

## Antipiracy and Unusual Coalitions in the Indian Ocean Region: China's Changing Role and Confidence Building with India

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### *Abstract*

Piracy and threats from non-state actors in the Gulf of Aden have triggered states to cooperate in securing water ways and the so-called “Sea Lines of Communication”, fundamentally transforming the maritime security environment in the region. As a result, the strategic importance of this region has not only been reaffirmed, but it has gained tremendous importance with the presence of several actors, especially China and India. Since 2008, these two countries have been involved in a larger global action against piracy. While China and India are not official members of any international mission, they coordinate alongside them. This has led increasing contacts and exposure of their naval capabilities – a possible confidence building effort? Will the Gulf of Aden and the broader Indian Ocean region emerge as an area of cooperation or competition between China and India? Which mechanisms could impact and explain the outcome? Drawing on interviews carried out with Chinese and European experts in the period of 2012-2015 this article explores the reasons and instruments of cooperation in the field of antipiracy and the degree to which China uses antipiracy as a confidence building measure.

### *Keywords*

Antipiracy, collective action, confidence-building, great power relations, China, India

### *Biographical Note*

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## 1 Introduction

Piracy along so-called Sea Lines Of Communication (SLOCs), such as the Strait of Malacca, the Gulf of Guinea, and even on the Amazon River, has seen an unexpected revival in public consciousness in the 2000s. Piracy in the Gulf of Aden, the region of focus for this paper, has also become a threat to shipping and maritime security for the two major powers in this region, China and India. As the events of piracy have been reducing significantly in the past few years, both countries, and in particular China, have remained active in sending their navies to the region. Considering their antagonistic relationship in naval-security terms this article asks the question of whether China considers antipiracy as a platform for confidence-building vis-à-vis its Indian neighbour. Will the Gulf of Aden and the broader Indian Ocean region emerge as an area of cooperation or competition between China and India?

After the fall of Somalia's Siad Barre government in 1991 Somalia became a country without government and is widely considered as a "failed state", a "fragile state", and as economically very poor (The Fragile States Index 2015; Powell, Ford, and Nowratesch 2006: 14). The international community reacted promptly, by putting a number of multilateral arrangements in place against pirates since 2008 – the Combined Task Forces 150 and 151, Operations EU NAVFOR Atalanta and NATO's operation Ocean Shield. So-called independent deployers China, India, Japan, South Korea and Russia, amongst others, have coordinated their navy vessels with these larger coalition forces. The early literature on countries' involvement in antipiracy soon argued that antipiracy was going to be too expensive, and if not supported by on-land measures supporting state-building in Somalia, would not be successful (Lunsford 2008). The unwillingness by Western countries to take action on land, in turn has been interpreted as a sign of countries' priorities to secure commercial interests (such as avoiding high oil prices), instead of ensuring humanitarian security in the region. Piracy rose to a peak in 2011 with 736 hostages held and 32 ships held (Winsor 2015). Yet, in the following years the antipiracy coalition (together with increased private security on cargo ships) was successful and, in practice, Somali piracy has reduced in absolute terms. A survey of imprisoned pirates carried out by Oceans Beyond Piracy found the presence of international navies to be the main deterrent, followed by armed guards aboard vessels (Oceans Beyond Piracy 2015). According to EU NAVFOR as of July 2015 no vessels and 26 hostages were held by pirates in the region (European External Action Service 2015). A 2014 report by Oceans Beyond Piracy estimated the total economic cost of Somali piracy at \$2.3 billion in 2014, down from \$3.2 billion in 2013 and \$6 billion in 2012 (Oceans Beyond Piracy 2014:1).

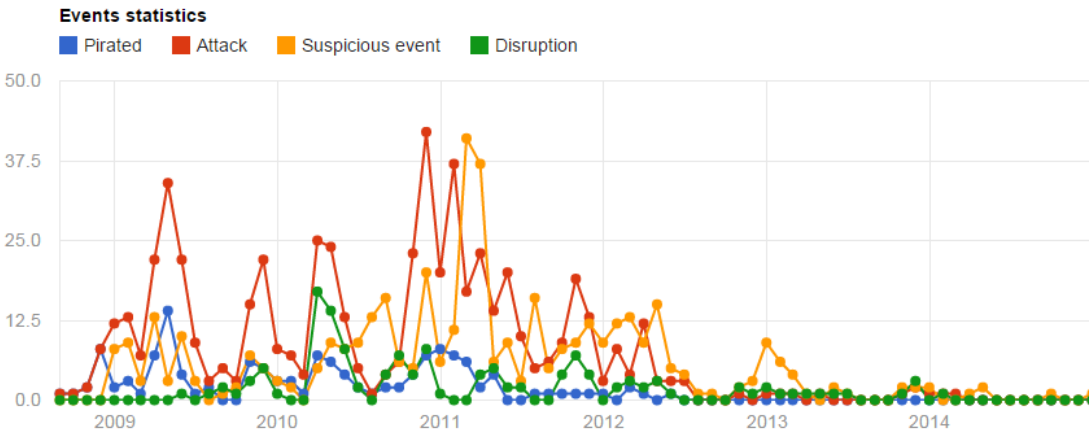


Table 1: Piracy events statistics, Source: EEAS (2015)

The table shows that the increase in cooperation together with increasing involvement of private security providers by ship owners after 2011 can be evaluated as successful. The increasing numbers of countries participating as well as the unabated contributions by the present deployers until today, even suggest a “bandwagon effect” of international cooperation.<sup>1</sup> There are two main puzzles raised by this effect. First, as mentioned above, there has been agreement by academics and some of the main players, such as the European Union on the need for a more sustainable strategy against piracy, a so-called “comprehensive approach” which would include on-land operations, peacekeeping and development cooperation (Neslen 2014). Providing prospects of stability and job opportunities for the young men who currently turn to piracy as a source of income, the logic goes, will remove the attractiveness of pirate attacks on international cargo ships. And yet, most countries focus on the seaborne escorts of trade vessels through the Gulf of Aden. Why has a large coalition of countries collaborated on antipiracy regardless of the awareness that Somalia is a failed state? Especially the emerging great powers, China and India? The second puzzle relates to the absolute reduction of piracy since around mid-2012, while antipiracy missions and participation have actually increased further during the same time period.

