

Parallel Progress, Positive Potential: Sino-American Cooperation to Further Sea Lane Security in the Gulf of Aden

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This article reflects solely the authors' personal views, and not the policies or estimates of the U.S. Navy or any other organization of the U.S. Government.

Anti-piracy efforts in the Gulf of Aden represent a successful example of international cooperation to secure sea lines of communication (SLOC), which involves cooperation between the U.S. and China and with the navies of many other nations. What are the strengths and weaknesses of U.S. and Chinese naval cooperation in the fight against piracy, and what lessons does each nation's experience in the Gulf of Aden offer for future Sino-American joint efforts to safeguard SLOCs in other maritime regions? This article (1) introduces piracy as a shared non-traditional maritime security threat, (2) surveys PLAN anti-piracy operations and Sino-

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American approaches, (3) examines the nature of U.S.-China anti-piracy cooperation to date, (4) discusses lessons offered by the Gulf of Aden case for future U.S.-China maritime commons governance, and (5) offers larger principles to guide bilateral cooperation.

This article reaches the following principal conclusions:

- Both the U.S. and China rely on secure SLOCs to an unusual degree. China's reliance is rising with particular rapidity.
- Anti-piracy offers the U.S. and China an unusually promising venue for cooperation thanks to its apolitical nature and the shared threat.
- Cooperation has reduced piracy significantly in the Gulf of Aden, but it is rising elsewhere, particularly in the Gulf of Guinea.
- China remains an independent deployer, working cautiously in parallel with other partner navies in the Gulf of Aden. Nevertheless, its contributions are already significant.
- Shared Awareness and De-Confliction (SHADE) remains the key coordination mechanism in which the U.S. and Chinese navies participate. They also have bilateral visits, information exchanges, and exercises — though these have been modest to date and there is considerable room for increase.
- Joint exercises in the Gulf of Aden from August 24-25 2013 featured destroyer *USS Mason* and Chinese missile destroyer *Harbin*, as well as helicopters and Special Forces attached to both warships.
- The operations can help pave the way for the PLAN's first-ever participation in the 2014 the Rim of the Pacific Exercise (RIMPAC).
- Given the idiosyncratic nature of piracy in different areas, it is difficult to apply tactics and operational know-how directly across regions—though the Gulf of Guinea is far more similar to the Gulf of Aden than the South China Sea.
- Perhaps the Gulf of Aden operations' most tangible lesson for both sides is the importance of identifying common interests and challenges, and maintaining constant dialogues accordingly.

I. INTRODUCTION: THREATS TO THE MARITIME COMMONS: IN THE SAME BOAT

The United States, China and other states in international society increasingly face difficult non-traditional maritime security challenges in the 21st century. Contemporary piracy in particular has emerged as both the most severe threat to international SLOC stability and as an example of how states can successfully apply complementary approaches to secure the global commons. A large reason for this success is due to the fact that despite the existence of deep strategic mistrust between states such as the U.S. and China, non-traditional security threats like piracy are apolitical. They impose similar economic, political and strategic costs to every state commensurate with its dependence on international maritime commerce in a given region. The undeniable commonality of this challenge is precisely why the U.S. and China are truly in the same boat when it comes to fighting piracy.

Economically, piracy incurs direct and indirect costs on all states dependent on maritime trade. The former can be in the form of hostage ransoms or stolen cargo, while indirect costs include but are not limited to expenses associated with public and private security forces, commercial vessel re-routing, pirate insurance, and criminal prosecution. Four-fifths of global trade is in the form of maritime commerce, much of which must transit vulnerable SLOC. The U.S. has the world's largest economy and has relied heavily on stable maritime shipping of vital energy and material resources for decades. As the world's second largest economy by any measure and an emerging maritime power, China relies on just five strategic SLOCs for nearly 90% of its maritime trade, none more important than the Strait of Malacca — through which 80% of Chinese oil imports pass.¹ Currently, China imports 60-62% of its total crude oil needs, roughly 90% of which comes by sea; no amount of overland pipeline construction appears likely to reduce this reliance.² China's dependence on foreign oil imports will likely rise substantially over the next twenty years; the costs of potential SLOC disruptions would increase commensurately.

