

**SIX YEARS AT SEA... AND COUNTING:  
GULF OF ADEN ANTI-PIRACY AND  
CHINA'S MARITIME COMMONS PRESENCE**

**By Andrew S. Erickson and Austin M. Strange**



**June 2015**



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## *Advance Evaluations*

“During a six-year effort, China’s navy overcame limited basing options and logistical nightmares to implement a successful anti-piracy campaign in the Gulf of Aden. The authors prove that China has the ability to conduct long-range naval operations far from home and explain how these operations now have far reaching strategic implications.”

—**Wendell Minnick, Asia Bureau Chief, *Defense News***

“A lucid analysis of China’s six years’ experience in anti-piracy activities in the Gulf of Aden, detailing the breakthroughs it has achieved in out-of-area operations, logistics and international cooperation. Erickson and Strange place these activities in the context of the PRC’s Far Seas naval diplomacy and the solidification of the PRC’s emergence as a maritime power.”

—**Prof. June Teufel Dreyer, Dept. of Political Science, University of Miami**

“The longest enduring ‘Far Seas’ mission China’s Navy has ever conducted is its continuing six-year participation in the multinational Gulf of Aden anti-piracy operations. The implications of what the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) and Beijing are learning from this experience to be applied in the future are central issues in China’s defense and foreign policies. Building on their earlier monograph *No Substitute for Experience* joined with meticulous exploitation of Chinese sources and interviews with PLAN officers, Erickson and Strange have prepared detailed descriptions of PLAN antipiracy operations over the years since 2008 and the ensuing deliberations inside China. Their assessments are therefore indispensable reading to understand what issues Beijing confronts as it weighs the future employment of what is an emerging

global Navy in support of China's rapidly expanding national interests."

—**Paul H.B. Godwin, Professor, National War College (ret.)**

"Throughout history, great powers have been interested in piracy as much for the advantages suppression can give them in the game of nations as in the more journeyman task of protecting trade. Erickson and Strange bring out clearly that modern China is no exception. The story of the Chinese Navy's deployment to counter the activities of pirates off Somalia demonstrated in the most visible terms that while it may not yet be a globally deployed fleet it is a globally capable one. The authors have drawn on a wealth of Chinese-language documents to show how over nearly twenty deployments to the region China's long-standing ambition to be able to operate across the world's oceans has been advanced by building an experiential platform from which to challenge its Asian neighbors and eventually the U.S. Navy. This book needs to be read by anyone interested in the part China played in quelling Somali piracy and in its seminal role in the rise of a new naval competitor."

—**Martin N. Murphy, author of *Somalia, the New Barbary? Piracy and Islam off the Horn of Africa and Small Boats, Weak States and Dirty Money: Piracy and Maritime Terrorism in the Modern World***

"PLA Navy watchers owe a debt of gratitude to Andrew Erickson and Austin Strange. Their monograph, *Six Years at Sea...and Counting: Gulf of Aden Anti-Piracy and China's maritime Commons Presence*, gathers under one cover the best single appreciation of how important anti-piracy operations have been to both China's reputation as a global responsible stakeholder as well as to the development of the PLA Navy to a more 'balanced' navy. After six years of 'far seas' operations it would be a mistake to pigeon-hole China's Navy as strictly a regional force. Anti-piracy operations in the Arabian Sea have permitted the PLA Navy to make huge strides



in its ability to conduct 'far seas' operations. These operations started in December 2008, which will be remembered as a key historic milestone in the evolution of the PLA Navy. It marked the beginning of the evolution of the PLAN from a coastal defense force to one that can join the great navies of the world in being able to conduct sustained operations in areas half way around the world from its home waters."

"The antipiracy patrols permit the PLAN to learn how to sustain warships on a distant station for months at a time. They have learned what works and what doesn't; what capabilities ships should be fitted with to be combat credible when on extended operations; what pieces of equipment and combat systems are reliable and what ones are not; and how to logistically sustain surface combatants, amphibious ships as well as support ships for months at a time—over nine months in some cases. China has learned the value of naval diplomacy which the PLAN has practiced relentlessly along the entire Indian Ocean littoral and into the Mediterranean and Black Seas.

"In short, the PLAN learning curve has been impressive; it has absorbed lessons quickly because the anti-piracy patrols are a real world 'battle-laboratory' for the PLAN, providing it an opportunity to observe the day-to-day operations of most of the world's leading navies and absorb best practices for its own use. This monograph is an important addition to our understanding of the evolution of the PLAN."

**—RADM Michael McDevitt, USN (ret.), Senior Fellow, Center for Naval Analyses**

"Andrew Erickson, the indefatigable and brilliant observer of China's Navy, has scored another important success. Working with Austin Strange, Erickson has written a landmark study on China's six years of counter-piracy operations in the 'far seas' of the Gulf of Aden.

Erickson assesses the benefits to China's new naval power of its experiences on the high seas, benefits that signifies the emergence of the PLA Navy as a global force to be reckoned with."

**—Bernard Cole, associate dean of faculty and academic programs and professor of international history, National War College, Washington, DC. He retired from the U.S. Navy in 1995 after thirty years of service.**

**Six Years at Sea... and Counting:  
Gulf of Aden Anti-Piracy and China's  
Maritime Commons Presence**

**Andrew S. Erickson and Austin M. Strange<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> The ideas expressed herein are solely those of the authors, who welcome comments for improvement at <[andrew.erickson@alumni.princeton.edu](mailto:andrew.erickson@alumni.princeton.edu)>. The authors thank Kenneth Allen, Gabriel Collins, David Cohen, Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga and several anonymous reviewers for helpful inputs.



## **I. Executive Summary**

Well over six years of Chinese anti-piracy operations off the Horn of Africa in the Gulf of Aden have directly supported People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) modernization goals and provided invaluable experience operating in distant waters. Lessons learned have spawned PLAN innovations in doctrine, operations and international coordination. Many of the insights gleaned during deployments are applicable to security objectives closer to home; some officers enjoy promotion to important positions after returning. Anti-piracy operations have been a springboard for China to expand its maritime security operations, from evacuating its citizens from Libya and Yemen to escorting Syrian chemical weapons to their destruction and participating in the search for Malaysia Airlines Flight 370. The broad operational and diplomatic benefits of Beijing's sustained Gulf of Aden presence suggest that, when operations eventually wind down, it will need to develop new ways to address its burgeoning overseas interests.

Beyond their broader significance, the more specific meaning of China's multiyear naval anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden depends largely on one's perspective. For virtually all observers, China's official response since 2008 to rampant Somali piracy, like that of other sovereign states, was a logical and measured response to threats to national and global economic, political and security interests. Such threats were particularly severe for China, which increasingly possesses economic and human interests sprawling beyond its national borders, and which relies on stable maritime commerce for prosperity. While China and others agree that the genesis and eradication of piracy are strongly rooted in domestic factors, long-term naval deployments have been a collaborative, "least-worst" approach sans more optimal alternatives.

## 2 Six Years at Sea... and Counting

For the Chinese people, at least to a limited extent, extended anti-piracy operations provide reassurance that their government is cognizant and capable with regard to protecting Chinese human and economic interests outside the Middle Kingdom. More broadly, continued domestic emphasis on the success of the PLAN in fighting pirates has contributed to a longer-term objective of reassuring the Chinese public that the country is protected by a powerful navy.

For the Chinese government, the mission has been a useful exercise in planning, implementation and coordination for state leaders within and outside the navy. Military and civilian officials alike were challenged by auxiliary but crucial elements of the deployments, such as logistics and budgeting, and had to consider how their strategic choices would impact domestic and international perceptions of Chinese foreign policy. Moreover, institutionalized coordination, ship-to-ship exchanges, joint exercises and port visits around Asia, Africa, Europe and the Middle East have added an important diplomatic layer to Chinese anti-piracy operations. Not unlike many other states, China has demonstrated a preference for operating under the aegis of a robust international legal framework such as that provided by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) when contributing to global commons security. Finally, distant sea anti-piracy operations have spurred internal and external discussions on the potential for more institutionalized overseas access points to better protect Beijing's interests abroad.

For the PLAN itself, well over 2,000 days of anti-piracy operations have directly supported naval modernization goals and provided an opportunity for PLAN warships, submarines and personnel to gain experience operating in distant waters. While PLAN anti-piracy task forces have largely exercised caution, increases in blue water competence as a result of the mission have spawned innovation in naval operations, doctrine and coordination. Many of the insights gleaned *en route* to, during and on the way home from deployments are applicable to security objectives closer to home. The importance

of the mission is modestly reflected in the rapid advancement that some officers enjoy after returning from the Gulf of Aden. Anti-piracy operations have been a springboard for China to progressively engage in a broader range of maritime security operations. The eventual conclusion of international Gulf of Aden anti-piracy operations will stimulate Chinese plans to bolster China's global maritime presence.

For those outside of China, Beijing's persistence presence in the Gulf of Aden has showcased China's growing naval competence. The PLAN continues to earn the respect of other navies also invested in fighting piracy. Moreover, besides protecting Beijing's overseas interests, anti-piracy operations have presented an opportunity for China to provide more public goods abroad as a responsible stakeholder. In this sense, the operations have been a useful reply to frequent claims that China contributes well below its capacity in international security affairs. More broadly, the breadth and consistency of China's anti-piracy efforts signal Beijing's willingness to cooperate proactively to achieve mutually desirable security outcomes under certain circumstances.

In addition to the several hundred Chinese-language open sources examined (the most relevant of which are quoted and cited), this study draws on the authors' several years of extensive academic interactions, discussions and interviews with Chinese interlocutors. These include, particularly, PLAN leaders—from PLAN Commander Admiral Wu Shengli on down—and working-level PLAN officers. Where possible, the key takeaways from these officials' remarks and responses are indicated in the text. It is a welcome testament to shared Sino-American and global interests in anti-piracy cooperation in the Gulf of Aden and other international waters that such revealing interaction has been possible. The authors are grateful for this opportunity to increase understanding, and hope to bring to a broader audience a sense of the PLAN's commitment to

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contributing to international security and increasing openness to discussing its efforts and aspirations in this regard.

With these perspectives in mind, this study explores the genesis, results and consequences of China's anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden over the past six-plus years.



## II. Key Judgments

- At its height, Somali piracy consistently affected Chinese trade and the safety of Chinese nationals at a distance and at levels unprecedented in contemporary times.
- As with other nations, China's decision to have the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) commence anti-piracy operations was a "least-worst" response in the absence of viable and desirable alternatives.
- Deployments off Somalia have supported naval modernization goals and provided an opportunity for the PLAN to gain experience operating in distant waters, some of which is applicable to security objectives closer to home.
- Chinese strategists were challenged by and responded to auxiliary but crucial elements of the deployments, such as logistics and budgeting.
- Beijing's rules of engagement (ROE) vis-à-vis suspected Somali pirates have been relatively cautious, although its operations have become streamlined and wider in scope over time.
- Greater Chinese competence in blue waters has led to growing operational creativity over twenty-plus escort task forces, as well as efficient coordination between civil and military entities in support of the anti-piracy mission.
- The PLAN has managed to utilize significant proportions of elite warships and even submarines, personnel and communications technology in continuous anti-piracy escort deployments, and has actively employed all three of its naval fleets.

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- As a result, China's Navy has cultivated thousands of naval professionals with "Far Seas" experience, including high-ranking naval officials who might have important responsibilities in future "Near Seas" operations more central to "core" Chinese national interests.<sup>2</sup>
- China's increasingly long blue water résumé will influence overall PLAN growth for the next several years under China's new civil and military leadership.
- Through a smorgasbord of regular coordination, ship-to-ship exchanges, "joint" (or, as they would be termed internationally, combined)<sup>3</sup> exercises and port visits around Asia, Africa, Europe and the Middle East, Beijing has greatly expanded its naval diplomacy in the name of anti-piracy.
- Aside from directly protecting Beijing's overseas interests, anti-piracy operations have presented an opportunity for

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<sup>2</sup> Drawing on the thinking of Admiral Liu Huaqing, who modernized China's Navy as its Commander from 1982–88, Chinese military strategists refer Sinocentrically to the Yellow, East China and South China Seas as the "Near Seas" (近海), areas between those seas and an arc drawn through Guam as the "Middle Seas" (中海) and areas beyond as the "Far Seas" (远海). 刘华清 [Liu Huaqing], 刘华清回忆录 [The Memoirs of Liu Huaqing] (Beijing: People's Liberation Army, 2004), p. 437.

<sup>3</sup> The PLA uses "joint" for bilateral and multilateral exercises, but the international community uses "combined." Kenneth Allen, "PLA Foreign Relations under Xi Jinping: Continuity and/or Change?" paper presented at the Chinese Council on Advanced Policy Studies (CAPS)-RAND-National Defense University 26<sup>th</sup> Annual PLA Conference, Arlington, VA, November 21–22, 2014.

China to provide more public goods abroad as a responsible stakeholder.

- Like many other navies, the PLAN's entrance into and presence in the fight against piracy demonstrates Beijing's preference to operate under the aegis of a robust international legal framework such as that provided by the United Nations Security Council.
- The drivers behind China's six-plus years of anti-piracy operations suggest it will work to further institutionalize its future role in global maritime security.
- Anti-piracy operations have been a springboard for Beijing to progressively engage in a broader range of maritime security operations. The eventual conclusion of international Gulf of Aden anti-piracy operations will stimulate thinking on how to maintain or bolster China's global maritime presence.
- Finally, Far Seas anti-piracy operations have spurred internal and external discussions on the potential for more institutionalized overseas access points to better protect Beijing's interests abroad.

### III. Introduction

Five years into its first distant seas mission, the PLAN already had ample reason to celebrate. On January 3, 2014, it held a thousand-person “Showcase Banquet” in which ten sailors received awards. PLAN Commander Wu Shengli delivered a speech lauding the PLAN’s first five years in the Gulf of Aden as strong testament to China’s success in pushing forward the construction of a modern navy.<sup>4</sup>

Wu’s remarks have not been published, but other official sources capture what was likely on his mind. In December 2013 *Navy Today*, the magazine of China’s Navy, published a 40-page special issue titled “The Five-Year Anniversary of Chinese Naval Escorts.” In the periodical’s preface, author Ren Haiping lauded the five-year anniversary of China’s anti-piracy escorts: “This is an historical moment in the People’s Navy’s history worth remembering.”<sup>5</sup> Ren continued:

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<sup>4</sup> Attendees included PLAN Political Commissar Liu Xiaojiang; Vice Commanders Ding Yiping, Xu Hongmeng, Tian Zhong and Ding Yi; Vice Political Commissars Wang Sentai and Ma Faxiang; and Chief of General Staff Du Jingchen. 王凌硕 [Wang Lingshuo] and 莫小亮 [Mo Xiaoliang], “执行亚丁湾索马里海域护航任务表彰大会举行” [Showcase Banquet Held for Carrying Out Gulf of Aden and Somalia Waters Escort Duties], 解放军报 [Liberation Army Daily], January 3, 2014, <http://military.workercn.cn/265/201401/05/140105083541889.shtml>.

<sup>5</sup> 任海平 [Ren Haiping], “大国海军的责任担当—写在人民海军护航编队出征五周年之际” [A Great Power Navy’s Assumption of Responsibility—Writing on the Five-Year Anniversary of the People’s Navy’s Escort Fleet Expedition], 护航 5 年特

The history of the rise and fall of great powers tells us that the navy and overseas trade are two large pillars of national power and prosperity. In order to ensure the safety of strategic sea lanes of communication, and to uphold the peace of international navigation lanes, the People's Navy's ambition is to move towards the deep blue and towards an unknown battlefield. [The mission represents] China's first time using [institutionalized] military force overseas to protect national strategic interests, the first time organizing maritime combat forces to discharge international humanitarian duties overseas, [and] the first time executing responsibilities to protect the safety of important lines of transportation in the Far Seas: [these] "three firsts" [三个首次] are visible proof of the People's Navy's historical leap, [reflecting] the honorable dreams of the Chinese people. This dream actually originated a century ago and has constantly lingered in [our] hearts. Thinking back to over 600 years ago, Zheng He led a vast and mighty fleet of Chinese ships to the Western Ocean seven times, but once glorious-China ultimately proved unable to carry on Zheng He's naval tradition, lowering its flags and sails amid futility. Following a

relentless trajectory outward [in the form of an] expansion of interests, following the navigation lines that Zheng He's fleet sailed in those times, the Chinese people's dream to go towards the deep blue and conquer the ocean has not ceased for even a moment.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, China's ongoing anti-piracy efforts and new accomplishments therein are rooted in a larger dream of national naval power.

As of December 26, 2014 (coincidentally the 121<sup>st</sup> birthday of People's Republic of China (PRC) founder Mao Zedong) China's Navy had maintained a six-year, uninterrupted security presence in the Gulf of Aden, situated between Somalia and Oman.<sup>7</sup> This is an unprecedented milestone for China's military development and, more broadly, Chinese foreign policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Ju Chengzhi, Head of the Ministry of Transportation (MOT)'s Department of International Cooperation, encapsulated the operations' impact at their outset: "This instance of China's dispatching warships to escort Chinese commercial ships has brought us a new concept: As [the Chinese] government, in order to ensure that Chinese commercial ships are able to perform regular seaborne transportation overseas, [it is necessary for us] to face some suddenly erupting situations, appropriately adhere to international

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> While Western sources refer alternately to the Horn of Africa, this study will use "Gulf of Aden"—the English version of the most commonly used Chinese regional descriptor.

common practices and to adopt more effective measures. This is a transformation in thinking.”<sup>8</sup> The Gulf of Aden mission has indeed catalyzed new thinking, both for China as a whole and its navy in particular. The effects will be felt for years in far-reaching, complex, sometimes subtle ways.

China’s naval anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden now stand at six years...and counting. Since December 26, 2008, PLAN task forces had escorted 5,465 Chinese and foreign commercial ships by the end of 2013,<sup>9</sup> a rate of over 1,000 ships per year.<sup>10</sup> The PLAN also thwarted over 32 potential pirate attacks, rescued 42 commercial ships and escorted 11 vessels previously taken by pirates.<sup>11</sup> As of April 2015, twenty PLAN task forces had escorted nearly 6,000 Chinese and foreign ships in well over 800 groups.<sup>12</sup> While the vast

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<sup>8</sup> 徐菁菁 [Xu Jingjing], “我们为什么要护航--专访交通运输部国际合作司司长局成志” [Why We Want to Escort: Interview with Ju Chengzhi, Head of the Ministry of Transportation’s International Cooperation Department], 三联生活周刊 [Sanlian Life Weekly], No. 3, January 19, 2009, pp. 92-95, [www.zsnews.cn/News/2009/01/16/1018431.shtml](http://www.zsnews.cn/News/2009/01/16/1018431.shtml).

<sup>9</sup> “China Continues Fighting Pirates off Africa,” Xinhua, December 27, 2013, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/834489.shtml>.

<sup>10</sup> “海军亚丁湾护航特别展举办” [Naval Aden Escorts Special Exhibit Hosted], 人民日报 [People’s Daily], December 26, 2013, [http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2013-12/26/nw.D110000renmrb\\_20131226\\_4-04.htm](http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2013-12/26/nw.D110000renmrb_20131226_4-04.htm).

<sup>11</sup> Peng Yining, “Navy Lauded for Foiling Pirates,” *China Daily*, December 26, 2013, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90786/8495596.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Admiral Wu Shengli, discussion with one of the authors and small group of Harvard administrators, faculty and students at Wadsworth House, Harvard

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majority of vessels escorted have been large commercial ships, smaller Chinese-flagged boats have benefitted as well. On May 12, 2015, destroyer *Ji'nan* of the 20<sup>th</sup> task force logged the PLAN's 839<sup>th</sup> escort trip by shepherding eight oceangoing fishing vessels across Gulf of Aden waters from east to west.<sup>13</sup> As **Exhibit 3** indicates, PLAN anti-piracy task forces have made over 120 calls on over 50 ports in 45 countries (as well as Hong Kong). About half of all Chinese anti-piracy port calls have officially been for ship and personnel replenishment, while the other half have been declared as friendly visits.<sup>14</sup> In reality the PLAN is likely able to engage in both types of activities during most port calls. The first 17 task forces served an overlapping total of 3,149 days, for an average duration of just over 185 days, typically making nearly 7 port calls each. The very fact that such information is actively recorded and publicized

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University, September 20, 2014. [Hereafter, "Admiral Wu Shengli, discussion with one of the authors."]; "中国海军护航编队执行第 700 批护航任务" [Chinese Naval Escort Task force Carries out 700<sup>th</sup> Escort Mission], 中国新闻网 [China News Web], April 5, 2014, <http://www.chinanews.com/mil/2014/04-05/6034225.shtml>.

<sup>13</sup> "Chinese Warship Escorts 8 Domestic Fishing-Boats," China Military Online, May 15, 2015, [http://english.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/2015-05/15/content\\_6492917.htm](http://english.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/2015-05/15/content_6492917.htm).

<sup>14</sup> Austin M. Strange and Andrew S. Erickson, "China's Global Maritime Presence: Hard and Soft Dimensions of PLAN Antipiracy Operations," Jamestown *China Brief* Vol. 15, No. 9 (May 1, 2015), [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=43868&tx\\_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=25&cHash=8a087cf151074eed214dfe5bba01edbf#.VVJPDfVhHw](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=43868&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=25&cHash=8a087cf151074eed214dfe5bba01edbf#.VVJPDfVhHw).



demonstrates the state's desire to derive maximum domestic and international publicity benefits from the mission.

More than 15,000 select PLAN personnel have sharpened their skills, improved coordination mechanisms and tested new technologies and platforms in the Gulf of Aden.<sup>15</sup> China has deployed over 30 unique naval vessels 60 times in an average of three task forces per year. The majority of platforms deployed belong to the most advanced classes of naval vessels: guided missile frigates, missile destroyers and amphibious landing ships. Through 20 escort task forces, nearly half of all PLAN warships deployed off Somalia since 2008 have served multiple tours there. More specifically, 16 out of 34 (47%) unique naval ships deployed by the PLAN have served on at least two escort task forces. At the time of the first deployment, selected task force destroyers *Haikou* and *Wuhan* were China's most advanced destroyers.<sup>16</sup>

Meanwhile, the People's Republic of China (PRC)'s State Council released a defense white paper titled *The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces* in April 2013. It provided an official summary of Beijing's anti-piracy activities:

To fulfill China's international obligations, the Chinese Navy carries out regular escort missions in

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<sup>15</sup> Peng Yining, "Navy Lauded for Foiling Pirates," *China Daily*, December 26, 2013, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90786/8495596.html>.

<sup>16</sup> 李杰 [Li Jie], "走向远洋新里程碑" [A New Milestone in Going to the Ocean], Five Year Escort Special Column, *Navy Today*, No. 12 (December 2013), p. 19.

the Gulf of Aden and waters off Somalia. It conducts exchanges and cooperation with other escort forces to jointly safeguard the security of the international sea lines of communication (SLOCs). As of December 2012, Chinese Navy task groups have provided protection for four World Food Programme (WFP) ships and 2,455 foreign ships, accounting for 49 percent of the total of escorted ships. They helped four foreign ships, recovered four ships released from captivity and saved 20 foreign ships from pursuit by pirates.

Chinese Navy escort task forces have maintained smooth communication with other navies in the areas of joint escort, information sharing, coordination and liaison. They have conducted joint escorts with their Russian counterparts, carried out joint anti-piracy drills with naval ships of the Republic of Korea (ROK), Pakistan and the United States, and coordinated with the European Union (EU) to protect World Food Programme (WFP) ships. It has exchanged boarding visits of commanders with task forces from the EU, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), the ROK, Japan and Singapore. It has exchanged officers for onboard observations with the navy of the Netherlands. China takes an active part in the conferences of the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS) and “Shared Awareness and Deconfliction” (SHADE) meetings on international merchant shipping protection.

Since January 2012, independent deployers such as China, India and Japan have strengthened their

convoy coordination. They have adjusted their escort schedules on a quarterly basis, optimized available assets and thereby enhanced escort efficiency. China, as the reference country for the first round of convoy coordination, submitted its escort timetable for the first quarter of 2012 in good time. India and Japan's escort task forces adjusted their convoy arrangements accordingly, thereby formulating a well-scheduled escort timetable. The ROK joined these efforts in the fourth quarter of 2012.<sup>17</sup>

It is clear that Chinese elites deeply understand the comprehensive weight of these operations. On the fifth anniversary of China's deployment, National People's Congress (NPC) deputy Du Benyin<sup>18</sup> stated, "It is imperative for us to go abroad in order to safeguard China's national interests. Our military development also requires us to go abroad. 'Going abroad does make a difference,' that is what many officers and men strongly felt."<sup>19</sup> But what specifically

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<sup>17</sup> 中国武装力量的多样化运用 [The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces] (Beijing: 中华人民共和国国务院新闻办公室 [Information Office of the State Council, The People's Republic of China]), April 16, 2013.

<sup>18</sup> According to *China Daily*, in 2013 Du was "NPC deputy and a political commissar of a navy submarine base."

"Military Deputies Vow to Build Strong Army," Xinhua, March 13, 2013, [http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2013-03/15/content\\_16312745.htm](http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2013-03/15/content_16312745.htm).

<sup>19</sup> Luo Zheng and Yang Zurong, "PLA Deputy to NPC: Going Global Really Makes Difference," *Liberation Army Daily*, March 11, 2013, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90786/8163323.html>.

prompted China to respond the way it did, and how did Beijing go about designing and implementing its first protracted Far Seas naval mission? What has China actually achieved in the Gulf of Aden, and what do these accomplishments mean for broader PLAN growth? With the PLAN about to mark the sixth anniversary of its first protracted contribution to international security, how has anti-piracy impacted its global naval activities, and what does it suggest about the future of Beijing's presence in the maritime commons?

Nontraditional security challenges outside of China, such as natural disasters, terrorist attacks and, in this case, piracy, pose growing threats to China's developing national interests. Initial Chinese efforts to safeguard overseas interests have included enhanced diplomacy and mediation (most prominently vis-à-vis Sudan and South Sudan), international and local institution and capacity building; crisis prevention and management; research and dissemination of best practices (e.g., regarding shipping security measures); enhancing diplomatic support for and education of nationals overseas; and "strengthen[ing] the risk assessment, crisis response, corporate social responsibility and political insurance capacities" of China's national oil companies.<sup>20</sup>

Yet incremental and stopgap measures had limited effect, forcing China to pursue more forceful approaches over time. Accordingly, Beijing is compiling an increasing track record of "innovative

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<sup>20</sup> Mathieu Duchâtel, Oliver Bräuner and Zhou Hang, *Protecting China's Overseas Interests: The Slow Shift away from Non-interference*, SIPRI Policy Paper, No. 41 (June 2014), pp. vi-vii, [http://books.sipri.org/product\\_info?c\\_product\\_id=479](http://books.sipri.org/product_info?c_product_id=479).

interventions,” including new types of overseas operations. These include noncombatant evacuation operations (NEOs), peacekeeping operations (PKOs), anti-piracy/SLOC protection patrols, hospital ship activities, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) and Mekong River patrols. Examples to date include: twenty-plus PLAN anti-piracy task forces in the Gulf of Aden since December 2008, safeguarding Syrian chemical weapons in the Mediterranean on their way to destruction, security patrols in the Mekong River, a 35,000-citizen NEO from Libya in March 2011 to which China’s air force and navy both rendered modest support, a March-April 2015 NEO from Yemen involving not only Chinese citizens but also foreigners from 10 nations as well as increasingly active UN contributions.<sup>21</sup> As of August 2013, the PLA had contributed over 20,000 personnel to UN peacekeeping missions over 23 years, and had roughly 2,400 personnel deployed in mid-2015, the most of any permanent UNSC member.<sup>22</sup> While the majority of these have been low profile, technocratic contributions mostly involving engineering, logistics and medical specialists, the PLA has invested significantly in training centers in Beijing and Nanjing. Deploying 400 combat troops to Mali, leading peacekeeping efforts in Cyprus and deploying multiple batches of hundreds of Chinese personnel to South Sudan

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<sup>21</sup> Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga, “PLA Navy Used for the First Time in Naval Evacuation from Yemen Conflict,” *Jamestown China Brief* Vol. 15, 7 (April 2015), [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=43751&cHash=2e6bdb7831a10bd56dd0104fca73acb6#.VTgHNWTBzRY](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=43751&cHash=2e6bdb7831a10bd56dd0104fca73acb6#.VTgHNWTBzRY).

<sup>22</sup> “United Nations Peacekeeping Troop and Police Contributors,” United Nations, accessed April 22, 2015, <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/resources/statistics/contributors.shtml>.

in recent years likely presage greater intensity and diversity of contributions. Of these efforts, China's anti-piracy mission in the Gulf of Aden stands out as its first operational military deployment beyond its immediate geographic periphery.

China's contemporary anti-piracy activities demonstrate Beijing's commitment to addressing a wide range of such threats. The ocean is at the center of China's policy of "going out" to pursue overseas resources and economic opportunities. China relies on seaborne shipping for the vast majority of its trade, and the PLAN is emerging as its most prominent military service abroad. Both Beijing's calculated, rapid response to Somali pirate attacks on Chinese citizens and its steadfast commitment to protecting Chinese and foreign ships over the last six-plus years signal China's staunch commitment to ensuring safe conditions for Chinese overseas. The population of the latter is also rapidly expanding: In 2014 alone over 100 million Chinese traveled abroad while several million others were working or studying abroad.<sup>23</sup>

The mission has become so routine that it is easy to forget its unprecedented nature. Precipitating events in 2008 included threats of and successful pirating of Chinese ships and crews, rising insurance rates and the failure of stopgap protections. In 2007–08, the Gulf of Aden region suffered ~100 pirate attacks annually, of

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<sup>23</sup> Li Xiaomin, "中国公民海外安全保护报告" [Report on Protecting the Safety of Overseas Chinese Citizens], in Yu Xiaofeng, ed., 中国非传统安全研究报告 (2012–2013) [Research Report on Chinese Nontraditional Security 2012–13] (Beijing: Social Sciences Documentation Press, 2013), pp. 231–32.

which 50-60 “hijackings” (piratings) were successful.<sup>24</sup> Rerouting to avoid threats risked delivery date slippage and hence loss of Chinese shipping firms’ market share and razor-thin profit margins. Circumnavigating Africa was costing Chinese vessels an additional six days, making the total voyage time from China to the Mediterranean twenty-four days instead of eighteen.<sup>25</sup> Compensation to at-risk commercial crews negotiated by the Hong Kong Seaman’s Union became increasingly unaffordable.<sup>26</sup> China’s shipping industry and the civilian bureaucrats responsible for it had exhausted low-cost alternatives.

Simultaneously, Somali piracy was becoming a major industry. According to Senior Captain Ma Luping, the PLAN in 2008 considered Somali pirates to be dangerous and professional: “According to the information we have come by, there are about 25 to 30 pirate organizations, totaling approximately 1,000 pirates, in the Gulf of Aden/Somali waters at present. Four of the larger organizations, including the Yi Te Lan [as transliterated] Guards and the Luo Ma Ni [as transliterated] Group, are relatively well equipped and have considerable organizational capacity with higher success rates. The way they [pirate] vessels is, in most cases, for large vessels

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<sup>24</sup> Admiral Wu Shengli, discussion with one of the authors.

<sup>25</sup> Xu Jingjing, “Why We Want to Escort: Interview with Ju Chengzhi, Head of the Ministry of Transportation’s International Cooperation Department,” *Sanlian Life Weekly*, No. 3, January 19, 2009, pp. 92-95, [www.zsnews.cn/News/2009/01/16/1018431.shtml](http://www.zsnews.cn/News/2009/01/16/1018431.shtml).

<sup>26</sup> See Hong Kong Seamen’s Union website, <http://www.hksu1946.hk/main/index.php>.

to take skiffs to distant waters before releasing them so the pirates can board the target vessels and [pirate] them. The waters they operate in were previously confined to approximately 200 nautical miles [370 kilometers/km] off the coast of Somalia. They have now gradually expanded outward.”<sup>27</sup> As former U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia David Shinn remarked in 2009, “The Somalis are entrepreneurial, flexible and adaptive.”<sup>28</sup>

These factors, as well as growing pressure from shipping companies and netizens as well as several high-profile Somali pirate attacks on Chinese seafarers, left no more room for muddling through. In particular, attacks such as the *Dexinhai* incident on October 19, 2008, in which Somali pirates successfully obtained multi-million dollar ransom payments from China, damaged Beijing’s credibility and further encouraged piratical extortion by demonstrating that it could pay handsomely.<sup>29</sup> Top-level leadership decision-making enabled pursuit of an escort mission that the PLAN had apparently discussed and proposed earlier. In an unusually rapid and effective interagency

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<sup>27</sup> “国防部介绍海军赴亚丁湾、索马里海域护航情况等” [Ministry of National Defense Briefing on Navy’s Deployment to Gulf of Aden/Somali Waters to Provide Convoy Cover and Other Information], December 23, 2008, [http://www.gov.cn/xwfb/2008-12/23/content\\_1185458.htm](http://www.gov.cn/xwfb/2008-12/23/content_1185458.htm).