These two empirical puzzles leads us to a more theoretical debate on explaining countries’ participation and cooperation in antipiracy. While the official discourse legitimizing antipiracy around 2008/2009 was built around securitization (human security, commercial interests, terrorism), after the successful reduction of piracy in 2012-2015, other motivators for China and India could have been prestige and image creation, “recognition games”, acting as a responsible stakeholder and norm entrepreneur, and

1 Interview, EU Military Service, Brussels, 06/06/2015.

public diplomacy. Another motivator is the importance of establishing a strategic presence in this critical part of the world. Furthermore, there are several stakeholders who even gain from piracy: navies because it helps demonstrate their utility and justify their budget, private security companies, the media because piracy is a good story, and for the Chinese people it provides “reassurance that their government is cognizant and capable with regard to protecting Chinese human and economic interests outside the Middle Kingdom” (Strange and Erickson 2015: 2). Illegal fishing in the area has also been argued to be an important cause (Schofield 2008).

What is the effect of this changed motivation from the perspective of two emerging, often antagonistic, powers, China and India? Situated in the discourse on great power relations and non-traditional security, this paper asks the question:

*Will the Gulf of Aden emerge as an area of cooperation or competition between China and India?*

Drawing on interviews carried out with Chinese and European experts in the period of 2012-2015 the article explores the reasons and instruments of cooperation in the field of antipiracy and the degree to which China uses antipiracy as a confidence building measure. The article critically assesses the changing nature and increasing coordination on antipiracy globally and in particular from a Chinese perspective. It then tests Chinese participation in antipiracy along the three steps of securitization identified in the following section. Especially step three and the *instrumentalization of antipiracy as a non-traditional security challenge in addressing traditional threats* will be tested on the case of China-India relations. By looking specifically at the mechanisms and factors that could impact and explain the outcome, the article aims to provide a new narrative on why countries participate in international antipiracy activities, while simultaneously tensions over the “One Belt, one Road” have been increasing. In that way the findings of the article may be extended beyond the Horn of Africa to include maritime security in the adjacent parts of the Indian Ocean.

## **2 The three steps of securitization**

The literature on antipiracy has applied several sources of concepts to explain why countries participate in international coalitions combating piracy: a. traditional security/regional strategic interests; b. idealism, public diplomacy, self-image as responsible stakeholders, c. postcolonialism, norm entrepreneurship (for example by China and Japan); d. securitization. With this multitude of approaches

being used on antipiracy, the following sections will need to address the theoretical question of what antipiracy is an instance of: a mere international issue, a non-traditional security issue, a confidence-building measure, a low-risk high-visibility issue or an avenue for power struggle and assertion? While these approaches do not all answer the same question of why countries participate in antipiracy directly, they each provide a prism through which to view the interplay between domestic considerations and international security cooperation.

The first set of literature relates to traditional security and regional strategic interests. This explanation first and foremost sees antipiracy as a consequence of instability within the Somali territory and a continuing spiral of state failure. Pirates' linkages with terrorist groups, such as Al Shahab have been established. Paradoxically, however, the overall reduction of pirate activities, while the situation in Somalia remains dire (unemployment rates of 80%), has been argued to drive former, now "unemployed" pirates to join terrorist organizations (Winsor 2015). However, while Somalia has been considered stateless and a "failed state" since the early 1990s, the threat of piracy really only increased from 2009 onwards (Hunter 2008, Tsvetkova 2009). Thus, this line of argument does not explain the intensified international presence to combat antipiracy in the Gulf of Aden.

The second set of explanations relates to idealist theories focusing on the cooperation aspect of international missions. Countries aspiring to be responsible stakeholders see it as part of their public diplomacy strategy to carry out high-visibility missions against the pirate as the "common enemy of all", a term which goes back to one of the first conferences on piracy in Nyon in 1937 (Reinsch 2014, 78; Heller-Roazen 2009). As Reinsch argues, the pirate seems to aim his violence against all states, making piracy a truly international issue, even bringing countries such as the US, Russia and Iran to the same table (2014: 79). At the same time pirates are considered to be exclusively profit-driven and typically international relations concepts such as national interest and ideology are not considered, making the phenomenon "convincingly unpolitical" (Reinsch 2014: 79). Thus antipiracy can be seen as focused on public diplomacy and "image building to both a domestic and international audience" (Lin-Greenberg 2010: 217).

Third, an emerging literature sees antipiracy as an avenue to act as norm entrepreneurs. Black and Hwang, for instance, situate themselves among culturalist and postcolonial perspectives, which see the "state's self identification [to inform] its foreign policy practice (Black and Hwang 2012: 445). Chinese and Japanese involvement in antipiracy in the Gulf of Aden is considered an example for these countries'

intention of transforming “the dominant norms in international society” (Black and Hwang 2012: 431). In the case of Japan, it promotes the model of the Japan Coast Guard, a civilian maritime police and rescue organisation, which reflects Japan’s view of itself as a mediator between East and West. For China it is the projection of the self-image of a “responsible and benevolent Great Power that derives from the Chinese conception of *Tianxia*” (Black and Hwang 2012: 445).

