

## **Briefing on Chinese PLA Navy's Escort Mission**

In accordance with the UN Security Council Resolutions, the Chinese Navy has started deploying naval task groups in the Gulf of Aden (GOA) and waters off Somali coast for escort missions since December 26<sup>th</sup>, 2008. Over the past seven years, the Chinese PLA Navy has dispatched 21 task groups, involving 62 ships and 46 helicopters to participate in the escort missions. As of September 15, the PLA Navy has properly provided protection for 6,056 vessels, with 8 World Food Program ships included; successfully rescued, recovered, and assisted more than 60 Chinese and foreign ships in need, verified and dispelled more than 2,500 suspicious ships, effectively suppressing the rampant activities of Somali pirates and vigorously safeguarding the navigation safety in this important world waterway.

The GOA and the waters off Somali coast is an important communications hub that connects Asia and Africa and it also constitutes critical "golden waterway" for European and African trade. About 1,500 Chinese merchant vessels pass through this sea lane annually. However, pirate activities in the above area have posed serious threat to the security of this region. As one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and as a nation with strong sense of responsibility, China is incumbent to perform its duty and deploys task groups for the missions that are conducive for maintaining the peace of the region and the world, and fulfilling the humanitarian obligations. Meanwhile, it is also consistent with the need to safeguard China's national strategic interests and protect the safety and security of important strategic sea lanes of communications.

When the Chinese PLA Navy's task group conducted its first escort mission in the GOA and waters off Somali coast, they were confronted with various challenges and difficulties. Our task groups have been tested in these missions. The challenges have the following characteristics: Firstly, the strength of pirates keeps growing and its activities tend to be increasingly rampant. The reasons attribute to the turbulent political situation in Somalia and the frequent internal disorder; besides, the counter-piracy efforts by the international community can only cure the symptoms instead of removing the root causes. Consequently, the pirate groups become increasingly rampant. They continuously change and adopt new means and ways for conducting activities and improve their capability in hijacking merchant vessels. Secondly, bad weather and severe environment of the area of responsibility (AOR) constitutes another challenge. Our task forces are exposed for long period of time at harsh environment of high temperature, high salinity and high humidity. In addition, the sand dust and monsoon period also pose negative effect upon the safe operation of equipment and personnel safety as well. Thirdly, the merchant vessels under escort are of various types and classes, and are difficult for coordination and organization. The MVs applying for escort are of various classes, flying different national flags, with different performance, tonnage, speed, freeboard, and hence have different defense capabilities. Besides, their time of arriving the rendezvous point varies. All these unfavorable factors seriously impact the overall command and coordination of the task groups. Any oversight or loophole would be exploited by pirates and the task group

would fall into passive situation. Fourthly, comprehensive support was difficult because of no oversea base. The AOR is far away from China's mainland. So far, the absence of oversea base capable of providing necessary support for long period deployment would impede the logistical material acquisition and therefore limit its logistical support capability.

Therefore, the Chinese PLA Navy has conducted in-depth analysis on possible difficulties of various kinds that might occur when conducting escort operations. In accordance with long-term mission requirements, we made adequate preparations and solved new problems in a timely manner. We actively adjusted escorting modes in practice and increased mission efficiency.

First, strengthen organization and leadership to implement efficient command. The Chinese PLA Navy has established special mission command organs. With 24-hour duty system, we conducted unified command and control of escort operations, and clarified a two-level flat command link from Navy headquarters to escort task groups to achieve continuous, real-time and effective command.

Second, well organize escort operations based on actual situations. In the beginning, the Chinese PLA Navy carefully analyzed the situation in the GOA and waters off Somali coast. We gave priority to the safety of escorted vessels. We improved pre-escort plans, and carried out mission-oriented training. By taking the most complicated, difficult situation and contingencies into serious account, we made full preparations for safe, timely and continuous escort operations, thus guaranteeing 100% safety of the escorted vessels.

Third, improve escorting modes and efficiency. Since multiple national departments are involved in escort operations, it is highly demanding for the time efficiency when handling emergent situations. The Chinese PLA Navy has established a command coordination mechanism with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Transport, COSCO and some other agencies and companies to conduct close coordination between each other, and improved command and optimized its process. As pirate activities keep changing, the Chinese PLA Navy has accordingly changed its escorting modes. In addition to company escort, escort patrol and special operation force (SOF) onboard escort, we have developed relay escort, responsive escort, Y area patrol and some others to maximize the overall efficiency of the task groups. Meanwhile, we adjusted the AOR in accordance with weather change. When necessary, we expanded patrol area and went to areas with frequent pirate attacks. We have made every effort to protect ships transiting the area and improve the escort efficiency.

Fourth, be decisive on making decisions on dealing with contingencies. A special command of the PLA Navy makes decisions immediately to ensure the task group to act in time in case of contingencies. On August 6<sup>th</sup>, 2009, the MV "Zhenhua 25" was attacked by pirate boats in Bab El-Mandeb Strait. Because that area was beyond the cover range of the ship-borne helicopter, the Commander of then task group immediately ordered that the supply ship be the relay for helicopter in order to drive off the eight pirate skiffs

where the pirates were attempting to embark onboard the MV. On November 21<sup>st</sup>, 2010, the MV Taiankou of COSCO was attacked by pirates in the Arabian Sea. The Commander on duty made immediate decision and commanded the escort ship to proceed to the incident area from hundreds of nautical miles away at high speed. While approaching the area, the escort ship collected information and made a careful plan for armed rescue. A team of SOF boarded the MV and successfully rescued the vessel and all 21 crew members.

Fifth, improve support capability by exploring and adopting multi-method support. The PLA Navy has developed a logistic support mode integrating regular sea replenishment by supply ship in the task group, occasional sea replenishment by contract merchant vessels, and port replenishment in harbor overseas, and a equipment support mode combining self-support repairing and maintenance, technical aid, and embarkation of emergent trouble shooting team. By utilizing a variety of resources and exploring ways to support the operating force, the PLA Navy has improved greatly its capability of comprehensive support in escort mission.

Sixth, enhance counter-piracy cooperation by conducting military diplomatic. During escort missions, the PLA Navy task groups have developed active and pragmatic cooperation with other counter-piracy forces, including;

- a. exchanging visits between mission commanders with CTF151, CTF 465, CTF 508, and operating warships from Russia, Japan, Singapore, the Netherlands, Korea, etc.;
- b. establishing a regularized mechanism of sharing intelligence with relevant countries and organizations;
- c. performing combined escort with Russia;
- d. conducting exercises and drills with Germany, the U.S., and Korea;
- e. exchanging ship riders with the Netherlands, and
- f. offering humanitarian aid to two foreign vessels.

The PLA Navy also receives support and help in the escort mission from other countries. In the rescue of the Chinese-flagged cargo ship MV Taiankou and the Panama-flagged cargo ship MV Full City, the PLA Navy was assisted by naval forces of the U.S., the UK, France, Turkey, and India. In the exchanges and cooperation between escorting forces, the navies share information and lessons learned candidly, and lay a good foundation for deepening the counter-piracy cooperation.

The counter-piracy escort mission gives the PLA Navy opportunities as well as challenges. Given the current situation, piracy threat in the Gulf of Aden and waters off Somali coast will not be eliminated in a short time. The escort mission will remain as a protracted task for the PLA Navy. The navy will resolutely execute the resolution of the UN Security Council and implement the decision and disposition of the PRC government, to defend the overseas interests of China, enhance international cooperation in the overseas interests concerned regions, and maintain regional and world peace.