Other than concrete economic incentives, both Washington and Beijing weigh the political costs and benefits of anti-piracy

deployments carefully. The U.S. has long been a provider of security assets in the Gulf of Aden and surrounding maritime and continental regions, and its mature presence carries an expectation of leadership with regard to regional security affairs. For China, internal and external political incentives have driven its sustained Gulf of Aden anti-piracy presence. Domestic audiences expect China to adequately protect Chinese citizens and property outside of China as the nation's "going out" policy manifests in the maritime domain.³ Internationally, the PLAN's anti-piracy missions demonstrate China's willingness and ability to provide more public security goods commensurate with China's aspirations to become a world power. Effective instances of cooperation also help mitigate suspicions that a larger Chinese footprint in international security affairs might threaten to undermine global governance mechanisms established decades ago.

Piracy is a volatile industry. Pirate activities in and around the Gulf of Aden have produced the greatest threats to SLOC stability for much of the 21st century, but it is useful to survey the latest trends in global pirate attacks at the time of this workshop. For example, Somali piracy plummeted during 2012 and 2013 from its peak levels in 2010, largely because of coordinated naval operations in the region. Meanwhile, pirate attacks continue to subtly trend upward in less-governed maritime regions in which piracy threats were too small to attract substantial coordinated international responses in recent years. According to the International Maritime Bureau (IMB), pirate attacks totaled 177 in 2012, amounting to less than 40% of 2010 levels. The Gulf of Aden experienced just eight pirate attacks during

the first six months of 2013, and only two successful hijackings were recorded. In contrast, there were 31 attacks in the Gulf of Guinea during the same period.⁴ These major shifts in the global piracy industry increasingly alter the maritime security calculus for states such as the U.S. and China which rely disproportionately on international SLOC.

The rise of modern piracy over the last twenty years has presented the U.S. and

The rise of modern piracy has presented the U.S. and China with an unprecedented opportunity to foster sustained military-to-military cooperation.

China, as well as other maritime partners, with an unprecedented opportunity to foster sustained military-to-military cooperation among Western and non-Western states. How has each party performed to date and what aspects of anti-piracy cooperation can be enhanced and applied to future instances of non-traditional security governance in the maritime commons? Analysis of Sino-American cooperation in the Gulf of Aden to date suggests that non-traditional maritime security cooperation, especially in the Far Seas (远海), can continue to provide useful maritime consensus building and military dialogue between the U.S. and China despite protracted disagreement concerning Near Seas (近海) issues. Future non-traditional security missions can help keep the balance in the U.S.-China military relationship, and both nations' navies are well-positioned to play the lead role in this balancing act.

II. PLAN ANTI-PIRACY OPERATIONS AND SINO-AMERICAN APPROACHES

PLAN anti-piracy operations are one component within a larger portfolio of Chinese Far Seas naval exposure that has recently included international voyages by vessels such as *Peace Ark*, *Haixun* and *Zheng He*. Unlike these international naval activities, however, the Gulf of Aden operations represent the first time in modern history that the PLAN has sent naval forces overseas for a “regularized” (常态化), multi-year mission of functional rather than representational nature. PLAN anti-piracy escort taskforces have escorted nearly 5,500 Chinese- and foreign-flagged commercial vessels, including vessels transporting UN World Food Program (WFP) supplies, over five years since December 2008 between over 600 escort missions.⁵ Yang Yujun, spokesman of the Ministry of National Defense, declared in November 2012 that the UN had granted China authorization to extend its anti-piracy escort operations through November 2013.⁶

The U.S.-China dimension of Gulf of Aden anti-piracy is critical given the unprecedented nature of maritime cooperation between the two countries there despite significant strategic friction in the Near Seas. Yet it is only one dimension of each state's international

cooperation in the region. The U.S., for example, commands Combined Task Force (CTF)-151, a multinational force that patrols the Gulf of Aden and nearby portions of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and also co-chairs Shared Awareness and De-Confliction (SHADE), a voluntary anti-piracy coordination mechanism. The U.S. Navy also works with NATO as well as various bilateral partners in the region to combat piracy. Meanwhile, PLAN anti-piracy taskforces conduct a multitude of bilateral multilateral exchanges and cooperation exercises with other states and regularly dock in littoral states to replenish ships and conduct diplomatic visits. For China, diplomatic exposure for the PLAN in Far Seas operations such as anti-piracy represent fundamental shifts in China's military diplomacy, which consisted of inviting a handful of states to watch otherwise-closed Chinese military exercises in previous decades.⁷

Exhibit 1(below) demonstrates one aspect of the comprehensive approach of the PLAN and lists various in-port visits made by Chinese anti-piracy deployments over the past five years.