Finally, antipiracy can be looked at through the securitization lens of analysis. The protection of the World Food Program ships, thus initial humanitarian motivations, led to the creation of the EU’s antipiracy mission. “Securitizing” diplomatic and economic interests that are negatively affected by lost cargo and increasing insurance premiums would mean that countries use military and foreign policy resources and instruments to protect these interests (King 2008). Furthermore economic, trade, human and environmental security and many others are included in national security strategies and all of them have been employed to justify participation in antipiracy efforts.

I have separated the process of antipiracy development according to three analytical steps: securitization of the issue, localization of an international practice and instrumentalization into great power politics. Steps 1 and 2 will only be looked at in a cursory manner, since they have been dealt with in the existing body of literature on Chinese antipiracy participation. To illustrate the concept of instrumentalization of an international practice for great power relations, the case of China-India relations will be used as a test case.

### **2.1 Step 1: Securitization and the rise of global powers**

Securitization of global threats which are not immediately security-related, including so-called non-traditional challenges is a phenomenon that has been analyzed in detail over the past twenty years, with the Copenhagen School being dedicated to understanding and extracting the mechanisms and reasons for securitization. Concurrent with the international trend, China has also been getting more active in non-traditional security (NTS), encompassing areas such as counterterrorism, cyber warfare, financial turmoil and climate change (Buzan et al. 1998; Wang 2007b). In the domestic academic debate the SARS epidemic of 2003 reoriented much government and research focus to the new area of NTS-studies. In the light of this context, China has not only through diplomatic actions, but also through increased investment and attention to theoretical and policy research, taken a more proactive stand on the global stage.

Singapore-based Li Mingjiang predicts that “China will become more proactive in its multilateral diplomacy, in many cases selectively, and increase its influence in global multilateral settings, [but] various concerns and constraints will make it unlikely for China to completely overhaul or even dramatically reshape the multilateral architecture at the global level” (Li 2011: 9). Therefore, while many would agree that there has been a steady increase in multilateral engagement, some claim that this takes place on a very issue-based and case-by-case level, making China a “selective multilateralist” (Kastner et al. 2010; Shambaugh 2010: 1).

The new Chinese security concept of 1996 acted as a “catalyst for the domestic debate on NTS”, in particular in countering the China threat theory (Morton 2011). Furthermore the emphasis on “new historic missions” and Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW) by Hu Jintao in his December 2004 speech, saw antipiracy overseas as one of its core components (Kamphausen 2013: 3). Thus antipiracy has emerged as a securitized issue in China even before the international coalition began coordinating its efforts in 2008.

## **2.2 Step 2: Localizing international practice**

An increasing body of literature is looking exactly at questions of localization, and “norm entrepreneurship”, of influencing the way international relations are carried out (Black and Hwang 2012: 437). On non-traditional security this level of analysis traces how a shared complex challenge is justified and included into mainstream strategic culture. “Localization is conceived as a longterm and evolutionary assimilation of foreign ideas, while some forms of adaptation in the rationalist international relations literature are seen as short run policy of accomodation” (Johnston 1996). Thus, while adaptation may be tactical and to some extent forced on the target audience, localization is voluntary and the resulting change likely to be more enduring” (Acharya 2004).

With increasing participation in antipiracy missions, the PLAN has begun localizing international practices both in its coordination efforts – for instance through increasing port calls and antipiracy drills. In more concrete terms Black and Hwang relate Chinese participation in antipiracy missions to its “self-image as a responsible and benevolent Great Power that derives from the Chinese conception of *Tianxia*” (2012: 431).



### 2.3 Step 3: Collective action as an instrument of Great Power Relations

Beyond the decision to address a non-traditional security challenge, multilateral platforms or ad-hoc cooperation are seen to create a network of interdependence. Without going into the theoretical foundations for collective action on a public good (for example Ostrom 2014), according to psychological and interpersonal theories by Kelley and Thibaut, closeness of relationships in itself can be a goal of cooperation (1978). In Cold War European Literature, the concept of confidence-building measures between adversaries corresponds to this logic. While traditionally confidence is seen as a precondition for collective action, the early history of countries' participation in antipiracy suggests the opposite sequence. Collective action on a low-risk issue, such as antipiracy, thus becomes a platform for confidence building in great power relations.

What makes Chinese accelerating involvement in antipiracy ever more salient for research is its coincidence with China's economic "rise"<sup>2</sup> and prospect of becoming a "great power" (Bijian 2005; Deng 2004; Kastner et al. 2010). The term "great power" has yet to be defined in a consistent manner. A most general definition encompasses economic and political power that allows a state to exert influence on a global scale (Waltz 1993). Theorist John Mearsheimer developed an entire theory of International Relations, based on the idea of "Great Powers" and the sequacious "Tragedy of Great Power Politics". Somewhat paradoxically he is one of the key proponents of the "China Threat" Camp of US analysts (Mearsheimer 2001). This negative connotation, however, is far from widespread amongst Chinese academic and policy circles. While there is an ongoing conceptual debate, there are wide differences on whether China can already be seen as a great power or whether it actually stands a realistic chance at getting there, considering rising domestic pressures (Itzkowitz-Shiffrinson 2009: 2). In their research agenda Kastner et al. have already started looking at how "multilateral regimes adapt to rising powers" (2010: 2). It will be part of this analysis to contribute to the question on whether China as a rising power can in fact be analyzed on the basis of universal theories on multilateral cooperation, whether it has to be treated as a case "sui generis" or whether, indeed, its emergence during an era dominated by paradigms of cooperation will have the world witness a new kind of great power, socialized in unprecedented levels of global interdependence.

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2 While most assert that China is rising, there is an ongoing debate on "whether "rising power" should be measured in terms of material indicators (i.e. capabilities) or influence over outcomes", Itzkowitz-Shiffrinson (2009: 5).