<sup>28</sup> “The Intensity, Spread and Economics of Somali Piracy,” lecture by David H. Shinn, Harvard Kennedy School, December 10–12, 2009, <http://zh.scribd.com/doc/24055830/Controlling-Maritime-Piracy>.

<sup>29</sup> “Somali Pirates: \$4 Million Ransom Paid for Coal Ship,” Reuters, December 27, 2009, [www.reuters.com/article/2009/12/27/us-somalia-piracy-china-idUSTRE5BQ0K420091227](http://www.reuters.com/article/2009/12/27/us-somalia-piracy-china-idUSTRE5BQ0K420091227).



approach, the PLAN, MOT and other relevant organizations coordinated necessary arrangements for the mission's December 26, 2008 launch.

China has sustained naval anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden for over six years. This long-term presence off Somalia has allowed China's Navy to achieve breakthroughs in terms of institutional underpinnings; out-of-area operations and logistics; and international cooperation. In addition, China's 21<sup>st</sup>-century Gulf of Aden experience has solidified its resurgence as an international maritime power. Since 2008, Chinese anti-piracy escorts have provided a foothold for incrementally expanding Beijing's global maritime presence by facilitating international anti-piracy cooperation, enhancing China's naval diplomacy, increasing Beijing's capacity for protecting its evolving overseas interests and contributing to global security as well as spurring debates on pursuing overseas access points for China's military. More broadly, the pragmatism and flexibility with which China has pursued these ends contrasts with more rigid policies in Asia-Pacific waters, and provides insight into China's future presence and role in the maritime commons.

The remainder of this study is arranged as follows. The next section provides background information on various factors that collectively explain why China entered the Gulf of Aden and has maintained its anti-piracy effort there. Next, the institutional and bureaucratic procedures prerequisite for the PLAN's Gulf of Aden mission are discussed. We then survey the nature and scope of China's Gulf of Aden anti-piracy activities from 2008–15, placing them in the larger backdrop of PLAN modernization under Xi Jinping. The subsequent section examines how Beijing has utilized the anti-piracy mission to enhance its blue water presence. This discussion is followed by exploring debates on overseas basing and force projection that arise from China's growing maturity beyond the Near Seas. Finally, we explore the ways in which the PLAN's protracted presence off

Somalia has altered Chinese perceptions of Beijing's presence and role in maritime commons security. The study concludes by summarizing its results and linking China's anti-piracy operations to the broader themes of Far Seas development and maritime commons security.

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## **IV. Why China's Navy Has Entered and Remained in the Gulf of Aden**

The Gulf of Aden, a crucial global maritime commercial artery pulsating with European, Africa and Asian trade, is located, depending on one's starting and ending points, approximately 5,400 nautical miles [10,000 km] from China's booming coastline. Beijing's initial entrance and protracted stay there is a major economic, political and military endeavor. China's decision to undertake it was likely motivated by a range of factors related to both the impact of piracy on Chinese interests and the operation's potential to contribute to long-term military and political goals:

- First, piracy directly affected Chinese trade and the safety of Chinese nationals.
- Second, the PLAN operation was a "least-worst" response compared with limited, and increasingly failed, alternatives.
- Third, anti-piracy operations are an opportunity for China to improve its international image by providing a global public good.
- Finally, the operations have supported naval modernization goals and provided an opportunity to gain experience operating in distant waters.

PLA National Defense University (NDU) professor Tang Yongsheng views the mission's significance as four-fold: (1) to protect China's overseas interests; (2) to build China's national image as a responsible power; (3) to conduct military diplomacy; and (4) to enhance China's military capabilities.<sup>30</sup> Tang's comprehensive four-point assessment is broadly representative of the diverse motivations for the mission, and merits brief explication:

First, many Chinese scholars view the protection of China's overseas interests as one of the most important motivations for the operation. The Gulf of Aden, as Tang suggests, is a crucial sea lane for China's commerce with Europe and North Africa, and for its petroleum imports from the Middle East. Tang further claims that the escort operation creates a forward presence that enables China to respond rapidly to contingencies, citing the role of the escort task force in the 2011 Libya evacuation. As unrest in North Africa and the Middle East continues, Tang's claim may well be tested in the future.

Meanwhile, Chinese experts continue to debate the effectiveness of escort operations in protecting commerce interests on the sea lanes. Some authors suggest that piracy in the Gulf of Aden is caused by government failure in Somalia, and escorts alone cannot solve the problem in the long run.<sup>31</sup> Others worry that without the legal

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<sup>30</sup> 唐永胜 [Tang Yongsheng], “中国参与亚丁湾反海盗行动与大国责” [China's Anti-piracy Operation at the Gulf of Aden and Responsibilities of Big Power], 国际政治研究 [International Politics Quarterly], No. 2 (2013), pp. 6-9.

<sup>31</sup> 王学军 [Wang Xuejun], “非洲海盗问题与国际反海盗合作” [Piracy in Africa and International Anti-Piracy Cooperation], 现代国际关系 [Contemporary International Relations], No. 12 (2012), pp. 28-33.

support enjoyed by foreign navies it is impossible to punish pirates effectively.<sup>32</sup>

Second, the escort operation is viewed as an “important practice” that builds China’s image as a responsible power.<sup>33</sup> China’s cooperation with foreign countries in the Gulf of Aden and its help to foreign ships will counter “China Threat” perceptions, and will improve China’s national image. This view is echoed by Professor Wang Yizhou, Deputy Dean of Peking University’s School of International Studies, who emphasizes the importance of China’s provision of public goods for maritime security. Wang suggests that as China builds its naval hardware, supplying public goods such as anti-piracy will be essential for China to win moral support.<sup>34</sup>

Third, China has been using escort operations to conduct military diplomacy. Its navy coordinates with foreign forces to improve escort efficiency. Chinese task forces actively visit foreign ports and conduct joint military exercises. These actions, Liu Jingjin and Qiu Caizhen maintain, are not only important for building up China’s

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<sup>32</sup> 王猛 [Wang Meng], “索马里海盗问题与国际社会的应对” [Piracy in Somalia and the Response of the International Community], *Contemporary International Relations*, No. 8 (2010), pp. 17-23.

<sup>33</sup> Andrew S. Erickson and Austin M. Strange, “China’s Blue Soft Power: Antipiracy, Engagement, and Image Enhancement,” *Naval War College Review*, Vol. 68, No. 1 (Winter 2015), pp. 71-91.

<sup>34</sup> 王逸舟 [Wang Yizhou], “中国外交的新机遇、新挑战——从海洋方向面临的问题说起” [New Opportunities and New Challenges for China’s Foreign Policy: Speaking from Issues Faced in the Ocean Direction], *中国国情国力* [China National Conditions and Strength], No. 6 (2013), pp. 7-9.

national image, but also provide China's Navy a chance to learn from experienced foreign counterparts.<sup>35</sup>

Last but not least, the anti-piracy mission affords China's Navy opportunities to practice basic blue water operations and gain irreplaceable experience in responding, unscripted, to realistic conditions in real time. The fact that some of the most advanced ships from all three fleets of China's Navy have long participated underscore efforts to gain real experience. While the anti-piracy tasks have different requirements from traditional military operations, they catalyze useful improvements in logistics and maintenance.

These assessments based on aggregation of Chinese sources track closely with the observations of the U.S. Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI): "The PLA(N)'s sustained counterpiracy operations in the Gulf of Aden demonstrate Beijing's intention to protect important SLOCs. China's participation serves several purposes: first, it is in line with the PLA(N)'s mission requirements to protect the PRC's strategic maritime interests; second, it provides the PLA(N) with the opportunity to develop and refine the operational capabilities it needs for 'far seas' operations; and third, it enhances China's image as a responsible member of the global community."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Liu Jingjin and Qiu Caizhen, "护航: 我海军军事外交的重要平台" [Escort Task: An Important Stage for Navy Military Diplomacy], 海军工程大学学报 [Journal of Naval University of Engineering] Vol. 8, No. 4 (2011), pp. 71-74.

<sup>36</sup> *The PLA Navy: New Capabilities and Missions for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Suitland, MD: Office of Naval Intelligence, 2015), p. 9.

## Direct Impact on China

### *Economic Factors*

China and other states faced considerable economic incentives, linked to national security, to respond directly to piracy. China's growing reliance on SLOC stability in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is arguably its largest source of external economic vulnerability in the post-reform era. Ninety percent of the world's trade in goods transits SLOCs, meaning that, even during times of peace in the traditional sense, no maritime trading state or its trading partners is immune to disruptions caused by piracy or other nontraditional security threats. These "lifelines" continue to transport massive amounts of energy and commodity supplies into China. While Beijing is seeking to balance its external supplies through extensive development of continental pipelines, reliance on SLOCs for critical materials will only increase in the coming decades.

This is due to several trends, including a growing emphasis in China on developing a world-class "ocean economy," as well as Beijing's need to deal with both environmental degradation and energy security threats by diversifying energy supply through seaborne oil and gas imports.<sup>37</sup> For example, China's tenth, eleventh and twelfth five-year guidelines (for the years 2001–05, 2006–10 and 2011–15,

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<sup>37</sup> 万建民 [Wan Jianmin], "从 '沿海' 走向 '远海'" [Moving from "Coastal Seas" to "Far Seas"], *经济日报* [Economic Daily], August 19, 2011, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64093/82429/83083/15456542.html>; "Key Targets of China's 12th Five-Year Plan," Xinhua, March 5, 2011, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2011-03/05/c\\_13762230.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2011-03/05/c_13762230.htm).

respectively) have all urgently stressed the need for China to confront the interrelated problems of environmental degradation and energy security through diversification. They have also called on China to produce, import and consume more natural gas, including liquefied natural gas (LNG), as well as identify and pursue sources of oil to reduce China's use of highly polluting coal. Any significant shift away from coal will demand a major increase in both oil and gas imports, which will heighten Beijing's already considerable reliance on international SLOCs. Additionally, virtually all of China's public and private transportation infrastructure depends on oil, for which there is often no readily available substitute that could persistently offset a shock to crude supplies. Moreover, while China continues to enlarge its national strategic petroleum reserve, its backup supply remains limited—even if 2020 targets are reached, China's national crude reserve will still be approximately two-thirds lower than America's current strategic petroleum reserve.<sup>38</sup> In addition to civil transportation, oil is indispensable for China's Navy and Air Force.

In 1993, China first became a net oil importer, and the proportion of Chinese oil consumption supplied by imports has risen steadily over the past two decades. In 2014, China imported 60 percent of its oil, a figure expected to reach 80% by 2035.<sup>39</sup> While Chinese energy

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<sup>38</sup> Wayne Ma, "U.S. Asks China to Team Up on Oil," China Real Time, *Wall Street Journal*, October 31, 2013, <http://blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2013/10/31/u-s-asks-china-to-team-up-on-oil/>.

<sup>39</sup> *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2015*, Annual Report to Congress (Arlington, VA: Office of the Secretary of Defense, May 8, 2015), p. 24.



independence is generally perceived as infeasible, Beijing is seeking to mitigate the potential risks of external dependence through diversification of types and suppliers.<sup>40</sup>

Robust trends towards greater reliance on international maritime trade are also reflected in China's pursuit of energy and commodity security. China became a net natural gas importer in 2007, and now imports approximately 32 percent of its gas supply.<sup>41</sup> Shipborne LNG supplies have, in recent years, begun challenging the predominance of traditional fossil fuels in relatively affluent regions of coastal China, where sectors such as residential use and maritime shipping continuously demand more energy.<sup>42</sup> More broadly, PLA Academy of Military Science (AMS) research fellow Xiong Yuxiang and other domestic experts have expressed concerns that increasing U.S. self-sufficiency as a result of shale gas exploits "could probably add security pressure on China's maritime economic lifeline, which runs along the Gulf of Aden and waters off Somalia to the Indian Ocean and the Strait of Malacca."<sup>43</sup>

In addition to energy security, the growing size and significance of China's ocean economy is defined by a booming international

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp. 18-19.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>42</sup> Navy Liu, "LNG Starts to Challenge Traditional Bunker Fuel in China," *Bunkerworld*, April 17, 2012, <http://www.bunkerworld.com/community/blog/112396>.

<sup>43</sup> "Chinese Military Shoulders Obligations in Safeguarding World Peace," Xinhua, April 16, 2013, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90786/8210159.html>.

maritime trade economy. “China has become a ‘Maritime Shipping Power,’” MOT official Ju Chengzhi declared during a 2009 interview. He cited as evidence his nation’s possession of the world’s fourth largest shipping fleet,<sup>44</sup> whose 3,300 vessels can transport a total of 84,840,000 tons among them, and reliance on seaborne shipping for 90 percent of its internationally traded goods (imports and exports).<sup>45</sup> Ju further explained that with 40,000 crewmen China is also a “seafarer power,” with responsibility to protect its citizens thus employed. Growth in Chinese port traffic underscores the magnitude of these trends. Further supporting Ju’s points is a study produced by the PLAN in 2000 projecting that national port throughput was likely to grow from 1.8 billion tons in 2000 to 3 billion tons in 2010. According to Chinese sources, actual growth surged well beyond this estimate to 7 billion tons as early as 2009.<sup>46</sup>

Moreover, according to an article by Navy Military Studies Research Institute (NMSRI) specialist Li Jie in the official PLAN publication

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<sup>44</sup> Different sources list different rankings, and data change over time. According to one 2015 source, China is now third behind Greece and Japan in terms of “ownership and control nationality.” “China-Owned Ships: A Rapid Rise to Become One of the World’s Largest Fleets,” *Hellenic Shipping News*, March 17, 2015, <http://www.hellenicshippingnews.com/china-owned-ships-a-rapid-rise-to-become-one-of-the-worlds-largest-fleets/>.

<sup>45</sup> Xu Jingjing, “Why We Want to Escort: Interview with Ju Chengzhi, Head of the Ministry of Transportation’s International Cooperation Department,” *Sanlian Life Weekly*, No. 3, January 19, 2009, pp. 92-95, [www.zsnews.cn/News/2009/01/16/1018431.shtml](http://www.zsnews.cn/News/2009/01/16/1018431.shtml).

<sup>46</sup> “对话尹卓, 护航是划时代标志性事件” [Conversation with Yin Zhuo: Escorts Are an Epoch-Making Event], *Navy Today*, No. 12 (December 2011), p. 22.

*Navy Today*, China presently has over 700 commercial vessels in operation under far ocean transportation organizations with a total capacity of 46 million tons. Chinese maritime shipping organizations have over 430 ships of various types with a total capacity of over 15.6 million tons, with over 400,000 standard storage containers. The privately-run Hebei Ocean Shipping Company Ltd. alone operates over 150 vessels with total capacity of 15 million tons.<sup>47</sup> While some of the specific figures reported vary even between different Chinese agencies, the overall point is clear: Beijing is heavily invested in sea-lane security—Chinese well-being quite literally depends on it.

If macroeconomic reliance forces Beijing to emphasize nontraditional maritime security threats, so too does the geographic nature of its SLOC reliance. China depends heavily on sea lines that are some of the world's busiest and most vulnerable to piracy. Five SLOCs account for 86 percent of China's foreign trade, the Strait of Malacca being the most important: roughly 82 percent of China's oil imports transit it,<sup>48</sup> and over 60 percent of the ships that transit the strait daily are Chinese.<sup>49</sup> Adding to these routes' strategic

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<sup>47</sup> Li Jie, "A New Milestone in Going to the Ocean," Five Year Escort Special Column, *Navy Today*, No. 12 (December 2013), p. 19.

<sup>48</sup> *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2015*, Annual Report to Congress (Arlington, VA: Office of the Secretary of Defense, May 8, 2015), p. 24.

<sup>49</sup> Zhang Xuegang, "China's Energy Corridors in Southeast Asia," Jamestown Foundation *China Brief*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (February 4, 2008), [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no\\_cache=1&tx\\_ttnews percent5Btt\\_news percent5D=4693.#.UsjfASuf95V](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews percent5Btt_news percent5D=4693.#.UsjfASuf95V).

significance, 16 percent of China's imported oil—comes from Saudi Arabia.<sup>50</sup> Yemen's instability following the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings, and the more recent outbreak of violent internal conflict, for example, raise the specter of Yemeni political collapse and refugee exodus. The conflict could unleash major domestic economic and political consequences for Saudi Arabia and subsequently threaten its oil exports. Perhaps more significantly, an unstable Yemen could "worsen the risk of piracy or terrorist attacks in or near the [Bab al-Mandeb] strait."<sup>51</sup> Already, it has required evacuation by the PLAN of Chinese nationals.

#### *Threats to Chinese Nationals*

Beyond the ocean economy, piracy has created unprecedented internal and external political challenges for China's regime. China's leadership has, on numerous occasions, discovered that individual pirate attacks on commercial vessels that generate media coverage have a greater impact on Beijing's domestic and international political image than do abstract trends. As long as pirate threats

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<sup>50</sup> *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2015*, Annual Report to Congress (Arlington, VA: Office of the Secretary of Defense, May 8, 2015), p. 25.

<sup>51</sup> Ben Simpfendorfer, "Yemen's Security Challenge Tests China's Foreign Policy," *South China Morning Post*, August 23, 2011, [www.scmp.com/article/976877/yemens-security-challenge-tests-chinas-foreign-policy](http://www.scmp.com/article/976877/yemens-security-challenge-tests-chinas-foreign-policy).

persist, states like China will be wary of taking public relations risks with major economic and political implications.<sup>52</sup>

By 2008, the Chinese public had become a significant source of pressure to intervene. The media outlet Eastday reported that a survey showed that 86 percent of Chinese “netizens” (active Internet users) supported a Gulf of Aden mission.<sup>53</sup> Chinese social networking websites, such as Weibo, captured some of the discontent felt by Chinese citizens as a result of Beijing’s initially hesitant response to Somali piracy. Many of these netizens criticized Beijing for its inability to protect its increasing number of citizens living abroad. China’s leaders surely followed these comments and blog posts.<sup>54</sup> This represented a sea change in popular expectations that Beijing may not have fully anticipated. In early 2008, one of the authors queried analysts from China’s intelligence community about the role that public pressure might play in catalyzing government response to protect Chinese citizens overseas who had come under threat. These experts did not see significant scope for Beijing to respond actively, particularly via military means. They maintained

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<sup>52</sup> “Pirates-Held Hostages Finally Come Home,” *China Daily*, July 25, 2012, [http://www.china.org.cn/china/2012-07/25/content\\_26004221.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/china/2012-07/25/content_26004221.htm).

<sup>53</sup> “中国海军远征索马里揭秘: 速射炮最适合打海盗” [Uncovering Secrets of the Chinese Navy’s Long-Distance Somalia Operation: Rapid-fire Assault Is the Most Suitable Way to Fight Pirates], 东方网 [Eastday Web], December 26, 2008, [mil.sohu.com/20081226/n261430151.shtml](http://mil.sohu.com/20081226/n261430151.shtml).

<sup>54</sup> 黄立 [Huang Li], 剑指亚丁湾: 中国海军远洋亮剑 [Sword Pointed at the Gulf of Aden: The Chinese Navy’s Bright Far Oceans Sword] (Guangzhou: 中山大学出版社 [Zhongshan University Press], 2009), p. 172.

that the Chinese public would not expect such protection to be extended, and would instead ask why their compatriots had placed themselves in vulnerable positions.

Yet China's government has since responded, and fast. Paradoxically, a long-entrenched, authoritarian regime like China's must in some respects be unusually responsive to short-term public-opinion trends, as it lacks either reserves of enduring ideological affinity or the political release valves of periodic elections and alternation of parties in power—and corresponding shedding of policy blame—that democratic states typically enjoy.<sup>55</sup>

In another online public opinion survey two days before the inaugural deployment, over 90 percent supported the mission out of over 17,000 respondents.<sup>56</sup> Domestic political pressure thus seems to have played a major role in heightening Beijing's prioritization of the piracy issue and in strengthening its ultimate response.

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<sup>55</sup> Andrew S. Erickson and Austin M. Strange, "Ripples of Change in Chinese Foreign Policy? Evidence from Recent Approaches to Nontraditional Waterborne Security," *Asia Policy*, No. 17 (January 2014), pp. 93-126.

<sup>56</sup> "网友: 支持中国海军护航树起大国形象" [Netizens: Support Chinese Naval Escorts Establishing the Image of a Great Power], 人民网 [People's Net], December 24, 2008, [military .people.com.cn/GB/42970/8570300.html](http://military.people.com.cn/GB/42970/8570300.html).

### A “Least-Worst” Option

China, like other states, realizes that modern piracy, whether in the Gulf of Aden or elsewhere, is not a self-generating threat, but rather the negative result of poor economic and political conditions on land coupled with contiguous states’ inability to control their coastlines. Although scholarly disagreement persists on the subject, piracy’s existence is clearly rooted in the failure of domestic governance institutions, leading to its presence in states such as Somalia, which are still extremely volatile and unstable.<sup>57</sup> A recent study found strong correlations between poor labor market opportunities and pirate attacks.<sup>58</sup> While deploying hulking warships to fight pirate militias might seem unnecessary to some observers, it was and remains one of the few implementable approaches—from the perspective of the United States and other experienced, yet financially stretched, deployers of power projection militaries, the least-worst option.

Mounting piracy problems finally imposed sufficient political incentives to make China’s leaders marshal a concrete response with the December 26, 2008 deployment of China’s first anti-piracy flotilla. Most visibly and hence the greatest subject of popular pressure, several Somali pirate attacks threatened the lives of Chinese

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<sup>57</sup> “U.N. Takes New Steps to Curb Somalia’s Pirates,” PBS NewsHour, December 17, 2008, [www.pbs.org/](http://www.pbs.org/).

<sup>58</sup> Ryan S. Jablonski and Steven Oliver, “The Political Economy of Plunder: Economic Opportunity and Modern Piracy,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* Vol. 57, No. 4 (2012), pp. 682-708.

merchant sailors and the profits of Chinese shipping companies.<sup>59</sup> China's foreign ministry states that from January to November 2008, seven of the 1,265 ships owned, cargoed or crewed by Chinese that transited Somali waters were pirated.<sup>60</sup>

Improvised measures advocated by the MOT, such as evasive maneuvering and deployment of water cannons and even improvised explosive devices, were ineffective. Reaching out to foreign governments and organizations, such as the International Maritime Organization (IMO), likewise proved insufficient. Model defense measures and all-Chinese teams that allowed the China Ocean Shipping (Group) Company (COSCO) to avoid being pirated entirely were not fully transferrable to many Chinese-connected ships.

Shipping companies became obligated to provide sailors extra incentives, under collective bargaining contracts negotiated with the Hong Kong Seamen's Union. For instance, sailors crewing Hong Kong-registered ships transiting high-risk waters such as the Gulf of Aden were entitled to double salaries and injury reimbursements during each day they spent there. Such contracts covered approximately one thousand Hong Kong-registered vessels and

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<sup>59</sup> Xu Jingjing, "Why We Want to Escort: Interview with Ju Chengzhi, Head of the Ministry of Transportation's International Cooperation Department," *Sanlian Life Weekly*, No. 3, January 19, 2009, pp. 92-95, [www.zsnews.cn/News/2009/01/16/1018431.shtml](http://www.zsnews.cn/News/2009/01/16/1018431.shtml).

<sup>60</sup> "Navy to Fight Pirates in Somali Waters," *China Daily*, December 19, 2008, [http://www.china.org.cn/china/military/2008-12/19/content\\_16975595.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/china/military/2008-12/19/content_16975595.htm).



foreign-registered vessels owned by Hong Kong ship owners. In “high-risk areas,” if a shipping company chose a route outside internationally designated safety corridors in the Gulf of Aden, sailors were entitled to disembark beforehand, leaving the company responsible for covering their travel fees.

Rising insurance premiums and re-routing costs threatened the narrow profit margins of China’s shipping industry, which lacked effective alternatives. Unable to afford private security firms’ hefty fees given their bare-bones business models, Chinese shipping to Europe began circumnavigating the Cape of Good Hope. The added sailing, on average six days, risked missing ironclad delivery dates, consequent breaches of contracts and thereby loss of market share to competitors.

Effectively addressing the surging piracy problem clearly required not merely uncoordinated stopgaps but decisive, comprehensive action from Beijing.

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### **Providing Global Public Goods**

Beijing’s deployment of naval anti-piracy forces has satisfied China’s need to demonstrate to domestic and foreign audiences its resolve in protecting overseas interests, while also bolstering its image as a responsible stakeholder. Ren Haiping, in a *Navy Today* publication, noted that China’s Navy had achieved “Two safety 100 percents” (两个百分之百安全) during escorts by ensuring absolute safety for

both all ships escorted as well as PLAN warships themselves.<sup>61</sup> Ren also stated that China's Navy had displayed the image of a responsible power throughout its then already more than 1,800 days in the Gulf of Aden.<sup>62</sup>

This is significant, as Chinese and international observers expand dialogues on potential discrepancies between Chinese capabilities and contributions in the global commons and other areas of international security. And as Beijing has quickly learned, incidents involving Chinese citizens, companies or military forces abroad offer excellent opportunities to portray China as a responsible stakeholder. Moreover, Wei Xueyi, commander of the 6<sup>th</sup> escort flotilla,<sup>63</sup> emphasized the international political angle of PLAN anti-piracy operations: "Warships are mobile national territory; the escort flotilla is a name card for China's image. While conducting escorts in the Gulf of Aden, we not only need to guarantee the safety of escorted ships, but need even more to display the elegance of the

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<sup>61</sup> Admiral Wu Shengli made an identical statement in his discussion with one of the authors.

<sup>62</sup> Ren Haiping, "A Great Power Navy's Assumption of Responsibility—Writing on the Five-Year Anniversary of the People's Navy's Escort Fleet Expedition," Five Year Escort Special Column, *Navy Today*, No. 12 (December 2013), p. 3.

<sup>63</sup> "中国海军护航编队渐成知名品牌 极少拒绝商船申请" [Chinese Naval Escort Fleet Has Become a Famous Brand—Rarely Refuses Requests from Merchant Vessels], *解放军报* [Liberation Army Daily], November 30, 2010, [http://www.china.com.cn/military/txt/2010-11/30/content\\_21449993.htm](http://www.china.com.cn/military/txt/2010-11/30/content_21449993.htm).

Chinese Navy, [and thereby] display an image of China being a responsible power.”<sup>64</sup>

Internationally, China’s announcement that it would dispatch an escort flotilla to the Gulf of Aden came as a surprise to few, particularly since several other nations had already undertaken, or were preparing to undertake, similar actions. For example, Russia, NATO countries and India had already announced anti-piracy deployments. Of course, Chinese naval officials were extremely cautious in announcing the PLAN anti-piracy mission, stipulating that it would protect mainly commercial vessels from Mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan, the only addition being “ships of international organizations [such as the WFP] that are carrying humanitarian supplies to Somalia.”<sup>65</sup> This posture conveniently allowed China to end its status as the only permanent UNSC member not contributing to global maritime security and

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<sup>64</sup> 钟魁润 [Zhong Kuirun], “中国海军的责任与担当: 海军第六批护航编队亚丁湾护航启示录之三” [The Responsibility and Undertaking of the Chinese Navy: Three Revelations of the Sixth Escort Task Force’s Escorts in the Gulf of Aden], *Liberation Army Daily*, November 30, 2010. For further details concerning the 6<sup>th</sup> task force’s experience in the Gulf of Aden, see “中国海军第六批护航编队凯旋” [Sixth Escort Task Force of the Chinese Navy Returns Triumphantly], 独家报道 [Exclusive Report], *Navy Today*, No. 2 (February 2011), pp. 40-43.

<sup>65</sup> “Chinese Navy Sets Sail for Anti-piracy Mission off Somalia,” *People’s Daily Online*, December 26, 2008, [english.peopledaily.com.cn/](http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/).

thereby to enhance its international resume as a responsible stakeholder while limiting its initial obligations.<sup>66</sup>

However, nontraditional security contingencies such as piracy present political and public relations challenges that are complex and risky for an often-cautious Chinese leadership. Specifically, anti-piracy operations involve the risk of embarrassing failures at the hands of unprofessional militants. Additionally, the PLAN's Gulf of Aden anti-piracy mission has exposed inherent tensions between China's traditional noninterventionist foreign policy and mounting domestic pressure on the Chinese government to protect its citizens and interests overseas within the context of poorly defined international maritime laws and norms concerning piracy. Both at home and abroad, China's leaders are pressured to make proactive international contributions. As such pressure grows on a range of issues, anti-piracy operations also represent relatively low-risk opportunities for testing Beijing's policy preferences in this regard.

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### **Military Modernization**

If failure threatens public support, success risks creating unrealistic expectations. Thus, Beijing's recent anti-piracy forays have sparked fundamental debates within China, with some policymakers eager to build on mission benefits and political justification otherwise

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<sup>66</sup> Amitai Etzioni, "Is China a Responsible Stakeholder?" *International Affairs*, Vol. 87, No. 3 (2011), pp. 539-53, <http://icps.gwu.edu/files/2011/05/China-Stakeholder.pdf>.

unavailable to Beijing, and others hesitant to depart from a conservative foreign policy. It is thus important to contextualize the Gulf of Aden mission in terms of broader Chinese military development. China's military, including the PLAN as well as the ground forces, People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) and the Second Artillery Force (PLASAF), has actively diversified its operational portfolio in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Broadening PLA roles reflect complex, perpetually shifting security environments inside and outside of China, as well as the recognition of these changes by China's Party, civil and military leadership. Gulf of Aden deployments embody the underlying need to creatively adapt to security challenges stressed in top-level doctrinal guidance, including Jiang Zemin's "winning local wars under conditions of informatization," Hu Jintao's "diverse military tasks," and Xi Jinping's injunction to "strategically manage the sea, and do more to promote China's efforts to become a maritime power."<sup>67</sup>

In particular, in 2004 Hu proposed the concept of "New Historic Missions," viewed by many as an extension of his broader "scientific development" guidance into the military realm.<sup>68</sup> China's contemporary military operations other than war (MOOTW),

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<sup>67</sup> As David Finkelstein notes, however, shifts away from industrial-age warfare doctrine began in the early 1990s. David M. Finkelstein, "China's National Military Strategy: An Overview of the 'Military Strategic Guidelines,'" *Asia Policy*, No. 4 (2007), pp. 67-72.

<sup>68</sup> James Mulvenon, "Chairman Hu and the PLA's New Historic Missions," *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 27 (Winter 2009), <http://media.hoover.org/sites/default/files/documents/CLM27JM.pdf>.

including Gulf of Aden anti-piracy, involve addressing nontraditional security threats and represent the operational embodiment of Hu's "New Historic Missions" guidance.<sup>69</sup> PLAN nontraditional security missions, such as anti-piracy and others enumerated above, are part of a larger push for China's military to perform historic missions. Hu's "scientific development" concept overtly links China's development with the prosperity of the world, imbuing nontraditional security missions conducted by the PLAN far from China with particular significance in modern Chinese military doctrine.

While these concepts are typically perceived as Hu's major contributions to Chinese security thinking and practice, follow through has been limited in scope and intensity, making the Gulf of Aden mission especially important. This is partly due to the fact that Hu was surrounded by Jiang Zemin allies during his first term, effectively limiting his scope for action. Even after being "freed" of these constraints during his second term, however, Hu apparently chose not to exercise power vigorously, and did not attempt to push through major new operations beyond the Gulf of Aden deployment.

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<sup>69</sup> Roy D. Kamphausen, "China's Military Operations Other Than War: The Military Legacy of Hu Jintao." Paper presented at SIPRI conference, "The Hu Jintao Decade in China's Foreign and Security Policy (2002-12): Assessments and Implications," Stockholm, April 18-19, 2013, <http://books.sipri.org/files/misc/SIPRI-Hupercent20Kamphausen.pdf>; Cortez A. Cooper, "The PLA Navy's 'New Historic Missions': Expanding Capabilities for a Re-Emerging Maritime Power," Testimony presented before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission on June 11, 2009, [http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/testimonies/2009/RAND\\_CT332.pdf](http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/testimonies/2009/RAND_CT332.pdf).

Other factors further increase the doctrinal significance of the PLAN's international anti-piracy operations. For example, the perceived inefficacy with which China's military responded to the Wenchuan Earthquake in 2008 incentivized the PLA to restore its image as a military capable of effectively protecting Chinese citizens at home and abroad in difficult conditions. In other words, the PLAN's Gulf of Aden deployment thus far and sustained presence can be viewed as a particularly useful, if thus far exceptional, operationalization of Hu's strategic guidance.<sup>70</sup> In the military realm, it affords China an opportunity to develop far-ranging naval capabilities under the aegis of providing public goods.

