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## *China's Naval Policy Off The Coast Of Somalia*

International Participation, the Preservation of Strategic Interests, or Security?

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This work will try to analyse China's naval policy off the Somali coast. The main contribution this work will attempt to make is to offer evidence concerning whether China's anti-pirating policies in the Gulf of Aden are more for the benefit of the international community, China's own strategic interest (a political economy outlook), or diplomatic growth. This work may be important as it could contribute to our understanding of China's current foreign policy to a slightly better degree. This will be attempted in the first instance by analysing the literature concerning China's humanitarian policies in Africa to establish a sense of the literature on this subject. In the second instance, we will examine the official foreign policy stance provided to the international community by the current administration in China. And finally, in the third instance, we will comparatively analyse if the policy statement is logically compatible with the extant literature. The analytical structure used to do so is Charmaz's (2006) grounded theory methodology. This study shows that China's foreign naval policy off the coast of Somalia is probably a mix of humanitarian, economic, and international diplomatic goals.

**Keywords:** China, Humanitarian Aid, Naval Policy, Security, Political Economy, Somalia, Pirates, Diplomacy.

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# China's Naval Policy Off The Coast Of Somalia

## International Participation, the Preservation of Strategic Interests, or Security?

### Introduction

An argument stemming from an emerging scholar and friend, Antony Ou, posits that China's entrance into naval policing off the Somali coast is a historic event. He reasons this to be the case because this is one of the few times China has engaged its fleet in the sovereign waters of another state and that, at least on this occasion, it may be contrary to the PRC's usual non-intervention policy respecting the sovereignty of individual states.<sup>1</sup> We could argue that China's fleet is necessary in the Gulf of Aden because Somalia does not have a strong sovereign state. It could also be argued that the USA's navy is stretched too thin, that it is increasingly unpopular, and that this presents a void that China can fill.<sup>2</sup> All of the points in Ou's argument could be real. However, this only presents one dimension of a multi-dimensional scenario (which is not to the detriment of Ou's important points). It is argued that China is not engaging its navy simply to protect its trade routes or to fill security gaps created by a weakening or over-committed United States navy. It is probably doing so to also try and strengthen its position as an international power and to also realize its own goals for development in Africa out of humanitarian concerns.

To gain a robust understanding of these positions and to try and tease out which position is most likely the most correct, this article will try to meet Beck and Grande's (2010) call for the use of a cosmopolitan methodology in the social sciences. To keep true to this call, the literature drawn upon to formulate the first part of this article will come from a variety of languages (some might say discourses) on the subject of China's naval policy in the Gulf of Aden, off the Somali coast. It is hoped that by using literature not simply from the English language, we might gain perhaps a more legitimate sense of the situation: one that is perhaps less parochial and conforming

- 1 This argument is especially pertinent if we were to consider the entire history of mainland China's usage of its navy. The activity of China's navy in the "deep" or "blue" waters of the Indian and Pacific Oceans is significant because it is, to our present understanding, the first time this has ever occurred.
- 2 If we were to take a deeper look at the evidence concerning this deployment, we would see two contrasting arguments in the English literature: the first is that China stipulated in the United Nations Security Council that it would not veto policing off the coast of Somalia because this did not constitute a breach of sovereignty. The second, which appears to contradict the first, is a recent statement by a high-level official in the PLAN (People's Liberation Army Navy) addressing the need for Chinese naval bases *outside* of China. This would have significant security ramifications and may lead to countries near such places viewing this as a threat to their sovereignty. For more information see, inter alia, Kostecka (2011), Africa Research Bulletin (2008), Erickson (2008) as well as Nicoll and Delaney (2008).



to cosmopolitan theory.<sup>3</sup> The goal of this paper is to analyse the PRC's foreign policies concerning pirating off the coast of Somalia and whether this naval action is more for the benefit of the international community and is an act of humanitarianism, whether it is a purely strategic ploy to protect its sea-going trade routes, or if it is something else we might be missing such as a specific desire to bolster diplomatic relations or China's role as a global partner.<sup>4</sup>

The literature will be investigated using simplified Mandarin, English, French, Spanish and Russian research. To go further, I shall also attempt to maintain a balance of gender (as close to 50/50 as possible) in the evidence drawn upon as this is also arguably part of a cosmopolitan methodology. Russian and Mandarin were selected because it gives a geographic balance to the evidence and might help to keep any one regional parochialism at bay. Spanish and French were chosen because they are Eurocentric languages which might help to provide a broader argument than by simply using English literature. It is hoped that the effort put into using this form of a cosmopolitan methodology will provide results that are slightly more robust than using research from only Eurocentric or Chinese discourses on the subject.