Exhibit 1: Selected International Port Visits by PLAN Anti-Piracy Forces

<p>ALGERIA Algiers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • April 2-5, 2013, Friendly Visit 	<p>KUWAIT Shuwaikh</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • November 27-December 1, 2011, Friendly Visit 	<p>QATAR Doha</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • August 2-7, 2011, Friendly Visit
<p>AUSTRALIA Sydney</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • December 18-22, 2012, Friendly Visit 	<p>MALAYSIA Port Klang</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • December 6, 2009, Friendly Visit 	<p>ROMANIA Constanta</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • July 31-August 3, 2012, Friendly Visit
<p>BAHRAIN Al Manamah</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • December 9-13, 2010, Friendly Visit 	<p>MALTA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • March 26-30, 2013, Friendly Visit 	<p>SAUDI ARABIA Jiddah</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • November 27-31, 2010, Friendly Visit
<p>BULGARIA Varna</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • August 6-10, 2012, Friendly Visit 	<p>MOROCCO Casablanca</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • April 9-13, 2013, Friendly Visit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • September 3, 2011, Replenish/Overhaul
<p>BURMA Rangoon</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • August 29-September 2, 2010, Friendly Visit 	<p>MOZAMBIQUE Maputo</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • March 29-April 2, 2012, Friendly Visit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • June 17, 2012, Replenish/Overhaul
	<p>OMAN Muscat</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • December 1-8, 2011, Friendly Visit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • January 1-6, 2013, Replenish/Overhaul
	<p>Salalah</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • June 21-July 1, 2009, Replenish/Overhaul 	

<p>DJIBOUTI Djibouti</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 <p>EGYPT Alexandria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • July 26-30, 2010, Friendly Visit <p>FRANCE Toulon</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • April 23-27, 2013, Friendly Visit <p>GREECE Crete</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • March 7, 2011, Replenishment/ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 <p>PAKISTAN Karachi</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 <p>PHILIPPINES Manilla</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • April 13-17, 2010, Friendly Visit <p>PORTUGAL Lisbon</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • April 15-19, 2013, Friendly Visit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • April 25-28, 2013, Replenish/Overhaul <p>SEYCHELLES Port of Victoria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • April 14, 2011, Friendly Visit • June 16-20, 2013, Friendly Visit <p>SINGAPORE Changi</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • September 5-7, 2010, Replenish/Overhaul and Joint Drills • December 18-20, 2011, Replenish/Overhaul and Friendly Visit <p>SOUTH AFRICA Durban</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • April 4-8, 2011, Friendly Visit <p>TANZANIA Dar es Salaam</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • March 26-30, 2011, Joint Drills and Friendly Visit <p>SRI LANKA Colombo</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • January 5-7, 2010, Friendly Visit • December 7-12, 2010, Friendly Visit <p>THAILAND Sattahip</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • August 16-21, 2011, Joint Drills and Friendly Visit • April 21-25, 2012, Friendly Visit
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<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Overhaul <p>Piraeus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• August 9-13, 2013, Friendly Visit <p>INDIA</p> <p>Cochin</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• August 8, 2009, Friendly Visit <p>ISRAEL</p> <p>Haifa</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• August 14-17, 2012, Friendly Visit <p>ITALY</p> <p>Taranto</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• August 2-7, 2010, Joint Drills and Friendly Visit		<p>TURKEY</p> <p>Istanbul</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• August 5-8, 2012, Friendly Visit <p>UKRAINE</p> <p>Sevastopol</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• July 31-August 3, 2012, Friendly Visit <p>UNITED ARAB EMIRATES</p> <p>Abu Dhabi</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• March 24-28, 2010, Friendly Visit <p>VIETNAM</p> <p>Ho Chi Minh City</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• January 13, 2013, Friendly Visit <p>YEMEN</p> <p>Aden</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• February 21, 2009, Replenish/Overhaul• April 25, 2009, Replenish/Overhaul• July 23, 2009, Replenish/Overhaul• September 28, 2009, Replenish/Overhaul• February 5, 2010, Replenish/Overhaul• May 16, 2010, Replenish/Overhaul• July 26, 2010, Replenish/Overhaul• October 1, 2010, Replenish/Overhaul
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Thus both the U.S. and China pursue broad portfolios of international anti-piracy cooperation that are important to consider when discussing bilateral U.S.-China anti-piracy collaboration. Additionally, it is worth reviewing the nature and scope of the PLAN's anti-piracy operations since they differ considerably from patrol-centric, multilateral U.S. operations. China's rules of engagement vis-à-vis Far Seas anti-piracy are outlined below.

