merchants who migrated to Malacca in the 15th century and the local women resulted in the emergence of a new community known as the Chinese guard.

In 1511, the Portuguese disrupted the existing order and created hardship in the

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region by attacking Muslim trade and territory, instating the Cartaz system for shipping in their sphere of influence and raising the Cross in an Islamized region. The Cartaz system was essentially a permit system that required merchants and traders to obtain a license- 'cartaz'- in order to conduct trade in Portuguese-controlled territories. It served as a means of control and taxation through regulating who could engage in trade. The Ottoman intrusion in the Iberian Peninsula and its expansion into central Europe and towards the maritime spaces in the Indian Ocean also played a role in how the Portuguese conducted their operations in Asia. In the harsh reality of the Portuguese conquest of Malacca and their efforts to monopolize the spice trade, restricting the functions of the Muslim traders, crucial choices had to be made by the local ports. Aceh Dar as-Salam, founded in approximately 1500 from two rivaling north Sumatran polities, stood out as Portuguese Malacca's nemesis. The relocation of Muslim trade networks from the conquered port of Malacca to Sumatra's eastern ports was the impetus for Aceh's economic rise, laying the foundations for its becoming one of Asia's greatest maritime powers of that time.

Because of its strategic location as a trade route linking China, India, and the Middle East, the Malaccan Strait attracted various actors with conflicting interests, ultimately creating a fertile ground for piracy and conflict. Piracy runs rampant along Southeast Asia, with seafaring tribes like the Orang Laut, Moken, and Sama Bajau notorious for patrolling their seas often on the behest of the leaders of the regions. The Orang Laut in particular were essentially considered state-sanctioned pirates.

The Portuguese conquest of Malacca was a prolonged process that began in 1509 and culminated in a final siege led by Viceroy Alfonso d'Albuquerque in July 1511. The initial stages involved intimidating the Malacca Sultanate to release prisoners of war and demanding a heavy indemnity and trade rights. When the sultanate refused, both sides prepared for war. The turning point in the Portuguese assault came with capturing the key landing place at the mouth of the Malacca River and St. Paul's Hill. The final battle on July 24, 1511, resulted in the breach of Malacca's defenses and the sultan's retreat upriver.

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Portuguese success was aided by their technological superiority, discipline, and military strategy, as well as a better-stocked arsenal. The Malaccan forces, relying on traditional weapons, were no match for the Portuguese. The Malacca Sultanate's lack of investment in superior arms and the use of mercenaries with uncertain loyalty contributed to its defeat. Foreign merchants, like the Javanese, Burmese, and Indians, shifted their allegiance to the Portuguese and assisted in eliminating the remaining Malacca forces at Pagoh. The once-mighty sultanate was vanquished, but the descendants of Malacca's sultans established smaller, less powerful kingdoms throughout Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula

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## Main Committee Topic

The committee is set in the aftermath of the invasion of Malacca. The strait has been captured by the Portuguese and given its strategic and cultural importance to many countries involved- being the halfway point between India and China- many parties had skin in the game. In this situation, major groups from throughout the region who have all had some association, cultural or economic, find themselves flocking to Malacca in order to preserve their trading ports while grappling with the issue/concept of piracy.

Alfonso d'Albuquerque became the de facto ruler of Malacca in the immediate aftermath of the capture of Malacca. The Portuguese Crown has granted him significant autonomy within the region.

Immediately after the capture of Malacca, once the Sultan had relocated to Johor, the Orang Laut followed suit or dispersed into other neighboring kingdoms. Your goal is to settle disputes within the region, with the unifying question of how can the delegates navigate a region fraught with escalating tensions while striving for the

common goal of mercantilism- finding a way to balance the national tensions.

You must also determine the extent to which the Orang Laut's presence in the region is a threat- what constitutes as piracy and what is colonialism? How do we maintain trade within the region and prosperity of the Malacca Strait? How do we combat "piracy" within the region?

### *Questions to Consider*

1. How were the actions of sea-going communities like the Orang Laut perceived by Europeans when they reached the region in the 16th century?
2. What were the distinctions and similarities between piracy as practiced by indigenous groups and European attacks on rival ships in the eyes of Europeans at that time?
3. Were there any attempts by other European powers or regional actors to challenge Portuguese control and influence in the strait after 1511?
4. What were the socio-economic consequences of the Portuguese occupation on the local populations?

## Bloc Positions

Malaccan Sultanate:

### ***Mahmud Shah of Malacca***

Mahmud Shah is the young ascended ruler of the Sultanate of Malacca. He is known to be a formidable yet responsible monarch leader. In the wake of the Portuguese invasion, Shah was forced to retreat south where he established his capital in Bintan (now part of Indonesia). Even so, Mahmud Shah continues to receive unwavering loyalty and allegiance from neighboring states that rendered him as the ruler of Malacca, maintaining his military strength and beneficial connections with leaders from various states.

### ***Tun Perak***

Tun Perak is the fifth *bendahara* (prime minister) of the Sultanate of Malacca. He is a soldier-statesman who successfully led the Malaccan army in defeating Siamese invaders in 1445, gaining prestige and the position of prime minister. He has a reputation for being highly loyal to the Malacca monarchy and embodies strong leadership qualities evoking a trust by the people in his skills and knowledge.

### ***Ratu (Queen) Kalinyamat***

Ratu Kalinyamat is the reigning queen of the Kalinyamat Sultanate (Javanese Islamic region in northern Central Java). Historically, she gained notoriety for her attack and naval expeditions on Portuguese Malacca. Due to the prosperous region of the Kalinyamat Sultanate, Kalinyamat is immensely wealthy and has an adept military force.