It is perhaps common knowledge at this stage in the literature that China imports a certain degree (the figures vary almost from source to source as disclosure from the PRC is considered unreliable in English and French forums) of primary resources from Africa. These resources often travel overland to ports on the east coast of Africa and are then shipped directly to Chinese ports (see De Bod, 2008; Mputa, Giersing, Kaombwe, 2004; Keeling, 2007; Clark, Dollar and Micco, 2004; and DeCaro, 2005/6 for more information in English).<sup>5</sup> Should the goods be shipped to ports on the west coast of Africa the goods would have to round the southern cape, go through the Suez Canal, or go the longer way through the Panama Canal: this substantially delays the time imports arrive and when taking into account the canal options a portion of profit goes toward paying passage fees. This might help to explain why Chinese companies are seen to be rebuilding or building completely new rail and road infrastructure in central and western Africa (see Vi, 2004; Kéfi, 2006; Lupano and Sánchez, 2009; Anonymous, 2004; Bavoux, 2000; Dorier-Apprill and Domingo, 2004; Ta, Choo, and

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3 This methodology warrants further explanation. It could be argued that focusing on the evidence in one language would be sufficient to first uncover different arguments as to why China sent the PLAN to Somalia. These arguments, again within one language, could then be rigorously analysed to try to reason which argument is "more right." And this, if we were concerned with establishing a parochial argument would be true. What we are trying to do is to break out of this parochialism by trying to engage a variety of languages (even if they produce the same arguments) as this in the end shows that these arguments are "more right" because they come from a diversity of sources, ways of thinking and systems of knowledge. We can extend this methodology from geography to gender and argue that relying too heavily on one gender at the expense of another may have us missing important points. Even if arguments could, despite our efforts, in the end be shown to be exactly the same, by using a cosmopolitan methodology and taking greater pains to draw evidence in a conscientious and balanced manner we can reason our research to be more robust than it would be from simply drawing from one language such as English.

4 One reason was specifically left out of this article: that of China's possible intentions of global military domination. It is reasoned that this is the least likely probability because non-democratic militaristic domination is something increasingly unsustainable (not to mention illegitimate in this growing democratic world). What is more likely is an attempt to become the most dominant economic player but again that is fraught with difficulties and improbabilities as greater legitimacy and public control of markets is sought throughout this globe.

5 See Martner (1982), Calas (2006); Bennafla (2002), Frémont (2009) and Mogilevkin (2001) for non-English evidence.



Sum, 2000; Dollar, 2008; Woodburn et al, 2008; Zepp-Larouche, 2007; and Deitch, 2009, for more).<sup>6</sup>

However, this look might be overly critical. There is a certain degree of evidence showing that the PRC is trying to participate in international humanitarian projects solely for that reason. Hongwu (2007), Yuan (2000)<sup>7</sup>, Zhen (2008), Lei (2009),<sup>8</sup> China News (2010), and Zhan (2007) show this in Mandarin literature. We start to see, however, a slightly more critical tone from Lebedeva (2008), Nizamov (2009), and Koksharov (2006), which can be seen in this quote:

Саммит в Пекине уникален как для Китая, так и для Африки. С Черного континента в Пекин прибыли представители практически всех африканских государств, на которые приходится четверть голосов в ООН, значительное количество природных ресурсов и мирового населения. В то время как Запад очень избирательно подходит к политическим контактам с африканскими странами, Пекин показал свою готовность налаживать связи со всеми. Так, на китайский саммит были приглашены президент Судана Омар аль-Башир, которого США и Евросоюз обвиняют в организации геноцида в Дарфуре, а также президент Зимбабве Роберт Мугабе, являющийся персоной нон грата в большинстве развитых стран. Китай готов открыто обсуждать даже те темы, которые обычно обсуждаются за закрытыми дверями. Так, Египет и Китай обсуждали вопросы сотрудничества в области ядерных технологий. “Китай и Африка разделяют общие интересы и имеют общие потребности”, - поприветствовал гостей председатель КНР Ху Цзиньтао. Он заявил, что развитие связей с Африкой станет одним из приоритетов внешней политики Пекина. (Koksharov, 2006: 62)