All fifteen of the PLAN's anti-piracy taskforces have been underpinned by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), specifically resolutions 1816, 1838, 1846 and 1851.⁸ China also secured explicit invitation from Somalia's ambassador to China. The PLAN has incrementally streamlined and adapted its anti-piracy operations upon this legal framework. While Chinese escorts were initially limited to protecting commercial vessels flagged to mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong, China eventually began providing safe passage for foreign-flagged vessels, and to date nearly 60% of all escorted vessels have been foreign. The nature of PLAN engagement with suspected pirates also merits attention. In 2009 China initially proposed dividing the Gulf of Aden into zones for which each navy would hold jurisdiction over and responsibility for, though this approach was never adopted.⁹ PLAN forces have operated in Somali waters and have even briefly landed on Somali shores; however, China's anti-piracy forces are extremely wary of the potential legal issues or precedents accompanying more aggressive tactics. Upon the initial deployment in December 2008, 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."¹⁰

Perhaps most germane in the context of U.S.-China cooperation, it is important to note that the PLAN is one of several "independent" providers of anti-piracy assets in the Gulf of Aden. While majority of international navies contributing to the fight against Somali piracy do so under the aegis of multilateral mechanisms, China, India, Japan, Malaysia, Russia and other independent

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forces operate primarily on a unilateral basis rather than under the command of a multinational anti-piracy force such as CTF-151, NATO Operation Open Shield (OOS), or EU NAVFOR. Known as “The Three Forces,” the primary multilateral anti-piracy mechanisms in the region include Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) Combined Task Force (CTF)-151 led by the U.S., North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)-led Operation Ocean Shield (OOS; previously Operation Allied Protector), and European Union (EU)-commanded NAVFOR (Operation Atalanta). Collectively these three groups place an average of nine naval vessels in the Gulf of Aden average over 90 maritime patrol and reconnaissance aircraft (MPRA) sorties every month and have approximately nine ships on active duty in the region at a given time.¹¹

China’s status as an independent operator is apparently driven by a multitude of factors. For example, it allows the PLAN to conduct its preferred method of anti-piracy operations: relatively low-risk escort operations that are designed at deterring rather than searching proactively for pirates. It also offers China an independent identity as a provider of maritime public goods rather than another state operating directly under Western-centric security mechanisms. Another element deals with potential frictions that would arise should China desire to operate directly under a Western-commanded mechanism, such as information sharing networks and technology theft.

Its independent approach notwithstanding, China’s relatively-cautious tactics over the past five years have not precluded meaningful contributions to Gulf of Aden security. Nor have they prevented progressive coordination between China and other anti-piracy maritime forces in the region such as those of the U.S. China has been “ready to exchange information and cooperate with the warships of other countries in fighting Somalian pirates” since its inaugural deployment in 2008.¹² Then-deployment commander Admiral Du Jingcheng remarked that the PLAN would “not accept the command of other countries or regional organizations,” but was eager to “facilitate exchanges of information with escort naval vessels from other countries.”¹³ Since Du’s remarks, the PLAN has coordinated information with over twenty nations including the U.S.¹⁴ The PLAN has, in the words of Li Faxin, established “High-

Trust Partner Relations” (高度信任的伙伴关系) with relevant nations operating in the Gulf of Aden.¹⁵

III. NATURE AND SCOPE OF U.S.-CHINA COOPERATION IN THE GULF OF ADEN

U.S.-China anti-piracy cooperation has benefited immensely from the existence of a low-sensitivity, flexible platform that ensures efficiency gains and mutual benefit. Shared Awareness and Deconfliction (SHADE), a voluntary multi-state anti-piracy information sharing mechanism co-chaired by representatives of “The Three Forces,” has served as a coordinator for diverse multinational and independent sources of anti-piracy assets, including those of the U.S. and China. Quarterly SHADE meetings are held in Bahrain and regularly host naval and industry leaders from various states. Willingness on the part of independent navies, China’s in particular, to synchronize their anti-piracy operations with Western forces within the SHADE mechanism is an historic achievement for 21st-century maritime commons governance. China was denied SHADE chairmanship in 2009 but has still actively coordinated its anti-piracy escorts with other SHADE members. For example, China participates in SHADE’s Convoy Coordination Working Group (CCWG) and therein coordinates its monthly escort schedules with other independent escorters including ROK, India and Japan.¹⁶

