Explaining China's Participation in Anti-Piracy Operations in the Gulf of Aden

Department of Political Science
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
May 2009

On 18 December 2008, Beijing announced its decision to deploy three ships of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) to join the international naval flotilla battling piracy in the Gulf of Aden. Three weeks later, two of China's most advanced destroyers accompanied by the PLAN's largest supply ship arrived off the Somali coast in China's first long range operational naval deployment with the stated mission of safeguarding Chinese shipping.[1] Aside from sending a *Luhu*-class guided missile destroyer and a supply ship on a global circumnavigation in 2002, the last time China deployed a naval fleet into the Indian Ocean was during the maritime expeditions of Admiral Zheng He in the 1400s.[2] All indications suggest that the current mission will not be short lived; Chinese naval assets will likely remain deployed to the region until improved political and social conditions in Somalia lead to a drastic reduction in maritime piracy.[3]

China's anti-piracy deployment, coupled with its increasing participation in United Nations peace operations, signals a shift in Chinese foreign policy behavior toward increased willingness to employ PLA forces in military operations other than war (MOOTW) to secure Chinese interests in regions distant from the Chinese mainland. These missions stand in stark contrast to past PLA operations, which rarely went beyond the Chinese periphery. This paper serves two primary purposes. First, it examines the drivers behind China's participation in anti-piracy operations. Second, it draws on campaign analysis of the current Chinese mission, supported by an examination of

---

[1] "China to send Navy to fight Somali pirates," *PLA Daily*. 22 December 2008. Available online: < http://english.chinamil.com.cn/site2/special-reports/2008-12/22/content_1594031.htm>. Accessed 30 March 2009.
[2] Andrew S. Erickson and Justin D. Mikolay, "Welcome China to the Fight Against Pirates," *Proceedings* 135 (March 2009).
[3] "Chinese new fleet sails to fight Somali pirates," *PLA Daily*. 2 April 2009. Available online: <http://english.chinamil.com.cn/site2/special-reports/2009-04/03/content_1713589.htm >. Accessed 13 May 2009.

Chinese defense publications and acquisitions, to assess what the current Chinese mission reveals about Chinese naval capabilities and potential future operations.

The first section attempts to determine the factors that motivate China's participation in anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden by qualitatively testing three potential drivers behind China's antipiracy deployment that have appeared in policy publications.[4] Was China driven solely by a desire to protect its own interests? Did Beijing hope to demonstrate its increasing role as responsible global actor? Or, is the mission a form of capabilities demonstration, development and training for the PLAN? Relying on media releases, unclassified Chinese military publications, and both Western and Chinese academic writings, this paper argues that China's anti-piracy mission was primarily motivated by a self-interested desire to protect Chinese interests, while at the same time enhancing China's diplomatic position and providing limited opportunities for military development.

The paper then offers a comparative campaign analysis of China's mission vis-à-vis the anti-piracy missions of other nations. This section examines the assets and tactics employed by China and other nations involved in maritime security operations in the Gulf of Aden and allows for a greater understanding of the objectives of each mission. The paper then concludes by examining Chinese tactical and doctrinal revelations from the current mission to analyze how China may execute future PLAN operations.

Explaining China's Participation

[4] For example see, David Lai, "Chinese Military Going Global," *China Security* 5, no 1 (Winter 2009), 3-8. Richard Weitz, "Operation Somalia: China's First Expeditionary Force," China Security 5, no 1 (Winter 2009), 27-42.

The driving forces behind China's decision to participate in anti-piracy operations can be categorized as either realist or idealist. The realist drivers include a desire to protect Chinese shipping, expand China's influence, and to provide opportunities for realistic training that will enhance the PLAN's capabilities in military operations other than war.[5] The idealist viewpoint suggests that China hopes to protect regional security and stability. The two categories of drivers are not mutually exclusive as China could help ensure regional stability while protecting its own economic interests, thereby developing its status as a more responsible actor in the international community and furthering its own interests.

Protecting China's Interests

China has tasked its anti-piracy force with the primary mission of ensuring the safety of Chinese ships and crews transiting through the pirate infested region.[6] On the day the Chinese mission was launched, Wu Shengli, commander of the PLAN, announced, "It's the first time we go abroad to protect our strategic interests armed with military force."[7] These official statements suggest that China is a realist actor seeking to protect its economic and strategic interests. This would support arguments made in some

[5] See note 4.
[6] Tian Yuan, "Somali pirates pose serious threat to China's rights and interests in navigation," *PLA Daily*. 26 December 2008. Available online: < http://english.chinamil.com.cn/site2/special-reports/2008-12/26/content_1599410.htm>. Accessed 14 May 2009.
[7] "Chinese Navy Off on Historic Anti-Piracy Mission," AFP. 26 December 2008. 30 March 2009. *Lexis Nexis*.

policy circles that China is a mercantilist power, using state resources to further economic and commercial development.[8]

The pirate-infested waters off the Coast of Somalia are a critical sea lane of communication for China, meaning that a lack of maritime security could disrupt trade critical to China's economic development. According to Chinese sources, more than 1200 Chinese ships and forty-percent of all goods and raw materials bound for China pass through the Gulf of Aden each year.[9] These vessels carry a variety of products including much of the crude oil imported to China. As a result of China's "Going Out" campaign, which was launched in 2002, many Chinese firms increased overseas investment in an attempt to meet China's growing demand for natural resources and raw materials that China was unable to meet through domestic production.[10] Today, China is the world's second largest importer of crude oil, and obtains about 46-percent of its imports from the Middle East and 32-percent from Africa.[11] Ships transporting oil from Angola and Iran, two of China's top crude oil suppliers, likely avoid the Gulf of Aden, however roughly 50-percent of China's annual crude imports must pass through the Gulf of Aden.[12] Escorting vessels through this region helps ensure security of supply of the resources critical for China's continued growth and protects Chinese goods whose exports fuel the Chinese economy.

---

[8] For example see, Sanusha Naidu, "China and Africa's Natural Resource Sector: A View from South Africa," Center for Strategic and International Studies. Available online: < http://forums.csis.org/africa/?p=33 >. Accessed 13 May 2009.
[9] "Piracy Fight to Boost US Ties," Chinadaily.com. 22 December 2008.
[63] Aaron L. Friedberg, "Going Out": China's Pursuit of Natural Resources and Implications for the PRC's Grand Strategy. (Seattle, WA: The National Bureau of Asian Research, 2006), 21-24.
[11] 2009 Report to Congress on China. (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2009), 4-5.
[12] In 2006, China's top oil suppliers were Saudi Arabia, Angola and Iran. Iran and Angola supply roughly twenty-eight percent of China's crude oil. Source, note 11.

In addition to protecting economic and commercial interests, China has used the anti-piracy mission as an opportunity to further its diplomatic objective of exerting greater influence over Taiwan. China has extended the offer of protection to ships from Taiwan and the Special Administrative Regions (SAR) of Hong Kong and Macao. Escorting Hong Kong and Macao ships does not generate political concerns because both SARs are self-governing entities of the People's Republic of China. As SARs, foreign policy and military related issues are the responsibility of Beijing, justifying PLAN escorts for SAR-owned ships. Providing escorts to Taiwan-owned ships, however, has considerable political ramifications. If it were to allow its vessels to join PLAN escorted convoys through the Gulf of Aden, Taiwan would appear to be under the sovereign protection and jurisdiction of the mainland. To avoid appearing to be subordinate to the mainland, Taiwan has declined to establish any official channels for Taiwan-owned ships to request escort from the PLAN.[13] Although no official mechanism for requesting a PLAN escort was initiated, the *Formosa Product Cosmos*, a tanker owned by the Taiwan-based Formosa Plastics Marine Corporation was one of the first ships to benefit from a PLAN escort. Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council, attempting to reinforce its position that Taiwan ships were not being protected by mainland forces, quickly announced that despite being owned by a Taiwan firm was registered in Liberia and rented to a South Korean company, and was therefore not considered a Taiwan ship.[14]

Instead of seeking PLAN escorts, Taiwan has directed its merchant and fishing vessels to summon the nearest warships from any nation if they are attacked by pirates in

[13] "Should We Accept China's Protection Against Pirates?" *The China Post*. 21 January 2009. *Lexis Nexis*.
[14] Ibid.

the Gulf of Aden.[15] Taiwan is also considering deploying its own warships to the region, however, Taipei must first overcome significant logistical and diplomatic obstacles.[16] Taiwan is not recognized by any nation near the Gulf of Aden, which may make resupplying its naval ships challenging. Beijing may also be able to use its diplomatic power to pressure states into blocking Taiwan's naval vessels from entering their ports to refuel and load additional supplies. Although China clearly did not launch its anti-piracy operation as a means of asserting greater influence, Chinese media has extensively covered the escort of the *Formosa Product Cosmos*, to demonstrate the mainland's protection of Taiwan ships.[17] Political tensions between Beijing and Taiwan may increase if Taiwan decides to launch its own anti-piracy operation.

While the mission may appear to further China's economic, commercial, and diplomatic interests, the Chinese task force focuses primarily on escorting Chinese-owned vessels, and largely excludes non-Chinese ships that might be carrying goods to or from China.[18] One of these ships, a Turkish-owned freighter was hijacked off the coast of Somalia in October 2008 while carrying a load of iron ore from Canada to China.[19] The primary mission of protecting Chinese vessels, instead of vessels carrying key Chinese imports and exports, suggests that Beijing may be more interested in protecting its own crews and ships than with securing critical supply lines. If true, the Chinese anti-piracy mission could not be considered a purely mercantilist act because a significant amount of

---

[15] Minnie Chan, "Taiwan Won't Seek PLA Protection from Pirates," *South China Morning Post*. 12 January 2009. *Lexis Nexis*.
[16] Ibid.
[17] For example, "Chinese mainland naval fleet escorts Taiwan merchant ship off Somalia," *Xinhua*. 12 January 2009. Available online: <http://english.chinamil.com.cn/site2/special-reports/2009-01/13/content_1617701.htm >. Accessed 20 March 2009.
[18] Some foreign flagged ships, including some from Germany have been escorted.
[19] Suzan Fraser, "Turkish Ship Hijacked," AFP. 30 October 2008. *Lexis Nexis*.