The Summit in Beijing is unique for both China and Africa. The Dark Continent is being represented by members of almost every country from the continent in Beijing. This accounts for a quarter of the votes in the UN and a significant amount of natural resources and world population. While the West takes a very selective approach to its relations with African countries, Beijing has shown its interest to establish relations with all. We have seen that China invited Sudan's President Omar al-Bashir, which the US and EU both accused of having been responsible for organizing the genocide in Darfur, as well as Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe, who is a persona non grata in most countries. China is prepared to openly discuss topics usually reserved for closed doors. For example, Egypt and China discussed issues for cooperation in nuclear

6 Some of these sources look at China instead of Africa as their central subject. These are considered important because it is arguable that China practices heavy infrastructural investment within its own borders and surrounding regions for similar reasons as to why it develops transport infrastructure in Africa. For example, talk of the “new silk road” is emerging. This is a PRC led project concerning a major international railway on the Eurasian continent.

7 This source brings about a slight degree of concern as the author writes more than 30 individuals took part in an international aid program to the “distant, mysterious Africa.” Perhaps this periodical is rather provincial which might help to explain this form of rhetoric.

8 Lei's work is rather useful as a general introduction to the role of Chinese aid in Africa. From this author we learn that in 2006, Beijing held a China-Africa Cooperation Forum. It is believed that the results of this forum, in addition to China's historical relations with Africa, form the “Beijing Consensus” which provides an alternative to the “Washington Consensus.”



technology. “China and Africa share common interests and have common needs” is how President Hu Jintao greeted his African guests. He stated that the development of relations with Africa will become one of Beijing’s foreign policy priorities.

This brief description of the ambivalence in the literature foreshadows what is to come when discussing China’s naval policy (especially that there is an arguable lack of critical analysis within the Mandarin literature). But before engaging this central subject we need to go further into the literature to gain a sense of how and why China does humanitarian aid in Africa. Once we gain a more robust understanding of the possible reasons, we may proceed to looking at the PRC’s naval policies off the coast of Somalia.

### Chinese Aid to Africa: Positive Evidence

我的目标是分析中国对非洲援助的主要驱动力,我认为中国援助非洲的目的并非仅仅依赖于现实主义者提到的出于安全利益的考虑,也不是自由主义所看到的中国以这种方式实现共赢,抑或受到人道主义需要的引导,诸如国际形象与中国作为发展中国家的身份也影响到中国的援助政策…第三章中国对非洲援助的主要驱动力 许多主导发展援助的因素都已经在关于对外援助的著作中分析到,就中国来说,首先现实主义派别强辩中国对非洲援助最起决定性的因素是中国由于自身国家发展对非洲资源的渴求,中国经济增长同国家利益安全紧密相关,其次自由主义学者坚持人道主义需要及经济动机是中国对非洲援助的主要因素。 这些原因不足以说明中国对外援助的全部动因,诸如国家形象建设与中国作为发展中国家的身份也都影响了中国对非洲的援助。事实上,建设一个良好的国家形象已经成为中国治国方略中的一个重要组成部分,建设诸如负责任的大国、非洲的好朋友这样的国家形象已经影响到中国外交政策表现。区域因素影响到中国援助政策,中国仍旧是一个发展中国家的现实决定对外援助要基于南南合作的基础之上,中国援助政策具有这种援助方式的特性与基本原则。(Lei, 2009: 4)

My goal is to analyse China’s aid to Africa and what its main driving forces are. I think Chinese aid to Africa is not simply based on realist security interests, or the liberal perspective that China seeks a win-win situation [perhaps economically] with Africa, or that it is merely guided by humanitarian concerns...We see that two major driving forces for China’s aid to Africa are [1] that continent’s resources and [2] China’s abilities to realize its aspirations for African national development or that China has specific humanitarian programs linked with economic interests. However, these are not convincing enough. We should also consider China’s goal of constructing a national image of itself as a developing country. This goal of constructing a good image of the national government is part of responsibly managing a big country, of being a friend to Africa, which culminates in South-South relations and mutual assistance.

This quote gives us a sense that there are at least three positions we should be considering when regarding Chinese aid to Africa (this is relevant to its naval policies in the Gulf of Aden). The first concerns its security interests; the second its economic



interests; and the third its diplomatic interests. At this point in the literature review, it appears that the Mandarin literature is more in support of the latter: that the PRC is seeking to improve its image internationally through diplomatic and humanitarian relations. When we look into Russian, Spanish, French and English literature, the emphasis is more on security, economics, and trying to find the wizard behind the curtain of Chinese aid. However, there are a number of pieces in the literature that are casting these three areas in an increasingly positive light.