China's Navy in particular had incentives to get more involved in higher profile, Far Seas operations. The anti-piracy mission helps maximize PLAN prestige, funding, equipment and information technology.<sup>71</sup> It helps afford the PLAN the greatest exposure abroad, the greatest diplomatic responsibilities, the greatest potential for international peacetime interaction and the greatest ability to learn from foreign counterparts of China's military services. Anti-piracy offers the PLAN justification for expanding and sustaining distant seas operations, while helping it enhance its ability to do so effectively. All these dynamics align with Beijing's emerging foreign and security policy, but from the perspective of PLAN organizational

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<sup>70</sup> The authors thank Nan Li for his insights concerning this paragraph.

<sup>71</sup> “中国海军赴索马里军舰雷达系统世界领先” [Satellite System of Chinese Navy Warship Going to Somalia a World Leader], Sina.com, March 3, 2009, [mil.news.sina.com.cn/2009-03-03/1427544201.html](http://mil.news.sina.com.cn/2009-03-03/1427544201.html).

interests the anti-piracy mandate could scarcely be more timely or congenial.

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As its ocean economy and international role expand, China will increasingly encounter security challenges that incur different types of costs, depending on whether and how Beijing chooses to address them. Modern piracy is one of the first of many challenges that will require Beijing to step outside its foreign policy comfort zone. This is because nontraditional security threats demand a multidimensional calculus and response for which China's previous static foreign policy approaches have proven progressively inadequate. The Gulf of Aden experience is positive for China and the world. It not only reflects Chinese understanding of this development, but also a realization that more often than not China and potential partners in the maritime commons share common interests and concerns.

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## V. From Recognition to Response: Institutional Processes and Preparations for Deployments

Facing the pressures described in the previous chapter, China's anti-piracy mission began taking shape years before the first escort task force—comprising the vessels *Haikou*, *Wuhan* and *Weishanhu*—left port in late December 2008. According to senior PLAN officials directly involved with its planning interviewed by one of the authors, the mission was designed and coordinated across multiple civil and military government organs. A PLAN senior official composed a report as early as late 2006, two years before the PLAN's inaugural deployment, advocating a Chinese presence in the Gulf of Aden. According to the official's own account, pure concern over the protection of Chinese commercial ships operating overseas—rather than broader issues such as China's international image and relationship with the United States—was the primary motivation for writing the report. This would make sense bureaucratically: Today's PLAN officers are specialized professionals focused on completing functional tasks, not authorized or expected to address larger political or ideational objectives outside their well-defined responsibilities. The report was first submitted to PLAN headquarters in Beijing and thereafter forwarded to the PLA General Staff Department (GSD) and subsequently the Central Military Commission (CMC). Reportedly, the CMC recognized the importance of the proposal and established an interagency research team in 2007 that included representatives from the PLAN, GSD, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM), MOT and COSCO.

Such organizational preparation helps explain how China's bureaucracy was able to initiate the Gulf of Aden mission so rapidly in late 2008. The multiagency approach to Somali piracy adopted by

China was reflected in the Ministry of National Defense (MND)'s press conference officially announcing the initial deployment on December 23, 2008. Hosted by MND Information Office deputy director and spokesperson Senior Colonel Huang Xueping, the briefing was also attended by PLAN deputy chief of staff Rear Admiral Xiao Xinnian and Sr. Capt. Ma Luping, director of the Naval Operations Bureau within the GSD Operations Department.<sup>72</sup>

This suggests that from its onset, responsibility for the Gulf of Aden mission straddled civil and military lines, and that a state-owned enterprise was deeply involved in the mission's genesis. Intense deliberations among different parties lasting over a year also reflects complex logistic and planning issues attached to the mission. Ultimately, the deployment forced new approaches. The PLAN had to face new questions, addressing the following issues:

- Logistics and budgeting for a long-term Far Seas deployment
- Diplomatic issues and international legal support
- Rules of engagement

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<sup>72</sup> "Ministry of National Defense Briefing on Navy's Deployment to Gulf of Aden/Somali Waters to Provide Convoy Cover and Other Information," December 23, 2008, [http://www.gov.cn/xwfb/2008-12/23/content\\_1185458.htm](http://www.gov.cn/xwfb/2008-12/23/content_1185458.htm).

At the beginning, China only planned for one year of anti-piracy operations. This was then extended for another year, and another, and so on.<sup>73</sup>

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### **Logistics and Budgeting**

How much and what types of food and medicine should the PLAN provision warships with for Far Seas deployments? How many personnel should it deploy? How much would warship and helicopter operations be challenged in such an environment, and what mitigating efforts could be undertaken? These questions are particularly salient for extended voyages in the Gulf of Aden, a vast maritime region notorious for its heat, humidity and salinity. Each of these factors threatened to destabilize the routine operations of multi-month deployments. They severely test the performance of PLAN platforms, equipment, systems and personnel.<sup>74</sup>

Mastering long-duration operations requires PLAN personnel to face basic challenges long endured by their great power navy predecessors. Unfavorable conditions test the mettle of officers and sailors alike. Besides serious health problems such as trauma, dermal disease and respiratory problems, even simple ailments as seasickness can jeopardize the performance of officers and

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<sup>73</sup> Admiral Wu Shengli, discussion with one of the authors.

<sup>74</sup> "Conversation with Yin Zhuo: Escorts Are an Epoch-Making Event," *Navy Today*, No. 12 (December 2011), p. 22.

crewmembers. PLAN anti-piracy personnel thus enjoy constant access to China-based health specialists via video communications.<sup>75</sup> When these measures prove inadequate, emergency procedures are employed. In 2009, for instance, a PLAN sailor suddenly developed acute appendicitis. His condition became too severe for on-ship experts to handle, and he was airlifted via helicopter to Oman's Salalah Royal Hospital.<sup>76</sup>

Questions surrounding food and equipment supplies, as basic as they might seem, are urgent for anti-piracy task forces at sea for months at a time. The PLAN's Logistics Department specially designed a shipborne technology for preserving vegetables, which increased freshness time from twenty-five to forty days, while some PLAN platforms have reportedly kept leafy vegetables fresh for over sixty days.<sup>77</sup> More recently, researchers at a South Sea Fleet base reported that their technology, which extended spinach and lettuce freshness from ten to ninety days, had already been used on five different Gulf of Aden deployments.<sup>78</sup> These issues are especially serious given the

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<sup>75</sup> "Chinese Navy Uses Telemedicine in Major Missions," *People's Daily Online*, January 7, 2013, [english.peopledaily.com.cn/90786/8080783.html](http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90786/8080783.html).

<sup>76</sup> 梁庆松 [Liang Qingsong], "护航保障, 我们创新了什么—人民海军执行护航任务两周年回眸(四)" [Escort Support, How Have We Innovated? A Robust Review of Two Years of Carrying Out Escort Responsibilities by the People's Navy (Part 4)], 人民海军 [People's Navy], December 28, 2010, p. 1.

<sup>77</sup> "Pelagic [Open Sea] Support Tested by Routinized Escort Mission," 军事报道 [Military Report], CCTV-7 (Mandarin), December 24, 2010.

<sup>78</sup> 仲续军 [Zhong Xujun] and 邵龙飞 [Shao Longfei], "南海舰队某基地建立远洋综合保障体系" [South Sea Fleet Base Sets Up Open Ocean Comprehensive Support

stern requirements of PLAN sailors: Special Forces, for example, are expected to execute responsibilities for a minimum of eight to ten hours per day, outside of unexpected operations, and seldom have the ability to connect with family and friends in China. Indeed, “getting salty,” or adjusting to the mundane but formidable challenges of long-term maritime deployments such as physical and mental health, has allowed PLAN forces in the Gulf of Aden to prepare for more intense missions in the future.

Health issues are only the tip of the iceberg for Chinese planners organizing Far Seas missions. Logistics is another major challenge: Replenishment in distant seas is far more difficult than closer to home, where advance ship handling and cargo transferring is simpler, as are navigation schedules, shipborne stores requirements and fuel storage.<sup>79</sup> They are also under more pressure to get things right the first time: Compared to training operations in the Near Seas, successful and failed distant sea operations alike generate larger, more visible consequences—often before the eyes of other navies, as well as the public back home.

While the mission was contemplated years in advance, China entered the Gulf of Aden without knowing its precise requirements. According to one PLAN official, the mission was experimental in the sense that China lacked a sense of overall mission cost, how many

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System], *Liberation Army Daily*, January 22, 2013, [http://www.chinamil.com.cn/jfjbmap/content/2013-01/22/content\\_25643.htm](http://www.chinamil.com.cn/jfjbmap/content/2013-01/22/content_25643.htm).

<sup>79</sup> Correspondence with U.S. Navy officer, January 2013.

and what types of ships would be needed to complete the mission and for how long the deployment would persist. Such uncertainties are clearly reflected by the significant evolution seen across PLAN's nearly twenty task forces. While the inaugural flotilla sailed for more than 100 days before making a port visit, more recent task forces routinely make four or more port calls over five to six months. According to a senior PLAN official, China's Navy lacked an established set of systematic procedures for budgeting for the deployments until after the second flotilla, which is when debates on logistical finances truly began to emerge. Moreover, only following the 4<sup>th</sup> flotilla did naval planners understand comprehensively the logistics needed for multi-month deployments, such as how best to utilize COSCO. Since then, COSCO, and specifically its subsidiary COSCO West Africa, Ltd., has become the Chinese Navy's largest partner for procuring supplies for PLAN ships on escort duty in the Gulf of Aden.<sup>80</sup> Similarly, although Chinese naval warships deployed to the Gulf of Aden possessed water desalinization capabilities long before the mission's onset, potable water conditions on early task forces were far from ideal.<sup>81</sup>

Larger questions also loomed, such as whether massive surface platforms such as frigates, destroyers and replenishment ships were

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<sup>80</sup> Yang Jingjie, "Captains Courageous," *Global Times*, December 24, 2012, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/751957.shtml>.

<sup>81</sup> 庞文强 [Pang Wenqiang], 陈洪钧 [Chen Hongjun] and 邓显伟 [Deng Xianwei], "海水淡化通航舰船的生命之源" [Purifying Salt Water: The Lifeline of Far Seas Warships], 海洋经纬 [Maritime Latitude and Longitude], 人民海军 [People's Navy], February 27, 2012, p. 4.

well suited for anti-piracy operations. As a PLAN official explained to one of the authors, such platforms were essentially the only options for the mission, since PLAN crewmen would have found it difficult to live on smaller vessels for multiple months. This reality is further exacerbated by China's lack of overseas bases or support points that could mitigate the fatigue and stress placed on crews unable to recuperate on land for extended periods. Ultimately, China's selection of warships has been largely similar to the choices made by other navies, including that of the United States, about which surface platforms to deploy. The main exception: the submarines that China is now sending to accompany some of its recent task forces.

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### **Diplomacy and International Law**

China's domestic economic growth and external economic interests are increasingly tied to political and social forces that Beijing is unable to manipulate directly. While China may not be able, or interested in trying, to control many of these risks, SLOC security is a global commons issue that has seriously threatened overseas Chinese interests. For example, as one Chinese scholar points out, "Somali piracy has not only disrupted navigation security but has also inflicted grave harm on China's national interests. This is the fundamental reason for China's escort operations in the Gulf of Aden."<sup>82</sup> One PLAN official has stated to one of the authors that

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<sup>82</sup> Huang Li, *Sword Pointed at the Gulf of Aden: The Chinese Navy's Bright Far Oceans Sword* (Guangzhou: Zhongshan University Press, 2009), p. 172.

“international cooperation should be the fundamental means to maintain SLOC security,” while another suggested that port security is crucial for SLOC security. Navies, meanwhile, are needed to protect core values of freedom of navigation and international maritime trade, eliminate manmade threats to these core values and protect the stability of the international legal order. Another PLAN official has articulated for one of the authors China’s position that different navies should fulfill different tasks that collectively ensure that SLOCs are universally secure and open:

One manmade threat is exclusive/exclusionary control of [any of] the world’s 130 navigable straits/passageways, 40 of which are major straits/passageways. The goal should be common use of all major international straits, but historically coastal states have sometimes sought to exert excessive control over them, challenging the right to common use.

PLAN officials have also outlined China’s opposition to exploiting maritime power to jeopardize SLOC security for other states, as well as interfering with SLOC security under the aegis of “freedom of navigation.” They also state that China’s Ocean Basic Law (中国海洋基本法) has already entered the Chinese legal process and been proposed to the NPC. The law is intended to establish a management system for China’s maritime territorial domain. Of course, as a separate PLAN official pointed out to one of the authors, China’s maritime claims are primarily a political rather than legal issue fueled by intense feelings and nationalistic emotions. Despite years of advocacy for the law, it apparently has still not been approved because of concerns about negative regional reactions and counteractions.

One PLAN official stated before one of the authors that Beijing’s concerns about naval infringement refer primarily to U.S. exercises in the South China Sea, and that states should not fear Chinese



activities in other crucial waterways, declaring, “China has an understanding with Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore that as long as there is not too much foreign interference China will not be concerned.” Meanwhile, another PLAN official has raised the notion of “small triangular relations,” such as “Singapore-China-U.S.” and “Korea-Japan-U.S.,” that can cooperate and manage control of important international SLOCs.

Additionally, retired PLAN rear admiral Yin Zhuo, a Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) national committee member and well-known commentator,<sup>83</sup> invokes the Gulf of Aden mission as proof of the value of strengthening PLAN Far Seas capabilities to safeguard SLOCs and Chinese overseas interests. Yin contends that China’s regional naval presence led to the successful 2011 evacuation of 35,000 citizens from Libya. By contrast, during a 2000 Solomon Islands coup, lack of PLAN ability and willingness to deploy to the central Pacific left Chinese evacuees to await the rerouting of a cargo ship.<sup>84</sup>

Despite these difficult questions, the initial interagency research group reportedly swiftly achieved consensus without major

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<sup>83</sup> Yin’s last billet was Director of Primary Integration Institute, Navy Equipment Demonstration Research Academy (海军装备论证研究院原综合所所长). For detailed biographical information, see “尹卓,” <http://baike.baidu.com/view/340410.htm>.

<sup>84</sup> 黄莹莹 [Huang Yingying], “如何护卫中国海洋权益和海外利益?” [How Can We Protect China’s Maritime Rights and Overseas Interests?], 国际先驱导报 [International Herald Leader], March 19, 2012, [www.qstheory.cn/gj/zgwj/201203/t20120320\\_146624.htm](http://www.qstheory.cn/gj/zgwj/201203/t20120320_146624.htm).

ideological debates, proposing to dispatch PLAN warships to protect China's commercial shipping interests in the Gulf of Aden. Given its economic role in Chinese maritime development and close ties to China's central leadership, the MOT played a pivotal role in organizing and supporting the mission.<sup>85</sup> Support from China's top leadership, and not necessarily pressure from Chinese netizens or other sources, was ultimately decisive in operationalizing PLAN anti-piracy flotilla deployments. At some point in 2007 or 2008 the Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC) approved the proposal. Following three months of preparation, the first task force was dispatched in December 2008.

The twenty PLAN anti-piracy flotillas to date have operated under the mandate put forth by such legal instruments as the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and an extensive series of UNSC resolutions (UNSCRs).<sup>86</sup> In addition, China secured

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<sup>85</sup> More recently the PLAN and MOT have actively pursued closer coordination, and on December 26, 2013, both sides signed a framework agreement attended by CMC member and PLAN Commander Wu Shengli designed to improve maritime emergency response, maritime transport and maritime ecological environment. See "PLAN, MOT Sign Strategic Cooperation Framework Agreement," China Military Online, December 26, 2013, [http://eng.mod.gov.cn/TopNews/2013-12/26/content\\_4480849.htm](http://eng.mod.gov.cn/TopNews/2013-12/26/content_4480849.htm).

<sup>86</sup> Commander James Kraska, JAGC, U.S. Navy, "Fresh Thinking for an Old Problem: Report of the Naval War College Workshop on Countering Maritime Piracy," *Naval War College Review* 62, No. 4 (Autumn 2009), p. 141. UNSCRs 1816, 1838, 1846 and 1851 provided foundational authorization. Renewal of authority was provided by subsequent resolutions at the end of 2009 (UNSCR 1897), 2010 (1950), 2011 (2020), 2012 (2077), 2013 (2125) and 2014 (2184). For full and original

an invitation from Somalia's ambassador to China before first deploying warships off the failed East African state's coast. Since then, the PLAN has gradually streamlined its operations within explicit legal restraints. For example, while the earliest Chinese escorts only served vessels flagged to Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, the PLAN soon began escorting foreign-flagged vessels. In total, almost 60 percent of all escorted vessels have been foreign-flagged across over fifty countries, and many escort convoys during 2013 were composed of nearly 75 percent foreign ships.<sup>87</sup>

In 2009 China proposed dividing the Gulf of Aden into zones of responsibility in which respective navies would exercise jurisdiction. But this approach was never adopted.<sup>88</sup> In subsequent years PLAN forces have operated in Somali territorial waters (where any maritime activities that they opposed would not have constituted "piracy" by definition, but rather "armed robbery") and have even landed briefly on Somali shores, where they faced the risk of armed confrontation with criminal elements. Other than specific cases that merit special approaches, however, the PLAN is wary of potential

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contents of all UNSCRs, see the relevant section of the UNSC's website, <http://www.un.org/en/sc/documents/resolutions/>.

<sup>87</sup> "Number of Ships Escorted by Chinese Naval Escort Task Forces Hits 4,000," *Liberation Army Daily*, July 19, 2011, [eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2011-07/19/content\\_4538482.htm](http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2011-07/19/content_4538482.htm).

<sup>88</sup> 吴末方 [Wu Mofang], "分区护航将是有效反制海盗的新举措" [Zoned Escorts Will Be an Effective Piracy Countermeasure], *Navy Today*, No. 1 (January 2010), pp. 21-23.

legal tensions or undesired precedents that might be set by publicly pursuing more aggressive tactics. This generates difficult questions: For example, should PLAN forces shoot at suspected pirates in certain cases? Should captured pirate suspects be arrested and detained onboard PLAN vessels, or simply driven away? In December 2008, before China's inaugural anti-piracy deployment, a *Global Times* article stated that the PLAN will not "take the initiative to search for captured vessels and personnel at sea and carry out armed rescues."<sup>89</sup> China has not held any pirates on its own soil, probably not surprising given its vast distance from the Gulf of Aden.<sup>90</sup> According to a PLAN official with whom one of the authors spoke, China has agreements with Kenya and the Seychelles to arrest pirates and turn them over to local authorities, but they have yet to be used. The problem is that there is no Chinese law authorizing the arrest of foreigners outside China or bringing them back to China to be tried. Lacking domestic judicial mechanisms for trying pirates, Beijing supports the establishment of special courts on Somali soil—still an unrealistic prospect, given that nation's continued disarray.

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<sup>89</sup> 石华, 张倍鑫 [Shi Hua and Zhang Beixin], "中国海军索马里护航不收费" [Chinese Navy Will Protect Ships Free of Charge], *Global Times*, December 24, 2008, <http://world.huanqiu.com/roll/2008-12/322933.html>.

<sup>90</sup> "Malaysia, S. Korea May Prosecute 12 Somali Pirates Captured in Raids," *Global Times*, January 26, 2011, [www.globaltimes.cn/world/asia-pacific/2011-01/616880.html](http://www.globaltimes.cn/world/asia-pacific/2011-01/616880.html).

## Rules of Engagement

Rules of engagement were another concern for naval planners before 2008. According to then-Navy deputy chief of staff Xiao Xinnian, PLAN anti-piracy forces were to pursue one of three protocols for dealing with pirates at the time of initial deployment: “In the first scenario, if we identify a suspect vessel at sea with certain characteristics, we would send a helicopter for reconnaissance first before dispatching our ships to approach it. In the second scenario, if the pirates are performing a hold-up and we have the conditions and capacity to stop them, our captain would issue correct instructions in light of the situation. In the third scenario, if the pirates attack us of their own accord, we would defend ourselves resolutely to ensure our safety. Those are the three main formats of engagement.”<sup>91</sup> Yang Wu, deputy head of the Special Forces units participating in the 9<sup>th</sup> task force, stated that his men were instructed to obey a three-second firing readiness order, though it remains unclear whether this is standard practice.<sup>92</sup>

PLAN task forces have thus far deterred suspected pirates by launching signal flares, flash bombs and stun grenades from warship decks and helicopters, with accompanying loudspeaker warnings in

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<sup>91</sup> “Ministry of National Defense Briefing on Navy’s Deployment to Gulf of Aden/Somali Waters to Provide Convoy Cover and Other Information,” December 23, 2008, [http://www.gov.cn/xwfb/2008-12/23/content\\_1185458.htm](http://www.gov.cn/xwfb/2008-12/23/content_1185458.htm).

<sup>92</sup> You Ji, “The PLA Navy’s Gulf of Aden Mission as Capability Building against NTS Threats,” in Lyle J. Goldstein, ed., *Not Congruent but Quite Complementary: U.S. and Chinese Approaches to Nontraditional Security*, China Maritime Study, No. 9 (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, July 2012), p. 34.

both English and Arabic<sup>93</sup> exhorting pirates to retreat.<sup>94</sup> In more difficult cases, machine gun fire into the water is added.

Generally speaking, China's future contributions to anti-piracy may continue to increase in quantity, particularly in terms of basic information sharing and coordination. Significant increases in quality, or fundamental changes to Beijing's rules of engagement, however, are less likely. One demonstrable example of these operational tactics in action came in March 2010 when *Weishanhu* fired warning shots to deter approximately 130 suspicious skiffs approaching *Weishanhu* and the ship it was escorting.<sup>95</sup> Some operations have been even more serious, such as when *Xuzhou* rescued twenty-one crewmembers of the COSCO-owned MV *Taiankou*, which had been boarded by four pirates.<sup>96</sup> Reportedly, PLAN Special Forces dispatched in a helicopter and two speedboats and armed with infrared and sniper equipment launched flares and flash-bang and percussion grenades as warnings, then boarded the

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<sup>93</sup> "PLA Navy's Tenth Escort Formation Conducts Day-and-Night Training to Improve Escort Capabilities," Military Report, CCTV-7 (Mandarin), 1130 GMT, November 13, 2011.

<sup>94</sup> Gao Fei, Li Gencheng and Jiang Rui, "Tenth Chinese Escort Task Force Expels Suspicious Pirate Targets," *Liberation Army Daily*, November 22, 2011, [eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2011-11/22/content\\_4720079.htm](http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2011-11/22/content_4720079.htm).

<sup>95</sup> "Escort Operations in Gulf of Aden: Real Combat-Oriented Escort Training Boosts Innovation Capability," Military Report, CCTV-7, December 22, 2010.

<sup>96</sup> "Chinese Cargo Ship 'Taiankou' Out of Danger Following Pirate Attack," Military Report, CCTV-7 (Mandarin), November 22, 2010.

vessel by dropping hooks and shelf ladders. The pirates were gone and all crew members were safe.<sup>97</sup>

Some of the PLAN's most intense experiences in the Gulf of Aden thus far involve not direct combat with pirates but retrieving commercial sailors previously held hostage. The 2012 pickup and transfer of Taiwanese fishing vessel *Shiuh-fu 1* is perhaps most exemplary. The crew was held captive for 571 days, and eventually left by Somali pirates for pickup on a Somali beach.<sup>98</sup> Type 054A frigate *Changzhou* then brought the crew to Tanzania, from which they were transported home.<sup>99</sup> In an unprecedented display of willingness to opt for pragmatism over principle, PLAN forces briefly deployed on Somali soil.

Other times, PLAN forces have used more direct—though still limited—tactics to engage aggressive pirates. A PLAN official has told one of the authors that “The PLAN has ROE contained in each order. The legal basis lies in such factors as national law, military policies and the mission.” “Tactics, techniques and procedures (TTP) for China are different than those for other countries,” a second PLAN official explained. “The PLAN may fire warning shots against

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<sup>97</sup> “Party Flag Flies Aloft along the Escort Routes,” Military Report, CCTV-7 (Mandarin), 1130 GMT, June 24, 2011.

<sup>98</sup> “China’s Escort Ship Picks up Fishermen Seized by Somali Pirates,” *CCTV News* (English), 0613 GMT, July 19, 2012.

<sup>99</sup> Zhang Yunbi and Zhao Shengnan, “Freed Somali Pirate Hostages Return Home,” *China Daily*, July 24, 2012, [http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/2012-07/24/content\\_15614224.htm](http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/2012-07/24/content_15614224.htm).

pirates, but may not shoot directly at pirates.” For instance, in December 2010 machine gunners aboard *Xuzhou* opened fire on a pirate skiff disguised as a fishing boat after it attacked Marshall Islands-flagged *Nordic-Apollo* and subsequently *Safire-T*, both in the PLAN’s escort convoy.<sup>100</sup>

Language used by various Chinese media agencies describing PLAN anti-piracy engagement, such as the number of pirate vessels “evicted,” is somewhat ambiguous and confusing.<sup>101</sup> Nonetheless, it seems that China’s Navy envisions a gradually more assertive, preemptive approach vis-à-vis pirates in stride with growth in capability and confidence. Apparent contradictions herein could be explained by local incentives and objectives outweighing theoretical doctrine, or by certain mission details not being reported upward.<sup>102</sup> Similarly, Chinese commanders in the Gulf of Aden could be knowingly encouraging behavior “outside the lines” to encourage more creative thinking, allowing the PLAN to obtain benefits without corresponding liabilities. That said, the precise nature of PLAN restraint regarding engagement and operations in the Gulf of Aden is less certain. It is possible that the PLAN rules of engagement

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<sup>100</sup> “FFG *Xuzhou* Sets Five Records in the History of PLA Navy’s Pelagic [Open Sea] Escort Missions,” Military Report, CCTV-7 (Mandarin), May 18, 2011.

<sup>101</sup> “Chinese Navy Evicts Over 70 Suspected Pirate Boats,” Xinhua, May 15, 2012, [eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/photo-reports/2012-05/17/content\\_4865487.htm](http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/photo-reports/2012-05/17/content_4865487.htm).

<sup>102</sup> The authors thank CMSI director Peter Dutton for the insights throughout the remainder of this paragraph.



vis-à-vis fighting piracy are more permissible in practice than official policies would suggest.

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More generally, how long should China's stint off Somalia persist, and what financial cost was China's leadership willing to pay for the mission? China's military planners were, of course, cognizant of larger strategic implications of Far Seas anti-piracy operations that may transcend mission-specific considerations. A PLAN official has emphasized to one of the authors that while the PLAN previously operated primarily in the Near Seas, this is inevitably changing with China's emergence as a great power. Although the Deng Xiaoping administration declared that China would not venture into the Indian Ocean or other regions in China's Far Seas, pragmatism has apparently won out over previous principle.<sup>103</sup> The official also pointed out that anti-piracy planners looked at the Gulf of Aden deployment with long-term PLAN development in mind, including how the deployment might facilitate assembling and training an effective aircraft carrier group.

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<sup>103</sup> For an excellent discussion on persistent tension between principle and pragmatism in Chinese foreign policy, see Wu Xinbo, "Contradictions Constraining China's Foreign Policy Behavior," in Suisheng Zhao, ed., *Chinese Foreign Policy: Pragmatism and Strategic Behavior* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), pp. 58-65.

## **VI. Six Years of Anti-Piracy and Broader PLAN Growth**

China's naval anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden provide some of the first major insights concerning China's approach to protracted Far Seas operations. The PLAN has discovered over the past half-decade that the most important lesson instilled through anti-piracy is the value of real experience. That is, China's Navy must learn by doing, and the insights it has gained from the Gulf of Aden mission would not have been available elsewhere. Broadly speaking, several major breakthroughs help explain why the PLAN initially undertook and continues to conduct anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden:

1. Creativity and inter-agency cooperation
2. Incorporating advanced equipment
3. Cultivating experienced personnel
4. Military diplomacy

Major changes in the organizational structure of China's armed forces are reflective of the ascendance of China's Navy as a pillar of national security, in both Near and Far Seas. In order to place these changes in context, this section will begin with an overview of military reform plans under Xi.

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### **Military Reform in the Xi Era**

The Gulf of Aden deployment is particularly interesting in the context of Chinese military and security reforms under Xi Jinping and China's new cohort of civilian and military leaders. While the precise outcome of these reforms is not yet clear in the public domain, it seems plausible that the PLAN will carry on the legacies of Jiang and Hu by further broadening its mission scope under the leadership of Xi. China's new leadership has, in its first three years, demonstrated an active interest in reforming Chinese security institutions that have important implication for Chinese naval development. While most accounts are highly speculative, Xi purportedly enjoys considerable legitimacy and acceptance among elite Chinese leaders.

Given Xi's apparently tight grip on the Party and military, it is possible that he may be planning to issue broad, doctrinal military guidance that would deeply impact the PLAN's development trajectory. Xi has not yet issued any specific guidance on this scale, but he likely has another seven years until his term ends in 2022 with the closing of the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress. However, for now specific guidance that would substantively alter the growing role of the PLAN in global maritime security, such as anti-piracy operations, seems unlikely to emerge, and China's naval role in global nontraditional missions is likely to continue its gradual increase under the new leadership.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Roy Kamphausen, David Lai and Travis Tanner, eds., *Assessing the People's Liberation Army in the Hu Jintao Era* (Carlisle, PA: Army War College, 2014).

Xi has already made it abundantly clear that his administration is placing more emphasis on preparing to be able to fight and win wars. His policies are highly focused and apparently emphasize meeting specific objectives cost-effectively. It is thus possible that Xi may place more direct focus on “traditional” capabilities such as state-to-state war fighting, which could result in a de-prioritization of anti-piracy and other nontraditional maritime security activities. Arguably, the ambivalence of China’s response to disaster relief in the Philippines following Typhoon Haiyan in late 2013 is an early sign of the PLA/PLAN’s “reading the tea leaves” in this regard. However, a more nuanced approach could emerge if Xi and his comrades seek to balance more active traditional military policies in the Near Seas that harm China’s international image with an increase in goodwill missions in the Far Seas.<sup>105</sup> Moreover, growing Chinese resources and capacity may convince that China can “do more of everything,” including anti-piracy-type missions.

Signs are beginning to emerge that China’s military will undergo major organizational changes under Xi. It was reported in late December 2013 that China is planning to condense the PLA’s seven ground force-dominated military regions into five integrated regions.<sup>106</sup> To date, Chinese official media sources, such as *Liberation Army Daily*, have responded by labeling rumors of military region

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<sup>105</sup> The authors thank Nan Li for insights in this paragraph.

<sup>106</sup> “China Mulls Revamping Military Regions to Boost Superiority in South and East China Seas,” Agence France-Presse, January 1, 2014, <http://sg.news.yahoo.com/china-mulls-revamping-military-regions-japan-report-080327249.html>.

reform as “pure guesses,” though no outright denial of the rumors has occurred. On January 3, 2014, a Xinhua article confirmed that the PLA would establish a joint operational command system “in due course,” designed to increase overall mobility and integration between China’s armed forces.<sup>107</sup> Shortly after, however, the China News Agency reported that the Information Affairs Office of the MND had stated that rumors on restructuring the PLA command system were “groundless.”<sup>108</sup> It seems most likely that reforms are under way, as mandated by Party decisions, but that details of implementation remain under negotiation, particularly controversial for a PLA almost certainly facing a significant wave of ground force downsizing, which would include significant reductions in senior officer billets. The Pentagon’s 2015 report on China’s military judges that reforms likely under consideration include reducing non-combat forces and the relative proportion of ground forces; elevating the proportion and roles of enlisted personnel and non-commissioned officers vis-à-vis commissioned officers; bolstering “new-type combat forces” for naval aviation, cyber and special operations; establishing a theater joint command system; and

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<sup>107</sup> Yang Yi, “New Joint Command System ‘On Way,’” Xinhua, January 3, 2014, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-01/03/c\\_133015371.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-01/03/c_133015371.htm).

<sup>108</sup> 陶社兰 [Tao Shelan], “中国军方澄清‘建立联合作战司令部’: 没有根据” [Chinese Military Clarifies “Establishing a Joint Operational Command”: Has No Evidence], 中国新闻社 [China News Agency], January 5, 2014, [http://news.cnr.cn/native/gd/201401/t20140105\\_514574004.shtml](http://news.cnr.cn/native/gd/201401/t20140105_514574004.shtml).

reducing China's current seven Military Regions by as many as two.<sup>109</sup>

If the said reforms were implemented, new regions would reportedly house a joint operations command mechanism to integrate PLA, PLAN, PLAAF and PLASAF resources and activities, reflecting China's quest for a military better suited to address a range of modern traditional and nontraditional security threats. As a result of the reform, the boundaries of existing PLA military regions could be redrawn. They would likely be reduced in number, and two coastal regions might be created with far greater navy and even air force representation in their leadership. This is significant for the PLAN, which no longer has support bases (*baozhang jidi*) other than for aircraft carriers in the North Sea Fleet (NSF) and South Sea Fleet (SSF).<sup>110</sup> The overarching result would be a heightened role for the PLAN in national security. As Li Qinggong, Deputy Secretary-General of the China Council for National Security Policy Studies, articulated, "China has built an iron bastion in its border regions. The major concern lies at sea."<sup>111</sup> If and when such consolidation actually occurs, the PLAN and PLAAF will be the clear "winners," and are poised to assume more central roles in maritime-oriented military regions. Indeed, the latest edition of the doctrinal handbook *Science of Military Strategy* suggests that the PLAN is gradually

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<sup>109</sup> *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2015* (Arlington, VA: Department of Defense, May 8, 2015), p. 1.