SHADE is controlled by Western navies. However, its voluntary, multilateral and democratic nature may attract independent providers like China who can contribute at will, whereas other multilateral forces such as CTF-151 are commanded by the U.S. and impose binding requirements. Given likely security barriers to more direct integration between China and traditional navies for the time being, SHADE has emerged as an innovative model for integrating Western and non-Western security assets in a period of uncertainty over how these two camps will interact and co-exist in the global commons. Signs of cooperation are plentiful. For example, the PLAN recently sent anti-piracy forces south of the Bab el-Mandeb to help fill gaps in patrol left by Western forces.¹⁷ Similarly, in July 2013 *Harbin* of the 14th escort taskforce voluntarily escorted

MV *Princess K*, a UN humanitarian relief ship, between the south Red Sea and northern Horn of Africa. It eventually relayed escort duties to EU NAVFORFOR ship *ITS Zeffro*.¹⁸ The PLAN has also previously assigned a PLAN surface vessel to help monitor the internationally recommended transit corridor (IRTC) jointly with CTF-151 forces, and has escorted UN World Food Programme (WFP) vessels on multiple occasions.¹⁹ Similarly, on November 22, 2010, the *USNS Lewis and Clark* and *USS Winston Churchill* aided the PLAN in assisting distressed ship *Taiankou*. These actions suggest that the PLAN is emerging as a force for pursuing the concept of “comprehensive security” creatively with other states.²⁰

China contributes to anti-piracy outside of its independent escorts and the SHADE mechanism. The PLAN visits and hosts other naval taskforces including the commanders of CTF-151, NATO and EU NAVFOR while in the Gulf of Aden. An article in *Modern Navy* from 2010 aptly summarized the PLAN’s basic approach to international anti-piracy cooperation: “While insisting on ‘focusing on self’ [以我为主] [when] conducting escorts, China’s navy [also] is actively expanding international maritime military exchanges and cooperation, [and] gradually establishing and exploring escort methods and mechanisms with relevant countries.”²¹

Recent positive developments notwithstanding, there are definite areas in which U.S.-China anti-piracy cooperation could be improved in the Gulf of Aden.

Recent positive developments notwithstanding, there are definite areas in which U.S.-China anti-piracy cooperation could be improved in the Gulf of Aden. For instance, the frequency and content of commander-level exchanges could be enhanced. **Exhibit 2** (below) surveys the rough frequency of PLAN task force exchanges with traditional forces in the region. It documents that while U.S.- and Chinese-commanded anti-piracy forces meet regularly in the Far Seas,

direct contact between U.S. and Chinese naval officials remains limited. One reason is that CTF-151 is usually commanded by non-U.S. personnel. The table also shows that other than the two

unprecedented joint anti-piracy exercises, the bulk of official U.S.-China anti-piracy discussions occurring at sea and its each nation's respective capitals are at the highest levels of military and civil administration. Given the high volume of crewmen and special forces deployed to the Gulf of Aden by both sides over the past five years, lower-level exchanges should be more commonplace.

Exhibit 2: Selected Commander-Level Exchanges Between PLAN and Multilateral Anti-Piracy Navies in Gulf of Aden²²

Date	Counterpart	Activity
November 2009	CTF-151	Hosted CTF-151 Commander aboard PLAN vessel
May 2011	CTF-151	Hosted CTF-151 Commander aboard PLAN vessel
July 2012	CTF-151	Hosted CTF-151 Commander aboard PLAN vessel
May 2013	CTF-151	Hosted CTF-151 Commander aboard PLAN vessel
January 2010	NATO	Hosted NATO anti-piracy Commander aboard PLAN vessel
January 2011	NATO	Hosted and visited NATO anti-piracy Commander
March 2011	NATO	Visited NATO anti-piracy Commander on counterpart ship
January 2012	NATO	Hosted and visited NATO anti-piracy Commander
April 2012	NATO	Met with counterpart officials
July 2012	NATO	Hosted NATO anti-piracy Commander aboard PLAN vessel
August 2012	NATO	Visited NATO anti-piracy Commander on counterpart ship
January 2013	NATO	Visited NATO anti-piracy Commander on counterpart ship
February 2013	NATO	Hosted NATO anti-piracy Commander aboard PLAN vessel
April 2013	NATO	Hosted NATO anti-piracy Commander aboard PLAN vessel
November 2009	EU NAVFOR	Met with counterpart officials
February 2011	EU NAVFOR	Visited EU NAVFOR Commander on counterpart ship
June 2011	EU NAVFOR	Hosted EU NAVFOR Commander aboard PLAN vessel
July 2012	EU NAVFOR	Visited EU NAVFOR Commander on counterpart ship
November 2012	EU NAVFOR	Hosted EU NAVFOR Commander aboard PLAN vessel
July 2013	EU NAVFOR	Visited EU NAVFOR Commander on counterpart ship