Rotberg (2008), Defraigne and Belligoli (2010), Andersen (2008), Davies et al (2008), Tjønneland et al (2006) and Rafferty (2011) argue, in English, that there is something to be said about the Beijing Consensus. It is, of course, difficult to gain an argument in this regard that is not ambivalent. Andersen, for example, argues that although the “substantial and growing number of Chinese companies present providing goods and services especially within construction is...a positive thing” (Andersen, 2008: 85) most of this work is done with Chinese businesses. This has the effect of catching the fish for Africans, but not teaching them how to catch it themselves which is an argument widely made in the critical literature. Andersen carries on with his argument that the alternative path to attracting investments provided by China is a good one as it promotes the abilities of (in his case oil rich countries) to develop themselves and not per a “Western” agenda (Andersen, 2008: 86). Although I feel this statement to be naïve as most oil rich African countries are highly undemocratic, this argument that China gives an alternative program to the “West” is probably a positive development for Africans.

We also see another argument which goes beyond the surface of Andersen’s work. Defraigne and Belligoli (2010) provide what I consider to be one of the most compelling arguments concerning why the PRC and companies based in the PRC wish to use their own Chinese labourers: it is probably not due to a dislike of African labourers, and it is unlikely that racism plays a strong role in that particular decision either. It probably has to do with three things: avoiding “joint ventures with local ‘ghost’ partners”<sup>9</sup> (Defraigne and Belligoli, 2010: 28; see also Christensen, 2010), to avoid having unqualified local companies win government bids for construction projects funded by PRC capital, and to avoid subcontractor “chains” which sees one company retaining a portion of the loan, passing on the rest to another company, which does the same to another, and ultimately no work gets done in the worst cases. In the usual cases, it is suggested, the impact of the aid capital would be greatly reduced by this financial skimming. It appears then, that the PRC and companies wishing to invest in African countries are seeking good governance, regulatory reliability, high quality African partners or firms capable of completing a task to high standards, and so forth.

The Beijing Consensus probably *is* pushing the issue of good governance perhaps to a limited extent, but it appear that this form of humanitarian aid (at least on land) has the effect of convincing African governments and their regulatory frameworks to improve. This could be happening now, especially if these countries want to see more PRC capital staying within their borders. Jiang (2008) shares his view that

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9 The authors cite a case in Zambia where a contract was made with a company that never existed.



Many developing countries in both Africa and Latin America are eager to translate China's booming prosperity into opportunities for their own development, in hopes that their experiences with China will be more positive than their past experiences with European powers and the United States. Worldwide surveys have shown that most countries in the world, especially developing countries, see China's economic rise as an opportunity rather than a threat. (Jiang, 2008: 59)

Although Jiang does not cite where he got his information concerning how "countries see" China's economic rise, it seems to fit with the arguments thus far emerging in the literature. China, and its operations in the African arena, does have its opportunities. Or, as Rotberg (2008: 1) stated, "China and Africa desperately need each other." It appears that China needs Africa to continue growing its "positive image among developing countries" (Degraigne and Belligoli, 2010: 19); that China needs the natural resources in Africa to an increasing degree (see Tjønneland et al, 2006, for one example out of many); and that China is seeking to establish its own framework of aid and development (Rafferty, 2011) that some are saying has its own similarities with "Western" programs.<sup>10</sup> This last reason has further support. Davies et al (2008:26) argue that African governments are not the instigators but the recipients of PRC conceived special economic zones or SEZs.<sup>11</sup> In a large study of the benefits of SEZs in China, Zhang (2000) argues that these benefits inform much of China's development strategies in the developing world.

При подготовке диссертации автор широко опирался на результаты исследований китайских и российских учёных по различным аспектам мировой практики в области создания и развития СЭЗ, а также по формам международного экономического сотрудничества. (Zhang, 2000: ¶17)

Chinese SEZs have a number of socio-economic potentials: significantly improved pensions, medical insurance and unemployment insurance, the creation of favourable conditions for the transformation of health care systems that led to the defeat of many infectious diseases and epidemics, as well as a growth in life expectancy and a reduction in mortality.

Should this eventually be the case in Africa, it could be that China will have done something the "West" was never capable of doing.<sup>12</sup> This would be the translation

10 An investigation into whether a post-universalist conception of international aid, or African aid/development, exists is needed. A comparative non-formal theoretical analysis of the Washington Consensus, Beijing Consensus, EU techniques, UN techniques, perhaps the varied international NGO techniques, and African methods using a cosmopolitan methodology is called for. The results of such an undertaking would be good to formalise theoretically so that we may pursue perhaps the most robust empirical studies on this subject to date.