<sup>110</sup> Authors' discussion with Nan Li.

<sup>111</sup> Yang Yi, "New Joint Command System 'On Way,'" Xinhua, January 3, 2014, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-01/03/c\\_133015371.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-01/03/c_133015371.htm).

moving from a three-fleet configuration toward a “two ocean” (两洋) orientation.<sup>112</sup>

Regardless of future trajectories, the PLAN has amassed a considerable portfolio of anti-piracy activities since December 2008. **Exhibit 1** organizes the statistical achievements of each escort flotilla through January 2014.

China’s operations in the Gulf of Aden have given the PLAN experience with many aspects of this transition. Accolades garnered while serving in the Gulf of Aden are, in some cases, relevant to broader Chinese naval development in the sense that the skills and experiences of anti-piracy personnel are valued upon their return home.

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<sup>112</sup> 军事科学院军事战略研究部 [Academy of Military Science Strategic Research Department], 战略学 [The Science of Military Strategy] (Beijing: 军事科学出版社 [Military Science Press], 2013), pp. 262-63, 270.

**EXHIBIT 1: PLAN Gulf of Aden Escort Statistics by Task Force (TF), 2008–15**

TF #	Fleet	Vessels and Pennant #s	# of Crew	Depart	Return	Days	Selected Ports Visited	Friendly Port Visits	Ships Escorted	Groups Escorted
		<i>Wuhan</i> 169 destroyer (DDG)								
1	SSF	<i>Haikou</i> 171 DDG <i>Weishanhu</i> 887 comprehensive supply/replenishment ship (AOR)	880	Dec. 26, 2008	Apr. 28, 2009	124	None (except for supply stops by <i>Weishanhu</i> )	0	212	41





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TF #	Fleet	Vessels and Pennant #s	# of Crew	Depart	Return	Days	Selected Ports Visited	Friendly Port Visits	Ships Escorted	Groups Escorted
		<i>Ma'anshan</i> 525 FFG					UAE			
4	ESF	<i>Wenzhou</i> 526 FFG	700	Oct. 30, 2009	Apr. 23, 2010	176	Saudi Arabia	3	660	46
		<i>Qiandaohu</i> 886 AOR					Philippines			
		<i>Guangzhou</i> 168 DDG					Egypt			
5	SSF	<i>Hengyang</i> 568 FFG		Mar. 4, 2010	Sept. 11, 2010	192	Italy Greece	4	588	41
		<i>Weishanhu</i> 887					Myanmar			

TF #	Fleet	Vessels and Pennant #s	# of Crew	Depart	Return	Days	Selected Ports Visited	Friendly Port Visits	Ships Escorted	Groups Escorted
AOR										
6	SSF	<i>Kunlunshan</i> 998					Saudi Arabia			
		landing platform dock (LPD)								
		<i>Lanzhou</i> 170		Jun. 30, 2010	Jan. 7, 2011	192	Bahrain	4	615	49
		DDG					Sri Lanka			
		<i>Weishanhu</i> 887					Indonesia			
AOR										

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TF #	Fleet	Vessels and Pennant #s	# of Crew	Depart	Return	Days	Selected Ports Visited	Friendly Port Visits	Ships Escorted	Groups Escorted
		<i>Zhoushan</i> 529 FFG					South Africa			
7	ESF	<i>Xuzhou</i> 530 FFG  <i>Qiandaohu</i> 886 AOR	780	Nov. 2, 2010	May 9, 2011	189	Tanzania Seychelles  (Singapore-docked)	3	578	38
		<i>Ma'anshan</i> 525 FFG								
8	ESF	<i>Wenzhou</i> 526 FFG  <i>Qiandaohu</i> 886		Feb. 21, 2011	Aug. 28, 2011	189	Qatar Thailand	2	507	46

TF #	Fleet	Vessels and Pennant #s	# of Crew	Depart	Return	Days	Selected Ports Visited	Friendly Port Visits	Ships Escorted	Groups Escorted
AOR										
9	SSF	<i>Wuhan</i> 169 DDG		Jul. 2, 2011	Dec. 24, 2011	175	Kuwait	3	280	41
		<i>Yulin</i> 569 FFG	878				Oman			
		<i>Qinghaihu</i> 885					Singapore			
		AOR								
AOR										
10	SSF	<i>Haikou</i> 171 DDG		Nov. 2, 2011	May 5, 2012	186	Mozambique	2	240	40
		<i>Yuncheng</i> 571 FFG	800				e			
		<i>Qinghaihu</i> 885					Thailand			
		AOR								

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TF #	Fleet	Vessels and Pennant #s	# of Crew	Depart	Return	Days	Selected Ports Visited	Friendly Port Visits	Ships Escorted	Groups Escorted
		<i>Qingdao</i> 113 DDG					Ukraine			
		<i>Yantai</i> 538 FFG	800	Feb. 27, 2012	Sept. 12, 2012	191	Turkey	5	184	43
		<i>Weishanhu</i> 887 AOR					Bulgaria			
							Israel			
		<i>Yiyang</i> 548 FFG								
		<i>Changzhou</i> 549 FFG	800	Jul. 3, 2012	Jan. 19, 2013	201	Vietnam	2	198	45
		<i>Qiandaohu</i> 886 AOR					Australia			







TF #	Fleet	Vessels and Pennant #s	# of Crew	Depart	Return	Days	Selected Ports Visited	Friendly Port Visits	Ships Escorted	Groups Escorted
							Algeria			
							Namibia			
							South Africa			
		<i>Changchun</i> 150 DDG					Jordan			
17	ESF	<i>Changzhou</i> 549 FFG	810	Mar. 24, 2014	Oct. 22, 2014	213	UAE Iran	4	115	43
		<i>Chaohu</i> 890 AOR					Pakistan			

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TF #	Fleet	Vessels and Pennant #s	# of Crew	Depart	Return	Days	Selected Ports Visited	Friendly Port Visits	Ships Escorted	Groups Escorted
18	SSF	<i>Changbaishan</i>		Aug. 1, 2014	Mar. 19, 2015	231	England	135	48	
		989 LPD					Germany			
		<i>Yuncheng</i> 571 FFG					Netherlands			
		<i>Chaohu</i> 890 AOR					France			
19	NSF	<i>Linyi</i> 547 FFG	700	Dec. 2, 2014			Djibouti	109	35	
		<i>Weifang</i> 550 FFG					Yemen			
		<i>Weishanhu</i> 887 AOR								

TF #	Fleet	Vessels and Pennant #s	# of Crew	Depart	Return	Days	Selected Ports Visited	Friendly Port Visits	Ships Escorted	Groups Escorted
		<i>Jinan</i> 152 DDG								
20	ESF	<i>Yiyang</i> 548 FFG <i>Qiandaohu</i> 886 AOR	>800	Apr. 3, 2015			Oman			

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TF #	Fleet	Vessels and Pennant #s	# of Crew	Depart	Return	Days	Selected Ports Visited	Friendly Port Visits	Ships Escorted	Groups Escorted
							2.71 different countries			
							2.94 different ports			
Avg. (TFs 1-17)	N/A	N/A	~800	~3 TFs per year	N/A	187.7 days	6.71 port calls	2.53 different states		
							3.18 friendly visits			
							3.53 replenish/overhaul			



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TF #	Fleet	Vessels and Pennant #s	# of Crew	Depart	Return	Days	Selected Ports Visited	Friendly Port Visits	Ships Escorted	Groups Escorted
							visits			
							~70			
							replenish/overhaul			
							visits			
							>>7 joint drills			

**Note:** Duration of TFs is based on date leaving and returning to port in China; exact dates for escort responsibilities in Gulf of Aden are not available systematically. Duration calculated using <http://www.timeanddate.com/date/duration.html>, with final day included. Activities by other non-TF vessels supporting mission (e.g., submarines) not included. Numbers of friendly visits, replenish/overhaul visits and joint drills total more than port calls because some port calls include multiple events. Number of port calls and related events, etc., may not be completely accurate or comprehensive. Replenishment/overhaul cases are particularly easy to miss since they are not always reported at the same levels of frequency and clarity as friendly visits. Summary statistics calculated exclude data from 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> TFs.

**Exhibit 1 Sources:**

**Overall:** Kenneth Allen, “PLA Foreign Relations under Xi Jinping: Continuity and/or Change?” paper presented at the CAPS-RAND-NDU 26<sup>th</sup> Annual PLA Conference, RAND Corp., Arlington, VA, November 21-22, 2014. **TFs 1-8:** “中国海军十批护航编队简介” [A Brief Introduction to China’s Ten Naval Escort Task Forces], Xinhua, December 26, 2011, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/mil/2011-12/26/c\\_122483096.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/mil/2011-12/26/c_122483096.htm); “中国海军第三批护航编队今启航赴索马里海域(图)” [Third Chinese Navy Escort Task Force Sets Sail for Somali Waters], 凤凰资讯 [Phoenix News] July 16, 2009, [http://news.ifeng.com/mil/2/200907/0716\\_340\\_1252031.shtml](http://news.ifeng.com/mil/2/200907/0716_340_1252031.shtml). **TF 9:** 郭丹 [Guo Dan], 李德 [Li De] and 肖德伦 [Xiao Delun], “海军第九批护航编队凯旋” [9<sup>th</sup> Naval Escort Taskforce Triumphs], 湛江日报 [Zhanjiang Daily], December 25, 2011, [http://www.gdzdaily.com.cn/zjnews/zjpolitics/2011-12/25/content\\_1435956.htm](http://www.gdzdaily.com.cn/zjnews/zjpolitics/2011-12/25/content_1435956.htm). **TF 10:** Gao Yi and Tang Zhuoxiong, “10<sup>th</sup> Chinese Naval Escort Taskforce Returns to Base,” *Liberation Army Daily*, May 8, 2012, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90786/7810913.html>. **TF 11:** “Chinese Naval Escort Taskforce Ensures Safety for 4,640 Ships,” *Naval Today*, May 14, 2012, <http://navaltoday.com/2012/05/14/chinese-naval-escort-taskforce-ensures-safety-for-4-640-ships/>; Chen Dianhong and Mi Jinguo, “11<sup>th</sup> Chinese Naval Task Force Returns Home After Visiting Israel,” *Liberation Army Daily*, August 21, 2012, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90786/7918352.html>; “11<sup>th</sup> Chinese Naval Escort Taskforce Leaves Gulf of Aden,” *Liberation Army Daily*, July 25, 2012, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90786/7886530.html>; 第十一批护航编队回到祖国怀抱 [11<sup>th</sup> Escort Taskforce Returns to the Embrace of the Mother Country], *Qingdao Finance Daily*, 6 September 2012, [http://qd.wenming.cn/syjj/201209/t20120906\\_345091.html](http://qd.wenming.cn/syjj/201209/t20120906_345091.html). **TF 12:** Cheng Bijie and Hou Rui, “12<sup>th</sup> Chinese Naval Escort Taskforce Returns Home After Visiting Vietnam,” *China Military Online*, January 15, 2013, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90786/8092041.html>; Cheng Bijie and Hou Rui, “12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Chinese Naval Escort Taskforces Conduct Mission Handover,” *China Military Online*, November 23, 2012, [http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2012-11/23/content\\_5109609.htm](http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2012-11/23/content_5109609.htm); “12<sup>th</sup> Chinese Naval Escort Taskforce Returns Home,” *China Military Online*, January 22, 2013, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90786/8101766.html>. **TF 13:** Zhu Shaobin and Xiao Jiancheng, “13<sup>th</sup> Chinese Naval Escort Taskforce Arrives in Gulf of Aden,” *China Military Online*, November 23, 2012, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90786/8031368.html>; Guan Lei and Xiao Delun, “13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Naval Escort Taskforces Conduct Mission-Handover,” *China Military Online*, March 15, 2013, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90786/8168363.html>; “China’s 13<sup>th</sup> Escort Fleet Returns

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### **Creativity and Inter-Agency Cooperation**

While frequently touted in China and abroad as an example of cooperation with other navies, China's initial and proceeding anti-piracy deployments have also catalyzed interagency coordination unprecedented in scale, extent and impact. For example, PLA No. 425 Hospital regularly supports officers and sailors deployed to the Gulf of Aden with real-time medical "teleconsultations" with Sanya-based staff.<sup>113</sup> Similarly, operations in the Gulf of Aden have spurred civil-military coordination among the navy and agencies such as the MOT that transcends bureaucratic barriers. Increasingly advanced and integrated network technology, including China's growing Beidou positioning, navigation and timing satellite system,<sup>114</sup> supports these efforts. The PLAN Control Center and MOT's China Maritime Search and Rescue Center (CMSRC) jointly track the locations and status of relevant Chinese merchant ships, aboard which the MOT has installed devices that support a "maritime satellite-based ship movement tracking system." Supported by newly developed software, the system facilitates features including "all-dimensional tracking" and video-based communications "at all

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<sup>113</sup> "Chinese Navy Uses Telemedicine in Major Missions," *People's Daily Online*, January 7, 2013, [english.peopledaily.com.cn/90786/8080783.html](http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90786/8080783.html).

<sup>114</sup> For *Beidou* details, see Kevin Pollpeter, Patrick Beshia and Alanna Krolkowski, "The Research, Development and Acquisition Process for the Beidou Navigation Satellite Programs," in Kevin Pollpeter, ed., *Getting to Innovation: Assessing China's Defense Research, Development and Acquisition System* (La Jolla, CA: University of California Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation, January 2014), pp. 57-61, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3p05b9xp>.

times.”<sup>115</sup> Additionally, in January 2014 the 16<sup>th</sup> escort task force employed an airborne video transmission system to snap photos of four suspicious vessels, which were sent to commanders in real time, allowing for Chinese warships to repel the vessels.<sup>116</sup>

This coordination is bolstered significantly by new ways of communicating that allow China to deploy new technologies with a wide range of applicability. Reportedly required by PLAN Commander Wu Shengli from the outset, anti-piracy task forces benefit from cutting-edge telecommunications. Yang Junfei, 11<sup>th</sup> task force Commander, stated that his flotilla has multiplied its overall efficiency through a transformation of its “original short-wave communication” system to one “composed of multiple satellite communication transmission networks.” The latter facilitates reporting escort situations, exchanging information with other navies, communicating with commercial ships in need of escort and organizing escort convoys.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> 张庆宝 [Zhang Qingbao], “‘海外经济利益应由自己来保护’—本报记者专访国家交通运输部合作司司长局成志” [Overseas Economic Interests”: An Interview with Director General Ju Chengzhi of the International Cooperation Department under the Ministry of Transportation], *People’s Navy*, January 9, 2009, p. 4.

<sup>116</sup> “Chinese Naval Escort Task force Repels 4 Suspicious Vessels,” China Military Online, January 15, 2014, [http://www.360doc.com/content/14/0115/14/363711\\_345466711.shtml](http://www.360doc.com/content/14/0115/14/363711_345466711.shtml).

<sup>117</sup> Chen Dianhong and Mi Jinguo, “11th Chinese Naval Escort Task force Holds Communication Drill,” China Military Online, June 28, 2012, <http://english.people.com.cn/102774/7858609.html>.

The operational challenges of Somalia have also catalyzed PLAN creativity. The complex nontraditional security threat of contemporary maritime piracy has forced PLAN forces to accustom themselves to reacting in unrehearsed ways, a significant departure from pre-Gulf of Aden times, when many PLAN sailors relied on rote procedures. Events force PLAN personnel to depart from the script of contingency plans they previously memorized. As mentioned above, in July 2012, *Changzhou* was responsible for picking up and transferring 26 civilian crewmembers of pirated Taiwan fishing vessel *Shiuh-fu 1*. The freed hostages were left on a Somali beach, which required the PLAN to perform an unprecedented shore landing and pick-up. Wave conditions prevented *Changzhou* from approaching shore. To search the surf zone, it sent two dinghies with five Special Forces members and four sailors. The team located the released hostages but was unable to extract them in the boats because of high waves near shore. *Changzhou* dispatched a helicopter, but the wet, sandy beach frustrated landing. Darkness threatened the freed hostages with the possibility of recapture. Two seasoned Special Forces members were therefore deployed to the beach to facilitate the helicopter's landing, after which PLAN forces were finally able to pick up the twenty-six hostages.<sup>118</sup> Recounting the event, helicopter pilot Chen Wengang recalled, "I could see they were terrified

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<sup>118</sup> 王志秋 [Wang Zhiqiu] and 侯瑞 [Hou Rui], "索马里海域大接护—十二批护航编队常州舰接护—十批护航编队常州舰接护"旭富一号'富渔船船员纪实" [Pickup in the Gulf of Aden: Real Account of the Twelfth Naval Escort Task Force Warship *Changzhou's* Pickup and Escort of *Shiuh-fu 1* Fishing Boat Crew Members], 综合新闻 [General News], *People's Navy*, July 2012, p. 3.

from their eyes when we finally met at the beach on the Somali coast.”<sup>119</sup>

Streamlined coordination and consistent improvisation have collectively stimulated PLAN efficiency over six-plus years of continuous escorts has increased the PLAN's Far Seas operations efficacy. For instance, the PLAN has increased the scope and versatility of convoy formations escorting warships and commercial vessels, employing multiple and combined escort procedures to best coordinate schedules and ship characteristics. China performs escorts 5 miles [9 km] north of the Internationally-Recommended Transit Corridor (IRTC), in parallel to other navies. 450 miles [833 km] long, the IRTC is divided into 25x25 mile [46x46 km] blocks. One-column convoys arrange the merchant ships in an equidistant pattern, typically flanked by one warship, which travels at a speed similar to that of the flotilla.

Recent anti-piracy escort task forces have lasted about six or seven months between departing and returning to home port, though both the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> task forces worked for an extended duration to help with other nontraditional security missions such as Syrian chemical weapons destruction and commercial aircraft search operations. Task forces rotate duties in the Gulf of Aden every three or four months. Mirroring increases in time at sea for PLAN ships is the

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<sup>119</sup> Peng Yining, “Navy Lauded for Foiling Pirates,” *China Daily*, December 26, 2013, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90786/8495596.html>.

aggregate number of commercial escorts they have performed.<sup>120</sup> For instance, China used over 300 days to escort 1,000 ships, over 220 more days to reach 2,000 escorts, and just over 180 additional days to reach its milestone of 3,000 escorts.<sup>121</sup> These are significant milestones, given the precision that escort operations demand, with ships of different speeds and schedules coming through the Suez Canal's time-limited gates.

With time China has streamlined its naval escort operations. PLAN warships adopt different escort formations in response to unpredictable circumstances such as the number and type of commercial ships, weather, region and PLAN capacity. Formations include single-, double- and hybrid-style columns, and sometime involve grouping commercial escortees by their relative displacements, speeds and features.<sup>122</sup> Additionally, as seen during 9<sup>th</sup> task force operations, a commercial vessel with a lower freeboard—potentially more vulnerable to boarding by pirates—might be placed

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<sup>120</sup> "China's Eleventh Escort Fleet Returns from Somali Waters," Xinhua, 13 September 2012, [news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-09/13/c\\_131848762.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-09/13/c_131848762.htm).

<sup>121</sup> 李建文 [Li Jianwen], "为了黄金航道的和谐平安: 写在海军护航编队护送中外商船总数突破 3000 艘之际" [For the Harmony and Safety of the Golden Waterway: Written at the Time of the 3,000<sup>th</sup> Escort Breakthrough by Naval Escort Task Forces of Chinese and Foreign Ships], *Liberation Army Daily*, December 4, 2010, p. 4, [www.chinamil.com.cn/jfjbmap/content/2010-12/04/content\\_44927.htm](http://www.chinamil.com.cn/jfjbmap/content/2010-12/04/content_44927.htm).

<sup>122</sup> "Eleventh Chinese Naval Escort Task Force Realizes Scientific Escort," China Military Online, May 5, 2012, [eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2012-05/08/content\\_4855639.htm](http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2012-05/08/content_4855639.htm).

closer to PLAN warships.<sup>123</sup> In previous cases PLAN task forces have assigned one surface platform, usually a guided missile frigate, to linger for extended periods at escort rendezvous points whenever certain merchant vessels are tardy due to weather, ship-specific constraints and so on.<sup>124</sup>

Just as escort tactics provide demonstrable examples of PLAN anti-piracy adaptation and creativity, the evolving operations of Special Forces deployed for PLAN escorts represent a critical feature of China's anti-piracy apparatus. Learning from early operations, recent Special Forces detachments have boarded certain commercial ships, such as those on the outside of the convoy and/or with lower freeboards, to provide on-ship anti-piracy protection.<sup>125</sup> They have repeatedly conducted integrated training with civilian seafarers to combat piracy jointly.<sup>126</sup>

In addition to operational innovations, the PLAN has utilized six-plus years of anti-piracy deployments away from home to achieve

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<sup>123</sup> "Ninth Escort Formation of PLA Navy Deploys SOF Soldiers on Board MVs to Keep the Charge Perfectly Safe," Military Report, CCTV-7 (Mandarin), October 19, 2011.

<sup>124</sup> Zhao Shengnan, "Navy Protects Ships from Pirates," *China Daily*, December 29, 2012, [europe.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2012-12/29/content\\_16066937.htm](http://europe.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2012-12/29/content_16066937.htm).

<sup>125</sup> "Conversation with Yin Zhuo: Escorts Are an Epoch-Making Event," *Navy Today*, No. 12 (December 2011), p. 22.

<sup>126</sup> "PLA Navy's Tenth Escort Formation Provides On-Board Escort for Merchant Vessels for the First Time," Military Report, CCTV-7 (Mandarin), 1130 GMT, November 28, 2011.

flatter command structures, facilitating more efficient intra-naval coordination. Operations with the scale and scope of China's Gulf of Aden deployment demand tight synchronization among manifold Chinese civil and military actors. To be sure, the command structure of the task forces mirrors that of PLAN headquarters, where many task force commanders are normally billeted, with a commanding officer (指挥官), political commissar (政治委员), deputy commanding officer (副指挥官) and heads of four groups: command group (指挥组), political works group (政工组), logistics group (后勤组) and equipment group (装备组).<sup>127</sup> But within this overall framework, China's Navy has adopted an unusually flattened command structure through which CMC orders can be passed directly to anti-piracy vessels without having to first transit fleet and base command levels. This allows anti-piracy task forces to receive authoritative commands and respond more quickly.

Similarly, the Comprehensive Planning Department of the PLAN's Equipment Department established a "shipping escort action equipment support administrative organization," and reportedly assigned a staff member specific responsibilities concerning shipping escort equipment organization and support. This institution has been tested continuously by unexpected incidents. For example, while en route to Libya's coast to assist China's evacuation of overseas nationals in 2011, frigate *Xuzhou* experienced a

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<sup>127</sup> Kenneth Allen, "PLA Foreign Relations under Xi Jinping: Continuity and/or Change?" paper presented at the Chinese Council on Advanced Policy Studies (CAPS)-RAND-National Defense University 26th Annual PLA Conference, Arlington, VA, November 21–22, 2014.

malfunction. The Equipment Department urgently worked with “diplomatic, civil aviation, Customs, Maritime Affairs and Public Security organizations, even delaying the takeoff of a scheduled flight.” Technology and flatter coordination structures have likewise deepened civil-military integration:

...it sent the spare parts on an outbound flight and thereby assured that the follow-on task could be executed. From getting the spare parts ready to clearing the malfunction all that distance away took only two days. Moreover, for emergency resupply of special weapons ammunition for the first shipping escort formation, an ordnance support organization finished arranging for more than 40,000 special weapons items to be delivered to the port of departure from various locations in China in 28 hours.<sup>128</sup>

One of the PLAN Deputy Commanders, Vice Admiral Ding Yiping, declared in December 2013 that the PLAN had no plans then to deploy an aircraft carrier formation to the Gulf of Aden to fight piracy. Interestingly, however, he suggested that the PLAN would expand patrols on the East African coastline, and intensify escorts for UN World Food Program (WFP) vessels. Given that the PLAN’s

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<sup>128</sup> 姚江 [Yao Jiang], 陆文捷 [Lu Wenjie] and 陆文强 [Lu Wenqiang], “托举战舰闯大洋: 装备保障为海军远洋护航行动提供有力支撑” [Holding Up Warships Rushing into the Big Ocean: Equipment Support is Effective in Navy’s Open-Ocean Shipping Protection Effort], *People’s Navy*, July 3, 2012, p. 3.



primary contributions to Gulf of Aden security have been ship escorts rather than zoned patrols, it remains unclear if Chinese naval ships will start patrolling East Africa's coast regularly as Ding suggests.<sup>129</sup> Regardless, China's *Yuzhao*-class Type 071 LPDs, as well as *Liaoning*, remain the PLAN's strongest surface platforms available for supporting anti-piracy and other nontraditional security operations. Type 071 flagship *Kunlunshan* participated in the 6<sup>th</sup> escort task force. *Jinggangshan*, a \$300 million, 200-meter Type 071 amphibious landing ship is equipped with four hovercraft and two Z-8 helicopters, and crewed by 800 officers and sailors. It deployed with the 15<sup>th</sup> task force in 2013.<sup>130</sup>

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### Equipment

Sustaining a large-scale security mission for over six years beyond the Asia-Pacific offers Chinese naval planners a testing ground for new platforms and development ideas. The military importance attached to the Gulf of Aden mission stems largely from the operational experience gained by China's Navy, which the PLAN is able to apply to many of its other operations, including traditional,

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<sup>129</sup> 陈国全 [Chen Guoquan] and 张新 [Zhang Xin], “海军将继续派兵护航” [Navy Will Continue to Send Troops to Escort], *Liberation Army Daily*, December 27, 2013, <http://mil.news.sina.com.cn/2013-12-27/0500757043.html>.

<sup>130</sup> “Chinese Navy Escort Task force Starts Mission at Gulf of Aden,” Xinhua, August 27, 2013, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/DesktopModules/DnnForge%20-%20NewsArticles/Print.aspx?tabid=99&tabmoduleid=94&articleId=806621&moduleId=405&PortalID=0>.

combat-based objectives in the Near Seas. For example, many of China's most advanced guided missile frigates, including *Huangshan*, *Yuncheng* and *Weishanhu* of the SSF, have deployed off Somalia, and sport some of the PLAN's strongest anti-aircraft, anti-missile and anti-submarine systems.<sup>131</sup> These PLAN surface platforms transit various strategic waterways en route to the Gulf of Aden, including the Chinese-claimed Paracel (Xisha) and Spratly (Nansha) islands in the South China Sea, as well as the Strait of Malacca and the Indian Ocean.<sup>132</sup>

The Type 056 *Jiangdao*-class frigate was introduced into the PLAN for the first time in 2013. While it appears to fill a much-needed role in China's Near Seas defense by providing a balance between power and speed, it also seems potentially useful in nontraditional security operations such as anti-terrorism, anti-piracy, border control and anti-drug activities.<sup>133</sup> 30mm remote control ship guns on both sides of the Type-056's bridge are ideal for low-intensity conflicts, and appeared first in the Gulf of Aden on replenishment vessel

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<sup>131</sup> "South China Sea Fleet Unveils New Round of Long Voyage Training," *Liberation Army Daily*, December 20, 2013, [http://eng.mod.gov.cn/TopNews/2013-12/20/content\\_4480189.htm](http://eng.mod.gov.cn/TopNews/2013-12/20/content_4480189.htm).

<sup>132</sup> "Chinese Naval Escort Task force Conducts Anti-Piracy Training," *Liberation Army Daily*, February 27, 2013, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90786/8146977.html>.

<sup>133</sup> 广闻 [Guang Wen], "近海卫士:浅析中国海军新型 056 型护卫舰" [Near Seas Protector: Towards the PLA Navy's Type 056 New Frigate], 舰载武器 [Shipborne Weapons], No. 1 (January 2011), pp. 26-29.

*Qinghaihu*.<sup>134</sup> Similarly, Chinese surface vessels such as search and rescue vessel *Haixun 01* are increasingly equipped with sound amplifier and water cannon equipment that allow PLAN sailors to deter pirates and other low-intensity threats using non-fatal means.<sup>135</sup> Of course, the Type 056 frigate appears to be primarily designed for Near Seas application. ONI summarizes its capabilities as follows: “The Jiangdao is ideally-suited for general medium-endurance patrols, counterpiracy operations and other littoral duties in regional waters, but is not sufficiently armed or equipped for major combat operations in blue-water areas.”<sup>136</sup>

Meanwhile, the PLAN has deployed its most advanced amphibious ships to the Gulf of Aden, such as the *Jinggangshan* amphibious transport dock (one of four Type 071 vessels; additional hulls likely soon),<sup>137</sup> which possess advanced air defense and anti-submarine abilities. The experience these ships and their crews accumulate off

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<sup>134</sup> 王进 [Wang Jin], “新时期新使命: 中国 056 型轻型护卫舰” [New Era, New Missions: The PLA-Navy’s Type 056 Light Frigate], *Shipborne Weapons*, No. 8 (August 2012), pp. 18-21.

<sup>135</sup> “Shanghai Commissions Large Patrol Vessel,” Xinhua, April 17, 2013, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2013-04/17/content\\_16413011.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2013-04/17/content_16413011.htm). For documentation of similar capabilities deployed in China’s consolidating Coast Guard, see Ryan Martinson, “Here Comes China’s Great White Fleet,” *The National Interest*, October 1, 2014, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/here-comes-china%E2%80%99s-great-white-fleet-11383>.

<sup>136</sup> *The PLA Navy: New Capabilities and Missions for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Suitland, MD: Office of Naval Intelligence, 2015), p. 14.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid*, p. 15.

Somalia represent important steps for building combat readiness absent traditional maritime conflicts or other opportunities to gain live experience.<sup>138</sup> Some Chinese experts view this as the PLA's most valuable current operational involvement, given that the PLAN has not had actual combat experience since the 1988 Johnson South Reef Skirmish. While U.S. and other foreign naval experts may be quick to dismiss the comparison for want of direct parallels, it is important to consider the PLA's long tradition of learning where it can and making do with what it has. Increasingly sophisticated PLAN exercises underway include targeted opposition force drills with in-depth hot washes to learn from successes and failures.

Moreover, Type 071 vessels, currently the PLAN's largest comprehensive amphibious warships with a displacement of over 20 tons, offer a wider deck and greater ability to introduce helicopters into war fighting training and operations in the Gulf of Aden.<sup>139</sup> The ongoing development of the "Type 081" landing helicopter dock promises another advanced platform suitable for Gulf of Aden and other anti-piracy missions. In 2007, data merged suggesting that China is developing a Type 081 landing ship that will be able to transport twelve helicopters and a crew of over 1,000 for a month at a time.<sup>140</sup> ONI describes this as "a follow-on [to the 071] amphibious

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<sup>138</sup> Military Report, CCTV-7 (Mandarin), 1130 GMT, March 19, 2013.

<sup>139</sup> Li Jie, "A New Milestone in Going to the Ocean," Five Year Escort Special Column, *Navy Today*, No. 12 (December 2013), p. 20.