While the foremost motivation for antipiracy efforts remains the security of trade routes (around 1,500 Chinese merchant vessels pass through the Gulf of Aden annually, Lessons from Piracy 2016 ), increasing attention has been given to other strategic implications of cooperation on antipiracy, such as image-building, training and testing of naval resources, and international burden-sharing (Hirono and Neill 2012: 16). Collective action on a low-risk issue, such as antipiracy, thus could become an instrument of confidence building in great power relations.

### **3 Methodology**

In order to address these questions the article builds on an extensive literature review, document analysis of speeches, reports and other firsthand sources, and interviews carried out in Beijing and Brussels from 2012 to 2015 with members of the academia, government think tanks, and participants in international peacekeeping missions and antipiracy operations.

Interview partners were first asked a set of questions investigating the unilateral motivation for participating in antipiracy: (i) what principles is participation based on (economic, security, international, competition); (ii) what is the domestic perception by the public and decision-makers; and (iii) has actual participation led to an adjustment and principles guiding international cooperation? The second set of questions was focused on the role of antipiracy as a confidence building measure, specifically in the Chinese-Indian context: (i) To what extent do China and India actually interact; (ii) is antipiracy considered a trust building measure; (iii) how do China and India perceive each other's participation; (iv) are there any observable implications for changing relations because of antipiracy coordination; (v) how does international socialization impact their bilateral relations?

China-India relations serve as a "typical case" (Seawright and Gerring 2008: 297), since there is a pre-existing tension and both countries take part in antipiracy efforts. India and China went to a short war with each other in 1962 and until today border disputes dominate the relationship instead of a flourishing two-way trade. India motivates much of its arms purchases with a need to be prepared for Chinese military power and what it perceives to be a China-Pakistan axis or the dual challenge of Pakistan and China (Sharma 2014). The String of Pearls theory, suspecting naval encirclement by China as well as Chinese investments in a blue water navy are a source of irritation and caution in Indian public and elite circles as well (Atal 2013). Of the countries participating in antipiracy efforts, India is the one with the strongest threat perception of Chinese naval presence.

The article thus provides an up-to-date account drawing on insights and the “success of antipiracy” in the 2010s. Taking China-India rapprochement as an example it qualifies the confidence-building potential of antipiracy measures. The article aims at hypothesis development and tests its hypotheses on the China-India case study. Future studies will have to systematize the findings and test their external validity for other multilateral and bilateral relations. The article concludes by identifying dynamics of cooperation and competition between China and India in their participation in antipiracy operations.

#### 4 Protecting sea trade, universal agreement on the “Somali pirate enemy” and Chinese participation

Piracy in the Gulf of Aden has triggered countries to cooperate in securing water ways and so-called “Sea Lines of Communication”. For seven years China and India have been involved in the effort, which is loosely characterized by three multilateral task forces: Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), NATO’s Operation OCEAN SHIELD, and the EU’s Operation ATALANTA, known colloquially as the “Three Forces,” or operated under CMF’s Combined Task Force (CTF)-150 or -151 (see Table 2). China and India are independent employers, yet coordinate *alongside* these task forces. Within this “coalition of the willing”, the actors China, India, the United States and the EU see crucial importance in maritime cooperation.

Antipiracy Initiative	Start	Under coordination of
Combined Maritime Forces (CMF)	12 January 2009	Multinational Force, UNSC Mandate
Operation OCEAN SHIELD	17 August 2009	NATO, rotating leadership (since October 2015 Turkey)
EU NAVFOR ATALANTA	December 2008	European Union

Table 2 International antipiracy coalitions in the Gulf of Aden

According to Article 101 of 1982 UN Convention on The Law of the Sea, acts of piracy include any of the following: “(a) any illegal acts of violence or detention, or any act of depredation, committed for private ends by the crew or the passengers of a private ship or a private aircraft [...] on the high seas, against

another ship or aircraft, or against persons or property on board such ship or aircraft [...] in a place outside the jurisdiction of any State [...].” China considers Piracy to be a non-traditional security threat, as opposed to its traditional threats from the United States, Japan and India (Craig 2015: 19).

Motivations for countries to take part in antipiracy missions are often based on very pragmatic considerations: for instance to train their own navies and be exposed to and to learn about others’ navy systems (Erickson and Strange 2014:191). From 2008-2015, the People’s Liberation Army Navy has deployed nearly sixteen thousand personnel on sixty-eight ships (including destroyers and comprehensive supply ships) with twenty-eight helicopters in eighteen task forces escorting around 6,000 individual ships and 800 groups (Erickson and Strange 2015: 81, Chen 2013, Zhao 2012). On January 2016 China deployed its 22th escort task force. While naval exposure is a particular interest for countries, such as China, which made the development of a blue water navy and the “protection of the open seas” a declared goal (Ministry of National Defense PRC 2015), other countries, such as Luxembourg and Lithuania can be understood to participate for similar reasons<sup>3</sup>.

Well over six years of Chinese anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden have directly supported People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) modernization goals and provided invaluable experience operating in distant waters. Lessons learned have spawned PLAN innovations in doctrine, operations, and international coordination. Many of the insights gleaned during deployments are applicable to security objectives closer to home; some officers enjoy promotion to important positions after returning. Anti-piracy operations have been a springboard for China to expand considerably its maritime security operations, from evacuating its citizens from Libya and Yemen to escorting Syrian chemical weapons to their destruction and participating in the search for Malaysia Airlines Flight 370. So great are the benefits to China's global maritime presence and enhanced image at home and abroad that when Gulf of Aden anti-piracy operations finally wind down, Beijing will have to develop new means to address its burgeoning overseas interests. (Erickson and Strange 2015: 1)

China, and to some extent India, used to have very little experience with their growing blue water navies, which means their interest in participating in maneuvers has increased. China for instance acts very adaptively, also as “a global power it will increasingly have to deal with the challenges of securing international waterways, while lacking the necessary capacities.”<sup>4</sup> Both countries do not take part in the existing international arrangements due to the novelty of this sort of naval cooperation. Both are not

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3 Interview, EU Military Service, Brussels, 06/06/2015

4 Interview, German Embassy, Beijing, 07/08/2012

part of existing alliances, such as NATO and the EU and their allies. Furthermore, naval control is considered an important part in both countries' sovereignty and cooperation would also mean sharing of information on one's own capabilities – to a much larger extent than sending troop contingents for UN peacekeeping for instance. This can be observed when the PLAN rejected the EU's request of establishing a bilateral framework agreement in January 2009 (Barton 2013). While this resistance determined the reluctance to take direct part in one of the international arrangements, counterpiracy practice and the dependence on mutual support has led to several areas of information sharing and informal institutionalization.