Chinese and China-bound goods is carried on foreign owned vessels.[20] Admittedly providing escorts to all ships carrying Chinese imports and exports would prove logistically difficult, and perhaps beyond current PLAN capabilities. This suggests that other drivers, such as the desire to demonstrate its status as a responsible rising military, also informed the decision-making calculus.

Becoming a Responsible Global Actor

Most Chinese policymakers and foreign analysts have argued that the PLAN anti-piracy mission was launched largely to protect Chinese shipping interests, however the Chinese government has gone to great lengths to characterize the mission as a demonstration of Beijing's increasing participation as a responsible actor in the international system. Chinese officials have stated that participation in anti-piracy operations is fulfilling an international obligation, and have justified their deployment by citing United Nations resolutions in government press releases and on government websites.[21] China announced its intention to deploy an anti-piracy force just days after the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 1851, which encouraged member states to take a more active role in fighting pirates off the Coast of Somalia.[22]

Although Security Council resolutions legitimize China's actions and decrease the potential of a long range Chinese military deployment being viewed through the lens of the "China threat", China's participation in anti-piracy operations does not necessarily

---

[20] The Chinese merchant marine consists of 1826 vessels, many of which are coastal vessels . *CIA World Factbook*. Non-Chinese ships routinely carry goods to China. See note 19 for an example of a case where a non-Chinese was carrying goods to China

[21] "Rear admiral: Chinese navy's anti-piracy escorts not a short-term mission," *PLA Daily*. 11 March 2009. Available online: <http://english.chinamil.com.cn/site2/special-reports/2009-03/11/content_1685574.htm>. Accessed 30 March 2009

[22] Resolution 1851. S/RES/1851 (2008) United Nations Security Council. 16 December 2008.

demonstrate a more responsible role in the international community. China has committed personnel and resources to combat piracy, a concern of many international actors international, but has decided to do so largely unilaterally, rather than by joining a multinational task force. PLAN Rear Admiral Du Jingchen, the mission's first commander made clear that China would not accept assignments from "other regional organizations or countries."[23] Combating piracy alongside other world navies strengthens China's claims of accepting greater international responsibility, however its unambiguous declaration against joining operations with non-Chinese command raises questions on China's actual willingness to cooperate with the international community.

While becoming a member of a multi-national task force would demonstrate Beijing's greater commitment to the international system and potentially enhance the effectiveness of anti-piracy operations through improved coordination and planning, it would also force Chinese commanders to give up some authority to non-Chinese officers. Under this type of arrangement, Chinese assets could theoretically be tasked to carry out missions that do not serve Chinese interests, such as patrolling a given geographical area, rather than escorting Chinese-owned vessels. Although China has opted to steer clear of joining a multinational task force, the PLAN does participate in information sharing and coordination with other navies in the region.[24]

China's reluctance to place its anti-piracy force under international command is a departure from its behavior in United Nations peacekeeping operations, the other major

---

[23] "Backgrounder: Chinese Navy sends most sophisticated ships on escort mission off Somalia," *Xinhua*. 26 December 2008. Lexis Nexis.
[24] "Japan, China to Coordinate Moves on Anti-Piracy," Japan Economic Newswire. 5 March 2009. Lexis Nexis.

facet of China's participation in international military operations other than war. China routinely authorizes its troops deployed on peacekeeping missions to fall under foreign command, and at the time of writing, a Chinese officer has only commanded one of the twenty-two missions where China has contributed personnel.[25] No publicly available Chinese government information explains Beijing's rationale for allowing non-Chinese command in peacekeeping missions but not in anti-piracy operations, however differences in the conditions surrounding the two types of operations allow this paper to offer two potential explanations. First, the three current multinational anti-piracy task forces are each led by western powers or western organizations of which China is not a member. The United States established Combined Task Force 151 (CTF-151) and contributes a bulk of forces assigned to the task force, NATO heads Operation Allied Protector, and the European Union organized Operation Atalanta. China's lack of membership in either the Atlantic or European based organizations precludes its participation in the EU and NATO missions, while domestic political and status concerns make it unlikely that China will contribute forces to an operation rotationally commanded by an American admiral

In contrast to anti-piracy missions led by western states and organizations, the peacekeeping operations where China has contributed personnel are planned and carried out by the United Nations. Not only does China's membership in the UN enable its forces to participate in these missions, but any changes to the mission or mandate of UN peace operations must be approved by a UN Security Council Resolution. As a permanent

[25] A list of missions where China has contributed personnel to UN Peace Operations is available as an appendix to *China's National Defense in 2008*. (Beijing: Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2009).

member of the Security Council, China has significant influence over the content and passage of any Resolution. Additionally, United Nations member states select the particular missions where they will contribute troops and can withdraw their forces at any time. The power to shape peace operation mandates combined with the ability to selectively contribute forces likely outweighs the importance of having a Chinese commander on the ground. The UN force commander executes a mandate in which China has a significant say, and China can withdraw its forces should the force commander made a tactical or operational level decision with which the Chinese disagree. In a hypothetical case where China participated in a western-led anti-piracy operation, China would likely have the ability to selectively contribute and withdraw its forces, but would certainly not have the same level of influence in high level planning as it does in the United Nations.

A second potential explanation for China's avoidance of participation in a multinational anti-piracy task force stems from the secrecy surrounding China's military operations and capabilities. China has a long strategic heritage that emphasizes secrecy in military affairs that has endured into the current security environment.[26] As described later in this paper, the destroyers China deployed on anti-piracy operations are among the most modern in the PLAN fleet. Submitting these vessels to foreign command could reveal capabilities or shortcomings of the advanced warships. Similarly, China has also avoided deploying advanced equipment such as helicopters to UN peace operations, in

[26] Discussion of secrecy and the need to hide true capabilities in Chinese strategic thinking dates back to the writings of Sun Tzu in the *Art of War* in 500 BC.

part due to concerns about revealing Chinese capabilities.[27] Thus, peace operations carried out by the UN rarely include advanced weapons systems, and China's contributions have been limited primarily to military observers, police officers, and relatively low-tech medical, engineering, and transportation units.[28]

Beijing's decision to launch an anti-piracy operation may have been motivated by anti-piracy deployments made by other nations, notably its Security Council counterparts, India, and Pakistan. China was the last of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council to commit forces to combat pirates off the coast of Somalia, and India deployed a *Talwar*-class frigate to the Gulf of Aden to protect its shipping interests in October 2008. Prior to deploying its own anti-piracy forces, China relied on other countries to rescue Chinese vessels in distress. For instance, a Malaysian navy helicopter and warship responded to a distress call from the Chinese owned *Zhenhua 4* cargo ship after it was boarded by pirates.[29] The Malaysian helicopter fired warning shots at the pirates' skiff and rescued the thirty-member Chinese crew. Malaysia deployed naval forces to the Gulf of Aden after two Malaysian commercial ships were hijacked in the region. China may have felt obligated to deploy forces in order to prevent itself from being accused as a free-rider and to maintain its status in light of anti-piracy deployments by other actors.

Despite not fully demonstrating China's commitment to the international system, Beijing has taken three significant steps to enhance cooperation and openness with the

---

[27] *China's Growing Role in UN Peacekeeping*, (New York: International Crisis Group, 2009), 29.
[28] Ibid, 9-10.
[29] Tham Choy Lin, "China Thanks Malaysia for Pirate Rescue." Malaysian National News Agency. Available online: < http://www.bernama.com/bernama/v5/newsindex.php?id=379891>. Accessed 25 March 2009.

international community. First, the PLAN flotilla has responded to the distress calls of non-Chinese vessels under pirate attack in the Gulf of Aden, and has also provided escort to several non-Chinese ships. This demonstrates a commitment to the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which states, "All States shall cooperate to the fullest possible extent in the repression of piracy on the high seas or in any other place outside the jurisdiction of any State."[30] Second, China has coordinated information sharing with the United States and potentially with France and Japan.[31] Media reports indicate that the United States has provided China with imagery intelligence and weather information. This would be a step toward Chinese participation in multilateral military operations. Third, China has been extremely transparent with its participation in this mission. The PLA established a regularly updated English language website that provides information on its anti-piracy operations. The site even outlines tactics and procedures used by the PLAN in conducting their operations. Additionally, the PLAN has reportedly embedded journalists from seven media organizations, including a representative from the Hong Kong-based Phoenix TV, onboard the ships. This marks the first time that a non-state-run media outlet has been invited to accompany a PLAN mission.[32] This type of openness stands in stark contrast to other realms of the Chinese military, where information is either unavailable or highly limited.

While the realist motivation to protect Chinese shipping interests is likely the key driver behind China's decision to launch an anti-piracy mission, the other factors

---

[30] *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas*. Available online: <http://www.un.org/Depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos_e.pdf>

[31] "Japan, China to Coordinate Moves on Anti-Piracy," Japan Economic Newswire. 5 March 2009. *Lexis Nexis.*

[32] Krisitn Kwok, "PLA ships leave for Somalia pirate patrols," *South China Morning* Post. 27 December 2008. *Lexis Nexis.*

described above may have played a role in China's decision-making process. The mix of protecting China's diplomatic and commercial interests, enhancing China's status as a responsible actor, and participating alongside world navies combating an international threat is largely in line with China's policy of peaceful development, which was first proclaimed in 2003. Under peaceful development, China will avoid the tension that is often associated with the growth of a rising state, while striving to create a stable global environment that facilitates China's continued development as an economic and diplomatic power.[33]

Training

In combating Somali pirates, China is relying on military forces to help further its peaceful development, affording the PLAN with valuable operational experience. The Chinese anti-piracy operation has been described as a training opportunity that serves a precursor to future long-range PLAN operations.[34] While the PLAN will undoubtedly gain significant experience from its first long-range operational deployment, it is unlikely that training benefits were factored into China's decision to launch the anti-piracy task force. The Chinese military was allegedly reluctant to deploy vessels to Somalia, and did so only after two months of pressure from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA).[35] Examining the potentially divergent interests of Chinese military and diplomatic actors is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is unlikely that the MFA's appeals for the mission were motivated by a desire to increase military training opportunities.

---

[33] Zheng Bijian, "China's 'Peaceful Rise' to Great-Power Status" *Foreign Affairs* 84 (September/October 2005), 22-24.
[34] Weitz, 34-35.
[35] *China's Growing Role in UN Peacekeeping*, (New York: International Crisis Group, 2009), 26.