<sup>140</sup> J. Michael Cole, "New Chinese Ship Causes Alarm," *Taipei Times*, March 31, 2012, <http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/front/archives/2012/05/31/2003534139>.

assault ship (LHA) that is not only larger, but incorporates a full-deck flight deck for helicopters.”<sup>141</sup>

The need to constantly supply Gulf of Aden task forces appears to have helped drive an increase in China’s fleet of replenishment oilers (AORs). For years the PLAN had five *Fuchi*-class AORs, its largest, most advanced; two more were added in 2013 and 2014 respectively, bringing the total to 9 today.<sup>142</sup>

Rotary wing aircraft (helicopters) have played an important role in maritime domain awareness and SOF deployment. Every helicopter-capable PLAN combatant can deploy one of the PLAN’s roughly 20 Z-9Cs. This workhorse airframe may be fitted with a KLC-1 search radar, dipping sonar and a lightweight torpedo. The upgraded Z-9D naval variant “has been observed carrying ASCMs.” In a sign of possible customization to support Gulf of Aden operations, several Z-9Cs conducting anti-piracy escorts have been observed with “a new roof-mounted electro-optical (EO) turret, unguided rockets, and 12.7mm machine gun pods.” The Z-8 medium-lift helicopter offers greater cargo capacity, but its larger size precludes deployment on some PLAN combatants. During Gulf of Aden anti-piracy deployments, “several Z-8s were seen with weapons pylons that are

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<sup>141</sup> *The PLA Navy: New Capabilities and Missions for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Suitland, MD: Office of Naval Intelligence, 2015), p. 15.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

capable of carrying up to four armament pods—the same rocket and 12.7 mm machine gun pods seen on the Z-9Cs.”<sup>143</sup>

In addition to traditional surface and aviation platforms, the PLAN boasts a burgeoning fleet of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), as well as an increasingly sophisticated collection of unmanned underwater vehicles (UUVs).<sup>144</sup> Particularly in the case of China’s more advanced UAVs, these autonomous platforms could be applied increasingly to Gulf of Aden and other Far Seas maritime operations. The PLAN has already deployed multiple types of UAVs, such as the BZK-005 and the S-100, in the Near Seas.<sup>145</sup>

The most dramatic example to date of new, operationally relevant experience derived from ongoing anti-piracy task forces, however, is China’s unprecedented submarine deployments into the Indian Ocean, Gulf of Aden, Persian Gulf, and possibly soon to other bodies of water. While these deployments have been ostensibly to support anti-piracy escorts, DoD judges that “the submarines were probably also conducting area familiarization, and demonstrating an emerging capability both to protect China’s sea lines of

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<sup>143</sup> *The PLA Navy: New Capabilities and Missions for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Suitland, MD: Office of Naval Intelligence, 2015), p. 17.

<sup>144</sup> For a survey of Chinese UUV research and development, see Lyle Goldstein and Shannon Knight, “Coming without Shadows, Leaving without Footprints,” U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings*, Vol. 136, No. 4 (April 2010), pp. 30-35.

<sup>145</sup> *The PLA Navy: New Capabilities and Missions for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Suitland, MD: Office of Naval Intelligence, 2015), p. 19.

communications and increase China's power projection into the Indian Ocean."<sup>146</sup>

On December 3, 2013, the Ministry of National Defense Foreign Affairs Office (MNDFAO) informed Indian military attachés that a Chinese submarine would enter the Indian Ocean, for the first time ever. Officials from the United States, Singapore, Indonesia, Pakistan and Russia were likewise notified. From December 13, 2013 to February 12, 2014, a *Shang*-class (Type 093) nuclear-powered attack submarine (SSN) navigated near Sri Lanka and into the Persian Gulf, transiting the Strait of Malacca on the way to and from its home port on Hainan Island.<sup>147</sup>

In September 2014, MNDFAO once again summoned foreign attachés to announce that another dispatch was imminent—this time China's first deployment of a conventionally powered submarine to the Indian Ocean. Attachés were informed that "the subs entering the Indian Ocean would assist anti-piracy patrols off Somalia."<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2015*, Annual Report to Congress (Arlington, VA: Office of the Secretary of Defense, May 8, 2015), p. 19.

<sup>147</sup> Dong Zhaohui, ed., "PLA Navy Submarine visits Sri Lanka," China Military Online, September 24, 2014, [http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2014-09/24/content\\_6152669.htm](http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2014-09/24/content_6152669.htm).

<sup>148</sup> Jeremy Page, "Deep Threat: China's Submarines Add Nuclear-Strike Capability, Altering Strategic Balance," *Wall Street Journal*, October 24, 2014, <http://online.wsj.com/articles/chinas-submarine-fleet-adds-nuclear-strike-capability-altering-strategic-balance-undersea-1414164738?tesla=y&mg=reno64-wsj>.

*Song*-class (Type 039) *Great Wall No. 329* from the South Sea Fleet made Beijing's first formal submarine visit to a foreign country when it visited Colombo, Sri Lanka from September 7-14. Accompanied by North Sea Fleet comprehensive supply ship *Changxing Lake* (pennant number 861), it docked at Colombo International Container Terminal, built with a Chinese investment of \$500 million.<sup>149</sup> Queried by fax by Bloomberg News, MNDFAO stated, "The submarine stopped in Colombo en route to the Gulf of Aden off the coast of Somalia to join a navy escort mission."<sup>150</sup> *Song 329* and *Changxing Lake* docked in Colombo again on October 13, where they remained five days for "refueling [sic] and crew refreshment."<sup>151</sup>

In an interesting example of art emulating life, a PLAN-produced TV series on the Gulf of Aden mission hints at similar submarine activities.<sup>152</sup> After serving as Political Commissar in the first Gulf of

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<sup>149</sup> Cdr. Gurpreet Khurana, Cdr. Kapil Narula and Asha Devi, "PLA Navy Submarine Visits Sri Lanka," *Making Waves*, Vol. 19, No. 9.2 (New Delhi: National Maritime Foundation, September 30, 2014), p. 37, [http://maritimeindia.org/pdf/MW%209.2\(Final\).pdf](http://maritimeindia.org/pdf/MW%209.2(Final).pdf).

<sup>150</sup> David Tweed, "China's Clandestine Submarine Caves Extend Xi's Naval Reach," Bloomberg, October 31, 2014, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-10-30/xi-s-clandestine-submarine-caves-bolster-china-s-maritime-goal.html>.

<sup>151</sup> Shihar Aneez and Ranga Sirilal, "Chinese Submarine Docks in Sri Lanka Despite Indian Concerns," November 2, 2014, <http://in.reuters.com/article/2014/11/02/sri-lanka-china-submarine-idINKBN0IM0LU20141102>.

<sup>152</sup> For details, see "《船在亚丁湾》今晚央八启航 钟雷演绎侠骨柔情" ["In the Gulf of Aden' Sets Sail from CCTV Tonight: Zhong Lei Plays Chivalrous Role], Xinhua, September 3, 2014, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/ent/2014-09/03/c\\_126951244.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/ent/2014-09/03/c_126951244.htm).



Aden task force beginning in Episode 1, in Episode 34 protagonist Xiao Weiguo departs Yulin Naval Base on a forty-day deployment in what is clearly a *Song*-class submarine.<sup>153</sup>

Shortly before this study went to press, too late to be included in DoD's 2015 report, a *Han*-class (Type 091) likewise entered the Indian Ocean and called on a port in the Gulf of Aden for the first time, operating in conjunction with an anti-piracy task force (possibly the 19<sup>th</sup>) for “more than two months,” until April 22, 2015.<sup>154</sup> In a CCTV interview, Yu Zhengqiang, the Qingdao-based submarine's deputy commander, enumerated challenges that he and his crew had to overcome: “This escort mission had multiple major safety concerns. First, there were concerns about all the equipment and facilities, and second [we had to] deal with various challenges while navigating totally unknown waters, which was complicated by military intelligence issues.”<sup>155</sup> According to one article, “CCTV broadcast footage of the improved type 091 nuclear submarine for the first time, indicating that the submarine's escort missions in the

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<sup>153</sup> Episodes of “舰在亚丁湾” [In the Gulf of Aden] may be viewed at “舰在亚丁湾 (完结),” [http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI5Y-oB1N4-zytZ3a\\_deUXcM\\_3CSVefaK](http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI5Y-oB1N4-zytZ3a_deUXcM_3CSVefaK).

<sup>154</sup> CCTV-7 report, as documented frame-by-frame in “官媒首曝海军 091 改型核攻击潜艇巡航亚丁湾画面” [First Official Media Exposure of Modified PLAN Type 091 Nuclear-Powered Attack Submarine in Gulf of Aden], Xinhua Net, April 27, 2015, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/mil/2015-04/27/c\\_127736846.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/mil/2015-04/27/c_127736846.htm).

<sup>155</sup> “港媒:央视首曝 091 改型核潜艇 亚丁湾护航常态化” [Hong Kong Media: CCTV Offers First Exposure of Modified 091 Nuclear Submarines—Normalization of Gulf of Aden Escorts], 环球网 [Global Net], April 29, 2015, <http://military.people.com.cn/n/2015/0429/c1011-26923066.html>.

region will become a standard exercise.”<sup>156</sup> If so, from a naval development perspective, some of the most exciting elements of Chinese Gulf of Aden deployments will increasingly occur underseas.

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### Personnel

Extended voyages where personnel are often at sea for months at a time require PLAN crews to master both logistical duties and personal health challenges. PLAN crews sent to the Gulf of Aden rise at 6:20 a.m. and discharge their duties for eight to ten hours daily. The PLAN assigns psychiatrists to address mental challenges faced by crewmembers, who are encouraged to take advantage of limited deck space, and are permitted to use the Internet on weekends.<sup>157</sup> Fu Guanghai, a PLAN sailor stationed on supply ship *Weishanhu*, stated that “We call home about twice a month, but the length must be kept below five minutes each time, which is not a lot when you count the dialing time in.”<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> “Getting Close to a Submarine Detachment of the PLA Navy,” *People’s Daily Online*, May 7, 2015, [http://english.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2015-05/07/content\\_6478476.htm](http://english.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2015-05/07/content_6478476.htm).

<sup>157</sup> Andrew S. Erickson and Austin M. Strange, “Learning the Ropes in Blue Water: The Chinese Navy’s Gulf of Aden Deployments Have Borne Worthwhile Lessons in Far-Seas Operations—Lessons that Go Beyond the Anti-piracy Mission,” U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings*, Vol. 139, No. 4 (April 2013), pp. 34-38.

<sup>158</sup> Ai Yang, “Navy Beefs Up Anti-Piracy Effort,” *China Daily*, March 24, 2010, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2010-03/04/content\\_9534852.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2010-03/04/content_9534852.htm).

Like surface platforms, naval personnel continue to accumulate otherwise unavailable Far Seas operational proficiency. First, naval operational modernization has the backing of China's top leadership to a historically unprecedented degree. Moreover, Chinese leaders are ideally positioned to guide PLAN modernization in the coming years. Xi Jinping's retention of Admiral Wu Shengli as PLAN commander, for instance, represents a strong vote of confidence of Wu's leadership since 2007, which has spanned the inaugural and subsequent 15 PLAN Gulf of Aden deployments. Xi had a chance to replace him, but did not, despite replacing all other senior PLA flag officers in similar positions. It seems likely that Xi sees a kindred spirit in Wu: a confident, extroverted, vigorous leader from a Party family with the father formerly a leader in the son's professional circle. Wu is also experienced in executive positions, with a temperament and physical, hands-on approach well suited to riding herd over an ambitious modernization process.<sup>159</sup>

Second, below the highest echelon of naval leadership, the PLAN is cultivating an elite cadre of officers, many of whom possess Gulf of Aden experience. Top leadership talents have been rotated through Gulf of Aden deployments before assuming prominent leadership positions. In particular, extensive service by key individuals highlights the connection between Gulf of Aden anti-piracy experience and naval promotion. For instance, Rear Admiral Qiu

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<sup>159</sup> For details, see Andrew S. Erickson, "China's Naval Modernization: The Implications of Seapower," *World Politics Review*, September 23, 2014, <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/14083/chinas-naval-modernization-the-implications-of-seapower>.

Yanpeng, once deputy commander of the East Sea Fleet (ESF), was promoted to NSF commander in early 2014. The promotion came after Qiu served as commander of the 4<sup>th</sup> escort task force while ESF deputy chief of staff over three years earlier. Qiu is now dual-hatted as PLAN Chief of Staff and Director of the PLAN Headquarters Department.

Around the same time that Qiu was promoted to NSF commander, his predecessor Vice Admiral Tian Zhong, who also has served in the Gulf of Aden, became a deputy commander of the PLAN. Now the most senior of five PLAN deputy commanders, he may eventually become a member of the powerful Navy Party Standing Committee (NPSC),<sup>160</sup> or “Navy Politburo.”<sup>161</sup> In 2011, Tian gave a presentation in London on international panel of naval officers. The following year, he was chosen for the 18<sup>th</sup> CCP Central Committee.

North Sea Fleet (NSF) Commander RADM Yuan Yubai, although a career nuclear submariner, led the 14<sup>th</sup> task force in 2013 before

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<sup>160</sup> David Liebenberg and Jeffery Becker, “Recent Personnel Shifts Hint at Major Changes on the Horizon for PLA Navy Leadership,” Jamestown Foundation *China Brief*, Vol. 14, No. 3, February 7, 2014, [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=41937&tx\\_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=25&cHash=6596e44f8d7d62e11038e307359acaea#.UvyMwyuf-LE](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=41937&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=25&cHash=6596e44f8d7d62e11038e307359acaea#.UvyMwyuf-LE).

<sup>161</sup> As ONI explains, “(NPSC) is the Navy’s senior-most decisionmaking organ, responsible for the day-to-day (peacetime) administration of the PLA(N), as well as dissemination and implementation of CMC directives.” *The PLA Navy: New Capabilities and Missions for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Suitland, MD: Office of Naval Intelligence, 2015), p. 32.

being promoted to his current position in July 2014. The ascent of Qiu, Tian and Yuan signals that Beijing places high importance on blue water experience within the highest echelons of naval leadership.<sup>162</sup>

This suggests that the PLAN often views Gulf of Aden experience as a significant checkbox for its leadership to tick off, proving their competence in real Far Seas operations before earning promotion. That Far Seas experience is apparently an important consideration for naval career advancement reflects the service's gradual reorientation to the Far Seas. **Exhibit 2** lists all individuals who have captained PLAN Gulf of Aden task forces.

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<sup>162</sup> For details on Qiu, Tian and Yuan, see *The PLA Navy: New Capabilities and Missions for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Suitland, MD: Office of Naval Intelligence, 2015), p. 34.

**EXHIBIT 2:****PLAN Anti-Piracy Escort Task Force Leaders with Rank, Billet and Grade**

TF #	Fleet	TF Commander (CDR)	TF CDR Billet	TF CDR Grade	TF Political Commissar (PC)	TF PC Billet	TF PC Grade
1	SSF	Rear Admiral (RADM, 少将) Du Jingchen (杜景臣)	SSF Chief of Staff (COS)	Corps Leader (正大军区职)	RADM Yin Dunping (殷敦平)	Deputy Director (DDIR), SSF Political Department (PD)	Corps Deputy Leader (副大军区职)
2	SSF	RADM Yao Zhilou (么志楼)	SSF Deputy Commander (DCDR)	Corps Leader	RADM Wang Shichen (王世臣)	Deputy Political Commissar (DPC), SSF	Corps Leader

<b>TF #</b>	<b>Fleet</b>	<b>TF Commander (CDR)</b>	<b>TF CDR Billet</b>	<b>TF CDR Grade</b>	<b>TF Political Commissar (PC)</b>	<b>TF PC Billet</b>	<b>TF PC Grade</b>
3	ESF	RADM Wang Zhiguo (王志国)	ESF DCDR	Corps Leader	RADM Wen Xinchao (温新超)	DDIR, ESF PD	Corps Deputy Leader
4	ESF	SRCAPT Qiu Yanpeng (邱延鹏)	ESF Deputy Chief of Staff (DCOS)	Corps Deputy Leader	RADM Gu Likang (顾礼康)	DDIR, ESF PD	Corps Deputy Leader
5	SSF	RADM Zhang Wendan (张文旦)	SSF DCOS	Corps Deputy Leader	RADM Chen Yan (陈俨)	DDIR, SSF PD	Corps Deputy Leader

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<b>TF #</b>	<b>Fleet</b>	<b>TF Commander (CDR)</b>	<b>TF CDR Billet</b>	<b>TF CDR Grade</b>	<b>TF Political Commissar (PC)</b>	<b>TF PC Billet</b>	<b>TF PC Grade</b>
<b>6</b>	SSF	RADM Wei Xueyi (魏学义)	SSF COS	Corps Leader	SRCAPT Lin Yanhe (林延河)	DDIR, SSF PD	Corps Deputy Leader
<b>7</b>	ESF	RADM Zhang Huachen (张华臣)	ESF DCDR	Corps Leader	SRCAPT Li Jianjun (李建军)	DDIR, ESF PD	Corps Deputy Leader
<b>8</b>	ESF	SRCAPT Han Xiaohu (韩小虎)	ESF DCOS	Corps Deputy Leader	SRCAPT Zhou Xiaojin (周校进)	Director (DIR), Zhoushan NSB PD	Division Leader (正军职)



<b>TF #</b>	<b>Fleet</b>	<b>TF Commander (CDR)</b>	<b>TF CDR Billet</b>	<b>TF CDR Grade</b>	<b>TF Political Commissar (PC)</b>	<b>TF PC Billet</b>	<b>TF PC Grade</b>
<b>9</b>	SSF	RADM Guan Jianguo (管建国)	SSF DCOS	Corps Deputy Leader	RADM Du Benyin (杜本印)	PC, SSF Submarine Base	Corps Deputy Leader
<b>10</b>	SSF	RADM Li Shihong (李士红)	SSF DCOS	Corps Deputy Leader	SRCAPT Shang Yaheng (商亚恒)		
<b>11</b>	NSF	RADM Yang Junfei (杨骏飞)	NSF DCDR	Corps Leader	RADM Xia Kewei (夏克伟)	DDIR, NSF PD	Corps Deputy Leader

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<b>TF #</b>	<b>Fleet</b>	<b>TF Commander (CDR)</b>	<b>TF CDR Billet</b>	<b>TF CDR Grade</b>	<b>TF Political Commissar (PC)</b>	<b>TF PC Billet</b>	<b>TF PC Grade</b>
<b>12</b>	ESF	RADM Zhou Xuming (周煦明)	ESF DCOS	Corps Deputy Leader	SRCAPT Zhai Yongyuan (翟永远)	PC, Unidentified (UI) Destroyer (DD) Flotilla (FLOT)	Division Leader
<b>13</b>	SSF	SRCAPT Li Xiaoyan (李晓岩)	SSF DCOS	Corps Deputy Leader	SRCAPT Zhuo Yixin (卓怡新)		
<b>14</b>	NSF	RADM Yuan Yubai (袁誉柏)	NSF COS	Corps Leader	SRCAPT Wu Haihua (吴海华)	DDIR, NSF PD	Corps Deputy Leader

<b>TF #</b>	<b>Fleet</b>	<b>TF Commander (CDR)</b>	<b>TF CDR Billet</b>	<b>TF CDR Grade</b>	<b>TF Political Commissar (PC)</b>	<b>TF PC Billet</b>	<b>TF PC Grade</b>
<b>15</b>	SSF	RADM Jiang Zhonghua (姜中华)	DIR, SSF AD	Corps Deputy Leader	SRCAPT Xiao Minsheng (肖民生)	PC, UI SSF Landing Craft FLOT	Division Leader
<b>16</b>	NSF	RADM Li Pengcheng (李鹏程)	NSF DCOS	Corps Deputy Leader	SRCAPT Sun Jian (孙健)	PC, UI NSF FLOT	Division Leader
<b>17</b>	ESF	RADM Huang Xinjian (黄新建)	ESF DCOS	Corps Deputy Leader	SRCAPT Fu Yaoquan (傅耀泉)	DDIR, ESF PD	Corps Deputy Leader

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<b>TF #</b>	<b>Fleet</b>	<b>TF Commander (CDR)</b>	<b>TF CDR Billet</b>	<b>TF CDR Grade</b>	<b>TF Political Commissar (PC)</b>	<b>TF PC Billet</b>	<b>TF PC Grade</b>
<b>18</b>	SSF	RADM Zhang Chuanshu (张传书)	SSF DCOS	Corps Deputy Leader	SRCAPT Zhou Minggui (周名贵)	PC, UI DD FLOT	Division Leader
<b>19</b>	NSF	RADM Jiang Guoping (姜国平)	NSF DCOS	Corps Deputy Leader	RADM Xia Ping (夏平)	DDIR, NSF PD	
<b>20</b>	ESF	SRCAPT Wang Jianxun (王建勋)	ESF DCOS				

**Note:** All ranks and grades at time of TF command. Ranks converted to closest English equivalents per “中、美、英三国军衔对照” [Ranks in the Chinese, U.S. and UK Armed Forces], <http://language.chinadaily.com.cn/focus/rank/rank.html>. The following are approximate equivalents: the four-star position 一级上将 (Admiral, First Class) is above four-star U.S. Navy (USN) Admiral but below five-star U.S. Fleet Admiral. The three-star position 上将 (Admiral) is roughly similar to a four-star USN Admiral. The two-star position 中将 (Vice Admiral) is similar to three-star Vice Admiral in the USN. The one-star 少将 (Rear Admiral) is similar to a two-star USN Rear Admiral (upper half/RADM), but above a one-star USN Rear Admiral (lower half/RDML). 大校 (Senior Captain) is decidedly below the largely-discontinued USN rank of Commodore (rendered in Chinese as 准将), but slightly above the position of USN Captain, akin to a captain, upper half. To facilitate comparison U.S./Western naval nomenclature, “支队” is translated as “flotilla.”

**Exhibit 2 Sources:** Chinese military and state media sources, including *People’s Navy*, *Liberation Army Daily*, *Xinhua*, *China Daily* and *People’s Daily*.

Prior to the first anti-piracy deployment, Ma Luping, Director of the Operations Department of the GSD Naval Operations Bureau, participated in an MND press briefing on the deployments.<sup>163</sup> Moreover, while no serving NSF, SSF or ESF commanders have participated, the experience of Du Jingchen and other Gulf of Aden task force commanders suggests that experience off of Somalia pays dividends for career development. Du commanded the inaugural escort task force, and later was promoted to Vice Admiral, ESF Commander and Navy Chief of Staff (COS).<sup>164</sup> More broadly, five serving or future fleet Deputy Commanders have commanded Gulf of Aden anti-piracy task forces.<sup>165</sup> One Fleet COS, another former one and four deputy COS, have commanded anti-piracy task

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<sup>163</sup> “Ministry of National Defense Briefing on Navy’s Deployment to Gulf of Aden/Somali Waters to Provide Convoy Cover and Other Information,” December 23, 2008, [http://www.gov.cn/xwfb/2008-12/23/content\\_1185458.htm](http://www.gov.cn/xwfb/2008-12/23/content_1185458.htm).

<sup>164</sup> Jeffrey Becker, David Liebenberg and Peter Mackenzie, “Behind the Periscope: Leadership in China’s Navy,” CNA China Studies, December 2013, pp. 92-93, <http://www.cna.org/sites/default/files/research/CRM-2013-U-006467-Final.pdf>.

<sup>165</sup> RADMs Wang Zhiguo (3rd TF) and Zhang Huachen (7<sup>th</sup> TF) were each ESF DCDR at the time of their TF command. RADM Yao Zhilou was SSF DCDR when he led the 2nd TF. RADM Qiu Yanpeng was ESF DCOS when he led the 4th TF, while Yang Junfei was NSF DCOS when he led the 11<sup>th</sup> TF. Jeffrey Becker, David Liebenberg and Peter Mackenzie, “Behind the Periscope: Leadership in China’s Navy,” CNA China Studies, December 2013, pp. 92-101, <http://www.cna.org/sites/default/files/research/CRM-2013-U-006467-Final.pdf>.

forces.<sup>166</sup> There is a strong correlation between anti-piracy task force command and high current or future rank.

Third, the PLAN sailors and auxiliary crewmembers sent to the Gulf of Aden are gaining a competitive advantage over Chinese sailors who stay home. For example, *Ma'anshan* Executive Officer Dong Qian reported that he had personally participated in two Gulf of Aden deployments.<sup>167</sup> PLAN sailors have conducted training involving “sea-and-air target searching, warship operation, navigation and mapping, early warning and detection,” outside of China’s territorial boundaries while sailing towards the Gulf of Aden.<sup>168</sup> SSF Naval Aviation Headquarters Director Liu Dehua remarked that there exists an urgent need to cultivate naval pilots to meet new task requirements accompanying the PLAN’s expansion into the Far Seas.<sup>169</sup> Similarly, University of New South Wales

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<sup>166</sup> RADM Wei Xueyi commanded the 6<sup>th</sup> TF as a fleet COS, while former NSF COS RADM Yuan Yubai led the 14<sup>th</sup> TF. *Ibid.*, pp. 92-93.

<sup>167</sup> “军报公开中国航母舰长非凡履历曾是柏耀平部下” [Military Newspaper Opens Extraordinary Career of Chinese Aircraft Carrier Captain: Was Once Subordinate to Bai Yaoping], *Liberation Army Daily*, November 20, 2013, <http://www.chinanews.com/mil/2013/11-20/5522730.shtml>.

<sup>168</sup> “Chinese Naval Escort Task force Conducts Anti-Piracy Training,” *Liberation Army Daily*, February 27, 2013, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90786/8146977.html>.

<sup>169</sup> 宋歆 [Song Qian], 钱晓虎 [Qian Xiaohu] and 高毅 [Gao Yi], “战鹰夜巡南中国海:南海舰队联合机动编队远海训练见闻之五” [Combat Aircraft Patrol the Night Over the South China Sea Part: Five of Eyewitness Account of the South Sea Fleet Joint Mobile Formation’s Distant Sea Training], *Liberation Army Daily*, March 26, 2013, p. 5.

scholar You Ji finds that “The hours and sorties of helicopter pilots in a four-month rotation in the Gulf of Aden far exceed their whole year’s flight time at home.”<sup>170</sup> This includes a wide range of all-weather nighttime training involving “blackout procedures,” in which pilots can barely see the sea surface, to strengthen ability to counter nocturnal pirate attacks.<sup>171</sup>

The PLAN has emphasized training before, during and after escort operations. In January 2013, for instance, the PLAN Command College in Nanjing conducted a two-week training module for 70 cadets from “leading organs and troop units.” The module “adopted many training forms including case analysis, problem exercise, simulated training and comprehensive drill to teach naval escort basic theory and exchange practical experience of naval escort.” It also involved drills teaching cadets how to react to unexpected incidents, such as pirate attacks on commercial ships.<sup>172</sup> This training followed a similar module initiated in February 2012 lasting for two weeks, during which 84 PLAN leaders attended training for high-

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<sup>170</sup> You Ji, “The PLA Navy’s Gulf of Aden Mission as Capability Building against NTS Threats,” in Lyle J. Goldstein, ed., *Not Congruent but Quite Complementary: U.S. and Chinese Approaches to Nontraditional Security*, China Maritime Study, No. 9 (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, July 2012), p. 34.

<sup>171</sup> “Witnessing Helicopter Flying Training of the 9<sup>th</sup> Chinese Naval Escort Task force,” *Liberation Army Daily*, August 15, 2011, [http://eng.mod.gov.cn/MilitaryExercises/2011-08/15/content\\_4290693.htm](http://eng.mod.gov.cn/MilitaryExercises/2011-08/15/content_4290693.htm).

<sup>172</sup> Shen Shu and Qian Xiaohu, “PLA Navy’s 2nd Ocean Escort Training Class Ends,” *Liberation Army Daily*, January 10, 2013, <http://english.people.com.cn/90786/8088320.html>.



level officers.<sup>173</sup> PLAN anti-piracy task forces also participate in extensive pre-departure training which includes officer instruction, and, for lower-level sailors, “72 action programs in four categories, 150 emergency plans in response to various scenarios and 15 drill scenarios of various types.”<sup>174</sup>

Equally interesting is the parallel emphasis placed by China’s Navy on anti-piracy training while en route to, and once having arrived in, the Gulf of Aden. Most recently, training for Special Forces in the 16<sup>th</sup> escort task force included warning fire as well as shooting practice involving sniping, light weapons and special ammunitions drills in the western Gulf of Aden, where waves, currents and winds rocked PLAN warships and increased the difficulty of shooting accurately.<sup>175</sup> PLAN training also involved working with commercial personnel, including the management of rendezvous, cooperation with merchant captains, deciding on optimal escort formations and making adjustments based on limitations of certain vessels.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> “Chinese Navy Steps Up Anti-piracy Training,” *Associated Press*, February 17, 2012.

<sup>174</sup> Shen Shu and Qin Ruoyun, “PLA Navy Opens First Training Class for Escort Mission,” *Liberation Army Daily*, February 15, 2012, [http://eng.mod.gov.cn/DefenseNews/2012-02/15/content\\_4345484.htm](http://eng.mod.gov.cn/DefenseNews/2012-02/15/content_4345484.htm).

<sup>175</sup> Zhang Tao, ed., “16th Naval Escort Task force in Firing Training,” China Military Online, January 3, 2014, [http://eng.mod.gov.cn/Photos/2014-01/03/content\\_4481767.htm](http://eng.mod.gov.cn/Photos/2014-01/03/content_4481767.htm).

<sup>176</sup> The authors are grateful to have received these insights from a U.S. Navy officer.

The composition of recent task forces underscores the intense, often iterated training that PLAN personnel deployed off Somalia receive. During the 7<sup>th</sup> task force, for example, over half of all officer and sailors were deploying to the Gulf of Aden for at least a second time, which suggests both that one mission may be insufficient to instill critical skills and that China's Navy is building an elite front line of naval personnel.<sup>177</sup> The latter point is reflected by Rear Admiral Xiao Xinnian's initial remarks at the MND's press conference in December 2008 announcing the escort mission. Xiao remarked, "Our officers and men must, before anything else, accomplish the mission they have undertaken. There is no problem with that part. All the officers and men aboard these three vessels are well trained and have received necessary preoperational training in light of this mission. ...this kind of mission poses no problem for our officers and men."<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> 王智涛 [Wang Zhitao] and 侯瑞 [Hou Rui], "压力来了, 动力才足亲历第八批护航编队临时党委的一次扩大会" [When Pressure Arrives: Experiencing the Eighth Escort Task Force's Temporary Party Committee Enlarged Meeting], General News, *People's Navy*, February 2011, p. 2.

<sup>178</sup> "Ministry of National Defense Briefing on Navy's Deployment to Gulf of Aden/Somali Waters to Provide Convoy Cover and Other Information," December 23, 2008, [http://www.gov.cn/xwfb/2008-12/23/content\\_1185458.htm](http://www.gov.cn/xwfb/2008-12/23/content_1185458.htm).

### **Military Diplomacy**

Besides simply raising operational competence across various personnel strata, China's leadership appears intent on utilizing China's Far Seas posting in the Gulf of Aden for a diverse portfolio of objectives, including diplomacy. Maintaining an active anti-piracy naval presence that consists of two to three large warships roughly 10,000 km from Chinese territorial waters opens considerable aperture for naval diplomacy and soft power projection. Since early 2009, PLAN warships have docked in over thirty littoral states in East Asia, the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), Africa, the Middle East and Europe for rest and replenishment, friendly visits, joint training and other objectives. In its first protracted naval operation in the international spotlight on—and especially visible before other navies and international observers—the PLAN has gained confidence and recognition regarding the quality of its naval operations. Heightening China's international status, the mission has undoubtedly spurred further debate in China about Beijing's provision of public goods. A full range of PLAN leaders regularly laud the navy's contributions in this regard during public appearances, including Rear Admiral Xiao Xinnian, one of the PLAN Deputy Chiefs of Naval Staff, who asserts that the mission “showcased China's positive attitude in fulfilling its international obligations and the country's image as a responsible stakeholder.”<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> “China Navy ‘Confident, Capable’ in Somalia Piracy Mission,” Xinhua, December 23, 2008, <http://nigeria2.mofcom.gov.cn/article/Chinanewss/200812/20081205977441.shtml>.

The PLAN is engaging the outside world more intensely than ever before. While it has actively pursued a wide range of naval activities, from disaster relief, to maritime medical services, to joint combat and non-combat exercises with other navies, none of these operations are comparable to the Gulf of Aden mission in scale and duration. Increasingly, it appears that Gulf of Aden experience, as well as other Far Seas exposure through training, joint exercises and humanitarian missions, are used as yardsticks for professionalism among PLAN leaders that have real impacts on their career progression. In 2011, *Liberation Army Daily* reported that the PLAN would install larger, brighter PLAN ensign flags on their surface platforms, viewed by Chinese maritime expert Ni Lexiong as an indication of China's "determination to be a sea power, because all its new standards have been learned from Western maritime powers like the United States."<sup>180</sup>

China Military Online, a media website supported by military mouthpiece *Liberation Army Daily*, ranked ten highlights of Chinese military diplomacy in 2013. The PLAN was involved of six of them, demonstrating its growing diplomatic role.<sup>181</sup> Perhaps this is not surprising: From 2002–12, 19 of 41 joint training activities

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<sup>180</sup> Minnie Chan, "Growing Navy Flies a Bigger, Brighter Flag as Its Role Widens," *South China Morning Post*, April 13, 2011, [www.scmp.com/article/964935/growing-navy-flies-bigger-brighter-flag-its-role-widens](http://www.scmp.com/article/964935/growing-navy-flies-bigger-brighter-flag-its-role-widens).