Within the EU NAVFOR mission there are interactions on operation, planning and training through the European Security and Defense College<sup>5</sup>. The EU Crisis Management and Planning Directorate has both military and civilian meetings with China, but also with India, particularly in the field of counter terrorism.<sup>6</sup> Both Chinese and European interviews suggested that there is clarity on how antipiracy missions benefit Europe and China, facilitating the actual cooperation on the ground<sup>7</sup>, while a French Diplomat, pointed out that the strategic consequences differ drastically: While the Chinese focus on escorting ships, the Europeans “actually fight and prosecute” pirates.<sup>8</sup> During the operations China agreed to using the EU's information system Mercury, rejecting the CENTRIXS, the US operated alternative.

Antipiracy as a platform for bilateral naval interaction even transcends the EU connection as China for instance even carried out a joint antipiracy drill with the United States on 17 September 2012 (USS Winston S. Churchill Public Affairs 2012). On October 1 China and India participated in a multilateral drill focusing on antipiracy and illegal immigration (Ray 2013). Similarly, China requested the EU for a similar drill, which took place on 14 July 2014, marking the first time the EU – as a regional actor – has conducted a naval drill with a third country (People's Daily, 2014). Thus, through regular coordination, ship-to-ship exchanges, combined exercises and port visits “Beijing has greatly expanded its naval diplomacy in the name of anti-piracy” (Erickson and Strange 2015: 6). Table 3 summarizes these contact points with the task forces and independent deployers as presented in the 2013 White Paper on the Chinese Armed Forces.

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5 Interview, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Brussels, 03/05/2013

6 Interview, European External Action Service, Brussels, 02/05/2013

7 Interview, European External Action Service, Brussels, 02/05/2013, and Interview, Communist Party School, Beijing, 24/08/2012

8 Interview, French Embassy, Beijing, 27/07/2012

### Chinese coordination with international antipiracy providers

- Joint escorts with Russian counterparts
- Joint anti-piracy drills with naval ships of the Republic of Korea (ROK), Pakistan, United States
- Coordinated with the European Union to protect World Food Programme Ships
- Exchanged boarding visits of commanders with task forces from the EU, NATO, Combined Maritime Forces, ROK , Japan and Singapore
- Active participation in Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS) and “Shared Awareness and Deconfliction” (SHADE) meetings
- Since 2012, China, India and Japan convey coordination, adjusted escort schedules, optimized available assets, ROK joined at the end of 2012

Table 3: Chinese coordination with international antipiracy providers, taken from Information Office of the State Council 2013

The SHADE mechanism however, seems to fulfil the sovereignty sensitivities by the PLAN since its focus is on facilitating tactical coordination: “a voluntary and horizontal command and control structure, where participants would not follow orders but simply coordinate their naval forces and, where possible, share best practice” (Barton 2013).

#### 4.1 Antipiracy as a means of confidence building

The idea behind confidence building measures is that more interaction, during which countries expose some of their naval capabilities in a cooperative manner, will demonstrate transparency and thus trust and confidence between two adversary actors. There are several ways of interaction between different navies on antipiracy: first on a very tactical level on ship-to-ship cooperation and, second, on strategic and policy coordination at the mission headquarters or in the capitals of the contributing countries. China interacts with other navies in several ways. First, through antipiracy drills, such as between EU NAVFOR and the Chinese PLAN (Ministry of National Defense PRC 2014). Besides a simple tactical drills, these allow to put in place a very basic political framework for future drills between the two maritime actors. Furthermore, by escorting ships, especially by the World Food Programme, Chinese participation meant a freeing up of resources by the main multilateral missions. Finally, all other involvement with

other countries is driven by the Chinese goals of achieving visibility and reinforcing a public image of a global actor.<sup>9</sup>

The various multilateral task forces provide platforms for potential interaction and diffusion. In fact antipiracy was one of the most frequently quoted non-traditional security issues when interviewees were asked about potential diffusion of practices from the European Union to China and India in preparation of this research. The respondents saw potential on two levels: in socializing Indian and Chinese navies into a certain way of cooperating internationally and secondly in lesson-drawing on a more tactical level through the interaction with other navies. On the socialization in a certain way of multilateral engagement – effective multilateralism being one of the EU’s strategic objectives as outlined in the 2003 European Security Strategy – there were first signs pointing in such a direction. One of the elements of such socialization is the willingness to take part but also shape the practice of international antipiracy operations. According to media reporting China in 2009 began lobbying for the chair of the current “facilitating venue” for the three task forces, called the SHADE (Shared Awareness and Deconfliction) programme (Erickson and Strange, 2013). Eventually, these intentions were withdrawn again. The SHADE mechanism is considered a key coordinating mechanism to manage the multitude of actors present in the antipiracy efforts – NATO, EU, independent deployers, and the maritime industry. SHADE was designed to ensure the best use of assets and to “avoid redundancies”, while deconflicting “ongoing military counter-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden and the western Indian Ocean” (Oceans Beyond Piracy 2015a).