Despite not being a primary driver for participation in the anti-piracy operation, the mission in the Gulf of Aden has allowed China to refine many of the tasks required to sustain long-range, blue water naval operations, such as underway replenishment, coordination with foreign navies, and communication.[36] A senior PLA officer at the strategy institute of China's National Defense University announced that "the results of participating in this kind of action are not just about gaining experience at combating pirates. It is even more about raising the ability to perform missions on seas far away."[37] The anti-piracy operation provides an ideal chance for the PLAN to practice and evaluate various blue water tactics, techniques, and procedures in an environment far from the Chinese periphery, without generating significant political or military alarm. The international nature of piracy as defined by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas combined with United Nations Resolutions calling for action against Somali pirates has helped to legitimize Chinese actions and minimized fears of a "China threat" stemming from the long-range deployment. The implications of these lessons on future PLAN operations are addressed later in this paper.

Comparative Campaign Analysis

This section analyzes China's anti-piracy deployment in addition to the missions launched by Russia, India, NATO, the UN, and the US-led Combined Task Force (CTF) 151. The analysis attempts to determine what event led the nation to deploy its anti-piracy operation, reviews the assets involved in each operation, and examines the tactics and rules of engagement employed by each force. A comparative campaign analysis

[36] Weitz, 34.
[37] Weitz, 34.

potentially allows for a better understanding of the intentions and objectives (ends) of each anti-piracy actor by examining their strategy (ways) and deployed assets (means).

This analysis relies entirely on unclassified material including news media, government announcements, and openly available reports on the capabilities of naval assets. While this information provides a foundation for campaign analysis, certain details regarding rules of engagement, tactics, and equipment specifications will remain closely guarded secrets of the participating states. Information concerning the date a mission is launched and the assets deployed is openly available, however the justification for a mission launch along with rules of engagement and tactics must be derived from published descriptions of participant state actions.

China

Strategy and Tactics

The PLAN anti-piracy flotilla was launched in late December 2008 in response to increasing pirate attacks in the Gulf of Aden, and is tasked with escorting Chinese vessels through the region. According to Rear Admiral Xiao Xinnian, deputy chief of staff of the PLAN: “The Chinese naval vessels will generally adopt three methods when performing their escort mission: Upon finding suspicious ships at sea, the Chinese side will first send shipborne helicopters to conduct reconnaissance before sending its naval vessels to approach them. Second, if pirates are engaged in robbery and if our conditions and capabilities permit us to stop them, the Chinese side will adopt appropriate measures in light of the circumstances. If the Chinese side encounters unprovoked attacks by pirates,

it will resolutely defend itself and ensure its own safety."[38] The official description of the mission focuses solely on locating and responding to specific pirate threats and omits key details of the Chinese operation. First, it makes no mention of the actual escort of Chinese vessels, although the protection of Chinese ships is the primary mission of the PLAN flotilla. Second, it does not describe the "appropriate measures" that will be used to respond to pirates. Many other missions in the region describe the process by which they, or regional African allies, will prosecute captured pirates. China's decision to omit this information may stem from a desire to appear as a responsible actor making a contribution to the international community, rather than solely protecting China's national interests. China may have left the definition of "appropriate actions" intentionally vague because of its commitment to respecting state sovereignty. Arresting and potentially trying pirates in the Chinese legal system could be viewed as a violation of Somali sovereignty.

The PLAN has escorted convoys of Chinese ships as well as responded to distress calls of non-Chinese ships under pirate attack. Each month, the Chinese Ministry of Communications releases escort plans to Chinese shipping companies who can then submit applications to the Ministry of Communications and the PLAN.[39] Chinese warships then lead convoys of ships through the Gulf. In emergency situations, ships can request assistance from the PLAN flotilla via email or emergency radio channels. One of the first direct engagements between Chinese forces and Somali pirates occurred in late

---

[38] "Chinese scholars, officers examine significance, purpose of anti-piracy mission." Xinhua, reported by BBC Monitoring Asia-Pacific. 25 December 2008. *Lexis Nexis*.
[39] Tian Yuan and Qian Xiaohu, "Chinese naval escorting formation reminds ships to pay attention to sailing safety" *PLA Daily*. 3 March 2009. Available online: <http://english.chinamil.com.cn/site2/special-reports/2009-03/03/content_1673945.htm>. Accessed 27 March 2009.

February 2009, when the PLAN responded to a request for assistance from the Liberian-flagged, Italian cargo ship *Lia*. Upon receiving distress calls, China scrambles naval helicopters carrying special-forces personnel to intercept the attacking pirates. Once arriving on scene, the Chinese helicopter fires warning shots or flares at the attacking pirates.[40] At the time of this writing, Chinese forces have not had to escalate the use of force beyond warning shots as attacking pirates generally flee after PLAN forces arrive. However, the PLAN vessels are equipped with modern weapon system, which could be used against pirates if they fail to respond to non-lethal warnings.

While China's Gulf of Aden security operation safeguards Chinese shipping vessels, it seems to offer little protection to Chinese fishermen sailing off the coast of Somalia. This is surprising as non-Somali vessels, including those operated by Chinese state-owned fishing enterprises, routinely fish near the Somali coast. Much industrial fishing occurs in the waters from Mogadishu to the Kenyan border, which is known for its diversity of fish species, including stocks of grouper and snapper.[41] The November 2008 hijacking of the state-owned *Tianyu 8* fishing vessel and its 24-member crew occurred near the Kenyan border and was the first seizure of a mainland owned ship by Somali pirates.[42] While the decision to deploy Chinese naval forces to the Gulf of Aden and not to fishing areas in the Indian Ocean could be justified by higher vessel traffic in the sea lanes of the Gulf, it is also possible that China does not want to visibly support violations of Somalia's exclusive economic zone. In 2005, the United Nations estimated

---

[40] "Across China On-board Wuhan" *Chinadaily.com.cn*. 31 January 2009. *Lexis Nexis*.
[41] Fishery Country Profile: Somalia. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. January 2005. Available online: < http://www.fao.org/fishery/countrysector/FI-CP_SO/en>. Accessed 14 April 2009.
[42] "Chinese fishing boat reported hijacked off Kenya" Associated Press. 14 November 2008. *Lexis Nexis*.

that 700 foreign-owned vessels were engaged in unlicensed fishing in the Somali EEZ, and Somali pirates have used illegal fishing to justify their actions as defenders of Somalia's territorial waters.[43] China would appear to be hypocritical if it protected Chinese shipping vessels violating Somalia's EEZ, while at the same time remaining highly protective of its own EEZ.

Equipment and Organization

The flotilla currently deployed to the Gulf of Aden consists of three of the PLAN's most advanced ships. The *Lanzhou*-class guided missile destroyer *Haikou* (DDG-171) and the *Guangzhou*-class destroyer *Wuhan* (DDG-169) are among the PLAN's newest destroyers. Both are indigenously produced and are equipped with a variety of surface to air missiles, anti-ship missiles, torpedoes and sensors.[44] The Haikou may also have the capability to transmit information to other ships over data link or satellite communications, something that could greatly enhance the effectiveness of the anti-piracy mission by rapidly disseminating information on the location of suspected. Each destroyer is also equipped with a Russian-built Kamov Ka-28 helicopter. The PLAN Ka-28s are capable of operating up to 200 kilometers from the host destroyer, greatly expanding coverage for the anti-piracy operations.[45] During the current mission, PLAN helicopters have been launched to respond to and deter attacks and have also been used in vertical resupply missions that allow for the transfer of goods between supply

[43] Fishery Country Profile: Somalia, 2005.
[44] "Type 052C (Luyang-II Class) Missile Destroyer," *Sino Defence.com*. Available online: < http://www.sinodefence.com/navy/surface/type052c_luyang2.asp> and "Type 052B (Luyang-I Class) Missile Destroyer," *Sino Defence.com.* Available online: < http://www.sinodefence.com/navy/surface/type052b_luyang.asp>. Both accessed 14 April 2009.
[45] Ibid.

vessels and the destroyers while underway.[46] The two destroyers are accompanied by the supply ship *Weishanhu*, the largest of its type in the PLAN fleet. During the deployment, the *Weishanhu* replenished its stores of fuel, water, and food in the Port of Aden, providing the PLAN with "a beneficial trail of logistics support mode by the Chinese Navy in performing military operations other than war abroad."[47]

The three-ship group likely makes up a *zhidui* (支队), an organizational grouping of vessels that is best translated as a flotilla. This paper assumes the group is a *zhidui* because flotillas are generally a division leader-grade command, led by either a Senior Captain or Rear Admiral. The anti-piracy mission is commanded by a PLAN Rear Admiral. When a *zhidui* conducts mobile task-force operations, it reports to its fleet headquarters, which in turn is responsible to PLAN Headquarters in Beijing. This differs from traditional operations, where support bases serve as a link between fleet headquarters and the *zhidui*.[48] The command structure for this mission may be even more direct, going directly from PLAN Headquarters to the flotilla. Chinese ships requesting armed escorts are instructed to contact the national Ministry of Communication.[49] Given the high profile nature of this mission, the Ministry of Communication may coordinate

---

[46] "Chinese ship carries supplies for naval escort fleet," *PLA Daily*. 1 February 2009. Available online: <http://english.chinamil.com.cn/site2/special-reports/2009-02/01/content_1638575.htm>. Accessed 27 March 2009.

[47] Tian Yuan and Qian Xiaohu. "'Weishanhu' ship accomplishes first replenishment at foreign port." *PLA Daily*. 25 February 2009. Available online: < http://english.chinamil.com.cn/site2/special-reports/2009-02/25/content_1665345.htm>. Accessed 19 March 2009.

[48] *China's Navy 2007*. (Office of Naval Intelligence, 2007), 4-5. Available online: <http://www.fas.org/irp/agency/oni/chinanavy2007.pdf>. Accessed 27 March 2009.

[49] Tian Yuan and Qian Xiaohu, "Chinese naval escorting formation reminds ships to pay attention to sailing safety" *PLA Daily*. 3 March 2009. Available online: <http://english.chinamil.com.cn/site2/special-reports/2009-03/03/content_1673945.htm>. Accessed 27 March 2009.

with the national-level PLAN Headquarters, which in turn may pass instructions to the mission commander.