<sup>181</sup> "Ten Highlights of China's Military Diplomacy in 2013," China Military Online, December 23, 2013, [http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2013-12/23/content\\_5702885.htm](http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2013-12/23/content_5702885.htm).

conducted by China's military involved the PLAN.<sup>182</sup> In early 2014, the same website also noted the “top ten pieces of PLAN news in 2013,” in which the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of anti-piracy escorts ranked eighth.<sup>183</sup> These highlights are parallel to broader outward engagement on the part of China's military, which had conducted 17 different joint exercises and trainings with foreign armies in 2013 as of November that year.<sup>184</sup>

Besides greatly enhancing China's ability to handle pirates over the course of six-plus years, China has progressively expanded the operational umbrella of PLAN anti-piracy task forces to include more diplomatic activities. In particular, with each successive task force sent to the Gulf of Aden, China's Navy has pursued more friendly visits at regional ports in Africa, Asia, Europe and the Middle East. Apparently PLAN planners were initially concerned that local opposition might arise following Chinese port calls, though

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<sup>182</sup> 邹立刚 [Zou Ligang], “保障我国海上通道安全研究” [Research on Ensuring the Safety of China's SLOC], 法治研究 [Research on Rule of Law], No. 1 (January 2012), p. 80.

<sup>183</sup> “Top Ten Pieces of PLAN News in 2013,” China Military Online, January 2, 2014, [http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2014-01/02/content\\_5717538.htm](http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2014-01/02/content_5717538.htm).

<sup>184</sup> “国防部新闻发言人答记者问 防空识别区并未扩大领空 但可更有效保卫领空” [Ministry of National Defense Spokesman Answers Reporters' Questions: The Air Defense Identification Zone Really Does Not Expand the Territorial Airspace, But Can More Effectively Defend It], Transcript of PRC National Defense Ministry News Conference, November 28, 2013, [http://www.mod.gov.cn/affair/2013-11/28/content\\_4476914.htm](http://www.mod.gov.cn/affair/2013-11/28/content_4476914.htm).

clearly this has not been an issue.<sup>185</sup> While many visits are focused on the real needs of PLAN surface vessels and crewmembers such as refueling and replenishment, a growing ratio of port calls are dedicated to friendly visits between China and littoral states. **Exhibit 3** underscores these trends, listing a selection of PLAN port calls since 2009 conducted under the aegis of anti-piracy.

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<sup>185</sup> You Ji, "The PLA Navy's Gulf of Aden Mission as Capability Building against NTS Threats," in Lyle J. Goldstein, ed., *Not Congruent but Quite Complementary: U.S. and Chinese Approaches to Nontraditional Security*, China Maritime Study, No. 9 (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, July 2012), p. 34.

### EXHIBIT 3: PLAN Anti-Piracy Task Force Port Calls 2009–15 (Selected)

**ALGERIA**

**Algiers**

- April 2-5, 2013, Friendly Visit

**ANGOLA**

**Luanda**

- June 5-7, 2014, Friendly Visit

**AUSTRALIA**

**Sydney**

- December 18-22, 2012, Friendly Visit

**BAHRAIN**

**Al Manamah**

- December 9-13, 2010, Friendly Visit

**BULGARIA**

**Varna**

- August 6-10 2012, Friendly Visit

**BURMA (MYANMAR)**

**Rangoon**

- August 29-September 2, 2010, Friendly Visit

**CAMEROON**

**Douala**

- May 30-June 2, 2014, Friendly Visit

124 Six Years at Sea... and Counting

**DJIBOUTI**

**Djibouti**

- January 24, 2010,  
Replenish/Overhaul
- May 3, 2010,  
Replenish/Overhaul
- September 13, 2010,  
Replenish/Overhaul
- September 22, 2010,  
Replenish/Overhaul

- December 24, 2010,  
Replenish/Overhaul
- February 21, 2011  
Replenish/Overhaul
- October 5, 2011,  
Replenish/Overhaul
- March 24-29, 2012,  
Replenish/Overhaul
- May 14, 2012,  
Replenish/Overhaul

- August 13-18, 2012,  
Replenish/Overhaul
- December 1-6, 2012  
Replenish/Overhaul
- June 6-8, 2013,  
Replenish/Overhaul
- July 28, 2013,  
Replenish/Overhaul
- October 7-9, 2013,  
Replenish/Overhaul



- February 22-26, 2014,  
Replenish/Overhaul
- April 1-5, 2014,  
Replenish/Overhaul and  
Friendly Visit
- June 30- July 4, 2014,  
Replenish/Overhaul
- September 8-12, 2014,  
Replenish/Overhaul
- November 3-7, 2014,  
Replenish/Overhaul

- January 25-30, 2015,  
Replenish/Overhaul

**EGYPT**

**Alexandria**

- July 26-30, 2010, Friendly Visit

**FRANCE**

**Toulon**

- April 23-27, 2013, Friendly Visit
- February 10-13, 2015, Friendly  
Visit

**GERMANY**

**Hamburg**

- January 19-24, 2015, Friendly  
Visit

**GREECE**

**Crete**

- March 7, 2011,  
Replenishment/Overhaul

**Piraeus**

- August 9-13, 2013, Friendly  
Visit

126 Six Years at Sea... and Counting

- February 17-20, 2015, Friendly  
Visit

**INDIA**

**Cochin**

- August 8, 2009, Friendly Visit

**INDONESIA**

**Jakarta**

- December 27-31, 2010, Friendly  
Visit

**IRAN**

**Bandar Abbas**

- September 20-24, 2014, Friendly  
Visit

**ISRAEL**

**Haifa**

- August 14-17, 2012, Friendly  
Visit

**ITALY**

**Taranto**

- August 2-7, 2010, Joint Drills  
and Friendly Visit

**IVORY COAST**

**Abidjan**

- May 20-22, 2014, Friendly Visit

**JORDAN**

**Akada**

- September 1-4, 2014, Friendly Visit

**KENYA**

**Mombasa**

- January 2-5, 2014, Friendly Visit

**KUWAIT**

**Shuwaikh**

- November 27 - December 1, 2011, Friendly Visit

**MALAYSIA**

**Port Klang**

- December 6, 2009, Friendly Visit

**MALTA**

- March 26-30, 2013, Friendly Visit

**MOROCCO**

**Casablanca**

- April 9-13, 2013, Friendly Visit

**MOZAMBIQUE**

**Maputo**

- March 29-April 2, 2012, Friendly Visit

**NAMIBIA**

**Walvis Bay**

- June 11-13, 2014, Friendly Visit

**NETHERLANDS**

**Rotterdam**

- January 26-29, 2015, Friendly Visit

128 Six Years at Sea... and Counting

**NIGERIA**

**Lagos**

- May 24-27, 2014, Friendly Visit

**OMAN**

**Muscat**

- December 1-8, 2011, Friendly  
Visit

**Salalah**

- June 21-July 1, 2009,  
Replenish/Overhaul

- August 14, 2009,  
Replenish/Overhaul

- January 2, 2010,  
Replenish/Overhaul

- April 1, 2010,  
Replenish/Overhaul

- June 8, 2010,  
Replenish/Overhaul

- August 10, 2010,  
Replenish/Overhaul

- January 19, 2011,  
Replenish/Overhaul

- January 28, 2011,  
Replenish/Overhaul

- April 10, 2011,  
Replenish/Overhaul

- June 23, 2011,  
Replenish/Overhaul

- August 8-11, 2011,  
Replenish/Overhaul

- November 7-10, 2011,  
Replenish/Overhaul
- February 21-24, 2012,  
Replenish/Overhaul
- July 1-3, 2012,  
Replenish/Overhaul
- July 9, 2012,  
Replenish/Overhaul
- March 28-29, 2013,  
Replenish/Overhaul

- April 16-19, 2014,  
Replenish/Overhaul
- May 11-13, 2014,  
Replenish/Overhaul
- October 6-9, 2014,  
Replenish/Overhaul
- November 3-7, 2014,  
Replenish/Overhaul

**PAKISTAN**

**Karachi**

- August 5-8, 2009, Joint Drills  
and Friendly Visit
- March 7-13, 2010, Joint Drills  
and Friendly Visit
- March 13, 2011, Joint Drills
- September 8, 2012,  
Replenish/Overhaul
- September 27- October 31, 2014,  
Friendly Visit

130 Six Years at Sea... and Counting

**PHILIPPINES**

**Manila**

- April 13-17, 2010, Friendly Visit

**PORTUGAL**

**Lisbon**

April 15-19, 2013, Friendly Visit

**QATAR**

**Doha**

August 2-7, 2011, Friendly Visit

**ROMANIA**

**Constanta**

- July 31 - August 3, 2012,  
Friendly Visit

**RUSSIA**

**Novorossiysk**

- May 8-12, 2015, Friendly Visit

**SAUDI ARABIA**

**Jiddah**

- November 27-31, 2010, Friendly  
Visit

- September 3, 2011,  
Replenish/Overhaul
- June 17, 2012,  
Replenish/Overhaul
- January 1-6, 2013,  
Replenish/Overhaul
- April 25-28, 2013,  
Replenish/Overhaul

- September 14-18, 2013,  
Replenish/Overhaul
- November 2-6, 2013,  
Replenish/Overhaul

**SENEGAL**

**Dakar**

- May 14-16, 2014, Friendly Visit

**SEYCHELLES**

**Port of Victoria**

- April 14, 2011, Friendly Visit
- June 16-20, 2013, Friendly Visit

**SINGAPORE**

**Changi**

- September 5-7, 2010,  
Replenish/Overhaul and Joint  
Drills
- December 18-20, 2011,  
Replenish/Overhaul and  
Friendly Visit
- September 5-10, 2013, Friendly  
Visit

- October 11-13, 2014,  
Replenish/Overhaul and  
Friendly Visit

**SOUTH AFRICA**

**Cape Town**

- June 17-20, 2014, Friendly Visit

**Durban**

- April 4-8, 2011, Friendly Visit

**SRI LANKA**

**Colombo**

- January 5-7, 2010, Friendly Visit

## 132 Six Years at Sea... and Counting

- December 7-12, 2010, Friendly Visit
- August 1-4, 2014, Replenish/Overhaul
- September 7-14, 2014, Replenish/Overhaul (Submarine & supply ship)
- October 13-18, 2014, Replenish/Overhaul (Submarine & supply ship)

### **Trincomalee**

- January 13-15, 2014, Friendly Visit

### **TANZANIA**

#### **Dar es Salaam**

- March 26-30, 2011, Joint Drills and Friendly Visit
- December 29, 2013-January 1, 2014, Friendly Visit

### **THAILAND**

#### **Sattahip**

- August 16-21, 2011, Joint Drills and Friendly Visit
- April 21-25, 2012, Friendly Visit
- September 12-16, 2013, Friendly Visit

### **TUNISIA**

#### **La Goulette**

- May 5-7, 2014, Friendly Visit



**TURKEY**

**Istanbul**

- August 5-8, 2012, Friendly Visit

**UKRAINE**

**Sevastopol**

- July 31-August 3, 2012, Friendly Visit

**UNITED ARAB EMIRATES**

**Abu Dhabi**

- March 24-28, 2010, Friendly Visit

- September 14-18, 2014, Friendly Visit

**UNITED KINGDOM**

**Portsmouth**

- January 12-16, 2015, Friendly Visit

**VIETNAM**

**Ho Chi Minh City**

- January 13, 2013, Friendly Visit

**YEMEN**

**Aden**

- February 21, 2009, Replenish/Overhaul
- April 25, 2009, Replenish/Overhaul
- July 23, 2009, Replenish/Overhaul
- September 28, 2009, Replenish/Overhaul

### 134 Six Years at Sea... and Counting

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| • October 24, 2009,<br>Replenish/Overhaul | Replenish/Overhaul                       |
| • February 5, 2010,<br>Replenish/Overhaul | • July 26, 2010,<br>Replenish/Overhaul   |
| • March 14, 2010,<br>Replenish/Overhaul   | • October 1, 2010,<br>Replenish/Overhaul |
| • May 16, 2010,                           | • March 29-April 3, 2015, NEO            |

**Note:** Visit times, purposes, etc. may not be completely accurate or comprehensive. Replenishment/overhaul cases are particularly easy to miss since they are not always reported at the same levels of frequency as friendly visits. Some dates were calculated automatically based on length of port calls.

China's 15<sup>th</sup> escort task force deployment, consisting of guided missile frigate *Hengshui*, comprehensive supply ship *Taihu* and amphibious landing ship *Jinggangshan*, offers a prime example of how anti-piracy escorts serve as a springboard for larger PLAN initiatives. In addition to training, at-sea replenishment and foreign port calls, the task force engaged with warships from Combined Task Force (CTF)-151, NATO, EU NAVFOR and the Ukrainian Navy, while also visiting Tanzania, Kenya and Sri Lanka following the end of its escort duties.<sup>186</sup>

China has combined port call diplomacy with a range of other creative contributions to international security made possible by its Gulf of Aden deployment. Simultaneously, China's anti-piracy escorts complement broader economic and security engagement with African and Middle Eastern states arguably most affected by the scourge of piracy—including Somalia's southwestern neighbor Kenya. For example, China is reportedly helping modernize the Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) to improve continental and maritime border security. In early January 2014, Governor Hassan Joho of Mombasa, Kenya's largest coastal city, remarked to the visiting PLAN 15<sup>th</sup> escort task force, "We shall be looking for additional support from our friends from China to expand and build new roads, construct an efficient commuter railway network as well as provide adequate water and power for industries and households."<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> "PLA Navy 15<sup>th</sup> Escort Formations Visits Tanzania, Kenya Sri Lanka after Time in Somali Waters," Military Report, CCTV-7 (Mandarin), December 27, 2013.

<sup>187</sup> Mwakera Mwakjefa, "Chinese Naval Vessels' Escort Missions Boost E Africa Trade," *Business Daily*, January 5, 2014,

Previously, in January 2014, the 15<sup>th</sup> escort task force visited Tanzania, where it held an opening day activity with over 1,000 people, and also worked with Tanzanian naval personnel on warship maintenance and marine training.<sup>188</sup>

The fact that many Chinese citizens overseas, often including the resident ambassador, attend PLAN port call ceremonies carrying larger diplomatic messages underscores the broader role of PLAN overseas visits under the anti-piracy aegis. This reality was demonstrated by the 15<sup>th</sup> escort task force's visit to Mombasa, Kenya in January 2014, where Chinese ambassador to Kenya Liu Guangyuan remarked, "Today, the visit to Mombasa by the Chinese Navy escort fleet has the same character with Zheng He's voyages 600 years ago. It is a journey of peace, friendship and cooperation. The fleet comes not only with China's solemn promise to safeguard world peace, but also with the sincere friendship from Chinese people to Kenya people." Underscoring the larger significance of the PLAN's visit, he also stated, "The visit is also a part of the

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<http://www.businessdailyafrica.com/Chinese-naval-vessels--escort-missions-boost-E-Africa-trade/-/539546/2135470/-/5v6agm/-/index.html>

<sup>188</sup> Zhang Tao, ed., "Chinese Naval Escort Task force Complete Visit to Tanzania," China Military Online, January 3, 2014, [http://eng.mod.gov.cn/DefenseNews/2014-01/03/content\\_4481782.htm](http://eng.mod.gov.cn/DefenseNews/2014-01/03/content_4481782.htm).

celebrations marking the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between China and Kenya.”<sup>189</sup>

More recently, Algeria, where PLAN anti-piracy forces previously docked in April 2013, announced plans to receive three Chinese frigates by 2015.<sup>190</sup> The frigates are reportedly similar to those built by Pakistan with Chinese technological assistance, the last of which was completed in 2013. China and Ethiopia have jointly discussed fighting nontraditional threats such as terrorism and piracy.<sup>191</sup> In September 2013 at the United Arab Emirates (UAE)-hosted Marine Counter Piracy Conference, Somalia’s president lauded China for its fight against piracy that creates \$18 billion in economic losses for the IOR annually.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Liu Zhen, “15<sup>th</sup> Chinese Naval Escort Task force Visits Kenya,” *China Daily*, January 3, 2014, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2014-01/03/content\\_17214623.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2014-01/03/content_17214623.htm).

<sup>190</sup> Tom Kington, “Algeria Prepares to Receive LPD amid Defense Spending Boost,” *Defense News*, January 31, 2014, <http://www.defensenews.com/article/20140131/DEFREG04/301310036/Algeria-Prepares-Receive-LPD-Amid-Defense-Spending-Boost>.

<sup>191</sup> “Ethiopia, China Cherish Relationship, Have Room for Further Cooperation: Minister,” *Xinhua*, September 2, 2013, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-09/02/c\\_132685263.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-09/02/c_132685263.htm).

<sup>192</sup> “Somali President Praises China’s Contribution to Reconstruction,” *China Daily*, September 11, 2013, [http://www.china.org.cn/world/Off\\_the\\_Wire/2013-09/11/content\\_30001258.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/world/Off_the_Wire/2013-09/11/content_30001258.htm).

Broad themes of cooperation and naval diplomacy notwithstanding, PLAN anti-piracy operations have also yielded modest but meaningful achievements in operational coordination with other navies. In October 2013 the PLAN showcased its flexibility in coordinating operations with other navies when the China Maritime Search and Rescue Centre (CMSRC) relayed a call for assistance from Taiwan merchant ship *Guihua* to Chinese frigate *Hengshui*. China published real-time location data about *Guihua* that was accessible to EU NAVFOR ships while *Hengshui* departed to replace a South Korean naval vessel no longer able to escort *Guihua* as a result of a “sudden failure” and because it was already scheduled to conduct a separate escort. *Hengshui* then proceeded to join *Guihua* and escort it safely to Port Aden.<sup>193</sup>

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The PLAN’s six-plus-year presence off Somalia has helped increase the military’s overall strength in terms of operations, coordination and creativity. While the precise extent is unclear, it has also helped thrust the navy into a more prominent role within China’s larger security apparatus. A PLAN official commented to one of the authors that within domestic strategic circles, China’s development of maritime, maritime security and maritime development strategies are among the most frequently discussed topics. Specifically, in official parlance: how can China become a maritime great power

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<sup>193</sup> “Multi-national Escort Task forces Jointly Rescue Taiwan’s Merchant Ship,” *Liberation Army Daily*, October 8, 2013, <http://english.people.com.cn/90786/8419358.html>.

through peaceful development in line with international norms, a harmonious society and environmental sustainability? And, how can China achieve maritime great power status in a way different from the approach taken by states that became great naval powers during the previous century?

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## VII. Gulf of Aden Operations and China's Future Far Seas Presence

“After decades of development, the PLA Navy now has the capability to provide protection in far seas,” declared PLA NDU Professor Guo Fenghai in December 2013.<sup>194</sup> Guo’s statement echoes the sentiment of many PLAN officials who laud the Gulf of Aden as a valuable stepping-stone for the PLAN into a more permanent Far Seas presence. Given Beijing’s long-time absolutist position on sovereignty and traditional reluctance to participate in international missions, this is indeed a veritable sea change. China’s well-documented verbal and (often) operational commitment to noninterference in the affairs of other states has increasingly evolved into a focal point of discussions about the future of Chinese foreign policy inside and outside of China. While many believe China’s approach is undergoing gradual adjustment and recalibration commensurate with its increasing relative stature in international economic and security affairs, to date there are still relatively few prominent, conspicuous manifestations of this transition, making China’s presence off Somalia all the more meaningful.

Indeed, the mission has driven a drastic increase in blue water diplomacy in the name of fighting piracy, and has prompted growing calls for a more regularized Far Seas presence. In particular, it has

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<sup>194</sup> Peng Yining, “Navy Lauded for Foiling Pirates,” *China Daily*, December 26, 2013, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90786/8495596.html>.



yielded several insights about China's evolving global maritime presence and its implications for Chinese naval development:

- First, anti-piracy operations have been a springboard for China to progressively engage in a broader range of maritime security operations.
- Second, China's increasingly comprehensive blue water pedigree will have a larger influence on overall PLAN growth.
- Third, the eventual conclusion of international anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden and off Somalia will create challenges for China's Navy as it attempts to maintain and bolster its international maritime presence.
- Fourth, the motivations for continuing to deploy anti-piracy task forces suggest that Beijing will work to institutionalize its future role in global maritime security.
- Finally, more than six years of anti-piracy operations thousands of miles from China have spurred Chinese discussions of more permanent overseas access points to better protect external interests.

Of course, Chinese strategists also understand the limits of Beijing's political and military efforts to protect overseas Chinese interests, which undoubtedly factors into China's calculus on how to design its future Far Seas presence. For example, Li Ruijing of the PLA AMS states that anti-piracy operations by China's Navy are inadequate for protecting Chinese interests comprehensively, particularly those that are smaller and more localized. Li argued that China would need private security contractors to fill this gap: "As exemplified by [the] U.S. [company] 'Blackwater,' by establishing and strengthening [the] Chinese 'Red Shield,' thereby letting Chinese civil security go abroad,

escorts can develop to the highest degree and protect China's overseas interests.”<sup>195</sup>

Li's vision for Chinese private security is already materializing, with the private sector offering security solutions, albeit to a very limited extent. In 2013, Qi Luyan, who had founded Huawei International Security Management four years before, stated: “China's security industry will definitely grow like China's other industries, because Chinese citizens and assets overseas are frequently threatened.”<sup>196</sup> ZTE Corp. has employed local guards in Pakistan, while Chinese energy companies have retained Western private security firms in Iraq.<sup>197</sup> Shandong Huawei Security Group hires former Chinese special forces. Genghis Security Academy offers bodyguard protection overseas. Huaxin Zhong'an even dispatched armed security personnel on Chinese commercial vessels in the Gulf of Aden for the first time in March 2012, some of whom had previously served there in the PLAN.<sup>198</sup> Special Fighters (China) International Security Service Group, China Kingdom International and Genghis

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<sup>195</sup> 李瑞景 [Li Ruijing], “借护航壮大蓝水海军” [Borrowing from Escorts to Expand Blue-Water Navy], *World Journal*, April 11, 2012, [www.ahwang.cn/sjb/html/2012-04/11/content\\_151231.htm?div=-1](http://www.ahwang.cn/sjb/html/2012-04/11/content_151231.htm?div=-1)

<sup>196</sup> Ben Marino, “China's Public Sector Looks to Private Security for Help,” *Financial Times*, November 26, 2013, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/626a2ac8-5272-11e3-8586-00144feabdc0.html#axzz2tC2ZoSTN>.

<sup>197</sup> Mathieu Duchâtel, Oliver Bräuner and Zhou Hang, *Protecting China's Overseas Interests: The Slow Shift away from Non-interference*, SIPRI Policy Paper, No. 41 (June 2014), [http://books.sipri.org/product\\_info?c\\_product\\_id=479](http://books.sipri.org/product_info?c_product_id=479), p. 51.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 54-55.

VIP Protection also headline the quickly emerging industry in China.<sup>199</sup> However, Western firms continue to dominate this market and it remains unclear how much share Chinese challengers can acquire in the near term.<sup>200</sup> Former Blackwater CEO Erik Prince is positioning his new Hong Kong-based Frontier Services Group to provide logistics and security for Chinese operations in Africa.<sup>201</sup>

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### **One Far Seas Mission Begets Another**

China's Gulf of Aden presence has supported various Chinese contributions to international security in the years since 2008. The PLAN has continuously aided UN WFP vessels by escorting them through pirate-infested waters off Somalia en route to Africa. China does not discriminate when escorting commercial ships, as it has

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<sup>199</sup> Bree Feng, "Chinese Bodyguards, When Police Won't Do," Sinosphere, *New York Times*, October 14, 2013, [http://sinosphere.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/10/14/chinese-bodyguards-when-police-wont-do/?\\_php=true&\\_type=blogs&\\_r=0](http://sinosphere.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/10/14/chinese-bodyguards-when-police-wont-do/?_php=true&_type=blogs&_r=0).

<sup>200</sup> Mathieu Duchâtel, Oliver Bräuner and Zhou Hang, *Protecting China's Overseas Interests: The Slow Shift away from Non-interference*, SIPRI Policy Paper, No. 41 (June 2014), [http://books.sipri.org/product\\_info?c\\_product\\_id=479](http://books.sipri.org/product_info?c_product_id=479), pp. 54-55.

<sup>201</sup> David Feith, "Erik Prince: Out of Blackwater and Into China," *Wall Street Journal*, January 24, 2014, <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702303465004579324650302912522>.

provided protection for Western-flagged ships, as well as ships belonging to autocratic regimes such as North Korea.<sup>202</sup>

In 2011, China dispatched the guided missile frigate *Xuzhou* from its escort duties in the Gulf of Aden to provide security during the evacuation of overseas Chinese citizens from Libya. Other Chinese naval vessels venturing into the Far Seas have also earned goodwill made possible by China's anti-piracy presence. In July 2013, the Chinese hospital ship *Peace Ark* conducted a 15-day operation in the Gulf of Aden. In addition to providing an array of medical services to citizens of eight different countries during its IOR goodwill visit, *Peace Ark* crewmembers also conducted medical exchanges with foreign naval medical counterparts,<sup>203</sup> as well as with foreign naval officers more broadly.<sup>204</sup>

More recently, PLAN guided missile frigate *Yancheng* of the 16<sup>th</sup> escort task force temporarily halted its anti-piracy escort duties to participate in a multilateral escort mission of Syrian chemical weapons across the Mediterranean Sea. By early February 2014, *Yancheng* had completed three escorts of Danish and Norwegian

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<sup>202</sup> “Changzhou Warship of PLA Navy’s Twelfth Escort Formation Successfully Receives 26 Crew Members of Taiwan’s ‘Hsu Fu-1’ Fishing Vessel,” Military Report, CCTV-7 (Mandarin), 1130 GMT, September 18, 2012.

<sup>203</sup> “‘Peace Ark’ Hospital Ship Leaves Gulf of Aden,” *Liberation Army Daily*, July 29, 2013, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90786/8345729.html>.

<sup>204</sup> 刘文平, 琚振华 [Liu Wenping and Ju Zhenhua] “‘和谐海洋’的新航迹” [New Course of “Harmonious Ocean”—Overview of Task Harmonious Mission-2013], *People’s Navy*, October 16, 2013, p. 2A.

ships stocked with chemicals in coordination with a Russian warship. The navies of China and Russia have also conducted patrols and surveillance activities in assigned areas outside Syria's main port Latakia (al-Lādhiqīyah) to ensure a stable environment for transporting the weapons away from Syria to their destruction.<sup>205</sup> China's Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying declared in early February 2014 that the PLAN was committed to continued support for chemical weapons removal, and escorts were completed on June 23, 2014.<sup>206</sup>

Chinese media outlets have lauded *Yancheng's* contributions in the Mediterranean, which began in the aftermath of China's controversial declaration of an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) in the East China Sea.<sup>207</sup> Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi initially declared China's willingness to support the mission in late 2013.<sup>208</sup> Xi Jinping personally sent greetings to *Yancheng* and its crew

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<sup>205</sup> "China Frigate Completes Second Escort of Syrian Chemical Weapons," China Military Online, January 29, 2014, [http://eng.mod.gov.cn/TopNews/2014-01/29/content\\_4487936.htm](http://eng.mod.gov.cn/TopNews/2014-01/29/content_4487936.htm).

<sup>206</sup> "China to Continue Syrian Shipment Support: FM," Xinhua, February 11, 2014, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-02/11/c\\_133107071.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-02/11/c_133107071.htm).

<sup>207</sup> Michael D. Swaine, "Chinese Views and Commentary on the East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone (ECS ADIZ)," *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 43 (2014), <http://carnegieendowment.org/files/CLM43MSCarnegie013114.pdf>.

<sup>208</sup> Zheng Kaijun, "China's Commitment to Escorting Syrian Chemical Weapons Transportation Significant," Xinhua, December 19, 2013, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90883/8489201.html>.

after the Chinese New Year.<sup>209</sup> Meanwhile, Chinese military officials and academics such as PLAN Naval Military Studies Institute Deputy Director Zhang Junshe said that China's role in escorting chemical weapons reflects the international community's recognition of the PLAN's growing escort capabilities, and presents China's Navy with a new venture in a relatively new region.<sup>210</sup>

The PLAN is increasingly adept at maximizing Far Seas value without bases by creatively pursuing complementary opportunities. In early 2014, Russia's Ministry of Defense announced that Russian nuclear missile cruiser *Peter the Great* and *Yancheng* would hold joint rescue and anti-terrorism drills in the Mediterranean Sea following their collaborative escorts of ships carrying Syrian weapons.<sup>211</sup> Given that China's coastline is about 10,000 km from the Gulf of Aden, and even further from the Mediterranean, such contributions to security in this increasingly vital region would likely be far more limited if China had not deployed warships to the Gulf of Aden in 2008.

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<sup>209</sup> "Chinese Warship Fulfills Third Mission of Escorting Syria's Chemical Weapons Shipping," China Military Online, February 12, 2014, [http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/2014-02/12/content\\_5767470.htm](http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/2014-02/12/content_5767470.htm).

<sup>210</sup> "China's Image Enhanced in Escort Mission of Shipping Syrian's Chemical Weapons," *Liberation Army Daily*, December 20, 2013, [http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2013-12/20/content\\_5700371.htm](http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2013-12/20/content_5700371.htm).

<sup>211</sup> "China and Russia to Hold Joint Drill in the Mediterranean Sea," CNTV, January 21, 2014, <http://english.cntv.cn/program/china24/20140121/100459.shtml>.

More recently, the PLAN demonstrated the options that maintaining anti-piracy operations in the Far Seas affords by helping escort Chinese and foreign nationals from Yemen following the outbreak of violent civil war. On March 29, 2015, all three PLAN vessels from the 19<sup>th</sup> task force halted anti-piracy escort operations for 109 hours to evacuate Chinese and foreign nationals from the port of Aden.<sup>212</sup> That day, frigate *Linyi* evacuated 122 Chinese nationals. On March 30, missile frigate *Weifang* evacuated 449 Chinese nationals.<sup>213</sup> Then, on April 2, one of the warships evacuated 225 foreign citizens from 10 countries.<sup>214</sup> Both China's timely response and its willingness to send its entire anti-piracy task force to the Yemeni coast reflect leverage offered by sustained nontraditional security operations in the area. This suggests a strategic challenge for Chinese naval planners looking to maintain or even boost China's global maritime

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<sup>212</sup> Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga, "PLA Navy Used for the First Time in Naval Evacuation from Yemen Conflict," *Jamestown China Brief*, Vol. 15, No. 7 (April 3, 2015),

[http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=43751&tx\\_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=789&no\\_cache=1#.VVTsX\\_IVhBc](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=43751&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=789&no_cache=1#.VVTsX_IVhBc).

<sup>213</sup> "Last Chinese Citizens Evacuated from Yemen," *Xinhua*, April 7, 2015, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/video/2015-04/07/c\\_134130134.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/video/2015-04/07/c_134130134.htm).

<sup>214</sup> "Chinese Navy Helps Hundreds of Foreign Nationals Evacuate War-Torn Yemen," *South China Morning Post*, April 3, 2015, <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1755221/china-evacuates-foreigners-war-torn-yemen>.

security presence once Gulf of Aden operations come to an eventual conclusion.<sup>215</sup>

On May 11, 2015, the navies of China and Russia began a ten-day joint exercise called “Joint Sea-2015” in the southern Russian city Novorossiysk on the Black Sea. The drills included six Russian warships, and were focused on “maritime defense, replenishment and escorting.”<sup>216</sup> The PLAN dispatched three ships from its 19<sup>th</sup> escort task force, namely *Linyi*, *Weifang* and *Weishanhu*, to participate. After leaving Novorossiysk, the nine warships conducted live-fire and other joint exercises in the Mediterranean Sea, seen by both sides as an increasingly strategic waterway. While modest in scale, the exercises offer yet another example of how Beijing has squeezed additional value out of its anti-piracy operations.

ONI judges that China’s “commitment and ability to sustain its counterpiracy operations in the Gulf of Aden indicates Beijing’s dedication to pursuing diversified military tasks around the world.

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<sup>215</sup> Austin M. Strange and Andrew S. Erickson, “China’s Global Maritime Presence: Hard and Soft Dimensions of PLAN Antipiracy Operations,” Jamestown *China Brief* Vol. 15, No. 9 (May 1, 2015), [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=43868&tx\\_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=25&cHash=8a087cf151074eed214dfe5bba01e dbf#.VVJPDfVhHw](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=43868&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=25&cHash=8a087cf151074eed214dfe5bba01e dbf#.VVJPDfVhHw).

<sup>216</sup> “China, Russia Launch Joint Naval Drills,” Xinhua, May 11, 2015, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-05/11/c\\_134229911.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-05/11/c_134229911.htm).



We expect this trend will continue or even expand as new security challenges provide opportunities for international operations.”<sup>217</sup>

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### **A New Player in the Global Maritime Commons**

China’s Gulf of Aden security contributions from 2008–15 and beyond herald China’s irreversible entrance into global maritime security as a meaningful player. Given that trends in the Yellow, East and South China Seas remain increasingly negative in terms of their impact on China’s international image, one can argue that China needs to pursue creative options that will strengthen its identity as a responsible stakeholder in international society, particularly in the maritime domain. China’s response to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief in the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan exemplifies the competing interests it must juggle in formulating policies concerning Near Seas neighbors. China’s initial contribution of \$100,000 upset many domestic and international commentators, although it subsequently boosted donations to over \$1 million while also dispatching in-kind goods as well as hospital ship *Peace Ark* to help the Philippines.<sup>218</sup> China’s perceivably meager contribution came in stark contrast to other nations such as the United States, which

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<sup>217</sup> *The PLA Navy: New Capabilities and Missions for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Suitland, MD: Office of Naval Intelligence, 2015), p. 43.