11 A look at China's role in Africa from the English literature is well covered by Alden (2005). In the *Monografías de Ceseden* no. 117 (April, 2010: 13, 25, 42) we see a detailing of China's probable strategic interests in Africa from the Spanish Ministerio de Defensa. Sautman and Hairong (2007) argue that there is a growing body of literature from African scholars defending the Beijing Consensus. Sautman and Hairong (2009) also argue in what is perhaps the first empirical study of African perspectives regarding Africa-China links that many non-elites feel positively about this relationship. This goes contrary to a wide amount of academic and media literature in the "West." The authors argue that Africans have variegated and complex opinions which differ from country to country but that the evidence initially shows Africans to be happier about relations with China than previously assumed.

12 From Millán (2010) we gather that China is already competing with the United States in the Gulf of Guinea. If China is capable of finding economic, strategic, or diplomatic niches in West Africa perhaps their Consensus has more appeal to African polities than that of the USA.





of high economic, social, and infrastructural growth in Africa in a way that has “no-strings-attached” (an argument widely made in the English and French literatures). To give an example of this, Rubio (2010) argues that Sudan and China both benefited from their bilateral relations in her case study of Chinese investments in the Sudan between 2003 and 2008.

La República Popular China ha buscado fortalecer su posición en el sistema internacional lo cual implica potencializar sus capacidades en lo económico, lo político y lo estratégico. La relación que establece con Sudán se convierte en un escenario útil porque le permite alcanzar dichas capacidades. Simultáneamente Sudán se benefició de esta relación en lo económico, al ser China su principal comprador de petróleo, y en lo político al recibir protección contra sanciones internacionales provenientes del Consejo de Seguridad de las Naciones Unidas. (Rubio, 2010: abstract)

The Republic of China has sought to strengthen its position within the international system. This potentially means building upon their economic, political and strategic capabilities. China’s relationship with Sudan is a useful case study because these parameters were achieved. Sudan simultaneously benefited from this relationship economically, China being the main buyer of oil, and politically through China’s protection of the Sudan from international sanctions by vetoing motions in the United Nations Security Council.

We see that the Spanish Ministry of Defence (in the *Monografía del Ceseden*, 2010: 42) argues China to be surpassing Europe’s role in Africa which relates to Christensen’s (2010) paper discussing how Norway could stand to learn from China’s programs in Africa. To finish with Eurocentric languages, Dologuele (2009: 15) gives us a perspective which might help to explain the “good” work China is trying to conduct in Africa: namely that the African continent is itself a growing and important player internationally mainly because of its role as a large natural resources provider.

### **China’s Aid to Africa: Critical Evidence**

Despite this growing body of positive, albeit it ambivalent in non-Mandarin literature, arguments in the literatures we have thus far examined, there is a much larger body of work that is critical of the Beijing Consensus in Africa. This is not to say that unbiased sources are only critical with the PRC. Most sources are critical of almost every international effort, including those home-grown in Africa, because these efforts are typically riddled with endemic governance problems. We see that corruption, a lack of accountability and transparency, poor representation, and a lack of long-term goals derived from Africans themselves and not the international community or elitist powers are common complaints in the critical literature. There is also the ever present issue of environmental degradation, human rights abuses, and “dealing with the devil” when it comes to trades with violent country-state regimes.



I should like to ask, however, that during this look into the critical literature, we should try to take in these arguments with a “hint of honey”<sup>13</sup> just as we should have been taking in the positive literature with a “grain of salt.” Ambivalence is probably the normative position in this body of literatures which reflects changes in China’s reasons for giving aid to Africa. It is argued that this will help us understand the PRC’s official naval policy in an ambivalent, multi-dimensional way. Hopefully after a look at the critical literature, we can see that the Chinese navy is operating off the coast of Somalia for many reasons. There should be no illusion that the Party is doing so for but one goal.

Bangui (2009: 58) informs that China’s national petroleum company CNPC (China National Petroleum Corporation) has succeeded in gaining a permit to exploit an oil field off the coast of Nigeria in partnership with South African Petroleum Co. This is significant because this area was as of now considered a guarded zone for Anglo-American companies like Exxon Mobil, Shell and Chevron. Although some might argue this new non-Western oil player in Africa to be a good thing, Yoshihara and Holmes (2008) remind us that this is part of China’s energy security plan: for the PRC to continue its growth it must control its resources. Lafargue (2008) convincingly argues that China is in a competition with the USA and India to diversify its energy imports so as to not be overly dependent on the Middle East. This is the first critical argument. We see that through a variety of international meetings there has been an emphasis on promoting economic investment from Beijing or Taipei into Africa and we might consider this to be part of a strategic ploy (see for example Ouedraogo, 2008).