The selection of a relatively senior PLAN officer to lead the three-ship fleet emphasizes the importance of the mission to China. On 26 December 2008, the PLAN appointed Rear Admiral Du Jingchen as the commander of the anti-piracy mission. Prior to assuming command, Du served as the Chief of Staff of the PLAN's South China Sea Fleet, where he was responsible for directing the operations of the command organization. Admiral Du also visited the United States as part of a military delegation in July 2008, one of a small number of senior Chinese military officers who have traveled to the United States. Additionally, Du has operational experience commanding a search and rescue operation in May 2002 following the crash of a China Northern Airlines flight off the coast of Dalian.[50] This blend of past operational experience, interaction with foreign militaries, and leadership at the fleet headquarters level likely made Admiral Du an appealing candidate to command a mission where PLAN forces would be engaged in a high operations tempo environment in close proximity to a multi-national naval task force.

The deployment of warships from multiple nations, many of which are wary of each other, has created a unique operating environment for Chinese naval forces. Chinese academics and senior military officers admit that while there may be small disagreements and some "secretive reconnaissance," military powers will likely not engage in

[50] "People/Points No.2 2009," *Beijing Review*. 4 January 2009. Available Online: < http://www.bjreview.com.cn/newsmaker/txt/2009-01/04/content_173065.htm>. Accessed 13 March 2009.

disputes.[51] Despite not joining a coalition task force, China vowed to cooperate with foreign navies operating in the region. The United States reportedly provided China with information concerning anti-piracy operations, and viewed the mission as "a springboard for a resumption of dialogue between PLA forces and U.S. Pacific Command forces." [52] Additionally, the navies of Japan and South Korea have each discussed coordination with Chinese anti-piracy forces. The Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force and the PLAN are considering sharing intelligence on pirates, while the Korean military has agreed to assist each other in combating pirates and will assist each other in emergencies. This was the first instance of cooperation in international operations between the Chinese and Korean militaries.[53] These cooperative efforts will help foster understanding between militaries and will be a step toward enhancing military transparency. Although the cooperation seems limited to operations in the Gulf of Aden, they may set the foundation for future peaceful engagement in

While anti-piracy operations have allowed China to enhance cooperation with its East Asian neighbors, it has also led to increased tensions between India and China. China accused the Indian Navy of using an attack submarine to stalk the PLAN flotilla with a Kilo-class attack submarine.[54] Chinese media reports suggest that the Chinese vessels and Indian submarine became locked in a half-hour long standoff in which "both

---

[51] "Cooperation in Gulf Mission 'Smooth.'" Chinadaily.com.cn. 19 February 2009. *Lexis Nexis*.
[52] "Fight Against Pirates Could Mend U.S.-China Ties." AFP. 18 December 2008. Available online: < http://www.defensenews.com/story.php?i=3870763>. Accessed 13 March 2009.
[53] "Korean, Chinese Military to Join Hands in Fighting Pirates." *The Chosun Ilbo*. 26 March 2009. Available Online: < http://english.chosun.com/w21data/html/news/200903/200903260021.html>. Accessed 28 March 2009 and "Japan, China to coordinate moves on antipiracy missions off Somalia." Japan Economic Newswire. 5 March 2009. *Lexis Nexis*.
[54] "Indian Submarine, Chinese Warships Test Each Other in Pirate Waters." *Indian Express*. 5 February 2009. *Lexis Nexis*.

sides tried to test for weaknesses in the other's sonar system." The standoff reportedly ended when the PLAN destroyers forced the Indian submarine to surface and leave the area.[55] This incident marked the first military standoff between China and India since a 1987 border skirmish.

NATO and the European Union

The European Union launched Operation ATALANTA, its first naval operation, on 8 December 2008 to support United Nations Security Council Resolutions in order to protect vessels delivering World Food Program food aid and to protect vulnerable vessels in the Gulf of Aden by deterring and preventing acts of piracy. To accomplish this mission the operation is mandated to: provide protection to vessels chartered by the World Food Program, to provide protection to merchant vessels, and to take the necessary measures, including the use of force to deter, prevent, and intervene in order to bring to an end acts of piracy and armed robbery."

The operation will include at least six frigates and three maritime patrol aircraft, which will be initially deployed for one year. Many of the vessels assigned to the mission are from NATO's Standing Maritime Group One, which has previously participated in anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden. Additionally, the EU mission regularly coordinates with vessels from NATO's anti-piracy operations and the American-led CTF-

[55] Gurmukh Singh, "Indian Submarine, Chinese Ship in Standoff Near Somalia: Chinese Media." Indo-Asian News Service. 4 February 2009. *Lexis Nexis*.

151 to respond to suspected attacks.[56] The operation can arrest and detain suspected pirates, who can be tried either by an EU Member State or by the Kenyan government.

While the Operation ATALANTA mandate specifies that the EU will protect vulnerable ships, press releases indicate that escorts have been limited largely to ships chartered by the World Food Program to carry humanitarian aid. Escorts for ship escorts have been denied by the German government, a contributor to the EU force, leading vessels to modify their sailing plans.[57] For now, the mission of Operation ATALANTA seems to fall under the realm of cooperative security. Most of the assets assigned to the operation appear to be escorting World Food Program vessels and responding to distress calls from vessels transiting the International Traffic Zone.

The first NATO anti-piracy task force was launched in October 2008, but was replaced two months later by the EU mission. The initial mission, Operation Allied Provider, provided escorts to vessels chartered by the World Food Program, resulting in the safe delivery of 30,000 metric tons of humanitarian aid to Somalia.[58] The four vessels and over 1000 officers and sailors that participated in Allied Provide were assigned to Standing NATO Maritime Group 2, and were supported by auxiliary and supply ships from several NATO nations.[59] In March 2009, NATO announced that it would resume its anti-piracy operations by deploying Standing NATO Maritime Group One (SNMG1)

---

[56] "EU ATALANTA and American CTF Warships Join Forces to Prevent Hijacking." Maritime Security Centre-EU NAVFOR Somalia. 3 March 2009. Available online: <http://www.mschoa.eu/display.aspx?articlename=47>. Accessed 25 March 2009.
[57] "Cruise Ship will Evacuate to Avoid Pirate Attack." Associated Press. 9 December 2008. *Lexis Nexis*.
[58] "Successful Completion of NATO mission Operation Allied Provider." Press Release, Allied Command Operations, Supreme Allied Powers Europe. 12 December 2008. Available online: < http://www.nato.int/shape/news/2008/12/081212a.html >. Accessed 27 March 2009.
[59] Ibid.

from Souda Bay to the Horn of Africa as part of Operation Allied Protector.[60] The Standing Group consists of six to ten frigates or destroyers under the command of a rear admiral from one of the ship contributing nations. Like the EU operation, NATO forces are tasked with serving as a deterrent against pirates; defending, disrupting and protecting against pirate attacks, including boarding suspected pirate vessels; establishing ad-hoc cooperation and coordination with non-NATO organizations in the region; enhancing stability within the international recommended transit corridor; and providing naval escort to humanitarian aid supply and other vessels if requested and authorized.[61]

The significant mission overlap between the NATO and EU operations leads to questions on why there are two simultaneous European ant-piracy operations. One potential explanation is that the EU deployment along with the other missions in the Gulf of Aden was having only a limited impact on deterring pirate activity, and than additional warships would lead to more robust anti-piracy operations. An alternative explanation is that both the European Union and NATO are continuing to shape the role of their military forces. Combating pirates is viewed by both organizations as a means of enhancing their roles in addressing collective security concerns.[62]

The United States

The United States launched its first dedicated anti-piracy mission in the Gulf of Aden in January 2009 to "create a lawful maritime order and develop security in the

---

[60] Slobodan Lekic, "NATO Resuming Anti-Piracy Mission." Associated Press. 26 March 2009. *Lexis Nexis*.
[61] Operation Allied Protector. Brochure, North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Available online: < http://www.manw.nato.int/pdf/web_copy_op_allied_protector.pdf >. Accessed 27 March 2009.
[62] NATO Resumes Anti-Piracy Operations. Press Release, North Atlantic Treat Organization. 13 March 2009. Available online: <http://www.nato.int/shape/news/2009/03/090313a.html>. Accessed 27 March 2009.

maritime environment."[63] Prior to the creation of Combined Task Force 151 (CTF-151), American warships assigned to Standing NATO Maritime Groups and CTF-150 patrolled the region. Although CTF-150 was tasked with anti-piracy missions, it was established at the outset of Operation Enduring Freedom to conduct maritime security operations such as deterring drug and weapons trafficking in the Gulf of Aden, the Gulf of Oman, the Arabian Sea, the Red Sea, and the Indian Ocean. The establishment of CTF-151 ostensibly allows CTF-150 to focus on maritime security operations related to the Global War on Terrorism while the new task force concentrates solely on anti-piracy operations.[64] While establishing CTF-151 will allow enhanced concentration on combating piracy, a force that is distinct from the one that supports US operations in Iraq could lead to participation by nations that oppose the war in Iraq.

According to the commander of US Naval Forces, Central Command, the organization responsible for CTF-151, the goal of the US-led task force is "dis-incentivizing piracy."[65] Accordingly the mission of the force is to disrupt, deter and capture suspected pirates, and to hold them accountable for their crimes by trying them in civilian courts in Kenya. At the start of the mission, the task force consisted of three ships, the amphibious transport dock USS *San Antonio*, the guided missile destroyer USS *Mahan*, and British frigate HMS *Portland*. These warships provided the task force with Marines, a military police detachment, intelligence personnel, a medical team, and HH-

---

[63] "New Counter-Piracy Task Force Established." Navy.mil. 8 January 2009. Available online: <http://www.navy.mil/search/display.asp?story_id=41687>. Accessed 30 March 2009.
[64] "New Counter-Piracy Task Force Established." Navy.mil. 8 January 2009. Available online: <http://www.navy.mil/search/display.asp?story_id=41687>. Accessed 30 March 2009.
[65] "New Central Command Unit Makes it Tough to be a Pirate." US Central Command. Available online: <http://www.centcom.mil/en/news/new-centcom-unit-makes-it-tough-to-be-a-pirate.html>. Accessed 20 March 2009.