<sup>218</sup> Greg Torode, “No Sign of Help for Philippines from China’s Hospital Ship,” Reuters, November 15, 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/11/15/us-philippines-typhoon-china-idUSBRE9AE0BA20131115>.

donated over \$86 million in food aid, shelter materials, clean water and hygiene education.<sup>219</sup>

The Gulf of Aden mission affords Beijing significant opportunities to project a positive image. Wei Xueyi, commander of the 6<sup>th</sup> escort task force, calls for PLAN escorts to “display an image of China being a responsible power.”<sup>220</sup> Chinese leaders are learning, however, that success comes with inflated expectations on the international stage. This reality makes China’s inevitable exit from the Gulf of Aden all the more interesting in the context of Beijing’s future IOR role, which many analysts believe will grow in the coming years.<sup>221</sup> It also poses similar questions for China’s future role in Middle Eastern, North African and Mediterranean maritime security.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> “Remarks by USAID Asia Bureau Deputy Assistant Administrator Greg Beck for ‘The Response to Philippines’ Typhoon Haiyan’ Conference,” Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS), Washington, DC, January 8, 2014, <http://www.usaid.gov/news-information/speeches/jan-08-2014-remarks-daa-greg-beck-response-philippines-typhoon-haiyan>.

<sup>220</sup> Zhong Kuirun, “The Responsibility and Undertaking of the Chinese Navy: Three Revelations of the Sixth Escort Task Force’s Escorts in the Gulf of Aden,” *Liberation Army Daily*, November 30, 2010.

<sup>221</sup> David E. Brown, *Africa’s Booming Oil and Natural Gas Exploration and Production: National Security Implications for the United States and China* (Carlisle, PA: Army War College Press, December 2013), pp. 85-86.

<sup>222</sup> Shannon Tiezzi, “Chinese Navy’s Role in Syrian Chemical Weapons Disposal,” *The Diplomat*, December 20, 2013, <http://thediplomat.com/2013/12/chinese-navys-role-in-syrian-chemical-weapons-disposal/>.

Certainly, there is another side to the debate about how anti-piracy escorts in the Gulf of Aden impact China's foreign policy. For instance, others have pointed out that by deploying large surface vessels to the Far Seas, and traversing Southeast Asia and the IOR in the process, Asian militaries such as China and Japan may be drawing the ire of neighboring Southeast Asian states unlikely to welcome the increase in military traffic near their borders.<sup>223</sup> Of course, these littoral states do not necessarily have much choice in the matter.

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### **How Long at Sea? Projecting the Remainder of PLAN Anti-Piracy Operations**

On November 12, 2014, the UNSC extended its mandate for state navies to fight piracy off Somalia for an additional 12 months and into November 2015. Based on its previous behavior, China is likely to remain contributing PLAN resources to the international anti-piracy effort there. "As long as Gulf of Aden pirate activities continue, so too will the escort operations of international navies," Admiral Wu Shengli declared in September 2014. "So far, there is no end in sight for the mission."<sup>224</sup> November 2015 is currently the latest date that the UNSC legally mandates navies to operate there. As this

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<sup>223</sup> Mark J. Valencia and Nazery Khalid, "The Somalia Multilateral Anti-Piracy Approach: Caveats on Vigilantism," *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, Vol. 8, No. 4, February 17, 2009, [http://www.japanfocus.org/-Mark\\_J\\_-Valencia/3052](http://www.japanfocus.org/-Mark_J_-Valencia/3052).

<sup>224</sup> Admiral Wu Shengli, discussion with one of the authors.

study went to press, there had been no explicit announcement by the PLAN or any other official Chinese policymaking agencies of when China's Gulf of Aden mission would cease.

For now, China and others continue smothering Somali piracy in the Gulf of Aden. But these deployments will presumably end at some point. Reports in late 2012 that worldwide pirate attacks had “plummeted” reflected the success of anti-piracy operations by navies throughout the world. According to the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) International Maritime Bureau (IMB) *Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships 2013 Annual Report*, there were just seven actual and attempted pirate attacks off Somalia in all of 2013.<sup>225</sup> From January–August 2014, there were only 17 attacks in the Gulf of Aden, none successful.<sup>226</sup> Given the lack of a successful Somali pirate attack since 2012, it is important to consider the “Post-Aden” era of China's Far Seas naval development. Presumably Chinese strategists are deliberating over if and when the PLAN should terminate its Gulf of Aden deployments, influenced in part by downward trends in Somalia piracy.

During a speech at the U.S. NDU in May 2011, PLA Chief of General Staff Chen Bingde suggested that China's Navy might not be able to support the Gulf of Aden mission much longer. Discussing China's deployment of naval power to protect the maritime commons in the

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<sup>225</sup> *Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships*, ICC International Maritime Bureau (IMB) report for the period January 1–December 31, 2013, published in January 2014, p. 5.

<sup>226</sup> Admiral Wu Shengli, discussion with one of the authors.

shipbuilding costs and foreign reactions to China's naval buildup, Chen acknowledged, "If the situation continues like this, it will create great difficulties for us to continue with such operations. Although the development of the Chinese PLAN has come a long way in recent years and we have developed a number of new ships... we are not that strong yet."<sup>227</sup>

ONI reported in late 2013 that Somali pirates failed to pirate a single commercial vessel in the Indian Ocean successfully during 2013.<sup>228</sup> Certainly, piracy and other nontraditional threats will not vanish entirely from the maritime commons. But the dramatic decline in Somali pirate attacks signifies meaningful gains made in this field by U.S.- and European-led multilateral anti-piracy forces, as well as "independent" contributors such as Russia and China. The very success of such collaboration, however, means that many states including China may soon lack a reason to keep large naval assets in the Gulf of Aden and surrounding waters.

However, this reduction is certainly not perceived by China or other states as signaling the eradication of this nontraditional security problem.<sup>229</sup> In late 2013, Naval Command College Professor Qu

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<sup>227</sup> Chen Bingde, "Speech Delivered at the U.S. National Defense University," Washington, D.C., May 18, 2011.

<sup>228</sup> Anna Culaba, "Somali Pirates Hijacked Zero Boats This Year," *RYOT News*, December 27, 2013, [http://www.ryot.org/somali-pirates-hijacked-zero-boats-year/513057?goback=.gde\\_1191857\\_member\\_5823841618339332099#](http://www.ryot.org/somali-pirates-hijacked-zero-boats-year/513057?goback=.gde_1191857_member_5823841618339332099#).

<sup>229</sup> A recent study on the Gulf of Aden mission states: "Presently, it is still not very safe in the Gulf of Aden and Somalia Waters. It is an arduous task and the convoy

Lingquan admonished Chinese not to avoid dismissing the threat of Somali piracy. Qu emphasized unpredictable increases and decreases in the frequency of attacks, as well as the expansion of pirate activities from a mere 200 nautical miles [370 km] to 1,750 nautical miles [3,241 km] and cunning tactics employed by Somali pirates as reasons to remain vigilant.<sup>230</sup>

Revelations in July 2014 that the Japan Maritime Self Defense Force (JMSDF) would assume command of CTF-151 added a new wrinkle to discussions about Beijing's future role in international anti-piracy.<sup>231</sup> Japan's command is enabled by its reinterpretation of its constitution, and builds on a host of related developments including the seconding of a JMSDF officer to the Pentagon to enhance interoperability amid heightened Sino-Japanese tensions in the East China Sea.<sup>232</sup> While it remains unclear how Chinese leaders have reacted to the CTF-151 announcement, it seems safe to assume that

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officers and men of the Chinese Navy still have a long way to go." Gao Xiaoxing et al., *The PLA Navy* (Beijing: China Intercontinental Press, 2012), p. 155.

<sup>230</sup> Li Jie, "A New Milestone in Going to the Ocean," Five Year Escort Special Column, *Navy Today*, No. 12 (December 2013), pp. 21-22.

<sup>231</sup> "Japan to Send SDF Officer to Take Command of Int'l Anti-piracy Force," *Kyodo News International*, July 18, 2014, <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/kyodo-news-international/140718/japan-send-sdf-officer-take-command-intl-anti-piracy-fo>.

<sup>232</sup> "MSDF Officer to Take Key Post at Pentagon," *Japan Times*, July 9, 2014, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/07/09/national/politics-diplomacy/msdf-officer-to-take-up-post-at-key-pentagon-naval-unit/#.U9gAZlZN3wI>.

Beijing will not visibly reduce its presence at a time when Tokyo is taking its contributions to an unprecedented level. This is particularly true since JMSDF efforts will certainly be more impressive to Western navies than China's parallel contributions in isolation, given the JMSDF's willingness and ability to integrate directly with these navies and (at least by sensitive Chinese standards) assume operational command over them. Whatever plans it may have had for winding down Gulf of Aden operations in the near future, China has surely postponed them for now.

Nonetheless, China's Navy must already be considering the costs and benefits of continued operations as progresses through a seventh year of continuous task force deployment.<sup>233</sup> The PLAN's learning curve in the Gulf of Aden has flattened progressively since 2008, which begs the question: Do the significant but largely abstract benefits of future escort task forces, or other forms of Far Seas anti-piracy operations, outweigh the many concrete costs? The most direct inputs include fuel, food, health equipment and supplies, ammunition and weaponry, auxiliary equipment as well as the expenditures associated with dispatching two to three large warships 10,000 km from China for six months at a time.

Like all other navies currently serving there, the PLAN will *eventually* conclude its Gulf of Aden anti-piracy operations. Even if China perceives the costs of the mission as beginning to overshadow

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<sup>233</sup> Anti-piracy operations have essentially been continuous since their inception, save for extenuating circumstances such as the aforementioned temporary cessation of operations to evacuate Chinese and foreign citizens from war-torn Yemen.

the benefits, the PLAN could remain in the Gulf of Aden past China's perceived point of diminishing marginal returns to avoid being perceived to shirk international responsibility. It may first wait until certain other navies withdraw before exiting the Gulf of Aden itself.

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### **Naval Planning After Anti-piracy**

The answers to these questions will offer significant insights into Beijing's longer-term plans for the Chinese naval presence in the maritime commons. While the Gulf of Aden mission has been difficult for Beijing in some respects, particularly regarding logistical planning, given China's lack of overseas basing infrastructure, the mission itself has served as a vital springboard for a more active Chinese naval engagement in the Far Seas. Once China departs the Gulf of Aden, its ability to respond to a myriad of security challenges, from evacuating Chinese citizens in Africa or the Middle East to providing military assets for UN-mandated international security operations such as the destruction of Syrian chemical weapons, will inevitably be compromised. It is thus probable that Chinese policymakers are considering various overseas access strategies for China's military that could come into play post-Gulf of Aden involvement.

Of potentially equal importance is the loss of opportunities to learn from other navies in the Gulf of Aden. China primarily uses



“shipborne radio station(s)” (舰机电台), “satellite phones” (卫星电话), “military data links” (军用数据链) and “the international Internet” (国际互联网) to communicate with other navies in the region.<sup>234</sup> Chinese naval leaders value the constant interactions with foreign navies that anti-piracy operations afford. And despite prideful statements by officials and experts, China harbors no illusions that its navy rules Gulf of Aden waters. As Ji Rongren declared:

Currently among the escort forces in the Gulf of Aden and Somali waters, three branches are the strongest: the task forces of EU NAVFOR, CMF [Combined Military Forces] and NATO. ...among [them], EU NAVFOR is the maritime force that has the most active and powerful escort and anti-piracy operation in the Gulf of Aden and Somali waters. Given that 95 percent of the EU's annual trade is seaborne, yet only 20 percent of this passes through the Gulf of Aden and Somali waters, one can see from this that safe navigation through this maritime area is very important to the EU. Starting in November 2007, NATO also began escorting ships carrying UN emergency assistance to Somalia; in March 2009 NATO again approved a combat plan for anti-piracy in the Gulf of Aden and Somali waters. CMF was established earlier. [This] U.S.-led

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<sup>234</sup> Li Jie, “A New Milestone in Going to the Ocean,” Five Year Escort Special Column, *Navy Today*, No. 12 (December 2013), p. 24.

[coalition] of ships from multiple states [was established] in October 2001. [It] was already established when “Operation Enduring Freedom” (持久自由行动) was initiated during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Twenty-three countries have subsequently participated [in CMF]. Five years in the Gulf of Aden have showed, [through] initiating international escort cooperation in the Gulf of Aden and Somali waters that fighting pirates jointly is the “trend of the times” (形势所需 大势所趋); it’s easy to see that the effect of relying on just one state “going it alone” (单枪匹马) would be extremely limited.<sup>235</sup>

Moreover, in addition to the economic, political and strategic costs and benefits discussed above, opportunity costs arise when one considers that certain landing ships and other assets could instead be training in the East or South China Seas. Alternatively, China may prefer to continue achieving incremental breakthroughs in the Gulf of Aden, where it can also test new platforms and systems, including indigenous ones such as the Z-9 helicopter.<sup>236</sup> This argument is of course two-sided, since Gulf of Aden experience is apparently considered by PLAN leadership when choosing surface platforms to deploy in the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean. For example, in early February 2014 the PLAN’s SSF dispatched amphibious landing ship

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<sup>235</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>236</sup> “Conversation with Yin Zhuo: Escorts Are an Epoch-Making Event,” *Navy Today*, No. 12 (December 2011), p. 22.

*Changbaishan* along with destroyers *Haikou* and *Wuhan*, both of which have extensive Gulf of Aden experience and are equipped with advanced weapon platforms, to perform anti-piracy, joint search and rescue and damage control training in the West Pacific after conducting similar drills in the Indian Ocean.<sup>237</sup>

Looking further ahead, if Gulf of Aden piracy does not reemerge as a sizable maritime nontraditional security threat to China's national interests, and if the UN does not extend the international mandate for states to fight piracy at some point, then what is the future of PLAN anti-piracy operations? Can the PLAN justify a continued Gulf of Aden presence internally and externally? If even such justification is possible, do Chinese strategists perceive the economic, political and strategic benefits of a long-term naval presence in the Gulf of Aden as greater than its comprehensive costs? Given this larger context, might it not make sense for China to seek to deepen cooperation with other navies and international organizations to minimize its own expenses?

Given its role as a gateway to various Far Seas security contributions, as well as brewing tensions in the Near Seas, the Gulf of Aden mission and the void its completion may leave in the PLAN's Far Seas presence creates challenges for Chinese policymakers. For example, since 2008 Beijing has consistently been able to offset arguably assertive, provocative actions in the Yellow, East and South

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<sup>237</sup> "China's Navy Starts West Pacific Drill," Xinhua, February 3, 2014, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/China-Military-Watch/2014-02/03/content\\_17267984.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/China-Military-Watch/2014-02/03/content_17267984.htm).

China Seas with incremental contributions to maritime security in its Far Seas, including the Gulf of Aden. For instance, the announcement on December 17, 2013 that China would assist with chemical weapons escorts coincided with U.S. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel labeling China's behavior during the "Cowpens Incident" in the South China Sea as "irresponsible."<sup>238</sup> While international goodwill and training missions by China's *Peace Ark* hospital ship, search and rescue vessel *Haixun 01* and other auxiliary platforms could be scaled up to fill the Gulf of Aden void, China's Far Seas diplomacy could suffer in other ways. As the Libya and Syria cases demonstrate, China's Gulf of Aden presence provides convenient access to Asia, Africa and Europe, as well as the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, even though China currently possesses no overseas bases. Given that during 2013 only a handful of pirate attacks (all failed attempts) occurred in the Gulf of Aden, compared to 31 in the Gulf of Guinea, suggests that China and other states may consider a greater role in the future of West African maritime security.<sup>239</sup>

The prospect of a future role for Beijing in Gulf of Guinea security is additionally intriguing, not only because of China's development

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<sup>238</sup> Jane Perlez, "Chinese Navy to Aid U.S. Ship Destroying Syrian Chemical Weapons," *New York Times*, December 20, 2013, [http://sinosphere.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/12/20/chinese-navy-to-aid-u-s-ship-destroying-syrian-chemical-weapons/?\\_r=0](http://sinosphere.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/12/20/chinese-navy-to-aid-u-s-ship-destroying-syrian-chemical-weapons/?_r=0).

<sup>239</sup> Andrew S. Erickson and Austin M. Strange, "A Role for China in Gulf of Guinea Security?" *The National Interest*, December 10, 2013, <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/piracy%E2%80%99s-next-frontier-role-china-gulf-guinea-security-9533?page=4>.

finance and trade activities in Gulf states, but also because it might be an ideal area for the United States and China to achieve mutually beneficial cooperation amidst a backdrop of growing Sino-U.S. strategic rivalry in Africa.<sup>240</sup> That said, many other advanced navies, including the U.S. and several European navies, are arguably ahead of China in this region. For instance, the EU announced in 2013 that it was “developing a Gulf of Guinea strategy” composed mainly of auxiliary support rather than actual deployments of European naval ships.<sup>241</sup>

PLAN officials appear cautiously open-minded regarding Gulf of Guinea maritime security. In “a concerning trend for all world navies,” Admiral Wu acknowledged, new piracy challenges have emerged in the Gulf of Guinea.<sup>242</sup> Another PLAN official suggests that “cooperation in the Gulf of Guinea might be possible in theory.” Another PLAN official told one of the authors: “Piracy is decreasing in the Indian Ocean Region, but increasing in other areas. China is considering cooperation with other nations in the Gulf of Guinea.” Yet another offered specific criteria:

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<sup>240</sup> David E. Brown, *Hidden Dragon, Crouching Lion: How China's Advance in Africa is Underestimated and Africa's Potential Underappreciated*, U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute Monograph, September 2012, pp. 96-99, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/PUB1120.pdf>.

<sup>241</sup> “EU to Boost Anti-Piracy Efforts in W. Africa,” *Agence France Presse*, August 28, 2013, <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5jiydJzcKVEbWWniErGvo3ypthZhA?docId=CNG.afdaec1fc7c25e9ddfe1fcbfd8d7b67.1a1>.

<sup>242</sup> Admiral Wu Shengli, discussion with one of the authors.

“China can consider Gulf of Guinea deployment if its policy criteria are met—a UN resolution, support of local governments and PLAN capabilities. The last is particularly important, as the Gulf of Guinea is far further removed from China than the Gulf of Aden, and China lacks basing facilities in the region or even logistical experience. Moreover, the Gulf of Guinea is not a central SLOC in the way that the Gulf of Aden is. If China deploys to the Gulf of Guinea, it will do so on its terms and in its own interest, and not worry about U.S. views of what China should do.”

Additionally, potential engagement in the Gulf of Guinea, similar to the Gulf of Aden, highlights the diverse regional perspectives among naval powers likely to get involved. For example, as one PLAN official pointed out, while his service views the Gulf of Aden mission primarily as a “one off” deal dependent on UN mandate as well as explicit local government support and invitation, the U.S. 5<sup>th</sup> Fleet has rich historical experience in the region and its presence there is not dependent on UNSC anti-piracy resolutions. Similarly, multiple European states enjoy an enduring presence in surrounding regions while India views the area on one of traditional Indian influence. In the Gulf of Guinea, China is also a newcomer in terms of historic involvement, particularly when compared to Europe and the United States. This is not to say that China is entirely absent in the Gulf’s present security framework, however. China has economic and security cooperation agreements with many littoral states there, and

sells ships to regional coastguards and navies. For instance, Nigeria purportedly ordered to offshore patrol vessels (OPV) from China, one of which was commissioned in 2015 along with another patrol boat given by China.<sup>243</sup> China's liaison for SHADE from PLAN escort task forces 3-17 Sr. Col. Zhou Boenvisions substantial space for Sino-American cooperation on Gulf of Guinea anti-piracy.<sup>244</sup>

Besides serving as a platform for other Chinese security missions beyond the Asia-Pacific, Gulf of Aden experience has arguably provided Chinese naval planners with important guidance on how to structure China's contributions to Far Seas maritime security while China develops into a maritime power. For example, as in the Gulf of Aden, China was comfortable with providing complementary, albeit parallel security contributions—rather than outright leadership—for the Syrian chemical weapons neutralization mission ordered by the UN. Cao Weidong of the Naval Military Studies Research Institute, the PLAN's strategic think tank, asserts that Syrian chemical weapons escorts were similar to China's ongoing anti-piracy escorts, and as such PLAN escort duties have already become a “walk in the park.”<sup>245</sup> While Cao's assessment of the operational aspects of the

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<sup>243</sup> Mrityunjoy Mazumdar, “Nigerian Navy Commissions Four Vessels,” IHS Jane's 360, February 19, 2015, <http://www.janes.com/article/49162/nigerian-navy-commissions-four-vessels>.

<sup>244</sup> Sr. Col. Zhou Bo, “Security of SLOCs and International Cooperation,” presentation at “ASEAN Regional Forum Seminar on SLOC Security,” Beijing, December 8, 2014.

<sup>245</sup> “销毁叙化武行动 19 日开始 中国海军将赴地中海护航” [Syrian Chemical Weapons Destruction Operation Begins December 19 Chinese Navy Will Visit

Syrian escort mission is plausible if hyperbolic, it would be difficult for Beijing to even participate in such activities in the first place without its Gulf of Aden presence, unless it pursues different forms of international footholds that can support a medley of military and paramilitary operations far from China's island and maritime claims.

While China is actively expanding its international maritime cooperation, annual exercises and visits cannot replace the regularized forms of communication and coordination achieved by the PLAN in the Gulf of Aden. For instance, its historic official participation in U.S.-led Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) 2014 exercise, the largest regularly held international maritime exercise, which is held biannually, is a useful multi-week platform for engagement across a variety of fields. Four PLAN ships drilled on subjects such as anti-piracy with international counterparts off Hawaii.<sup>246</sup> But RIMPAC is not regularized or high-intensity. On the other hand, as an active member of the SHADE coordination mechanism, China's Navy has regularly coordinated its escorts with other "independent providers" such as India, Japan and South Korea through the

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Mediterranean Sea for Escorts], 钱江晚报 [Qianjiang Evening News], December 20, 2013, <http://china.haiwainet.cn/n/2013/1220/c345646-20061957.html>.

<sup>246</sup> "Chinese Naval Taskforce Shifts to Maritime Exercise Phase of RIMPAC," *Liberation Army Daily*, July 11, 2014, [http://eng.mod.gov.cn/DefenseNews/2014-07/11/content\\_4521731.htm](http://eng.mod.gov.cn/DefenseNews/2014-07/11/content_4521731.htm); Ding Ying, "Taking Part at Sea," *Beijing Review*, July 5, 2014, [http://www.bjreview.com.cn/quotes/txt/2014-08/14/content\\_627873.htm](http://www.bjreview.com.cn/quotes/txt/2014-08/14/content_627873.htm); "Focus Today," CCTV-4 (Mandarin), 1330-1400 GMT, July 3, 2014.



Convoy Coordination Working Group (CCWG).<sup>247</sup> Like China, each of these “independent providers” relies heavily on energy and commodity shipments through the Gulf of Aden and proximate waterways. Many of them have contributed substantial security resources off Somalia. For example, in January 2014 South Korea deployed its 15<sup>th</sup> anti-piracy task force from Busan Port, consisting of veteran destroyer *Cheonghae* and over 300 personnel, including Special Forces, an underwater demolition team, navy seals, marine and naval aviators.<sup>248</sup> As a PLAN official told one of the authors, CCWG navies prefer to “escort merchant ships from point A to point B” rather than serve as “traffic police.” He allowed, “There are advantages and disadvantages to each approach.”

Besides convoy coordination, PLAN ships have previously “fill[ed] patrol gaps” left by Western navies. China’s Navy also communicates routinely with Western and other navies through the EU’s Mercury software as well as bridge-to-bridge radio. PLAN forces quickly adopted the former technology to communicate with CMF, EU and NATO ships because it is more secure than commercial e-mail services, and also allowed China to learn NATO-based nomenclature and procedures including code words used openly across Mercury.

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<sup>247</sup> Unless otherwise specified, the insights in this paragraph are from the minutes of the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth SHADE meetings.

<sup>248</sup> “S. Korea Send Anti-Piracy Troops to Gulf of Aden,” *Yonhap*, January 16, 2014, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/news/2014/01/16/0200000000AEN20140116007200315.html>.

China is, according to a Western SHADE representative whom one of the authors interviewed, “trying to validate its own contributions, but not to change the status quo.” There may be some effort to make adjustments at the edges, however. A PLAN official has stated before one of the authors that SHADE is “very important” (非常重要), “but there is still some space for improvement.” Specifically, in his view, “two aspects need to be solved.” The first is “strategic cooperation,” or how the United States and China can establish a “balance of interests in the Indian Ocean. The United States should clearly recognize Chinese interests and the contributions to stability it has already made.” If the United States can recognize and acknowledge China’s interests in the Indian Ocean, he maintained, there will be more opportunities for cooperation between the two navies.

The second is “lower-level cooperation,” including joint exercises and technical communication, i.e., through the commonly-used Channel 16 VHF.<sup>249</sup> This area is relatively easy and simple: “Far away from [China’s] homeland, the U.S. and Chinese navies are friends.” Some aspects need to be improved, however, particularly regarding information exchange. Whereas the U.S. and EU navies exchange e-mail daily, it was typical for the Chinese task force to receive “only three emails.” As for vessels under attack (VSL) lists, deployment sheets and weather conditions, “we need to do more in this field.” The PLAN official believes deep antagonism still exists among officers and enlisted in the U.S. and Chinese navies. One day, for instance, a Chinese vessel conducted gunnery practice in the Gulf of

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<sup>249</sup> Channel 16 VHF is a marine radio frequency commonly used for initial calling of ships, including in situations of distress.

Aden, causing a nearby U.S. vessel to regard its guns as pointed at it. The U.S. Navy—whose officers believe the PLAN should have broadcast its plans clearly in advance per customary practice—contacted its attaché in Beijing, and a message went up the PLA chain of command, leading Party leadership to ask the PLAN what it was doing. Finally, the PLAN official saw room for logistics cooperation given the fact that the United States has bases in region, unlike China.

Provided that this were not wielded to attempt to strengthen China's Near Seas claims, or restrict legal presence, surveillance and exercises in China's exclusive economic zone and the airspace above it, it might indeed offer some constructive approaches. From a more practical standpoint, as the Gulf of Aden has shown, multilateral cooperation of scale can drastically lower individual providers' costs.

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### **Putting Down Roots Overseas**

Will Beijing eventually pursue overseas military basing arrangements to facilitate a more permanent Far Seas presence after the PLAN's exit from the Gulf of Aden? If so, when and how? Similar to the above discussion of gradual adjustments to Beijing's longstanding reluctance towards projecting security abroad and when its actions will impact events in other states, China's uneasiness about overseas basing is also deeply rooted in its own national history. Any change to Beijing's military basing policy would carry rich symbolic meaning.

Logistics and intelligence support remain key constraints on Chinese operations in the Indian Ocean and beyond. To remedy this, the Pentagon assesses, Beijing "will likely establish several access points in this area in the next 10 years. These arrangements likely will take the form of agreements for refueling, replenishment, crew rest and low-level maintenance. The services provided likely will fall short of

permitting the full spectrum of support from repair to re-  
armament.”<sup>250</sup>

In **Exhibit 4** below, several ports in Africa, Asia and the Middle East where China has been involved economically are compared in terms of their nature, capacity, strategic relevance and China’s known involvement therein.

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<sup>250</sup> *Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2015*, Annual Report to Congress (Arlington, VA: Office of the Secretary of Defense, May 8, 2015), p. 41.

**EXHIBIT 4:****Ports for Potential PLAN Overseas Access and PLAN Visits Thereto**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Port</b>	<b>Maximum Draught (meters)</b>	<b>Pier Space/ Dimensions</b>	<b>Level of Replenishment/ Repair Facilities</b>	<b>Development/ Significance</b>	<b># PLAN Anti-Piracy-Related Visits Since 28 December 2008</b>	<b>Most Frequent Nature of Visits</b>
<b>Oman</b>	<b>Salalah</b>	17.5	7.1 - 9.1 m	Longshore, Electrical Repair, Navigation Equipment, Ship Repairs (Limited), Marine Railroad	Only small craft facilities currently available.	20+	Replenish/ Overhaul (Diesel fuel, water, food/perishables, liberty) <sup>1</sup>

170 Six Years at Sea... and Counting

				Size (Small), Garbage Disposal			
<b>Djibouti</b>	<b>Djibouti</b>	18	6.4 - 7.6 m	Mobile Cranes, Floating Cranes, Longshore, Electrical Repair, Navigation Equipment, Ship Repairs (Limited), Marine Railroad Size (Medium), Garbage Disposal	Multiple foreign naval/military bases; China reportedly invited to establish its own military facility. <sup>ii</sup> Small repairs possible; container terminal phase 1 construction completed; can berth 2 large container vessels together.	20+	Replenish/ Overhaul

<b>Yemen</b>	<b>Aden</b>	14.7	6.4 - 7.6 m	N/A	National Dockyard Company offers range of limited facilities, services. Workshops, large lathes, electrical, casting, refrigeration, other repair shops; in-water repair services. Two floating docks.	10+	Replenish/ Overhaul.  NEO, March 29- April 3, 2015  <i>Usage suspended indefinitely due to Yemeni Civil War.</i>
<b>Pakistan</b>	<b>Karachi</b>	13	9.4 - 10 m	N/A	PLAN's preferred Indian Ocean repair facility, on territory of close strategic partner. Two dry docks available; 18,000/ 25,000 DWT; development of bulk cargo,	5+	Friendly Visits/Joint Drills

172 Six Years at Sea... and Counting

					deep-water container terminals and other expansion underway, including 18m container terminal.		
<b>Pakistan</b>	<b>Gwadar</b>	12.5	367 sq-m	Control tower (foot print only), Maintenance workshop (general), Vehicles Servicing Garage	500-acre shipyard. 2 600kdwt dry docks planned. VLCC + ULCC construction planned. Expansive second phase of the port was supposed to be completed in 2010 but has not yet begun construction.  Further development to include 15-20 berths, ship cargo handling equipment, port machinery and	N/A	N/A



					warehouses; not commercially viable at present. Announced in January 2013 that China Overseas Port Holdings would take over port management control, with China Communications Construction Company (CCCC) as the contractor for the project. Reported in May 2013: China Overseas Port Holdings officially assumed operational control.		
<b>Singapore</b>	<b>Singapore</b>	16.7	3.4 - 4.6 m	Electrical Repair, Ship Repairs (Major), Drydock Size (Large), Dirty	Excellent; 1 terminal, 9 sub-ports; military ports.	4+	Replenish/ Overhaul/ Friendly Visits

174 Six Years at Sea... and Counting

				Ballast			
<b>Sri Lanka</b>	<b>Colombo</b>	16	3.4 - 4.6 m	Longshore, Ship Repairs (Major), Marine Railroad Size (Medium), Drydock Size (Small)	Multiple afloat repair berths. Dry docks available up to 120,000 DWT; Deepwater port opened in 2012; Colombo South Harbor Development project will increase depth to 18 m then 23 m; phased development of 4 new terminals with 3-4 berths each. Reported \$500 million Chinese investment. <sup>iii</sup>	4+	Friendly visits (SSF Song-class/Type 039 <i>Great Wall</i> No. 329 and NSF submarine support ship <i>Changxing Island</i> No. 861 docked at Colombo International

							Container Terminal from September 7-14, October 13-18, 2014).
<b>Sri Lanka</b>	<b>Hambantota</b>	17 (in future)	N/A	N/A	Ship serving capabilities planned;  Port to be constructed in 3 stages over 15 years. Phase 1 accommodated first vessel in 2010; general cargo berth of 610 m; handles vessels up to 100,000 DWT; phase 2 initiated	N/A	N/A

176 Six Years at Sea... and Counting

<b>Sri Lanka</b>	<b>Trincomalee</b>	13	4.9 - 6.1 m	Longshore, Ship Repairs (Limited), Marine Railroad Size (Very Small), Dirty Ballast	Minor repairs possible. Slipways for naval, commercial vessels.	1	Friendly Visit
<b>Bangladesh</b>	<b>Chittagong</b>	9.15	6.4 - 7.6 m	Longshore, Ship Repairs (Limited), Marine Railroad Size (Small), Drydock Size (Medium)	Private repair yards available. Dry dock available for vessels up to 16,500DWT.  New collocated port to be completed in three phases by 2015; will increase capacity from current 1.1-million to 3-million TEU for container	2	Replenish/ Overhaul/ Joint Drills

					traffic and 30.5-million to 100-million tons for bulk cargo.		
<b>Seychelles</b>	<b>Port Victoria</b>	11.5	11 - 12.2 m	Longshore, Electrical, Ship Repairs (Limited), Marine Railroad Size (Small), Garbage Disposal	December 2012: Seychelles Foreign Minister Jean-Paul Adam invites China to establish anti-piracy base. <sup>iv</sup> Limited repairs. Divers, underwater welding equipment available. Dry-dock shipways available for vessels <300 GT.	2	Friendly Visits
<b>Burma</b>	<b>Sittwe</b>	4.8	4.9 - 6.1 m	Longshore, Ship Repairs (Limited)	Available; Kyaukpyu deep sea port on Maday Island by Than Zit river mouth; initiated in 2009, project will produce 91 berths, accommodate 300,000-ton oil tankers. Shallow draught, problematic currents,	1	Friendly Visit

178 Six Years at Sea... and Counting

					rocky obstacles.		
<b>Tanzania</b>	<b>Bagamoyo</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A	Not yet built. Announced in March/April 2013 that China plans to fund Bagamoyo port with capacity of 20 million TEU/year to be completed by 2017. China to commit 800 billion Tanzanian shillings (\$500 million) in 2013 for starting port construction; remainder of Chinese financial aid package will follow in 2014-15; \$10B total Chinese investment; will include the building of new 34-kilometre road joining Bagamoyo to Mlandizi, 65 km		N/A

					<p>railway connecting Bagamoyo to Tanzania-Zambia Railway (TAZARA) and Central Railway.</p>		
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**Note:** Plus signs indicate the possibility that not all port calls have been included. For more information on possible PLAN overseas access points, see Andrew S. Erickson and Austin M. Strange, *No Substitute for Experience: China's Anti-Piracy Operations in the Gulf of Aden*, Naval War College Press China Maritime Study 10 (November 2013); Andrew S. Erickson, "China's Modernization of Its Naval and Air Power Capabilities," in Ashley J. Tellis and Travis Tanner, eds., *Strategic Asia 2012-13: China's Military Challenge* (Seattle, WA: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2012), pp. 89-91; Christopher D. Yung and Ross Rustici with Scott Devary and Jenny Lin, "*Not an idea We Have to Shun*": *Chinese Overseas Basing Requirements in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Institute for National Security Studies *China Strategic Perspective 7* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, October 2014), <http://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/stratperspective/china/ChinaPerspectives-7.pdf>.