The second critical argument, which ties in with the first, concerns China’s global diplomatic expansion (what Jakobson, 2009, called “global reach” or what Holslag, 2006, called a “pragmatic mercantilist policy”). Abramova and Fituni (2009) argue that China’s diplomatic dealings with Africa can be said to be “business as usual.” They reason that China is trying to strengthen its diplomatic ties with Africa simply because it needs the resources in that continent. Should it control these crucial resources it may gain a strategic advantage over other powers like the USA or EU.

La Chine et le continent africain célèbrent aujourd’hui leurs retrouvailles. La Chine voit dans l’Afrique un réservoir de matières premières énergétiques et minières. Pour les Etats africains, Pékin est un partenaire commercial idéal, qui n’impose pas de conditions politiques particulières à ses fournisseurs et qui leur assure même un soutien diplomatique. Mais les relations sino-africaines heurtent les intérêts des Etats-Unis soucieux, eux aussi, de diversifier leur approvisionnement pétrolier. Surtout l’enthousiasme de l’Afrique pour la Chine risque de s’émousser rapidement ; à terme, une hausse des prix agricoles aurait un effet négatif sur les économies africaines. (Lafargue, 2005: 12)

13 Witkowski (2009) for example argues that despite the critical literature regarding US and Chinese imperialism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century there is a growing body of evidence showing that the two powers have been and continue to be working together. Could this eventually grow into a new cosmopolitan “hot peace” instead of a new bi-polar “cold war”? There is also an argument from Kernen (2007) that should be considered here: he reasons previous literature on China’s relations with Africa to have been confined too rigidly to classical international relations theory. He argued that because of China’s relations with Africa, such has caused a multiplicity of economic activities through civil society and specifically outside of Chinese governmental interests between Chinese and African firms.



China and the African continent are celebrating their reunion today. China sees a reservoir of energy-related primary materials and minerals in Africa. For African states, Beijing is an ideal economic partner, who does not impose specific political conditions on its suppliers and that assures them diplomatic support. But these Sino-African relations collide with the interests of the USA and its own needs to diversify its oil suppliers. We may eventually see Africa's enthusiasm for China fade over time especially if food prices continue rising in Africa which will have a negative effect on the continent's economy [this might force China to withdraw until favourable conditions return].

The third critical argument concerns China's focus on security. Min and Cheng (2002) for example argue that China must focus on securing the requisite amount of potable water internationally to meet her demands at home. This form of water security, they argue, is made possible through globalization and the opening of foreign markets like those in Africa. We also see, from other sources like Natalizio (2009) and Shelton (2006) that evidence is suggesting the PRC may be shifting its foreign policies to reflect the growing security needs of perhaps all countries now that globalization is a greater reality.

Este mérito, sin embargo, no es atribuible a la comunidad internacional, sino a un cambio en la percepción china de cómo salvaguardar sus intereses nacionales, su seguridad energética y sus objetivos económicos de una manera más en línea con el comportamiento de los otros grandes jugadores de la política internacional. (Natalizio, 2008)

This merit, however, is not attributable to the international community, but to a change in the Chinese perception of how to safeguard their national interests, energy security and economic objectives in a manner more in line with the behaviour of the other big players in international politics.

This third argument opens the possibility that the PLAN may be operating to support China's economic, diplomatic and security needs. The deployment, surely part of an international fleet, helps to keep trade routes as free of pirates as possible. This may have the effect of increasing trade between China and Africa as well as the trade that has grown outside of governmental relations via civil society. This might promote a growth in development as incentives to invest in a less violent Africa become more prevalent.

To finish, the fourth argument concerns China's lack of human rights and environmental concern which is a subject sufficiently covered by the extant literature. However, what appears to be an emerging area of analysis is how Chinese trade is reacting to greater international pressure (from the UN, EU or other blocs) on African governments to improve their governance, curb corruption and increase sustainable environmental practices. That is, of course, a topic for a separate discussion.

### The PRC's Official Policy Statements

As can be seen in the aforementioned sections discussing China's aid efforts in Africa, there are three broadly agreed upon reasons it is doing so. The first concerns the need for natural resources and the security of that specific trade. The second regards the promotion of the Beijing Consensus and the development of infrastructure and



society in Africa so as to facilitate the first reason. The third potential reason regards China's need to build its international image as a global partner, power and developing country concerned with the human plights of others in developing countries. But does the PRC's official press releases concerning its deployment of PLAN to the Gulf of Aden conform to these reasons elicited from the international literature?