60H utility helicopters.[66] Additional coalition vessels as well as civilian-operated ships from America's Military Sealift Command joined the mission after its initial establishment. In addition to the ships and manned aircraft assigned to the mission, the task force also relies on unmanned aerial vehicles for airborne surveillance missions.[67] The assets assigned to the task force monitor maritime traffic, perform routine queries of vessels, and conduct ship boardings using Coast Guard law enforcement detachments and Navy vessel boarding, search, and seizure teams.[68] Press releases suggest that the US-led task force provides a deterrent presence and responds to distress calls, rather than escorting vessels like the Chinese fleet.

Russia

Russia launched its anti-piracy operations on 26 September 2008. The Russian Navy announced the deployment of the Baltic Fleet frigate *Neustrashimy* to Somalia with the stated mission of "ensur[ing] security in several regions of the world oceans" and protecting Russian citizens and commercial vessels.[69] The *Neustrashimy* is a general purpose frigate that incorporates stealth technology. The ship is equipped with a Ka-27 ASW helicopter and is armed with SS-N-25 anti-ship missiles, SA-N-9 surface to air missiles, torpedoes, a 100-mm gun, and depth charges.[70]

---

[66] Brian Goodwin, "San Antonio Key to Counterpiracy Mission." Navy.mil. 17 January 2009. Available online: <http://www.navy.mil/search/display.asp?story_id=41844>. Accessed 30 March 2009.
[67] Monique K. Hilley, "Mahan UAV at Forefront of 21st Century Readiness." US Navy. 24 February 2009. Available online: <http://www.navy.mil/search/display.asp?story_id=42801>. Accessed 30 March 2009.
[68] Chad R. Erdmann, "Mahan Implements Maritime Strategy During Counterpiracy Operations." US Navy. 27 January 2009. Available online: <http://www.navy.mil/search/display.asp?story_id=42084>. Accessed 30 March 2009.
[69] http://en.rian.ru/russia/20080926/117144421.html
[70] "Russia Sends Warshp to Fight Piracy Near Somalia." *Novosti*. 26 September 2008. Available online: < http://en.rian.ru/russia/20080926/117144421.html>. Accessed 25 March 2009.

The *Neustrashimy* was deployed on the same day the Ukrainian-operated cargo vessel, MV *Faina*, was hijacked. At the time of the hijacking, the *Faina* was captained by a Russian and manned by seventeen Ukrainians, a Latvian, and two additional Russian sailors. The ship was carrying thirty-three Soviet-made T-72 tanks and a large cache of ammunition, small arms, rocket-propelled grenades and anti-aircraft guns allegedly bound for Southern Sudan.[71] Although the deployment of the Russian frigate coincides with the hijacking of the arms carrying freighter, planning for the deployment of the *Neustrashimy* likely began before the *Faina* was hijacked. The Russian Navy announced in June 2008 that it was prepared to deploy vessels to Somalia following the hijacking of a cargo vessel crewed by Russian sailors.[72] However, after the hijacking of the *Faina*, the *Neustrashimy* joined naval vessels from other nations that had surrounded the *Faina* to prevent the offloading of any weaponry.[73]

Like China, Russia has chosen to conduct its operations independent of any established task-force, but considers itself to be supporting international anti-piracy efforts.[74] Despite not participating in a multinational anti-piracy task force, Russian naval vessels deployed to the Gulf of Aden reportedly coordinate their actions with other warships operating in the region.[75] Similar to the Chinese, Russian naval vessels deployed to the region escort transiting commercial vessels, including non-Russian

---

[71]

[72] "Russian Navy Ready to Head for Somalia." *Novosti*. 3 June 2008. Available online: < http://en.rian.ru/russia/20080603/109146873.html>. Accessed 25 March 2009.

[73] "Pirates Seize Indian Vessel Off Somalia." *CBS News*. 21 October 2008. Available online: <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2008/10/21/world/main4535303.shtml?source=RSSattr=World_4535303>. Accessed 25 March 2009.

[74] http://en.rian.ru/russia/20080926/117144421.html

[75] "Neutrashimy patrol ship replenishes reserves, readying to patrol Gulf of Aden." ITAR-TASS. 28 October 2008.

ships.[76] Russian media has also reported that the Defense Ministry will consider providing naval escorts on a commercial basis to non-Russian ships, although at the time of writing, there have been no government announcements that confirm this.[77] In addition to escorting vessels, the Russian Navy has arrested suspected pirates and turned them over to Yemeni authorities for prosecution.[78]

India

India deployed a frigate to the Gulf of Aden on 18 October 2008 to escort its commercial vessels in the region. Only one Indian dhow was seized by pirates prior to the deployment, but roughly 30 Indian ships pass through the Gulf of Aden each month and numerous ships of other nationalities with Indian crew members had been captured.[79] India provides one-sixth of the world's maritime workers.[80] The decision to deploy an anti-piracy force was reportedly made after the September 2008 hijacking of the Japanese-owned chemical tanker MV *Stolt Valor*, which had a crew of 18 Indians.[81] India launched its own mission rather than joining an existing task force because the largest naval task force patrolling the region in October 2008 was the US and European led

---

[76] "Russian Navy to Provide Services to Fight Somali Pirates." *Pravda*. 20 November 2008. Available online: < http://english.pravda.ru/russia/economics/106726-1/>. Accessed 25 March 2009.
[77] "Russian Navy to Provide Services to Fight Somali Pirates." *Pravda*. 20 November 2008. Available online: < http://english.pravda.ru/russia/economics/106726-1/>. Accessed 25 March 2009.
[78] "Russian Navy Transfers Detained Somali Pirates to Yemen." *Novosti*. 18 February 2009. Available online: < http://en.rian.ru/world/20090218/120209688.html>. Accessed 25 March 2009.
[79] A list of ships attacked by Somali pirates is available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_ships_attacked_by_Somali_pirates. Accessed 19 March 2009. Also, "India Emerges From Obscurity as New Global Force." *Canberra Times*. 24 November 2008.
[80] Anuh Chopra, "India leads fight against Somali pirates." *The Christian Science Monitor*. 20 November 2008. *Lexis Nexis*.
[81] Rajat Pandit, "Commandos answer SOS from Saudi, Indian vessels, scare off pirates." *The Times of India*. 11 November 2008. Available online: < http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/India/Navy_foils_Indian_ship_hijack_off_Aden/articleshow/3699918.cms>. Accessed 30 March 2009.

Combined Task Force-150.[82] In addition to combating piracy, CTF-150 was responsible for supporting maritime operations in the North Arabian Sea as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom, the US-led war in Iraq, which India did not support.

India's operation appears to be focused on escorting and protecting Indian ships, however the *Tabar* has assisted non-Indian ships. The Indian Navy has deployed the INS *Talbar*, a Russian-made *Talwar*-class frigate commissioned in 2004. The ship, which is assigned to India's Western Naval Command in Mumbai, is armed with a variety of surface to air and surface to ship missiles as well as a 100-mm gun. The *Tabar* is also equipped with a Chetak utility helicopter. The mission differs from previous deployments in that the Indian Navy has been authorized to act autonomously. Previously, ships had to wait for orders from New Delhi before carrying out preventive and deterrent attacks. This allows greater flexibility for the mission commander and is representative of the innovation in tactics and strategy that many navies are practicing in the region.[83]

India's deployment has been largely successfully in preventing hijacking of Indian vessels, and no Indian flagged vessel has been captured since the India launched its deployment. On 11 November 2008, pirates attempted to board the MV *Jag Arnav*, a large cargo ship owned by Mumbai-based Great Eastern Shipping Company. After receiving a distress call via a text message from the *Jag Arnav*, the INS *Tabar* launched a

---

[82] "Indian wants UN force off Somalia after its ship is refused protection." Indo-Asian News Service. 14 November 2008. Available online: < http://www.thaindian.com/newsportal/uncategorized/india-wants-un-force-off-somalia-after-its-ship-is-refused-protection_100118981.html> . Accessed 30 March 2009.
[83] Anuh Chopra, "India leads fight against Somali pirates." *The Christian Science Monitor*. 20 November 2008. *Lexis Nexis*.

helicopter carrying a team of Marine Commandos, which deterred the attack.[84] The *Tabar* then escorted the *Jag Arnav* to safety. Despite these successes, the Indian mission has not been entirely without flaw. One week after rescuing the *Jag Arnav*, the *Tabar* sunk a Thai-owned fishing vessel with a crew of 15 Thais and one Cambodian. The Indians initially suspected the vessel was a pirate mothership and was fired upon by individuals onboard the ship, however later reports indicate that the ship was in the process of being hijacked.[85]

Japan and South Korea

Japan and South Korea both announced their plans to deploy warships to the Gulf of Aden in early 2009, shortly after China launched its anti-piracy mission. Like China, these deployments will be the first overseas operational naval combat mission for both Korea and Japan, and both nations will concentrate their deployments on protecting commercial vessels from their home countries.

On 28 January 2008, Japan's Defense Minister ordered the Maritime Self Defense Force to prepare for an anti-piracy deployment in Somalia.[86] The Japanese government viewed the pirate activities as a "major threat not only to Japan but also to international society and it is a problem that [Japan] must deal with urgently.[87]" Five Japanese-owned ships were hijacked by Somali pirates before the initial announcement was made, more

---

[84] Rajat Pandit, "Commandos answer SOS from Saudi, Indian vessels, scare off pirates." *The Times of India*. 11 November 2008. Available online: < http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/India/Navy_foils_Indian_ship_hijack_off_Aden/articleshow/3699918.cms>. Accessed 30 March 2009.
[85] "Indian navy 'sank Thai trawler'" *BBC News*. 25 November 2008. Available online: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/7749245.stm>. Accessed 30 March 2009.
[86] "Japan to deploy ships off Somalia." *BBC News*. 28 January 2009. Available online: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7855120.stm>. Accessed 28 March 2009.
[87] Ibid.

than the number of Chinese vessels hijacked before the Chinese launched anti-piracy operations.[88] Despite the perceived urgency, significant debate surrounded the deployment of Japanese forces due to constitutional restrictions on the use of force. After members of Japan's ruling party argued that anti-piracy operations should be seen as law enforcement operations as opposed to strictly military operations, two Japanese destroyers were authorized to deploy to Somalia in mid-March. The vessels will be deployed under the maritime police action provision of the Self Defense Force law, meaning that Japanese ships in the Gulf of Aden will only be able to protect ships owned by Japanese firms or flying the Japanese flag. To further demonstrate the law enforcement nature of the mission, officers from the Japan Coast Guard will be onboard the destroyers in order to handle police-related matters such as the collection of evidence and arrest of suspects if pirates are found. This is similar to the American practice of using Coast Guard boarding teams to carry out the law enforcement related task of arresting suspected pirates.