Moreover, working with the U.S. is only one part in China's international cooperation efforts on fighting piracy. China hosted naval representatives from international escort symposium during February 24-25, 2012 in Nanjing.²³ According to China's 2013 Defense White Paper "The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces,"²⁴ China has already, in addition to the U.S., conducted joint anti-piracy drills with the naval ships of the Republic of Korea (ROK), Pakistan and Russia. Similarly, Chinese Defense Minister Chang Wanquan stressed anti-piracy cooperation with Europe in April 2013 when Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the European Union (EU) for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, visited Beijing. A China Military Online article wrote, "Chang Wanquan said that although it is not long since the China-EU defense and security cooperation came into birth, the cooperation has developed quickly. Both sides have maintained smooth development in high-level reciprocal visits, policy dialogue and personnel training and made fruitful cooperation in anti-piracy escort and patrol."²⁵ Both the U.S. and China should certainly welcome multilateral cooperation in all forms against piracy. Arguably, however, the U.S. and China should foster a more central collaborative partnership against maritime piracy that can help lay authoritative foundations for dealing with future non-traditional security threats to the maritime commons and SLOC.

IV. LESSONS FOR FUTURE U.S.-CHINA NON-TRADITIONAL MARITIME SECURITY COLLABORATION

The Gulf of Aden operations' most tangible lesson for both sides is the importance of identifying common interests and challenges, and maintaining constant dialogues accordingly.

How can both sides work together more effectively to secure the world's SLOCs? Each region and individual threat imposes unique challenges on the U.S., China and other nations that require innovative solutions. Perhaps the Gulf of Aden operations' most tangible lesson for both sides is the

importance of identifying common interests and challenges, and maintaining constant dialogues accordingly. Anti-piracy is one of many ongoing initiatives that have the potential to bolster U.S.-China military ties. Indeed, the July 2013 round of the U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue concluded with over 90 “strategic track outcomes.”²⁶ And while anti-piracy cooperation is merely one component of a much larger U.S.-China military relationship, piracy’s persistence as a universal threat to maritime security has resulted in both sides placing considerable emphasis on working together to eradicate it.

Accordingly, themes of anti-piracy and non-traditional security cooperation have frequently appeared in recent U.S.-China military dialogues. More recently, both sides have made efforts to enhance their operational anti-piracy relationship. In September 2012 guided missile frigate *Yiyang* of the 12th PLAN escort taskforce and U.S. Navy missile destroyer *USS Winston Churchill* jointly participated in a bilateral anti-piracy exercise titled “Joint Boarding and Checking.”²⁷ During the exercise U.S. and Chinese naval personnel combined to form a mixed assault team which employed helicopters and skiffs to board a pirated commercial vessel, then providing cover for each other while capturing the suspected pirates.²⁸ This occurred after a scheduled joint anti-piracy exercise in 2011 was apparently canceled by China. Following the successful 2012 exercises, it was announced in April 2013 by a Chinese military spokesperson that China and the U.S. would conduct additional joint exercises in the Gulf of Aden during 2013.

These plans materialized in summer 2013, less than a year after the inaugural U.S.-China joint anti-piracy exercises in the Gulf of Aden. On August 23, 2013, U.S. and Chinese commanders met aboard U.S. missile destroyer *USS Mason* to exchange views and finalize plans for the joint exercise. *Xinhua* reported that both sides deployed missile equipped destroyers, supply ships and ship-based helicopters and special task forces to participate in the drill, suggesting that the joint exercises may be more significant in scale and complexity compared to the 2012 exercises.²⁹ Moreover, the August exercises reportedly centered around ten new tasks that emphasized the use of weapons and live-fire training, and is the

first instance that included Special Forces and aerial surveillance on maritime targets in night conditions.³⁰ The exercises were completed in August. The joint exercises occurred off the Yemeni coast from August 24-25, and featured U.S. destroyer *USS Mason* and Chinese missile destroyer *Harbin*, as well as helicopters and special forces attached to both warships.³¹ Similar to inaugural joint exercises in September 2012, the 2013 exercises involved onboard search and seizure drills, as well as a joint U.S.-China anti-piracy team. American and Chinese crewmen jointly boarded a Chinese oiler acting as a pirate vessel during a simulation that included hostages and emergency medical assistance.³² They also incorporated live fire and aviation operations. The operations are being viewed as an essential primer for 2014, when the PLAN will participate in U.S.-led RIMPAC exercises for the first time in history.