To try and gain an answer to this question, Charmaz's (2006) grounded theory methodology is central. A key part of this method is to have constructed a research plan through preliminary qualitative analysis. In this case, such was attempted through the investigation of literature in English, French, Russian, Spanish and simplified Mandarin. Using the process of thematic analysis we have come to see the aforementioned possible reasons that the PRC deployed the PLAN to the Gulf of Aden. It can be argued that we now have a hypothesis: that the PLAN is acting to promote the economic, security and diplomatic goals of the PRC. It is important, as per this methodology, to now test this hypothesis with a relevant body of data.

To do so, we will compile a list of press releases and official statements from the PRC specifically regarding this PLAN deployment. We will then investigate this data to see if it conforms or contrasts with the literature thus far seen. Box 1 details the literature we will draw upon to complete this task. My initial presumption is that there will not be any dissimilarity between the data and the literature.

#### Box 1 Data

1. Mingxin, Bi. August, 31, 2010. "Chinese Navy Hospital Ship Sets Sail on First Overseas Medical Mission." *Chinese Government's Official Web Portal*. [http://english.gov.cn/2010-08/31/content\\_1692806.htm](http://english.gov.cn/2010-08/31/content_1692806.htm)
2. Anonymous. August 3, 2010. "Chinese Naval Warships Welcomed in Italy." *Chinese Government's Official Web Portal*. [http://english.gov.cn/2010-08/03/content\\_1670550\\_2.htm](http://english.gov.cn/2010-08/03/content_1670550_2.htm)
3. Tang, Anne. July 26, 2010. "Chinese Naval Warships Pay Five-Day Visit to Egypt." *Chinese Government's Official Web Portal*. [http://www.gov.cn/misc/2010-07/26/content\\_1664472.htm](http://www.gov.cn/misc/2010-07/26/content_1664472.htm)
4. Yang, Fang. October, 29, 2009. "Fourth Chinese Navy Flotilla to Sail for Waters off Somalia." *Chinese Government's Official Web Portal*. [http://english.gov.cn/2009-10/29/content\\_1452107.htm](http://english.gov.cn/2009-10/29/content_1452107.htm)
5. Hong'e, Mo. April 22, 2009. "Chinese Navy Sails onto World Stage." *Chinese Government's Official Web Portal*. [http://english.gov.cn/2009-04/22/content\\_1292352.htm](http://english.gov.cn/2009-04/22/content_1292352.htm)
6. Hong'e, Mo. January 20, 2009. "Chinese Navy Escorts 16 Ships off the Somali Coast." *Chinese Government's Official Web Portal*. [http://english.gov.cn/2009-01/20/content\\_1210310.htm](http://english.gov.cn/2009-01/20/content_1210310.htm)
7. Mingyu, Zhang. January 13, 2009. "China Restates Protection Offer for Taiwan Ships off Somalia." *Chinese Government's Official Web Portal*. [http://english.gov.cn/2009-01/13/content\\_1204529.htm](http://english.gov.cn/2009-01/13/content_1204529.htm)
8. Guodong, Du. December, 27, 2008. "Chinese Navy Sends Most Sophisticated Ships on Escort Mission off Somalia." *Chinese Government's Official Web Portal*. [http://www.gov.cn/misc/2008-12/27/content\\_1189366.htm](http://www.gov.cn/misc/2008-12/27/content_1189366.htm)
9. Hong'e, Mo. December 25, 2008. "FM Press Conference on Dec. 23." *Chinese Government's Official Web Portal*. [http://english.gov.cn/2008-12/25/content\\_1187319.htm](http://english.gov.cn/2008-12/25/content_1187319.htm)
10. Hong'e, Mo. December, 22, 2008. "FM Press Conference on Dec. 18." *Chinese Government's Official Web Portal*. [http://english.gov.cn/2008-12/22/content\\_1186262.htm](http://english.gov.cn/2008-12/22/content_1186262.htm)



Inputting the search term “PLAN Gulf of Aden” in the search function of the official PRC English website<sup>14</sup> had returned ten government statements (see above). As initially presumed, there has been no evidence that contradicts what the literature has thus far explained. Should we look into the data we see that the primary goal of the PLAN (as of December, 2008) was to escort trade ships and to patrol open water in the Gulf of Aden as part of an international counter-piracy team which can be seen in the following two quotes delivered by Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Qin Gang:

About China’s sending convoy vessels to the Aden Gulf and seas off the Somali coast, this mission is based on UN Security Council Resolutions and with consideration of the practice of other countries. The purpose is to ensure the safety of Chinese ships and personnel on the route and protect vessels of international organizations carrying humanitarian materials. This is in line with international laws, UN Security Council Resolutions and the request of the Somali Government. China pursues a path of peaceful development, and adopts a national defense policy which is defensive in nature. This is a reflection of Chinese Government’s commitment to safeguarding world peace and stability and concept of “putting people’s interest first, exercising state power for the people”. In the future, the Chinese diplomacy and military will continue to make positive contribution to world peace and stability. (Hong’e, December 25, 2008)

So far as China is concerned, during the first 11 months of this year, China has all together 1,265 commercial ships sailing through the route, that is, three to four ships per day on average. 20% of them were attacked. This year, there are seven hijack cases involving China, including two Chinese ships and 42 Chinese seafarers, five foreign ships with Chinese seafarers, cargo or flying Hongkong flag. Up to date, there remains one Chinese fishing boat and 18 crew members held captive. (Hong’e, December 22, 2008)

Should we look into the other eight sources in the data we would see the same reasoning for deployment. However, to add some greater detail, a main position (and one that representatives of the PRC have been adamant about) is that China is participating in an international effort under a United Nations mandate (effectively the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1814, 1816, 1838, 1846, 1918 and 1950). Because of this, it is not violating the government’s previous position of not infringing upon sovereign states as Somalia arguably has no recognizable sovereignty. China is also operating in concert with other countries and under international law which removes any unilateral militaristic questionability to the operation.

## Conclusion

An unexpected finding of this study is that the PLAN also engages with the navies of several other countries, especially those (like Egypt) with the capacities to police their regional waters. This is something not yet seen in the literature but it does relate to the arguments concerning China’s desire to strengthen diplomatic ties and to act

14 <http://english.gov.cn>



as a global power with humanitarian interests (even though these may simply be to improve trade via less pirating and greater maritime safety). We see, for example, that on April 20, 2009, the PLAN held a parade with “21 navy ships from other countries” (Hong’e, 2009) and that it did so because “inviting foreign navies to China is a process of communication and exchange” (Hong’e, 2009).

We also see that the PRC is still strictly adhering to its non-intervention policy. Its press releases are typically careful to state that the PLAN is participating with other international navies under the aegis of several UN counter-piracy resolutions. This relates to Rafferty (2011) and others who argued China to be trying to create peaceful resolutions to long-standing problems like the Taiwan question. We see, in the primary data just scrutinized, that the PRC has at least on two occasions extended the offer to police Taiwanese trade vessels. This, just like most other statements in the primary data or arguments in the literature, is ultimately ambivalent. We can reason that the PRC may be conducting these activities for both critical interests and positive interests. Going beyond that, we might also reason that China deployed the PLAN as part of its international diplomatic efforts, or as Lei (2009) argued, to build its national image.

This returns us to Ou’s suggestion that the deployment of the PLAN was not only an unprecedented move, but that it was nearly completely at odds with the rest of China’s naval history. It might be argued that China is now participating differently in world affairs, perhaps due to globalization, and that the PLAN will play a central role in future efforts to improve and protect trade, to secure a steady and timely flow of primary resources and to build its international diplomatic relations.

This was seen through a literature review of five languages (Russian, Spanish, English, French and simplified Mandarin) concerning China’s aid relationships with the continent of Africa. This review gave us several prominent arguments as to why China had deployed the PLAN off the coast of Somalia. As is hopefully now reasonably argued, such was done for several reasons and not just one. This small finding is perhaps important as it might allow us to continue thinking of China as starting to change its foreign policies: is this the rise of an international player with compassionate answers to global problems?

This is a question that will likely only be answered by the future actions of the PRC. The outlook at this stage, at least in China’s domestic relations, is not overly positive with the arrests of Liu Xiaobo and Ai Wei Wei among a reported great deal of other “lesser knowns.” It may appear contradictory then for us to reason that the PRC’s foreign policy might in the end promote democracy when it is oppressing the rise of Chinese democracy at home. Also, further research is needed into other possible motives for the PLAN’s activities in the Gulf of Aiden and other regions in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. It is probable that arguments on this subject in lesser known languages are being made which someone would do well to bring into more popular forums.



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