The Japanese government is attempting to grant greater authority to its anti-piracy force through a bill submitted to the Diet that will allow the Japanese warships more latitude in engaging pirates, such as firing at pirate vessels that ignore warning shots.[89] The bill may also allow Japanese destroyers to escort Chinese vessels and vice-versa. Currently the Japanese are limited to serving as a deterrent force and to firing non-lethal warning shots while protecting Japanese vessels. Although the Maritime Self Defense

---

[88] M/V Golden Nori (hijacked 28 Oct 07, released 12 Dec 07), M/V Stella Maris (hijacked 20 July 08, released 26 September 08), M/V Irene (hijacked 21 August 08, released 11 September 08), MT Stolt Valor (hijacked 15 September 08, released 16 November 08), MV Chemstar Venus (hijacked 15 November 08, released 12 February 09).

[89] Antipiracy task force heads for Somalia." *The Japan Times*. 15 March 2009. Available online: <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20090315a1.html>. Accessed 27 March 2009.

Force will initially escort only Japanese vessels, it is difficult to determine whether Japan is acting entirely out of self-interest, as constitutional provisions prevent Japanese naval forces from protecting non-Japanese vessels.

Japan deployed two destroyers, the *Sazanami* and the *Samidare* to the region. The *Sazanami* is a Japanese-built *Takanami*-class guided missile and anti-submarine warfare destroyer commissioned in 2005. It is equipped with a variety of weapons systems including a 127 mm gun. The *Samidare*, another indigenously built warship commissioned in 2000 is equipped to carry out both anti-submarine and anti-ship missions and is armed with weapons including the sea-sparrow anti-shipping missile and a 76-mm rapid fire naval gun. Each of the ships is also equipped with two SH-60K helicopters and two speed-boats that will likely be used as to rapidly respond to distress calls.[90] Japan also plans to deploy a land based P-3C patrol aircraft to the Gulf of Aden, if it is able to draft a status of forces agreement with the government of Djibouti, the African country where Japan plans to base its aircraft.[91] The P-3C, which is capable of monitoring surface traffic, will greatly enhance Japan's situational awareness over the Gulf of Aden and would represent the first Gulf of Aden deployment of a shore-based patrol aircraft by a nation that is not a member of any multinational coalition.[92]

Korea deployed the Cheonghae unit to the Gulf of Aden in early March 2009. The deployment followed the September 2008 hijacking of a South Korean bulk carrier, four separate hijackings of Korean-owned fishing boats, and the hijacking of other ships

---

[90] "Japan destroyers to set sail for antipiracy ops off Somalia." *Yahoo! Asia News*. 14 March 2009. Available online: < http://asia.news.yahoo.com/090313/kyodo/d96te21g1.html>. Accessed 29 March 2009.
[91] "Antipiracy task force heads for Somalia." *The Japan Times*. 15 March 2009. Available online: <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20090315a1.html>. Accessed 27 March 2009.
[92] Operation Atalanta expects to operate at least 3 maritime patrol aircraft.

with South Korean crewmembers.[93] The Korean naval unit consists of the *Munmu the Great*, a 4,500 ton KDX-II destroyer, along with a Lynx helicopter, speedboats, and 300 sailors, including 30 special operations troops.[94] The KDX-II destroyer is equipped with Harpoon ship-to-surface missiles, RAM Mk 31 ship-to-air missiles, as well as an Mk 45 127-mm gun. The Korean unit will operate with CTF-151 and will rely on existing logistical infrastructure to support its operations.[95] During the planned six-month mission, the Korean Navy will escort South Korean commercial ships through the Gulf of Aden in an effort to protect Korean economic interests.[96] The unit will also "monitor, inspect, stop and seize" pirate vessels as part of CTF-151.

Korea's dual mission of providing support to the American-led task force while also protecting domestic economic interests sets it apart from many other actors in the region. While most independent anti-piracy actors such as China and Russia combat pirates in addition to escorting their own vessels, Korea carries out non-escort anti-piracy duties as part of CTF-151 . Korea may have pursued this strategy in order to gain access to the logistical infrastructure of CTF-151, eliminating the need for Korea to deploy its own auxiliary ships or develop contractual agreements with service providers in ports. Prior to deploying its forces, a Korean team assessed infrastructure in Bahrain and determined that, "There will be no problem regarding logistics support because [Korea]

---

[93] "South Korean Ship Hijacked off Somalia" Associated Press. 10 September 2008. *Lexis Nexis*.
[94] "South Korea Launches Naval Unit Against Somali Pirates" AFP. 3 March 2009. *Lexis Nexis*.
[95] "Anti-Piracy Operations Off Somalia Face Challenges" *Korea Times*. 9 February 2009. *Lexis Nexis*.
[96] Jung Sung-Ki. "New S. Korean Naval Unit to Deploy to Somalia" *Defense News*. 3 March 2009. Available online: < http://www.defensenews.com/story.php?i=3971516 >. Accessed 27 March 2009.

can use services from local companies contracted with other navies such as the United States, Britain and Germany."[97]

Discussion

A review of the major Gulf of Aden anti-piracy campaigns reveals that operations can be broadly categorized as presence missions and escort missions. Presence missions focus primarily on responding to distress calls, deterring acts of piracy by patrolling established safe transit zones, and escorting vessels carrying humanitarian aid. These missions offer their services to ships regardless of their nation of ownership or registry, and are normally carried out by multinational task forces. Escort missions, which are generally launched by individual states provide armed escort to vessels from the deploying state and also respond to distress calls of nearby ships. Additionally, the review finds that most actors have deployed surface combatants such as destroyers and frigates to combat Somali pirates. These warships are generally equipped with detachments of special forces personnel, speed boats, and helicopters. These relatively low tech assets greatly enhance the robustness of the anti-piracy forces by providing them with a rapid response capability that extends the reach of the warships.

China and other independent anti-piracy actors focus their missions on providing armed escorts to their own commercial ships, confirming the hypothesis that China is a realist actor seeking to protect its national interests. Dedicating warships to escort convoys of merchant vessels is a far more effective method of anti-piracy force employment for nations with realist motivations. Using a limited number of warships, the

[97] "Anti-Piracy Operations Off Somalia Face Challenges" *Korea Times*. 9 February 2009. *Lexis Nexis*.

PLAN is able to protect a significant portion of Chinese shipping vessels passing through the Gulf of Aden. In 2008, more than 1200 Chinese vessels passed through the Gulf of Aden, amounting to just over 100 ships each month.[98] By 6 February 2009, China had completed 15 escort missions, protecting 33 Chinese and Taiwanese ships.[99] PLAN warships first arrived in the Gulf of Aden on 6 January 2009, suggesting that only a third of Chinese vessels transiting through the region are provided with a PLAN escort.[100] It is unlikely that China has denied escorts to Chinese ships as the PLAN has escorted non-Chinese vessels, something that would likely be avoided if the flotilla was unable to meet demand posed by Chinese ships. Even if all 1200 ships were to request an escort, this would only amount to roughly four ships a day. Assuming an equal amount of eastbound and westbound traffic, 14 ships would travel in each direction weekly. Since the voyage through the Gulf of Aden takes just over two days, the PLAN destroyers operate could each escort three one-way convoys per week, assuming the destroyers operate independently.[101] Under this system, each destroyer would be responsible for about five Chinese ships per escort mission. If they conduct escorts together, the flotilla would likely still be able to meet the current level of demand, but would need to schedule convoys in advance to prevent vessels from waiting long periods for the PLAN escort vessels.

---

[98] "Chinese Navy Completes 15 Escort Missions in Gulf of Aden" *PLA Daily*. 7 February 2007. Available online: <http://english.chinamil.com.cn/site2/special-reports/2009-02/07/content_1644539.htm>. Accessed 15 March 2009.
[99] Ibid.
[100] The actual percent of mainland vessels requesting escort may be slightly higher, as the figure of 1200 ships likely includes Taiwan ships, which are not officially authorized to request escorts.
[101] Two day voyage time based on Chinese press reports specifying the completion of 15 missions in roughly 30 days. Additionally, using a 10kts speed for the convoy, it would take approximately 45 hours to transit the Gulf of Aden.

Presence missions appear to be significantly less efficient than escort missions at preventing attacks against ships. Numerous ships have been hijacked off the Horn of Africa since the various coalition missions have been in place. This inefficiency stems in part from insufficient presence in the pirate infested waters, which covers more than 1.1 million square miles.[102] At any given time, there are about twenty-seven ships from the EU, NATO, and CTF-151 operating in the waters off the Horn of Africa, meaning that each ship is responsible for protecting over 40,000 square miles. Admittedly, warships are likely concentrated in areas with high commercial traffic flows, but this illustrative calculation demonstrates the vast surface area which must be protected. The US Navy claims that sixty-one ships are needed to protect just internationally designated shipping lanes, which make up only a small portion of the pirates' operating area.[103]

Despite the relative inefficiency of presence missions, they are a logical approach for the multinational task forces deployed to the region. Protecting major shipping lanes and serving as a deterrent against acts of piracy enhances the security of all vessels transiting through the Gulf of Aden and surrounding waters, while ensuring the relevance of multinational security organizations. Actions that improve the global security environment for all actors are means by which the EU and NATO can take an active role in carrying out their post-Cold War security strategies that revolve largely around collective efforts aimed at building security and ensuring stability.

China's commitment to a long-term anti-piracy mission suggests that it will continue providing armed escorts even as pirate attacks in the region extend beyond the

---

[102] Donna Miles, "Latest Ship Seizures Broaden Counter-Piracy Challenge" Navy.mil. 27 March 2009. Available online: <http://www.navy.mil/search/display.asp?story_id=43830>. Accessed 27 March 2009.
[103] Ibid.

Gulf of Aden and further into the Indian Ocean. This would place PLAN escort vessels increasingly closer to the Indian subcontinent and the operating area of the Indian Navy, potentially increasing tensions, such as additional naval confrontations, between China and India. As additional nations launch anti-piracy missions, the Gulf of Aden and Indian Ocean will become increasingly complicated operating area patrolled by warships from a variety of states and organizations, each with a unique set of strategic objectives. The region may become a microcosm of geopolitical relations between rising and major powers. States may develop and expand bilateral relations by cooperating in the war against piracy, but the risk of confrontation remains as navies send their most advanced warships to battle pirates in the region.