Under SHADE, the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS) was formed in order to share lessons between force-deploying actors. “The CGPCS was set up in January 2009 to ‘foster closer international cooperation to address the scourge of piracy off the coast of Somalia’, following the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1851 (2008)” (Tardy 2014: 7). It brings together over 80 participants including states, the European Union or the International Maritime Organisation as well as shipping industry and seafarers’ representatives and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

According to representatives by the EU military service, both SHADE and the CGPCS are considered to be “smooth”, well-functioning coordinating mechanisms.<sup>10</sup> The very structure, which has “none of the attributes of formal multilateral settings (secretariat, decision-making procedures, legal framework,

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9 Interview, EU Military Service, Brussels, 6 May 2015

10 Interviews, EU Military Service, Brussels, 6 May 2015

budget, etc.)” and the fact that it is purely operational (“all navies talk without problem about how to avoid wasting resources”) and not political can be seen as one of the reasons for its success (Tardy 2013: 7). There are no reports of a national navy defecting and not escorting a vessel as agreed under the SHADE coordination.<sup>11</sup>

#### **4.2 Case Study China-India Relations**

As we have seen, there is an existing multilateral infrastructure creating interfaces between national navies involved in antipiracy, both at the practical and at the policy level. Furthermore, the two countries have been working closely on combating other non-traditional threats, such as terrorism. For instance after a visit of the Indian Home Minister to Beijing in November 2015, the two countries issued a rare joint statement pledging intensified information exchange regarding terrorist activities (Patranobis 2015). But what does this mean for countries’ bilateral relations and how could “confidence-building” antipiracy play out in practice? As Kanti Bajpaj argues there is “a growing view, fuelled by outsiders as well as commentators in China and India, that the two countries are in competition in the Indian Ocean region” (Bajpaj 2013, Mohan 2012). One of the visible areas of content is China’s launch of the ambitious “Belt and Road” initiative (also known as “The Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-century Maritime Silk Road”, or “One Belt, One Road”). Part of the project is designed to go from China’s coast to the Indian Ocean region. New Delhi has been highly skeptical towards the idea, distrustful of the true intentions of this initiative. Some counterproposals from the Indian side have emerged, such as “Project Mausam” (2014-2019), which is meant to “re-establish communications between countries in the Indian Ocean world” and to foster “understanding national cultures in their regional maritime milieu” (IGNCA 2014).

Looking at two countries that have an adversary security relationship such as China and India, the following section will first look at what interactions they actually have bilaterally and whether (joint) discourses and actions on antipiracy have a “confidence-building” effect. Figure 1 displays the time line of international antipiracy coalitions and Indo-Chinese relations in that context. It demonstrates the rapprochement by the two sides following the establishment of SHADE, for instance through the coordination mechanism which was established between China, India and Japan in 2012. It also shows antipiracy as a platform for disputes, for instance in 2012 and 2014, which signify the increasing suspicion towards foreign naval presence in the Indian Ocean.

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11 Interview, EU Military Service, Brussels, 6 May 2015



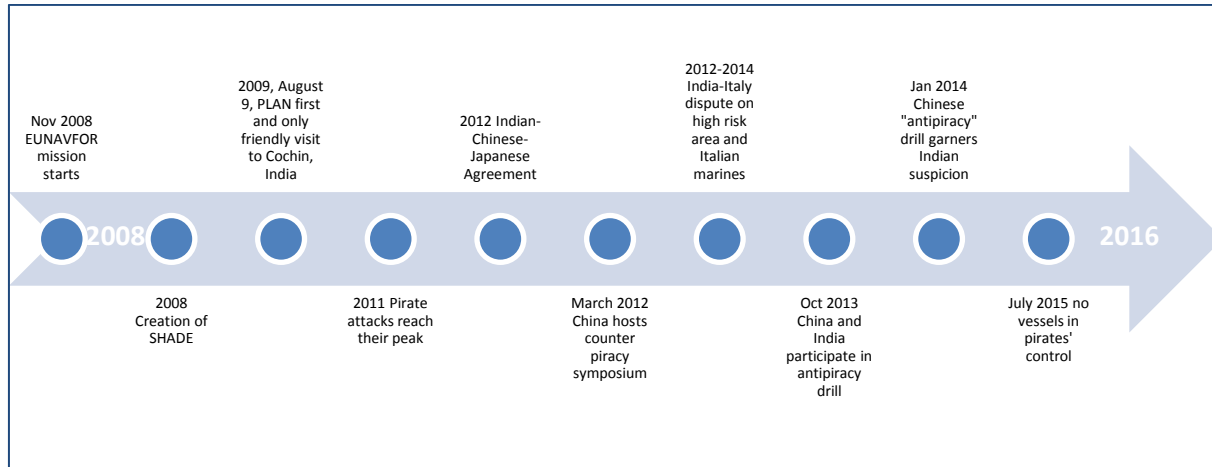


Figure 1: Timeline of China-India relations on anti-piracy in the Indian Ocean

There are several constraints of institutional nature, affecting in particular Indian participation in the missions. A common problem cited in recent strategic writings in India regarding cooperation with Europe for anti piracy operations is that EUNAVFOR Somalia carrying out operation Atalanta, and the NATO's operation Ocean Shield is not deployed as a UN Peacekeeping Force (UNPKF), under a unified command which could lead to centralized coordination as required for the success of such operations. Ships from countries like China, India and Japan thus operate independently. Efforts of SHADE by the United States under its Maritime Liaison Office in Bahrain are deemed as "naturally inadequate" (Sawhney 2010: 137). If there was to be a unified command under the auspices of the UNPK missions, as seen for land based peacekeeping operations, India would be much more ready to participate in its structure (Sawhney 2010, Mohan 2012). As a consequence Indian participation under Atalanta has been much lower than that of China.