## 180 Six Years at Sea... and Counting

- i. Christopher D. Yung and Ross Rustici with Scott Devary and Jenny Lin, “*Not an idea We Have to Shun*”: *Chinese Overseas Basing Requirements in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Institute for National Security Studies *China Strategic Perspective 7* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, October 2014), <http://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/stratperspective/china/ChinaPerspectives-7.pdf>.
- ii. “China Declines to Confirm or Deny Djibouti Base Plan,” Reuters, May 11, 2015, <http://af.reuters.com/article/topNews/idAFKBN0NW0XA20150511>; “吉布提欢迎中国来建基地” [Djibouti Welcomes China to Build a Base], 环球时报 [Global Times], March 8, 2013, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/2013-03/08/c\\_124434216.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/2013-03/08/c_124434216.htm).
- iii. Cdr. Gurpreet Khurana, Cdr. Kapil Narula and Asha Devi, “PLA Navy Submarine Visits Sri Lanka,” *Making Waves*, Vol. 19, No. 9.2 (New Delhi: National Maritime Foundation, September 30, 2014), [http://maritimeindia.org/pdf/MW%209.2\(Final\).pdf](http://maritimeindia.org/pdf/MW%209.2(Final).pdf), 37.
- iv. Li Xiaokun and Li Lianxing, “PLA Navy Looks at Offer from Seychelles,” *China Daily*, December 13, 2011, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2011-12/13/content\\_14254395.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2011-12/13/content_14254395.htm); Jeremy Page and Tim Wright, “Chinese Military Considers New Indian Ocean Presence,” *Wall Street Journal*, December 14, 2011, <http://online.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052970203518404577096261061550538>; “Seychelles Invites China to Set Up Anti-Piracy Base,” *Defense News*, December 2, 2011, <http://www.defensenews.com/article/20111202/DEFSECT03/112020302/Seychelles-Invites-China-Set-Up-Anti-Piracy-Base>.



**Exhibit 4 Sources:**

Data obtained from IHS Maritime Sea-web and the following port websites:

<http://www.salalahport.com/index.php?lang=en&name=List%20of%20Assets&itemid=162>, <http://ports.com/oman/port-of-salalah-mina-raysut/>; [http://www.worldportsource.com/ports/portCall/DJI\\_Port\\_of\\_Djibouti\\_2169.php](http://www.worldportsource.com/ports/portCall/DJI_Port_of_Djibouti_2169.php), <http://ports.com/djibouti/port-of-djibouti/>, [http://www.searates.com/port/djibouti\\_dj.htm](http://www.searates.com/port/djibouti_dj.htm); [http://www.worldportsource.com/ports/commerce/YEM\\_Port\\_of\\_Aden\\_214.php](http://www.worldportsource.com/ports/commerce/YEM_Port_of_Aden_214.php), <http://ports.com/yemen/port-of-aden/>; <http://ports.com/pakistan/port-of-karachi/>; <http://www.gwadarport.gov.pk/portprofile.html>; [http://www.searates.com/port/singapore\\_sg.htm](http://www.searates.com/port/singapore_sg.htm); [http://www.worldportsource.com/ports/portCall/LKA\\_Port\\_of\\_Colombo\\_44.php](http://www.worldportsource.com/ports/portCall/LKA_Port_of_Colombo_44.php); <http://ports.com/sri-lanka/port-of-trincomalee/>; [http://www.searates.com/port/chittagong\\_bd.htm](http://www.searates.com/port/chittagong_bd.htm); [http://www.searates.com/port/port\\_victoria\\_sc.htm](http://www.searates.com/port/port_victoria_sc.htm); [http://www.worldportsource.com/ports/portCall/MMR\\_Port\\_of\\_Sittwe\\_2337.php](http://www.worldportsource.com/ports/portCall/MMR_Port_of_Sittwe_2337.php).

As the exhibit shows, PLAN vessels have stopped principally at ports in countries abutting the Gulf of Aden. Its current facilities approach has drawbacks; many Chinese strategists continue to debate access alternatives. Yin Zhuo stated that Gulf of Aden operations have demonstrated that some of the PLAN's equipment and resources are inadequate for fulfilling blue water missions. In particular, Yin emphasized that information and communications infrastructure was relatively ineffective for conducting Far Seas operations for extended periods, lagging far behind the relevant naval capabilities of Western states.<sup>251</sup> Yin has also previously argued for basing arrangements, given that current reliance on supply from Muslim countries is insufficient to provide pork for PLAN task forces with over 800 sailors.<sup>252</sup> Pan Chunming, deputy director of an SSF political division, perceives Chinese overseas supply infrastructure as inadequate. Likely referring to Djibouti, he asserts, "Once we coordinated with a foreign port to berth for three days. However, the port later only allowed us to stay for one day, because a Japanese ship was coming."<sup>253</sup> This news could hardly have been well-received by the PLAN. Japan has employed P-3C surveillance aircraft to complement Maritime Self Defense Forces (MSDF) destroyers sent

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<sup>251</sup> *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2011* (Arlington, VA: Office of the Secretary of Defense, May 6, 2011), p. 62.

<sup>252</sup> "Conversation with Yin Zhuo: Escorts Are an Epoch-Making Event," *Navy Today*, No. 12 (December 2011), p. 22.

<sup>253</sup> Yang Jingjie, "Captains Courageous," *Global Times*, December 24, 2012, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/751957.shtml>.

to the Gulf of Aden to conduct anti-piracy operations.<sup>254</sup> It dispatches P-3 surveillance flights out of its naval base completed in 2011 and located north of the Djibouti-Ambouli International Airport. Japan announced in August 2013 that it planned to arm Djibouti with additional maritime patrol ships to improve the African state's littoral security.<sup>255</sup> A PLAN official advanced a cynical interpretation of Tokyo's contribution, stating that Djibouti is not overly concerned with adherence to international standards in its exclusive economic zone (EEZ), and it is rather great powers that typically opposed foreign behavior they perceived as unacceptable in their own EEZs.

Meanwhile, scholar Chen Chundi advocates for a PLAN presence across what he terms the "Islamic Crescent of Chinese Transport," stretching from Southeast Asia through South Asia, Central Asia and the Middle East, to North Africa. Specifically, Chen calls for China to use positive diplomacy in this region to establish mutually beneficial port call agreements.<sup>256</sup>

Naval scholar Jing Aiming opts instead for a concept of three different levels of "support points" for China's Navy in the Far Seas. The first level, including foreign ports such as Djibouti, Aden and

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<sup>254</sup> "Deepen Ties with Nations of GCC to Ensure Energy Security," Editorial, *Yomiuri Shimbun Online*, August 25, 2013, <http://www.yomiuri.co.jp>.

<sup>255</sup> "Japan to Provide Patrol Ships to Djibouti to Enhance Maritime Security," *Kyodo World Service*, August 27, 2013.

<sup>256</sup> "利比亚战争的思考: 中国海军如何维护我国海外的利益? [How Does China Protect Its Overseas Interests?], 现代舰船 [Modern Ships] (April 2011), pp. 14-17.

Salalah, are adequate for refueling and supply needs, and the PLAN could rely on commercial transaction in these areas. Second, Seychellois Port Victoria could support fixed schedules of PLAN ship supply, air-based reconnaissance and platform replenishment. Third, ports in places like Pakistan could support long-term, bilateral contractual agreements that enable more comprehensive supply, replenishment and large-scale weaponry repair.<sup>257</sup>

Despite local resource limitations, the Seychelles has emerged in recent years with Djibouti and Karachi, Pakistan as a frontrunner for a potential Chinese military base or regular access point. In March 2012 China announced plans to establish a presence in the Seychelles to support its anti-piracy mission.<sup>258</sup> That said, China's official response was wary of comparing such a presence to a military base, and insisted that it would be used purely for logistical and supply purposes. China's Ministry of Defense explained, "According to escort needs and the needs of other long-range missions, China will consider seeking supply facilities at appropriate harbors in the Seychelles or other countries."<sup>259</sup> In May 2012, both nations signed an agreement allowing the PLAN to transfer detained pirates to

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<sup>257</sup> 景爱明 [Jing Aiming], "中国海外军事基地渐行渐近" [China's Overseas Military Basing Proceeding Gradually], 晚霞 [Sunset], No. 2 (February 2012), p. 25.

<sup>258</sup> Ng Tze-Wei, "Beijing Will Consider Seychelles Basing Offer," *South China Morning Post*, December 13, 2011, <http://www.scmp.com/article/987633/beijing-will-consider-seychelles-base-offer>.

<sup>259</sup> Li Xiaokun and Li Lianxing, "Navy Looks at Offer from Seychelles," *China Daily*, December 13, 2011, [www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2011-12/13/content\\_14254395.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2011-12/13/content_14254395.htm).

Seychelles.<sup>260</sup> In July 2013 they signed an agreement to enhance coordination between each side's foreign ministries, while also discussing a number of bilateral projects ranging from marine research and security to direct flights between China and Seychelles.<sup>261</sup> Similarly, in March 2013 Djibouti, where PLAN forces have docked over fifty times as of 2012, invited China to build a military presence there.<sup>262</sup> In 2014, China and Djibouti reportedly signed a security and defence strategic partnership agreement that facilitates PLAN access.<sup>263</sup> In mid-2015 Djibouti President Ismail Omar Guelleh purportedly claimed that negotiations with Beijing on a Chinese military base in Djibouti were ongoing.<sup>264</sup> A Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson initially neither confirmed nor denied the report.

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<sup>260</sup> "Seychelles and China Sign Accord on Transfer of Suspected Pirates," *Seychelles Nation*, May 19, 2012, [article.wn.com/view/2012/05/19/Seychelles\\_and\\_China\\_sign\\_accord\\_on\\_transfer\\_of\\_suspected\\_pi/](http://article.wn.com/view/2012/05/19/Seychelles_and_China_sign_accord_on_transfer_of_suspected_pi/).

<sup>261</sup> "China and Seychelles Create Stimulus for Further Consultation," *Seychelles Nation*, July 25, 2013, <http://www.nation.sc/article.html?id=239346>.

<sup>262</sup> "Conversation with Yin Zhuo: Escorts Are an Epoch-Making Event," *Navy Today*, No. 12 (December 2011), p. 22.

<sup>263</sup> John Lee, China Comes to Djibouti," *Foreign Affairs*, April 23, 2015, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/east-africa/2015-04-23/china-comes-djibouti>; "Djibouti and China Sign a Security and Defense Agreement," February 27, 2014, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201402280055.html>.

<sup>264</sup> "China 'Negotiates Military Base' in Djibouti," *Al Jazeera*, May 9, 2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2015/05/150509084913175.html>.

China may thus establish its first batch of limited overseas strategic support points in the IOR in order to support a regularized PLAN presence. In Jing Aiming's vision, strategic support points can be divided as follows. First-level points serve primarily to fuel and replenish PLAN ships in peacetime, and could include the ports of Djibouti and Salalah, both of which PLAN anti-piracy escort ships have called on extensively in recent years. Second-level points help with relatively fixed ship and aircraft berthing and replenishment as well as sailor rest. Seychelles' Victoria Port could be an ideal second-tier point. Third-level access points are more comprehensive, offering all-inclusive replenishment, and supporting rest, reorganization and major ship repairs. Pakistan could potentially provide such a base. Jing thinks that within a decade it is possible to achieve this nodal system that involves northern and western Indian Ocean replenishment lines incorporating ports in the Middle East as well as northern and eastern Africa. Meanwhile, central and southern lines could rely on the Seychelles and Madagascar.<sup>265</sup>

China and other states may also be increasingly willing to adopt more proactive approaches to maritime piracy and other nontraditional security threats to the global commons, possibly including entering the sovereign territory of other nations under special circumstances. In 2011 Chief of PLA General Staff Chen Bingde stated, "For counter-piracy campaigns to be effective, we should probably move beyond the ocean and crush their bases on the land." Chen elaborated, "we should not only fight with pirates on the

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<sup>265</sup> 景爱明 [Jing Aiming], "中国海外军事基地渐行渐近" [China's Overseas Military Basing Proceeding Gradually], *Sunset*, No. 2 (February 2012), p. 25.

sea, but also on the ground; because those pirates operating on the sea are simply low-ranking ones, and the true masterminds are on the ground. All the ransoms and treasures they obtained were all later handed over to their chiefs of organizations.”<sup>266</sup> Chen’s words reflect widely held beliefs among both Chinese and non-Chinese leaders that eradicating piracy and similar nontraditional security threats ultimately requires more “bottom-up,” holistic approaches.

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Although China’s regional objectives have not changed, its strategic environment has. More importantly, China’s strategic means have increased and strengthened. Achieving a stable surrounding environment has constantly been a central strategic objective of Chinese diplomacy. While refuting the “Chinese threat doctrine” in the late 1990s, an important piece of evidence used by Chinese leaders was the fact that China’s military—lacking even a single aircraft carrier—was defensive in nature and did not constitute a threat to neighboring countries. Clearly, Chinese military force has made great strides in recent years. In December 2008, a Chinese naval escort formation entered the Gulf of Aden in the Indian Ocean for the first time, and China announced that it was going to build an indigenous Chinese aircraft carrier.

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<sup>266</sup> Chen Bingde, “Speech Presented at the U.S. National Defense University,” Washington, D.C., May 18, 2011.

Now an increasingly capable Chinese Navy is increasingly visible to the world, incentivizing its civilian masters to balance Near Seas assertiveness with Far Seas public goods contributions. Discussion of potential avenues for future Far Seas military access for China thus raises important questions about what types of missions the PLAN may pursue outside of the Second Island Chain in the post-Gulf of Aden anti-piracy era.

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## VIII. Conclusion:

### A New Approach to Maritime Commons Security?

PLAN anti-piracy operations are one component of a larger portfolio of Chinese “Far Seas” naval diplomacy through operations in areas beyond the Second Island Chain, that recently include voyages by vessels such as *Peace Ark*, *Haixun 01* and *Zheng He*.<sup>267</sup> So far, China has been more a follower than an initiator. Using large, powerful warships in anti-piracy operations represents an extreme example of having far more capabilities than is necessary for the mission. But there are currently no viable alternatives; other navies use this same approach. Moreover, the cost of sustaining the Gulf of Aden mission is not prohibitive, even though not having bases in the region imposes additional costs on China’s deployment. Most importantly, Chinese capabilities and interests are beginning to call for a broader approach.

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<sup>267</sup> See Nan Li, “The Evolution of China’s Naval Strategy and Capabilities: From ‘Near Coast’ and ‘Near Seas’ to ‘Far Seas,’” *Asian Security*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (2009), p. 129.

### **Embracing a Broader Far Seas Presence**

In early February 2014 PLAN personnel onboard *Yancheng* raised Chinese New Year banners to deliver Spring Festival greetings to Chinese citizens while helping escort ships carrying relinquished Syrian chemical weapons. So too did PLAN ships stationed off Somalia during the celebrations.<sup>268</sup> Meanwhile, in keeping with his unrelenting emphasis on technology incorporation and disciplined naval development, Admiral Wu Shengli exchanged greetings with multiple PLAN task forces stationed in the Far Seas via videoconference.<sup>269</sup>

For many of these sailors, it was not their first time greeting friends and family at Lunar New Years from the Far Seas. PLAN personnel have become accustomed to working in the maritime commons, where they can gain opportunities and insights simply unavailable closer to home. These lessons are readily apparent to China's Navy and the rest of the world. Yet the PLAN's Gulf of Aden achievement is a milestone for reasons beyond the military domain. For those interested in China's role in 21<sup>st</sup>-century international society, well over six years' operations off Somalia have showcased China in its first protracted operational role within the context of international

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<sup>268</sup> "Chinese Soldiers Abroad Extend Spring Festival Greetings," China Military Online, February 2, 2014, [http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/2014-02/02/content\\_5758575.htm](http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/2014-02/02/content_5758575.htm).

<sup>269</sup> "Wu Shengli Extends Video Greetings to Escort and Training Task forces," China Military Online, January 28, 2014, [http://eng.mod.gov.cn/DefenseNews/2014-01/28/content\\_4487787.htm](http://eng.mod.gov.cn/DefenseNews/2014-01/28/content_4487787.htm).

security. The PLAN has embodied the spirit of “creative involvement,” operating independent of but in parallel with Western and other naval forces. More broadly, the operations signal that Beijing appears willing to cooperate with the United States and other naval powers to tackle shared nontraditional security challenges. Those calling on the Middle Kingdom to grow into a responsible stakeholder following persistent economic development and status ascendancy can cite Gulf of Aden anti-piracy as a modest but welcome example.

These developments mirror broader Chinese naval growth, highlighting the important role of anti-piracy operations in 21<sup>st</sup>-century PLAN modernization. For one, working under the aegis of fighting piracy has contributed to remarkable improvements in PLAN training and operational capability. As part of the December 2013 *Navy Today* special issue, reporter Li Jie interviewed PLA NDU Strategic Research Education and Research Department Deputy Director Ji Rongren and Naval Command Academy Professor Qu Lingquan to discuss China’s first five years in the Gulf of Aden.<sup>270</sup> During the interview, Ji stated, “During these five years, China’s Navy has firmly grasped escort opportunities all along, [and has] truly achieved the strategic transition of stepping outside of China’s gateway and moving towards the Far Seas.”<sup>271</sup> Even anodyne language such as this describes activities simply unthinkable a decade or two ago.

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<sup>270</sup> Li Jie, “A New Milestone in Going to the Ocean,” Five Year Escort Special Column, *Navy Today*, No. 243 (December 2013), pp. 18-26.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*

A PLAN official emphasized to one of the authors two major Chinese distant seas interests: SLOC security and the growing imperative “to protect overseas Chinese citizens, rights and property.” In accordance with Chinese policy, he stressed the need to uphold the UN Charter. SLOC security “is an important way in which the Chinese government can fulfill its international obligations under the UN to promote peace and development and China’s obligations under the UN Charter as a great power.” To achieve SLOC security, the United States and China “should work together to build a reasonable, peaceful, stable maritime order under the UN Charter.” Challenges to China’s SLOC security include unfavorable conditions and regional political instability: “territorial issues and maritime disputes are a challenge to China’s SLOC security.” The PLAN remains inexperienced in SLOC security; Gulf of Aden operations are “China’s first time away.” As it continues to fulfill obligations to the international community, then, “China’s national interests demand that it move from the Near Seas to the Far Seas, where it must consider its international responsibilities and cooperate with the United States. In international cooperation, it is natural to have friction; the issue is how to control, reduce or minimize conflicts.”

Clearly, important issues are under discussion in PLAN circles and beyond. Du Wenlong, a researcher at AMS and colleagues Yang Wang and Shi Jian of China PLA Information Engineering University (中国人民解放军信息工程大学) posit that “building a powerful navy is a necessary requirement for cementing a position as a great power.” They also note that foreign trade accounts for over

60 percent of China's GDP,<sup>272</sup> which accentuates China's need to have a powerful navy.<sup>273</sup>

China's contribution to Gulf of Aden anti-piracy has entailed "major costs in forces, human resources and money," Admiral Wu Shengli attests. "The U.S. Navy and other top level U.S. leaders are very happy that this is continuing. They are satisfied that China expends significant resources to make a contribution," thereby reducing the resource burden on the United States. "There are just some members of Congress who remain opposed to the missions." Admiral Wu added that he wants to invite U.S. Congressional representatives to visit PLAN ships in the Gulf of Aden.<sup>274</sup>

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### **Opportunities for Cooperation**

It may not be surprising to see states joining forces against nontraditional threats like piracy, since there are clear economic and political incentives for cooperating rather than competing. That China continues to work actively with U.S., Japanese and European

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<sup>272</sup> For details, see "Dependence on Foreign Trade Tops 60%," Xinhua, August 5, 2008, [http://www.china.org.cn/business/news/2008-08/05/content\\_16140437.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/business/news/2008-08/05/content_16140437.htm).

<sup>273</sup> 杜文龙 [Du Wenlong], 杨王 [Yang Wang] and 诗剑 [Shi Jian], "强大海军是大国标配" [The Powerful Navy Is a Standard Configuration for the Power], 护航 5 年特别策划专家来论 [Five Year Escort Special Column Expert Discussion], *Navy Today*, No. 243 (December 2013), pp. 30-35.

<sup>274</sup> Admiral Wu Shengli, discussion with one of the authors.

navies off Somalia, however, is unprecedented given maritime relations among these states in the Asia-Pacific. The Gulf of Aden plays the foil to China's assertive reputation in the contentious East and South China Seas, where increasingly Chinese behavior is perceived as often counterproductive and sometimes downright dangerous.

Moreover, Gulf of Aden cooperation between China and the United States, as well as U.S. allies, provides a basis for discussions about 21<sup>st</sup>-century great power relations in the maritime commons. This is meaningful, given considerable disconnect between each side over the actual conceptual underpinnings of such a relationship. A PLAN official stated that achieving a "new type of great power relations" (NTGPR), as advocated by Xi Jinping, will be a long-term process that will be very different from U.S.-USSR Cold War relations. Yet Beijing has not specified clearly what it means by NTGPR or the related "new type navy-to-navy relations" advocated by CNO Admiral Wu Shengli to his American counterpart CNO Admiral Jonathan Greenert during his visit to China in July 2014. There is reason to believe that both formulations include Chinese expectations for Washington to yield to Beijing's principled positions, and that the United States should not allow itself to be perceived as embracing such slogans uncritically.<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>275</sup> For in-depth discussion, see Andrew S. Erickson and Adam P. Liff, "Not-So-Empty Talk: The Danger of China's 'New Type of Great-Power Relations' Slogan," *Foreign Affairs*, October 9, 2014, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/142178/andrew-s-erickson-and-adam-p-liff/not-so-empty-talk>.

Given these political limitations, regular contact in the Gulf of Aden and other commons regions is a modest but useful activity, particularly when compared to adversarial, sometimes dangerous U.S.-USSR commons interactions decades earlier. Admittedly, the maritime component of the relationship will require incremental progress amid frequent setbacks, which suggests that both sides need to focus more on understanding each other. Moreover, engagement does not automatically translate to improvements, but requires painstaking bilateral efforts regardless of eventual outcome. For example, one PLAN official stated that NMSRI has faced difficulties translating the U.S. maritime forces' 2007 strategic document, *A Cooperative Strategy for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Seapower*, into Mandarin—particularly concerning concepts like “interoperability.” The immense difficulty of building a new type of relations notwithstanding, anti-piracy has afforded a valuable learning window amid perpetual strategic friction.

Proceeding in parallel to noted bilateral approaches towards the United States, of course, is gradual recognition by Chinese naval thinkers that multilateralism will play a greater role in international maritime security. One PLAN official asserted that the “new approach” by China in the maritime commons is “cooperative and basically multilateral.” He also stated that in this regard, the “Gulf of Aden is a good precedent, but has yet to be generalized in terms of international law,” and “when it comes to sea, China is still immature. It looks territorially, like an insecure land power.” The same official questions China’s ability to play a larger role at sea in the future due to its lack of both overseas facilities as well as strategic trust with the United States. Participation in and attention to international mechanisms, and cooperation with the U.S. Navy, he argues, are ways to overcome these obstacles. These goals demand flexibility, inclusiveness, respect for sovereignty and willingness to actively utilize existing mechanisms and regional architectures.

While six-plus years already represents a significant commitment, it would be unrealistic to suggest that the Gulf of Aden experience would translate directly to the Yellow, East and South China Seas—rife with tensions over outstanding island and maritime claims between Beijing and its neighbors—or even completely to other regions that Beijing does not contest. Nevertheless, China’s global engagement stretches far beyond East Asian waters, and the world will expect more genuine contributions from Beijing as its stake in international security grows—regardless of the state of affairs in China’s immediate neighborhood. While flashpoints remain close to home, six-plus years of uninterrupted anti-piracy deployments in distant seas reflect a qualitative improvement in Chinese global security engagement. Both China and other states can cite Gulf of Aden activities as a model for pragmatic cooperation while encouraging a more active, transparent Chinese international security presence.

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### **An Emerging Global Navy**

Through this large-scale, long-term operation, China’s Navy has incrementally accrued know-how and lessons that it could not have gained otherwise. Moreover, with impressive speed and resourcefulness, it has implemented them widely, and thereby realized operational and procedural improvements. For instance, the PLAN has progressively adopted a foreign port-based refueling structure based on the needs of its task force ships. Similarly, China’s anti-piracy flotillas have adopted escort procedures and formations based on mission-specific details rather than following uniform models. ONI recognizes this transition in its latest unclassified report: “During the past decade, requirements for diversified missions and far seas operations have stimulated an operational shift and have catalyzed the acquisition of multi-mission platforms capable of improved sustainability and self-defense in blue water.



Most of the PLA(N)'s new acquisitions are suited for both near seas and far seas missions."<sup>276</sup>

Moreover, as a result of anti-piracy operations, the PLAN is carving out a unique role in Chinese diplomacy. Chinese anti-piracy warships increasingly work with other navies and call on foreign ports for resupply and exchanges. Such international interaction burnishes China's image as a great power stakeholder, and offers valuable learning opportunities, including exposure to international best practices. And, the Gulf of Aden has become a springboard for greater Chinese involvement in international security. Prominent examples include the 7<sup>th</sup> task force's symbolic participation in the 2011 Libya evacuation,<sup>277</sup> the 16<sup>th</sup> task force's 2013–14 escorts of foreign vessels transporting Syrian chemical weapons to be destroyed,<sup>278</sup> the 17<sup>th</sup> task force's 2014 participation in the

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<sup>276</sup> *The PLA Navy: New Capabilities and Missions for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Suitland, MD: Office of Naval Intelligence, 2015), p. 8.

<sup>277</sup> The 7<sup>th</sup> task force's guided-missile frigate (FFG) *Xuzhou* was sent to symbolically escort chartered Greek vessels transporting some of the 35,000 Chinese citizens evacuated from civil war-torn Libya. "Greek Ship Docks at Crete with Evacuatees from Libya," *People's Daily Online*, March 3, 2011, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90776/90883/7306359.html>.

<sup>278</sup> The 16<sup>th</sup> task force's FFG *Yancheng* provided escorts beginning December 31, 2013 before being relieved on March 8, 2014 by the separately dispatched FFG *Huangshan*. Guo Renjie, ed., "Chinese Navy Wraps Up Escort Mission for Syria's Chemical Weapons," *China Military Online*, June 25, 2014, [http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2014-06/25/content\\_6010867.htm](http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2014-06/25/content_6010867.htm); Zhou Wa, "Warships to Help Dispose of Syrian Chemical Weapons," *China Daily*, December 26, 2013, [http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/epaper/2013-12/26/content\\_17198885.htm](http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/epaper/2013-12/26/content_17198885.htm).

unsuccessful search for Malaysian Airlines (MH) Flight 370 and the 19<sup>th</sup> task force's evacuation of citizens from Yemen in 2015.<sup>279</sup> Given that, to date, similar to the behavior of most states, many of China's major military, noncombatant and operational contributions to international security have occurred in areas deemed important to Chinese national security, in the future onlookers might expect China to assume more roles in peripheral regions, as well.<sup>280</sup> As China becomes increasingly maritime in orientation, and broadens its strict definition of its national interests, the PLAN may also have an increasing role in providing security interest protection.

Looking back, then, China's six-plus-year Gulf of Aden mission demarcates its irreversible entrance into international security as a meaningful, all-around actor. With success comes heightened expectations, and as a result of its significant contributions to security off Somalia, China will increasingly be called on to punch at a heavyweight level in the maritime and global commons. So long as Beijing embraces this more active role with transparent, progressive behavior, both China and the international community should welcome a greater role for China.

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<sup>279</sup> All three 17<sup>th</sup> task force vessels, en route to the Gulf of Aden were diverted to participate. “圆满完成护航、访问、联合演习及搜救马航 MH370 失联航班任务 海军第十七批护航编队凯旋” [The 17<sup>th</sup> Naval Escort Task Force's Triumphant Return: Successful Completion of Escorts, Visits, Joint Exercises and Joining in Search and Rescue Efforts for the Lost Malaysian Airlines Flight 370], *解放军报* [Liberation Army Daily], October 23, 2014, [http://world.gmw.cn/newspaper/2014-10/23/content\\_101595642.htm](http://world.gmw.cn/newspaper/2014-10/23/content_101595642.htm).

<sup>280</sup> Philippe D. Rogers, “China and United Nations Peacekeeping Operations in Africa,” *Naval War College Review*, Vol. 60, No. 2 (Spring 2007), pp. 73-93.

In 2013, Zhang Jing of the PLA NDU, who has served on an anti-piracy escort task force, stressed the broader implications of what by then had been five-plus years of escorts for China's international influence:

Escort task forces have always placed the mother country and people's interests first, carrying on the fine traditions of extreme hardiness, being very able to fight [and] extreme dedication; taking peace, openness, cooperation and harmony as foundational concepts; constantly exploring innovation, overcoming difficulties and fulfilling missions; [and] creating fine accomplishments.<sup>281</sup>

Beijing itself has sent decidedly mixed signals about the extent to, and way in, which it seeks a more direct leadership role in future responses to maritime piracy and similar nontraditional security threats.<sup>282</sup> Practically speaking, assuming anti-piracy leadership would probably require the PLAN to advance the command and control (C2) abilities needed to manage multilateral efforts. These are prerequisites for integrating more closely with, and even exercising some degree of leadership over, other nations' ships.

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<sup>281</sup> 张京 [Zhang Jing], “护航展示中国国际影响力” [The Escort Shows China's International Influence], 护航 5 年特别策划 新闻会客厅 [Five Year Escort Special Column News Reception Room], *Navy Today*, No. 243 (December 2013), pp. 26-29.

<sup>282</sup> “China to Lead SHADE's Anti-piracy Patrols off Somalia,” China Defense Blog, January 28, 2010, [china-defense.blogspot.com/](http://china-defense.blogspot.com/); Zhang Haizhou, “Navies Agree on ‘Set Areas’ for Somali Patrols,” *China Daily*, January 30, 2010, [www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2010-01/30/content\\_9401589.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2010-01/30/content_9401589.htm).

For now, Beijing is probably content with its important position without subordination among navies in the Gulf of Aden. It is able to work together with, but not under the command of, Western multilateral naval forces. In other words, in terms of 21<sup>st</sup>-century international maritime security, the Gulf of Aden mission is slowly allowing the PLAN to “find its place in the sun.” It can be risky and disruptive for a nation to attempt this. But in the broad waters of the global maritime commons, there is plenty of room and responsibility for a rising navy to come into its own if it focuses on providing public goods that should be welcomed by all.

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