Implications on the Future Roles of the Chinese Navy

China's deployment to the Gulf of Aden, along with analysis of discussion in Chinese military and academic circles, has led to western speculation that the PLAN's mission may shift to the protection of strategic sea lanes of communication.[104] Although the current anti-piracy deployment represents a new type of mission for the PLAN that signals an increased willingness to use military force to protect Chinese interests, the focus of China's navy will likely continue to be the defense of Chinese territory and China's periphery. Given China's strategic principle of winning local wars in conditions of informationization, the bulk of China's naval operations will likely remain concentrated near China in order to respond to local crises that may emerge.[105] In its description of "the high-tech local wars that China may face in the future," the Chinese

[104] Andrew S. Erickson and Lyle Goldstein, "Gunboats for China's New 'Grand Canals'?," *Naval War College Review* 62, no 2. (Spring 2009), 44-76.
[105] *China's National Defense in 2008*, 8.

Academy of Military Science's 2005 text, *The Science of Military Strategy*, lists potential wars stemming from ethnic extremism in China's border regions, conflicts over resources and territory in the Yellow Sea, the East China Sea, and the South China Sea, as well the "key issue" of a potential crisis with Taiwan.[106] Even potential great power conflicts are discussed in the context of local area wars as the analysts who wrote the text describe China as being geographically located in a region where the "strategic interests of big powers meet."[107] The *Science of Military Strategy* does briefly mention the protection of channels of strategic energy supply, but addresses the topic in a chapter on local wars and China's "ecological and oceanic resources" suggesting that the authors may have been referring to ensuring security of resource flows and extraction in the South China Sea.[108]

While the mission of the PLAN will likely continue to be centered on safeguarding Chinese territory, recent Chinese military publications hint at a growing long-range role that features a broader spectrum of missions in addition to territorial defense. China's desire to develop naval capabilities is lucidly described in *China's National Defense in 2008*, which states, the "Navy has been striving to improve in an all-round way its capabilities of integrated offshore operations…and to gradually develop its capabilities of conducting cooperation in distant waters and countering non-traditional security threats, so as to push forward the overall transformation of the service."[109] The 2008 publication also places an emphasis on the development of capabilities in military operations other than war (MOOTW), such as anti-piracy operations. According to the

---

[106] *The Science of Military Strategy*. Peng Guangqian and Yao Youzhi, eds, (Beijing: Military Science Publishing House, 2005), 441-442.
[107] Ibid, 439
[108] Ibid, 446.
[109] *China's National Defense in 2008*, 23.

paper, China "takes MOOTW as an important form of applying national military forces, and scientifically makes and executes plans for the development of MOOTW capabilities."[110]

China's anti-piracy mission in the Gulf of Aden afforded China the opportunity to employ and test naval techniques and evaluate some of its newest equipment in an operational environment far from the PLAN's traditional operating area. The lessons learned on sustaining long-range deployments, coordinating military operations in a multinational environment, and general tactical and equipment operations skills will undoubtedly help shape and improve the PLAN's development in both traditional territorial defense operations as well as in MOOTW scenarios. Indeed, the PLAN viewed the escort mission as "a test of the achievements of the PLAN in preparation for combats *(sic)*."[111] Upon his return to China in April 2009, Rear Admiral Du Jingchen, the commander of the first Chinese naval escort task force announced that the operation was a learning experience that revealed gaps in China's naval capabilities in areas such as combat readiness training, organization, equipment development, comprehensive support, and laws and regulations.[112] Du argued that the shortcomings should motivate a increased pace in naval development, stating that, "the escort mission can impel us to further update our concept and probe into new ways and new methods in naval building."[113]

---

[110] *China's National Defense in 2008*, 9.
[111] Qu Yang, "'Firsts' created by first Chinese naval escort task force," *PLA Daily*. 29 April 2009. Available online <http://english.chinamil.com.cn/site2/special-reports/2009-04/29/content_1745054.htm >. Accessed 13 May 2009.
[112] Qu Yang, "Du Jingchen: escort is conducive to naval building," *PLA Daily*. 29 April 2009. Available online <http://english.chinamil.com.cn/site2/special-reports/2009-04/29/content_1745055.htm >. Accessed 13 May 2009.
[113] Ibid.

While the real world experience China gained in its deployment to the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Aden may be the current pinnacle of the PLANs realistic training in conducting offshore campaigns and MOOTW, its importance should not be overstated. Aside from the great distance between China and the Gulf of Aden, the anti-piracy operation is a relatively uncomplicated mission compared to other contingencies that the PLAN might face. China is operating in a low risk threat environment free of hostile aircraft, surface ships, and submarines and is participating in an operation that has international support. A potential conflict with Taiwan or over territorial claims in the South China Sea would likely require a far larger force and more sophisticated tactics and planning.

While the conditions surrounding the mission in Somalia are unique and not likely replicable in any other region of the world, China's participation offers valuable insight into the operational capabilities of the PLAN.[114] When analyzed in the context of Chinese military publications, observations of current anti-piracy operations can be used to assess China's ability to carry out potential future naval missions. This paper relies on information about the anti-piracy operation released by the PLA to asses limitations in Chinese naval capabilities to examine the feasibility of sustaining SLOC protection operations in a hostile environment. Both western and Chinese analysts have suggested that as China's dependence on foreign energy sources grows, the nation will become increasingly vulnerable to operations designed to limit or block China's access to energy

[114] Conditions in off the Horn of Africa are unique for many reasons including the existence of a UN resolution urging nations to participate in anti-piracy operations and the broad international support for anti-piracy operations.

resources.[115] Given the possibility of an energy resource blockade against China, analysts suggest that the PLAN enhance its ability to protect key sea lanes of communication to ensure security of energy resource supply.[116]

The analysis conducted in this section is not intended to be detailed net assessments of force-on-force campaigns. While recent publications demonstrate the utility of such analysis, they are beyond the scope of this paper.[117] Instead, the paper attempts to illustrate how lessons learned, successes, and shortcomings from the anti-piracy operation apply to future PLAN missions. Admittedly, any method of military operations analysis that relies largely on Chinese government-controlled press releases is not ideal. Publicly released information is likely incomplete with little or no mention of shortcomings and specific details on successes. Despite a lack of discussion in these areas, the *PLA Daily*, the official media outlet for the PLA, describes many new tasks and challenges the anti-piracy flotilla was forced to overcome. Even brief mention of these challenges offers insight into procedures or activities that the PLAN may consider as difficult.

Protecting Sea Lanes of Communication in a Hostile Environment

China's participation in current anti-piracy operations offers a valuable window into Chinese naval capabilities. Although the PLAN is tasked with a variety of missions ranging from coastal defense to strategic deterrence, this paper analyzes only one

---

[115] Gabriel B. Collins, "No Oil for the Lamps of China?," *Naval War College Review* 61, no 2. (Spring 2008), 79-95.
[116] Erickson and Goldstein (2009), 44-76.
[117] Recent published examples of net assessment campaign analysis include Kelly Greenhill, "Mission Impossible? Preventing Deadly Conflict in the African Great Lakes Region," *Security Studies* 11, no. 1 (Autumn 2001): 77-124, and Caitlin Talmadge, "Closing Time: Assessing Possible Outcomes of U.S.-Iranian Conflict in the Strait of Hormuz," *International Security* 33, no. 1, (Summer 2008): 82-117.

potential type of naval operation, the sea transportation defense/sea communication line defense campaign.[118] China's growing dependence on energy resources from abroad has led both western and Chinese analysts to discuss the need for the development of military capabilities to protecting strategic sea lanes of communication (SLOCs) through which oil and energy resources travel.[119] A SLOC defense campaign in a hostile environment is also analyzed due to its similarity to the current anti-piracy mission. Using evidence drawn from the China's Gulf of Aden deployment to assess the PLAN's ability to conduct other potential operations such as amphibious landings or "land attack campaigns from the sea" would offer little analytical value due to the significant differences in the techniques, force requirements, and tactics. Still, analysis of a SLOC defense operation provides insight into shortcomings in logistics and combined operations capabilities that could impact any future PLAN operation.

As described earlier, China's current technique for protecting its shipping interests relies on a maritime convoy. After requesting naval protection, commercial vessels rendezvous with Chinese warships at a predetermined location. The convoy then transits through the piracy area of operations, with Chinese warships serving largely as a deterrent against would be pirates, firing warning shots and launching helicopters to fend off suspected attackers. In some cases, Chinese special forces personnel reportedly board merchant vessels in the front, middle, and rear of the convoy formation to act as "onboard

[118] The campaign is referred to as a sea transportation defense campaign, sea traffic defense campaign, and sea communication line defense campaign in *The Science of Military Campaigns*. Wang Houqing, et al, eds. (Beijing: National Defense University Press, 2000), 311-315. This paper refers to the campaign as SLOC defense/protection.
[119] Erickson and Goldstein (2009), 44-76.

guards."[120] These techniques are well suited for protecting shipping against untrained, poorly armed, non-state actors, but would be unable to defend Chinese shipping from a more advanced military seeking to block Chinese energy supply flows.

In a hostile situation, a blockading power could target both Chinese warships and the ships they escort by either attacking the vessels with the intent of destroying them as the Germans did during the Battle of the Atlantic or could use deterrence to stop vessels in a campaign similar to the maritime quarantine of Cuba during the Missile Crisis. In either scenario, a potential adversary would be employing equipment far more advanced than the rocket propelled grenades and rifles carried by Somali pirates. Thus, a Chinese defensive escort force would need to serve far more than a deterrent purpose. PLAN surface ships, submarines, and aircraft would need to operate collectively to protect the SLOC and vessels transiting through it by locating potential threats and attacking or avoiding them. The current mission has offered China an environment to train for basic elements of a long-range, but a protection mission in a hostile environment would involve far more forces and be significantly more complex.