The anti-piracy exercises in August 2013 came amid a period of active U.S.-China military relationship building at the operational and discourse levels. Operationally, almost immediately before the joint anti-piracy drills in the Gulf of Aden, the PLAN dispatched the internationally experienced guided-missile destroyer *Qingdao*, missile frigate *Linyi* and supply ship *Hongzhehu*, as well as a 680-member crew and a helicopter, to a maritime region near Hawaii to conduct joint search and rescue drills with the U.S. Navy.³³ The fleet will then sail to Australian and New Zealand waters to participate in a multinational Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) naval exercise and international naval parade. Anti-piracy and broader maritime commons cooperation in 2013 has occurred amid increased dialogue between U.S. and Chinese military leaders, reflecting the niche role that anti-piracy and other non-traditional security challenges can play in providing both sides with opportunities for positive cooperation despite conflicts over core interests. Almost concurrent with the joint exercises, for example, Chinese National Defense Minister Chang Wanquan visited U.S. counterpart Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel in mid-August. This was after U.S. Pacific Fleet (PACFLT) Commander Admiral Cecil Haney met Central Military Commission Member Wu Shengli in May 2013 in Beijing, then visited South Sea Fleet (SSF) Commander Admiral Jiang Weilie



in June.³⁴ Earlier, in April 2013 PLA General Chief of Staff Fang Fenghui hosted counterpart U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Martin Dempsey, with both remarking on the importance of U.S.-China military contacts.³⁵ It is no coincidence that anti-piracy cooperation was emphasized during each of these high-level meetings: both sides recognize that non-traditional maritime security is one challenge that the U.S., China and world must face together. The Gulf of Aden experience has highlighted this reality.

How, then, might the U.S. and China draw lessons from the Gulf of Aden and apply them in future cases of anti-piracy or other non-traditional security operations designed to secure the world's SLOCs? It is difficult to directly apply tactics and operational know-how across regions given the idiosyncratic nature of piracy in different areas. For instance, much of the piracy in the South China Sea historically occurs in ports rather on the open ocean, unlike in the Gulf of Aden and Gulf of Guinea. Perhaps the greatest lesson for the U.S. and China is the need for both sides to work together creatively to find ways to secure SLOCs given unique features of each challenge and the environment in which it arises.

For example, the South China Sea remains a point of serious discussion among Chinese maritime planners despite experiencing low levels of piracy in recent years. In 2008 some even questioned the PLAN's Gulf of Aden deployment, wondering why maritime security resources were being deployed so far from China's shores. Professor Ma Xiaojun of the Central Party School's International Strategic Studies Institute stated at the time, "Another kind of objective is to do things in a sound and practical way, doing whatever we can according to our capability. If you truly have the capability to do long-term escort duty off the east coast of Africa, why do you not first subdue the South China Sea pirates? The international community, especially ASEAN, hopes more that China will make more effort to crack down on pirates in the South China Sea region. This possibility is more realistic."³⁶ While the scale of pirate attacks in these regions does not approach levels witnessed in recent years in the Gulf of Aden, the U.S. and China both recognize the volatility and unpredictability of non-traditional maritime security threats, and should consider options for



building on Gulf of Aden cooperation in future scenarios of pirate contingencies.

This is especially pertinent as China's global maritime commercial and strategic interests continue to expand. Presently, for instance, 80 percent of China's oil imports and 30 percent of its iron ore imports must transit SLOCs in the South China Sea and the Malacca Strait. While moderate supply diversification is allowing China to increasingly bypass these waterways by exploiting new supply channels such as pipelines in Burma, complete avoidance of vulnerable waterways such as the Strait of Malacca is unrealistic given the long delays and increase the costs of transportation and shipped materials imposed by alternatives.

The Gulf of Aden naval deployment shows that China has mature capabilities to respond to non-traditional maritime security threats with global range. Similarly, the logistical costs and challenges encountered by China during its Gulf of Aden missions demonstrate Beijing's staunch commitment to combatting piracy and other maritime threats in cases where overseas Chinese economic, political and human security is jeopardized. Most pirate-infested regions share a commonality that lies in weak response capability among littoral states in the region. In the future the U.S. and China will both be expected to make substantial contributions in other regions where local capacity is inadequate for securing the SLOCs.