India's core interests differ from China's (see Table 4). This is particularly true in relation to anti-piracy in the Gulf of Aden, which belongs to the Indian Ocean and thus to what it perceives its own sphere of influence. While their interests align in principle on the fact that Anti-piracy is a rather low-risk mission, for China it also contributes to its aspiration to shifting from a land based power a so-called "oceanic power". In 2008, however, the increase of Western and Chinese naval ships in the Indian Ocean under the banner of anti-piracy was initially greeted with suspicion. India is more interested in cooperating with other countries on counterterrorism issues, which carry less relevance for India's own territorial integrity. From a more pragmatic perspective, both countries want to protect their core trade routes. For

China, this article claims, the naval exposure through antipiracy can also serve as a platform for confidence-building.

Interests, based on	China	India
...principles	Antipiracy as a low risk mission, rather than addressing the root causes in Somalia, as willingness is low to put Chinese soldiers at risk.  Shift from land-based power to “oceanic power”	Antipiracy as a low-risk mission, preference for international cooperation on anti-terrorism.  Protection of regional sphere of influence in the Indian ocean
...pragmatic motivations	Implications for core trade route; naval exposure, confidence-building in the Indian Ocean	Implications for core trade route

Table 4: Chinese and Indian interests in antipiracy coordination

In practice there are several core obstacles hindering closer cooperation between China and India through antipiracy: firstly the interaction created through participation is more limited than what appears on paper, secondly there have been international disputes on the effects of rising insurance premiums in waters close to the Indian coast line and disputes on the areas that can be controlled for antipiracy, and thirdly Chinese presence in the Indian ocean in itself creates a traditional security challenge for India.

The multilateral mechanisms described in the previous section see India and China interact only to a very limited extent. China has in general been more active within SHADE, already actively participating since its creation in 2008, while India has focused on its own missions.<sup>12</sup> The first official mention of antipiracy in bilateral talks between China and India took place in February 2012, when the two agreed to undertake joint operations against pirates. Steps taken have been slow however. For instance, there would be benefits to discuss antipiracy also at multilateral BRICS meetings, but “tensions between China and India had long been identified as the major obstacle to including maritime security in discussions during the BRICS [Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa] summit” (Stuenkel 2012).

Secondly, there is disagreement on the international or national jurisdiction of areas affected by piracy. These tensions were expressed in the Italy-India case of February 2012, when two Italian sailors that were part of a military security team protecting a privately-owned cargo ship, shot at a fishing boat

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12 Interview, EU Military Service, Brussels, 6 May 2015

which they mistook for a pirate's attack (AlJazeera 2014). The Indian courts threatened to prosecute the Italian nationals outside of international law and for murder in the Indian system. The row was characteristic of an ongoing dispute of how close to the Indian coast international waters can be claimed and what threats there would be to the Indian local fisheries and jurisdiction (Press Trust of India 2012). A similar incident happened in October 2013, when the Indian coast guard stopped an armed ship operated by a U.S. maritime security company, which carried an international crew and arms, but failed to produce adequate documentation (Chandresekaran 2013). According to a report by Reuters, this case "highlights "loosely-regulated practice of placing private and military armed guards on ships for protection against pirate attacks" (Chandresekaran 2013).

Antipiracy activities are seen in direct relation to Indian maritime security in the Indian Ocean and are perceived "as a direct challenge to India's commercial and strategic interests. Chinese companies have been building maritime and energy infrastructure in countries such as Sri Lanka, Maldives, and Myanmar to decrease their dependence on the straits of Malacca. In India, these actions have led to the view that China is encircling India by building commercial ports that it may develop into military bases in the future" (Dixit 2014). From 29 January to 3 February 2014, a three-ship taskforce of the Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) conducted antipiracy, search and rescue, and damage control exercises near Indonesia, which were observed with suspicion by Indian commentators (Krishnan 2014). Similarly, in 2014 Chinese submarines have publicly docked in the ports in the Indian Ocean, such as Colombo and Karachi. The Chinese said those submarines were on way to take part in the anti-piracy operations and used the ports for re-supply. But it cause serious concerns to India suspecting that "China is practising long-range deployments of its nuclear and conventional submarines on the pre-text of anti-piracy patrols" (Pandit 2015). This observation seems to be echoed by external actors as well, such as US representatives, who also questioned the "logic" behind the submarine deployments (Peri 2016). Thus, antipiracy is perceived as a cover for increasing overall Chinese naval presence in the Indian ocean, going counter to the confidence-building hypothesis.

However, in the case of China-India relations, such obstacles have not yet led to a similar confrontation. There is a history of making mutual port calls between the two countries and, in what can be considered a first, the two countries participated in a joint naval exercise on antipiracy, maritime security and illegal immigration in 2013 (Ray 2013). "Even though India and China are not on the same page on navigational rights in the South China Sea, the two navies agreed to increase ship visits, conducting joint maritime search and rescue exercises and cooperate in counter-piracy operations" (Ray 2013).

### **4.3 Antipiracy as an instrument of great power relations: Cooperation and competition**

After revisiting the events and the participation by China and India in antipiracy I will now return to the initial question of whether the Indian Ocean region will emerge as an area of cooperation or competition between India and China. And which mechanisms could impact and explain the outcome?

In order to answer the question of this special issue on whether there is more cooperation or competition between the two, antipiracy acts as a platform for both. The 2012 agreement to develop a mechanism to coordinate Chinese, Indian and Japanese navy ships – who provide their protection vessels independently – when escorting cargo vessels through the Gulf of Aden was a clear sign of cooperation (Information Office of the State Council 2013). Similarly, the first joint training exercise and the two countries' participation in the SHADE mechanism were symbolic for the rapprochement created within the multilateral setting of antipiracy.