Broadening the Scope of the Mission

In 2000, the National Defense University in Beijing published *The Science of Military Campaigns*. The text offers a comprehensive background to the study of operational level campaigns and provides general guidelines for executing various types of military campaigns. The authors describe "sea transportation defense" as a potential

[120] Xia Hongping and Cao Haihua, "Second Chinese naval escort taskforce accomplishes large-scale escort task," PLA Daily. 29 April 2009. Available online :< http://english.chinamil.com.cn/site2/special-reports/2009-04/29/content_1745053.htm>. Accessed 13 May 2009.

naval operation designed to safeguard sea communication safety by defending against enemy attacks on load and unloading ports and mid-way ports, protecting transportation ships, and to break an enemy blockade against port and water channels.[121] A SLOC defense mission involves four distinct components.[122] First, Chinese ships must be defended during the loading phase. Next a regional task force consisting of aviation units, surface warships, and submarines must ensure control of the sky and sea surrounding the SLOC. In addition to seizing air and sea control, an additional "escort group" must be assigned to protect ships that are transiting through the SLOC. This component of the mission differs from the regional task force as it focuses on protecting specific ships, whereas the regional defense mission aims to maintain region air and sea superiority. Finally, the destination ports must be defended as the ships are unloaded.[123]

The current anti-piracy operation differs significantly from a traditional SLOC protection campaign in that the current threat of pirates only necessitates protection of commercial vessels during the escort phase of a SLOC defense campaign as outlined in *The Science of Military Campaigns*. Given the relatively localized and low-tech nature of Somali pirates, there is no need to protect origin and destination ports, nor do pirates pose any air based or subsurface threat. A SLOC defense campaign in a more hostile environment, potentially stemming from a larger conflict would greatly widen the scope of the mission, requiring protection of Chinese shipping interests in all phases of a ship's

---

[121] Wang Houqing, et al, (2000), 311. Most of the campaigns described in the text appear to focus on a potential crisis in the Taiwan Strait, however, the general lessons can be applied to operations other than a conflict involving Taiwan.

[122] Ibid, 312.

[123] Ibid, 312.

journey from the point of origin until the ship is offloaded. *The Science of Military Campaigns* describes the need protect against both conventional attack and sabotage beginning with loading in the port of origin.[124] It is unlikely that a blockading power will use conventional attacks against non-Chinese ports where energy resources are loaded onto China-bound vessels, as port facilities are generally used by multiple nations, and not exclusively by China. Chinese military planners would therefore need to focus their attention on developing measures to prevent sabotage against Chinese vessels. Deploying a base defense force to achieve this task, as advocated by *The Science of Military Campaigns*, may not be feasible in a non-Chinese port of origin because of a variety of factors ranging from political to logistical concerns. Thus, China may need to coordinate with local governments for in-port protection or station security teams onboard vessels while they are in port, which may prove to be both monetarily and labor intensive.

Once a vessel leaves port, it will potentially face aviation, underwater, and surface threats posed by the blockading force. Since these threats are absent in the current anti-piracy operation, China is able to protect its vessels with a minimal deployment of forces. In a higher risk environment, China could not simply escort convoys of ships, but would also be required to search for adversary submarines, mines, aircraft, and surface ships, which could be a massive undertaking depending on the blockading power and the size of the operating area. Additionally, China maintaining sea and air control over the area of operations, would be a difficult challenge for China given the PLAN's limited experience in combined arms operations and the lack equipment such as aircraft carriers. While China's current deployment to the Horn of Africa can technically be considered a

[124] Ibid, 313-314.

combined arms operation because of its use of aviation assets, special forces, and surface combatants, the combined nature of the operation is minimal. The two utility helicopters and few dozen special forces personnel act largely as extensions of the destroyers, generally carrying out short patrol flights in response to reports of suspected pirate activity. The current mission has not provided China with the opportunity to practice true combined arms operations.

Logistical Shortcomings

China's participation in the anti-piracy mission also highlighted the lack of sufficient underway replenishment capabilities as a key PLAN shortcoming. In order to sustain long duration, long-range operations, warships must refuel and replenish their stores of ammunition, food, and other supplies. While these needs can be satisfied by making port calls, docking into foreign ports generally takes warships away from performing their mission and can be rather dangerous, as demonstrated by the 2000 terrorist attack against the USS *Cole* as it pulled into Aden for a routine refueling.[125] To eliminate the need for port calls solely for replenishment and refueling, many modern navies rely on underway replenishment, a practice of transferring fuel and goods from one ship to another. [126] In most cases, purpose built auxiliary ships designed to resupply surface vessels are tasked with underway replenishment. The PLAN deployed the *Weishanhu,* an indigenously produced, *Fuchi*-class multi-product replenishment ship as part of the anti-piracy task force. The *Weishanhu* is one of five replenishment ships in the PLAN's fleet with blue water capabilities; a majority of China's other replenishment

[125] Dave Moniz, "US Ships Vulnerable at Refueling Ports, Navy Didn't Relax Guard Cohen Says," USA Today. 13 October 2000. *Lexis Nexis*.

ships are designed for coastal use and lack the ability to conduct long distance operations.[127] In comparison, the United States operates thirty-nine auxiliary vessels capable of resupplying a variety of goods, with dozens more in the National Defense Reserve Fleet and Ready Reserve Fleet that could be quickly activated in the event of a crisis.[128]

The dearth of oceangoing auxiliary ships in the PLAN likely influenced the force structure of China's current anti-piracy mission and will limit future long-range naval operations if the fleet size is not increased. While the Chinese destroyers initially assigned to the mission remained in the region for roughly three months before being relieved in April 2009, the *Weishanhu* was not replaced by another replenishment vessel and remained deployed to the Gulf of Aden. A variety of plausible explanations could justify the *Weishanhu*'s longer deployment. First, it is possible that as a larger vessel, it has a slightly longer endurance than the smaller surface combatants. It is also possible that Chinese military planners feared that deploying a second oceangoing replenishment vessel to the Gulf of Aden before the *Weishanhu* returned would leave the South Sea Fleet (SSF) without a large replenishment vessel to support potential contingency operations in the SSF area of responsibility. The SSF, which has contributed all of the vessels and personnel assigned to the anti-piracy force, maintains two of the PLAN's five large, oceangoing replenishment ships.[129] While the PLAN could deploy a supply ship from either the East Sea or North Sea Fleets, it would likely require significantly more coordination as Chinese naval operations traditionally include only forces from one of

---

[127] *The Military Balance 2009*, (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2009), 35-36. *Sino-Defence Naval Vessels Description*, Available online: < http://www.sinodefence.com/navy/vessel.asp>.
[128] *The Military Balance 2009*, 35-36.
[129] *Sino-Defence Naval Vessels Description*.

China's three fleets.[130] A SLOC defense operation in a hostile environment would certainly require more than one auxiliary ship. The increased number of PLAN surface combatants deployed in a more stressing operational environment would necessitate the need for additional support vessels. Additionally, Chinese military planners would need to consider the loss of auxiliary vessels due to enemy attack or equipment stemming from a high operations tempo. The potential for losses may result in increased requirements for ships capable of underway replenishment. China could use civilian cargo vessels to fill some of the underway replenishment capabilities gap. The Chinese anti-piracy has relied on civilian vessels for replenishment, and has received three tons of fresh vegetables and food from the Chinese Shipping Company's "New Africa" freighter.[131]

The great distance between the Gulf of Aden and the Chinese mainland further complicates the logistics associated with sustaining a sea lane protection operation. In the current anti-piracy mission, China has been able to use civilian cargo vessels to supplement naval resupply ships and has loaded additional fuel, water, and food onto the *Weishanhu* in the Port of Aden.[132] In a hostile environment, the long logistical tail required to support deployed operations would be an attractive target for a blockading power. Unarmed civilian ships carrying supplies to deployed Chinese naval forces would therefore require escorts, placing additional demands on PLAN resources. Additionally, the practice of commercially purchasing fuel and supplies in the area of operations may

---

[130] *China's Navy 2007*, --.
[131] Qian Xiaohu and Tian Yuan, "Chinese ship carries supplies for naval escort fleet," *PLA Daily*. 1 February 2009. Available online: < http://english.chinamil.com.cn/site2/special-reports/2009-02/01/content_1638575.htm>. Accessed 3 March 2009.
[132] Xia Hongping and Hou Yaming, "Supply ship 'Weishanhu' berths in Port of Aden for Replenishment," *PLA Daily*. 27 April 2009. Available online: <http://english.chinamil.com.cn/site2/special-reports/2009-04/27/content_1742339.htm>. Accessed 13 May 2009.

not be feasible in a hostile environment. During the first and second Chinese anti-piracy deployments, the PLAN coordinated with the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Chinese Overseas Shipping Company to arrange "commercialized material procurement" in the Port of Aden."[133] During the three-day port call, the *Weishanhu* was loaded with fuel, water, and food, while some crewmembers took shore leave.[134] In this case, China was able to replenish the military vessel in a foreign port likely because anti-piracy operations have received support from the international community and are legitimized by UN Security Council Resolutions.

If China became involved with a conflict that required armed defense of SLOCs, Beijing may find itself unable to access foreign port facilities. This may be especially true if the SLOC defense mission is a component of a broader war between China and another large power, such as a war involving the United States in the South China Sea. In such a conflict, the United States may attempt to block China's access to energy resources and other materials that could aid China's war effort by establishing blockade operations far from the shores of China, where the mission would be less risky to the blockading force.[135] A blockading power could use its influence to encourage states to bar Chinese warships from entering their ports, through coercive diplomacy or by offering economic or diplomatic incentives. States may also seek to remain neutral in a potential conflict, and independently decide to bar foreign warships from their ports and territorial waters if SLOC defense campaign is part of larger conflict. In these cases, China's ability to

[133] Ibid.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Collins and Murray (2008), 81-87.

sustain long-range operations would be significantly impaired, unless the PLAN acquires more naval auxiliary supply ships.

Conclusion

As China continues to develop economically and diplomatically, it will increasingly rely on international markets and foreign suppliers. This growth will be coupled with another component of China's peaceful development, the desire to be viewed as more responsible and cooperative actor committed to ensuring global stability. These objectives have already manifested themselves in a Chinese foreign policy that appears increasingly willing to employ military forces in MOOTW to further China's interests and enhance its image as a responsible state actor. As the PLA becomes more active in international operations, the PLAN will likely find itself deployed on a variety of new missions that involve it to travel further from China's shores and employ new equipment and techniques in addition to its primary mission of territorial defense. However, China's ability to carry out these new tasks may be limited by shortcomings in logistical capabilities and combined arms operations.

17.407 / 17.408 Chinese Foreign Policy: International Relations and Strategy
Spring 2009