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China's Out of Area Operations

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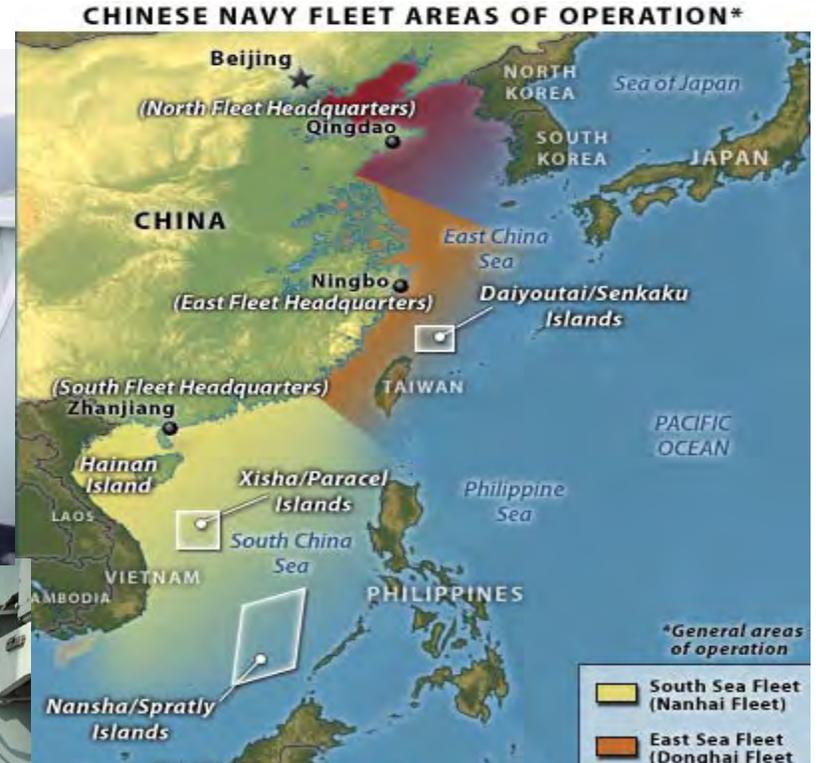
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Background





Key Questions

How competent is the PLA Navy in conducting out of area deployments?

- What obstacles and challenges does the PLAN still face?
- What possible solutions might the PLAN come up with?
- How long have they been doing this?
- What might be next for the PLAN?
- What does this mean for China as an emerging global military power?

What kind of Short-Term and Long-Term Trajectories can we expect from the PLA Navy?



Study Background

- Prompted by the Gulf of Aden deployment and other PLA Navy (PLAN) Out of Area operations
- Attempts to get at the strategic & operational significance of these deployments
- Undertaken primarily for OSD Policy, Joint Staff J-5, and PACOM
- Four parts:
 - case histories and trajectories ✓
 - anatomy of GoA deployment decision
 - examination of “The String of Pearls” concept
 - PLA force structure implications



What this study doesn't cover

- China's broader Maritime Strategy
- China's effectiveness in conducting a Joint Forcible Entry Operation vs. Taiwan
- China and A2AD
- China's maritime territorial disputes in SCS and ECS
- China's Out of Area U.N. Peacekeeping operations



Study Approach

- Examined history of PLA Navy out of area operations
 - Official history of the PLA Navy (当代中国海军)
 - Translated journal & newspaper articles going back 10 years
- Studied the out of area deployments of other militaries
- Noted the challenges common to all out of area ops
- Noted the potential solutions to these challenges
- Derived potential short- and long-term trajectories
 - Chinese (Navy and public) suggested solutions
 - Lessons from other military out of area operations
 - Assessed the likelihood that PLA/PRC would adopt suggested solutions
- Implications for U.S. policy



History of Out of Area Operations

- PLA Navy Out of Area operations are not new:
 - 1976 Surface ship blue water training (south pacific)
 - 1980 recovery of long-range test rocket
 - 1984 Antarctic expedition
 - 1985 first port visit to Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka
 - 1997 3 ship port visit to Hawaii, San Diego
 - 2002 global circumnavigation
 - 2005 Exercises with ASEAN navies
 - 2008-2010 3 ship Gulf of Aden deployments



Operational Patterns

- PLA Navy deployments have expanded incrementally
- Lack of capacity has led the PLAN to utilize the same, small number of surface combatants for deployments
- Out of Area deployments are calculated to maximize potential political benefits
- The Chinese tend to over prepare
 - Newest ships
 - They study the operation in minute detail
 - Highest ranking individuals are involved in detailed planning
 - Multi-Agency task forces organized to study & execute the out of area deployment



How well have the most recent Gulf of Aden deployments gone ?