On the other hand, antipiracy drills and activities are perceived as an invasion into Indian areas of dominance, and Chinese drills, its relations with countries, such as the Seychelles, Maldives and Sri Lanka are by many pundits considered to be signs of an encirclement strategy ("The string of pearls"). Recent assertiveness by China concerning its maritime security interests in the South China Sea and the publication of the 2013 Blue Book on the Indian Ocean by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, a government think tank, reinforces the Indian wariness of Chinese objectives. The book states that "in the past, China's Indian Ocean strategy was based on 'moderation' and 'maintaining the status quo', but the changing dynamics of international relations necessitates China play a more proactive role in affairs of the region" (Kaplan 2013). Thus, while no comparable open confrontations, as witnessed with the Italian marines in 2012, have taken place between China and India surrounding antipiracy, one cannot exclude an emphatic reaction by India, should a Chinese antipiracy ship be seen as interfering within Indian territorial waters. Thus the concluding answer on whether antipiracy is successfully used for confidence building between the two countries has to remain ambiguous. As an Indian journalist put it, "New Delhi and Beijing undoubtedly realize the potential of a cooperative partnership on a vital issue like anti-piracy operations. But they are also fully aware of the limits of even this win-win situation" (Gokhale 2012).

There are several filters factors, such as history, personal background, political system and culture (Gippner and Mohan 2015) that impact the potential for cooperation on antipiracy. Initially questions of

history and culture, of interventionist structures and developing country solidarity create a general distrust towards a Western-led antipiracy alliance and make progress and approximation a slow process. Political context and slow decision-making structures explain the hesitant and step-by-step approach within Chinese foreign policy elites. Avoidance of risk and strong respect for the principle of non-interference, might explain why there is a willingness to take part in officers trainings and planning, and yet SHADE is a mere facilitating platform and bridge to bridge exchanges remain a rarity. Regardless, in line with its general neglect for India in its foreign policy, the country is seen as a distinct actor in the area of antipiracy.

The field of antipiracy thus while opening areas of cooperation and coordination has done so in general and across all participating countries, and has seen emerging economies close ranks with established ones in what can be described as a “success story of friendly relations”. An initial distrust of the antipiracy initiative and EU and NATO leadership can no longer be observed in the two countries’ discourses. Both actors take advantage of antipiracy as a means of engaging multilaterally and reinforcing a public image of a responsible actor, but so far they have not leveraged it yet for their bilateral relationship beyond the first set of joint antipiracy drills. However, looking into the future a changing discourse can be observed. With China getting engaged at an early stage, there is a possibility that India might follow a similar trajectory as China with a certain time lag.

## **5 Conclusion**

Antipiracy has been identified as one of the areas of international cooperation where emerging powers such as China and India have an increasing interest in participation that exceeds practical, economic-interest driven, motivations. Similar to other major economies, China and India support the non-threatening global discourse, which depicts “the Somali pirate” as an undisputed “enemy of all” and “other” (Reinsch 2014: 69). Cooperation alongside actors such as the EU and even NATO, which would be unthinkable in another context, has suddenly become legitimized. In that way, antipiracy as such has moved from addressing a non-security issue, which additionally *ex ante* appeared as a costly and futile endeavour, to an area of international engagement and an opportunity for confidence building between major countries.

The analysis has shown that there is no definite answer on whether the Gulf of Aden will become an area of competition or cooperation. So far antipiracy has served as a platform of cooperation and led to

intensified contacts between the two navies. China has whole-heartedly embraced this process, exposing increasing numbers of navy staff to exercises and coordination mechanisms in the Gulf of Aden. India on the other hand, continues to feel threatened by the Chinese presence in the region on the one hand, and fights legal battles concerning the delineation of high risk areas in its coastal zones on the other. More recent Chinese claims that submarines present in the Indian Ocean were needed for antipiracy purposes, as well as the opening of a Chinese refueling point in Djibouti are considered proof of this perception (Peri 2016). Hence, while China might – amongst others – consider antipiracy as a platform for increased cooperation and hence confidence-building, the perception by India has not changed.

The article also explored the hypothesis on the instrumentalization of antipiracy cooperation for great power relations based on the China-India case study. It argued that antipiracy efforts – in particular in light of their overwhelming success at securing waterways in the Gulf of Aden – can be seen as instruments of great power relations. In its present form and geopolitical context, antipiracy cooperation at a strategic and a tactical level exhibits both elements of competition and cooperation.

This ambiguity could be explained by the fact that the relations between these two emerging great powers, India and China, are constantly evolving, with neither of them having reached a status quo position. Antipiracy might be special, because it is at the interface between traditional and non-traditional security relations. While Chinese and Indian cooperation is slowly moving forward in the context of BRICS, for example with the creation of the BRICS development bank in July 2015, regular border disputes and an increasing Chinese presence in the Indian ocean through submarine port visits to Sri Lanka and Pakistan, reinforce India's threat perceptions. Interestingly, a similar area of non-traditional security, United Nations peacekeeping, sees similarly low levels of bilateral interaction due to India's far greater involvement, not due to threat perceptions.

A potential way forward towards increasing interaction in the Indian Ocean might even lie in including antipiracy, as an area of common interest, in other multilateral fora. China and India have held maritime dialogues since 2014 to exchange their views on issues related to maritime concerns and cooperation. Besides, they both participate in two regional associations: China is a dialogue partner of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) while India is a full member. China is an observer of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and is looking for full membership.

Future research would have to further verify these findings by analyzing the discourse on antipiracy in both countries and perceptions of each others' participation in official documents. As the issue of

antipiracy is still evolving and international cooperation will likely be considered along others of the “seven piracy chokepoints”, I expect both countries to take stronger coordinating roles using experiences like this and the Malacca Straits Patrols network. The positive mode of interaction between the EU, NATO, and the independent force deployers China and India in the Gulf of Aden, might thus serve as a template for cooperation.

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