### ***Raja Mudaliar***

Mudaliar is renowned in Malacca for being the wealthiest trader and the Chief of Port. Due to his extensive involvement in the trade along the Malacca Strait, he created a network of connections with traders from around the world. However, his dedication to the business of trade has caused the monarchy and the public to be wary of his true intentions. His connections and passion for business causes him to act in his own best interest in the pursuit of personal wealth accumulation.

### ***Hang Tuah***

Hang Tuah was a distinguished *laksamana* (admiral), diplomat, and ambassador in Malacca. After his greatest

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feat of saving Tun Perak trapped in a violent conflict, he became recognized and deeply respected by the monarchy. He became an aide and ambassador for the monarchy, embarking on diplomatic journeys to allied states. Tuah dedicates great loyalty to the Malacca monarchy and has vast military and diplomatic experience and knowledge.

Portuguese:

*Crusades and feudalism, Islamophobia and the warrior culture were central to the Portuguese worldview. But this conquistador also understood global patterns of trade and realized that if he seized Malacca, Portugal would gain an upper hand on a European commercial rival: the city of Venice.*

### ***Afonso de Albuquerque***

Afonso de Albuquerque, 1st Duke of Goa was a Portuguese admiral and statesman. He had great ambitions as a navigator and explorer in an attempt to dominate trade amongst the Southeast Asian regions. With his bold and ambitious approaches when conquering Malacca, Albuquerque has knowledgeable, experienced, and creative skills in strategizing and attacking.

### ***Captain Fernão Pires de Andrade***

Fernão de Andrade was a Portuguese trader, pharmacist, and diplomat who largely worked alongside Afonso de Albuquerque. Andrade's goals as a diplomat were to establish a positive and mutually beneficial relationship with China. However, due to his eager mission to establish trade with China, the Portuguese left a negative impression. The Chinese government was highly suspicious of Andrade for being a spy after he had sent ships along the Fujian, China coast.

### ***Tomé Pires***

Tomé Pires was a Portuguese pharmacist, colonial administrator, and documenter. Similarly to the fate of Fernão Pires de Andrade, the Chinese were suspicious of his intentions and refused contact, as the Chinese relationship with the Portuguese deteriorated. Pires' strength is his writing, documenting his surroundings which prove to be beneficial to the Portuguese in their conquest.

### ***Ferdinand Magellan***

Ferdinand Magellan was a highly skilled naval officer and explorer. He embarked on journeys to find optimal trade routes for the

Portuguese and was the first to find a route to Asia via the Pacific. Due to his loyalty to the Spanish empire, Magellan received the position of Commander of the Order of Santiago providing him immense naval power.

### ***Duarte Fernandes***

Duarte Fernandes was a Portuguese diplomat and explorer. He worked closely with Afonso de Albuquerque and was sent on diplomatic missions to present the Portuguese capture of Malacca in a positive light. Fernandes successfully established cordial relationships with other regions including the Kingdom of Siam. His reputable and charismatic persona establishes him as an able ambassador.

### ***Dom Francisco de Almeida***

Dom Francisco de Almeida was a Portuguese explorer, soldier, and nobleman whose goal was to further develop and improve the Portuguese spice trade. He constructed designated trading posts and communicated with local authorities. Francisco de Almeida's abilities in construction and communication established him as a crucial figure of establishing Portuguese trade in various regions.

### ***Diogo Lopes de Sequeira***

A Portuguese fidalgo who had been sent, in 1509, by the Portuguese Viceroy of India, Dom Francisco de Almeida, to establish contact with the Malacca Sultanate. His mission was part of the larger Portuguese efforts to expand their influence and control over trade routes in the Indian Ocean. Diogo Lopes de Sequeira's diplomatic mission to Malacca marked one of the earliest Portuguese interactions with the Sultanate. He had successfully established friendly relations, paving the way for subsequent Portuguese ventures in the region.

Other Prominent Figures:

### ***Mahmud Begada***

Was the most prominent sultan of the Gujarat Sultanate. Throughout his rule as Sultan he struggled against the Portuguese. Gujaratis played a crucial role as middlemen in the trade of valuable goods, including spices from the Maluku Islands and silk from China. They had acted as intermediaries, acquiring these goods and then selling them to various parties, including the Mamluks and Arabs.

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***Manuel Godinho de Erédia***

A Portuguese cartographer who prepared maps of Asia for the King of Spain. He is very adept at navigating the Malacca Strait and is well traveled in the region and the adjacent areas.

***Pati Unus***

Crown prince of Radesh Patah, he is a key figure in the resistance efforts against the Portuguese. He was a skilled military commander, in charge of the Islamic Fleet of Java.

***Nina Chatu***

A Hindu merchant living in Malacca as an administrator of the Indian spice trade. He works closely with Raja Mudaliar as an apprentice due to their similar nature of prioritizing business and the accumulation of wealth. Although Chatu has been in this field of expertise for a relatively short period of time, he has made connections with influential figures across various regions across the world.

**Ming Dynasty:*****Zhu Wan (1547)***

Zhu Wan is the Chinese deputy commander and imperial agent, who was in charge of Zhejiang and Fujian's naval defense. He is known to be strictly self-disciplined and dutiful to authorities yet employs unauthorized means of punishment including executions. Nonetheless, as a deputy commander and imperial authority, Zhu Wan has the ability to prosecute in accordance with the visions of the emperor, Zhu Houzhao.

***Emperor Zhu Houzhao (1505-1521)***

The Portuguese conquest of Malacca enraged the Zhengde Emperor of China when he received the envoys from the exiled Sultan Mahmud. The furious Chinese emperor responded with brutal force, culminating the period of three decades of prosecution of Portuguese in China.

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