- By all unclassified accounts the deployments have gone well
- Fifth task force left for Gulf of Aden in March 2010
- No major incidents or embarrassing events
- Several deployments to GoA, conducting hundreds of escort missions including foreign vessels
- Initial deployment task force stayed out to sea for over 100 days without a port call
- The Task Forces have cooperated to a limited extent with CTF-151
- Possibility that the PLA Navy may assume leadership of U.S.-EU counter-piracy coalition (SHADE)



But the PLAN has far to go

- Chinese accounts & subsequent commentaries note where the PLA Navy needs improvement:
 - Hard to maintain and repair the ships in the task force
 - Difficult to preserve and maintain fresh fruits and vegetables
 - Weapons systems did not entirely match the mission
 - A notable shortage of helicopters in the task force (only 2)
 - Materiel and armament supply cycle was too long
 - Difficult to access good & comprehensive medical care
 - Difficult to sustain a steady and robust pace for these deployments—
not enough ship capacity

Subsequent Chinese commentaries on the need for Chinese facilities highlighted the difficulties to PLAN Operating Forces



Other Military Out of Area Operations case histories

- U.S. Asiatic Squadron operations in the Pacific (mid- to-late 19th Century)
- Central/Southwest Pacific campaigns (1942-1945)
- Soviet out of area ops in Mediterranean and Indian Ocean (Cold War)
- Falkland War (1982)
- Grenada (1983)
- Libya Air Strikes (1986)
- Desert Shield/Desert Storm (1990/1)
- Operation Sea Angel (1991)—HA/DR to Cyclone devastated Bangladesh
- Operation Amaryllis (1994)—French NEO from Rwanda genocide
- Tsunami Disaster Relief efforts and Humanitarian Assistance ops



Continuum of out of area deployments

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	Stage 5
"Baby Steps"	Military Diplomacy	Non-Combatant Contingency Operations	Out of Area Low Intensity Conflict	Major Combat Operations
Surveillance	Show the Flag Ops	NEOs	Counter-Piracy Operations	Maritime Supremacy
Reconnaissance	Port Visits	HA/DR	Escort Operations	Carrier Operations
Training	Exercises with Other militaries	Maritime Peacekeeping	FONOPS	Out of Area ASW/ASUW/AAW
Experimentation		Other Support Missions	Maritime Intercept Operations	Out of Area JFEO

Challenges Common to all out of area operations

- Distance
- Duration
- Capacity
- Complexity of Coordination
- Hostile Environment

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- **Complexity of Coordination** Absence of home support communications infrastructure, forces spread out over a wider area & far from home
- **Hostile Environment** All of the above plus an enemy attempting to erode your capabilities or destroy your forces



Potential Solutions

Distance	Duration	Capacity	Complexity of Coordination	Hostile Environ
Access to neutral airfields	Extended (3 Year) deployments	Civilian/Merchant Fleet to supplement lift	SATCOM to participating ships	Security Detail for Non-Combat
Access to Neutral ports	Swap Crews, Not ships	Civilian Reserve Aircraft	Joint Command & Control Doctrine	Carrier Air for CAP
Establish Bases on Acquired territory	Medical Care Afloat	Prepositioned Equipment	LNOs serving on other staffs	Access to Neutral Air fields
Carrier Air/Take Your protection With you	Floating Supply bases	Access to neutral Ports/bases	Access to neutral facilities	Out of area ASW/ASUW
Prepositioned equipments	Access to neutral facilities			JFEO



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Possible Short-Term Trajectories

- To address China's more immediate out of area challenges, the Chinese will:
 - Get temporary access to facilities out of area
 - Increase the number of UNREP ships
 - Improve food preservation techniques
 - Expand surface combatant capacity
 - Improve intra-task force supply options
 - Provide more SATCOM assets for surface combatants



Possible Long-Term Trajectories

- To address China's Long-Term out of area challenges, the Chinese will:
 - Acquire, lease, get access to territory where its navy can more effectively operate out of;
 - Take their protection with them
 - Carrier ops, long-range ASW/ASUW, small scale amphib ops
 - Make use of merchant shipping and civilian assets as a supplement to military shortfalls
 - Use some version of a mobile supply platform
 - Comprehensive supply ship, supply squadrons
 - Enhance intra-task force lift
 - Helicopters, lighterage, landing craft
 - Expand the use of SATCOM for all deploying ships



Implications

PLAN still has some ways to go before it can operate effectively out of area;

- The PLAN is expanding incrementally and cautiously and taking few political risks;
- China has a long way to go before it reaches Global Military Power status
 - No network of facilities to maintain and repair its ships
- Chinese Out of Area ops make PLA Navy more lethal/more effective the closer it gets to home
 - The U.S. needs to ensure its alliances are robust
 - U.S. military presence in Asia as a hedge against an overconfident PRC
- U.S. is going to have to adjust to the reality that China is operating out of area & we have work out what that means when it comes down to:
 - Doing exercises
 - Working together on HA/DR
 - NEOs
 - Cooperation in Maritime Security