The U.S. and China can achieve mutually beneficial outcomes in other pirate-infested regions without necessarily deploying naval forces as in the Gulf of Aden. As noted, a commonality among pirate-infested regions is the relative lack of capability among states in the region to eradicate the piracy problem without external intervention. Domestic instability onland is in fact often the root of piracy, as in the case of Somalia. Currently the U.S. Navy is engaged in anti-piracy capacity-building in other regions vulnerable to piracy such as the Gulf of Guinea, where economically motivated pirates are using increasingly merciless tactics to hijack vessels ranging from fishing trawlers to oil tankers. The Obangame Express joint anti-piracy exercises are led by the U.S. Naval Forces Africa (NAVAF) annually, and recently have involved European and African coastal states' participation in week-long exercises.⁵⁷

As in the case of the Gulf of Aden, joint capacity building and similar cooperation between the U.S. and China could help further strengthen international maritime commons governance capacity in the 21st century. Similarly, there are other regions — including the South China Sea — that hold potential for deeper U.S.-China non-traditional maritime security collaboration.

V. CONCLUSION

Ultimately, the most significant aspect of U.S.-China cooperation against piracy in the Gulf of Aden is not the considerable gains made in the immediate fight against piracy. Rather, it is the bricklaying that both sides have started with respect to building a foundational model for securing 21st-century SLOCs against non-traditional security threats. Modest but meaningful successes in anti-piracy cooperation can be extended into humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, counterterrorism, and peacekeeping missions, particularly in the maritime domain in years to come as the U.S. and China meet more frequently on the high seas. Unlike previous great maritime power relationships such as that of the U.S. and Soviet Union during the Cold War, non-traditional maritime security and its direct connection to SLOC security provide the U.S. and China with a vital opportunity to build maritime trust — an opportunity not to be missed.

Rather than attempting to duplicate Gulf of Aden tactics or operations, the U.S. and China can take several larger principles from their experience cooperating in the Gulf of Aden that can be applied to future efforts protecting SLOCs and the maritime commons, as well as their bilateral cooperation more broadly:

The most significant aspect of U.S.-China cooperation against piracy in the Gulf of Aden is that both sides have started with respect to building a foundational model for securing 21st-century SLOCs against non-traditional security threats.

1. *Pursue proportionality* — Building on the “responsible stakeholder concept,” the U.S. and China should bear responsibility for provision of international security “public goods” in proportion to the degree that each nation benefits from, and influences, the international system. This might be termed the “Spiderman Doctrine” — “with great power comes great responsibility,” so with increasing power and status comes increasing responsibility. Washington should welcome a greater Chinese leadership role in maritime security operations commensurate with its provision of collective security, and Beijing should support continuing U.S. leadership roles constructively in regions where Chinese capabilities are still nascent.

2. *Maintain reciprocity* — Both sides should be able to act with the expectation that good will efforts to enhance cooperation in maritime non-traditional security will be reciprocated by the other. This can help to avoid concerns that positive overtures will be exploited by the other side, as exemplified by American suspicions that a “new type of great power [naval] relations” is merely nebulous rhetoric with undertones of expectation that Washington yield to an ascendant Beijing and its principled positions.

3. *Transcend the “lowest common denominator, build on the possible”* — While each will act according to its own interests, the U.S. and China should at least demonstrate awareness of each other’s interests and positions concerning capabilities, norms, legal issues and other dimensions that undergird cooperation at sea. Based on this awareness, both sides should pursue creative avenues for pursuing collective security and achieving “cooperation while reserving differences” (合而不同). The most realistic approach is to proceed incrementally: from small initiatives to bigger initiatives, from non-traditional to traditional security, and from further from the Near Seas to closer to the Near Seas. Today, it is in the Far Seas and Far Oceans that the U.S. and Chinese navies can best cooperate. They should work to ensure that disagreements in the Near Seas do not sabotage cooperation further afield.

4. *Emphasize function over form* — The U.S. should welcome constructive Chinese contributions, without fixating on their form. Washington should welcome and show flexibility vis-à-vis



Chinese actions that are largely positive. The U.S. should anticipate China's hesitancy to simply integrate into Western-established security mechanisms (e.g., Combined Task Force/CTF-151) and look for ways to deepen cooperation incrementally through other mechanisms, such as Shared Awareness and Deconfliction (SHADE).

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