

NAVY NEWS WEEK 8-4

20 February 2019

Somalia: Iran Deports Suspected Pirates to Somalia

in [Piracy and Security News](#)

17/02/2019



Thirteen Somali nationals have been deported to Somalia after serving several years in Iranian jails for alleged piracy. In a statement published on Iranian News Agency, the country's Justice Ministry announced that 10 Somali convicts had been deported to their homeland on Wednesday. The individuals are said to have been convicted in Iranian courts for piracy. Deputy Minister of Justice Mahmoud Abbasi said that the convicts would end their jail term in Somalia. Iran is among the countries that have been operating in the Indian Ocean to fight against pirates since 2011. Its navy forces had seized boats and detained dozens of Somalis suspected to have been involved in piracy. Many Somali pirates suspects are now serving jail terms in Iran. Mid last year, Somali pirates had freed four Iranian sailors held captive for more than three years. Piracy along Somalia's coastline had fallen far from its peak in 2011-2012 when pirate "mother ship" boats ranged thousands of miles across the Indian Ocean. Several foreign navies, including those from the European Union and China, operate regularly in the area as part of anti-piracy missions.

Source: Shabelle via <https://www.hellenicshippingnews.com>

Ukraine says Russia fires on its ships in Black Sea

Posted by Mike Billings

The Ukrainian Navy said today that Russia's coast guard opened fire on Ukrainian vessels in the Black Sea following a tense standoff off the coast of the Crimean Peninsula, wounding two crew members. Russia didn't immediately comment on the claims. Ukraine's Navy said that two of its vessels were struck and that Russian coast guard crews boarded them and a tugboat and seized them. There have been growing tensions between Ukraine and Russia, which annexed Crimea from Ukraine in 2014 and has steadily worked to increase its zone of control around the peninsula. Earlier, Russia and Ukraine traded accusations over another incident involving the same three vessels, prompting Moscow to block passage through the Kerch Strait. The Ukrainian vessels apparently wanted to travel through the strait to other ports in Ukraine, and Ukrainian authorities said they had given advance notice to the Russians. Russia's coast guard said that the three Ukrainian vessels made an unauthorised crossing through Russian territorial waters, while Ukraine alleged that one of its boats was rammed by a Russian coast guard vessel. The Kerch Strait is a narrow body of water nestled between Crimea and the Russian mainland. The incident began after the Ukrainian Navy claimed a Russian coast guard vessel rammed one of its tugboats, which was traveling with two Ukrainian Navy artillery boats from Odessa on the Black Sea to Mariupol in the Sea of Azov, via the Kerch Strait. *"Russian coast guard vessels ... carried out openly aggressive actions against Ukrainian navy ships,"* the Ukrainian Navy statement said. It said a Russian coast guard ship damaged the tugboat's engine, hull, side railing and a lifeboat.

Source: Maasmond Clippings



The Danish guided missile frigate **F 361 Iver Huitfeldt** comes in to Devonport past Drake's Island Feb 15 for operational sea training. When Denmark was making decisions in 1999 about future warship design they decided on one particular hull design and used it in both the 6,650 ton Huitfeldt frigates and the 4,500 ton Absalom class flexible support ships. ... a canny decision which might be copied by other countries now trying to make up their minds about future designs. Externally they look the same and their dimensions are the same...138 metres long... but the frigates are built for speed and have four MTU diesels instead of Absalon's two. Absalon can also utilise six interchangeable modules for command and support, ranging from commando operations to hospital facilities on humanitarian missions. The Huitfeldts use the space for greater protection, speed and weaponry

Photo : Raymond Wergan, Newton Ferrers.

USS Tulsa (LCS 16) Commissioned as Navy's Newest Surface Combatant

Story by Petty Officer 1st Class Woody Paschall

The littoral combat ship **USS Tulsa (LCS 16)** was commissioned as the Navy's newest surface combatant in a ceremony in San Francisco Feb. 16. The Independence-variant LCS is the Navy's second ship to be named for the city of Tulsa, Oklahoma. *"She truly is an amazing ship and an amazing addition to the fleet, but as impressive as she is, she would be nothing without the Sailors you see lining her deck this morning,"* said Cmdr. Drew Borovics, **Tulsa's** commanding officer. *"And as much as they have already accomplished, they know their true greatness lies ahead as **Tulsa** enters the fleet and stands ready to answer her nation's call. They are the finest Sailors our Navy has to offer. They are tough, able and ready to take our nation's newest warship to sea."* Indeed, in little more than three years, the ship has progressed from its keel laying in Mobile, Alabama, to its commissioning. Kathy Taylor, the ship's sponsor and former Tulsa mayor, was present for both events and many in between. *"I have gotten to know the crew of this exceptional **USS Tulsa**, and I know they will fight when they must,"* said Taylor. *"I know they will protect this country at all costs, because they know everything they fight for and they protect keeps the promises made to all Americans."* Current Tulsa mayor G.T. Bynum emphasized the bond between the people of Tulsa and the Sailors who serve aboard the Navy's newest ship. *"Wherever you are in the world, whatever day it might be or whatever hour in that day, we hope you know that there are hundreds of thousands of your fellow Tulsans who are thinking of you, and who are honored to be associated with you and are so proud of you,"* said Bynum. The crew visited the city little more than a year ago to learn more about it and its people. Oklahoma Sen. James Lankford recounted some of the characteristics of the city and its people beginning at the city's founding as the destination of a forced migration of Native American people, through booming growth and cultural turmoil and into a city renowned for its diversity and beauty. *"When you arrive at any port of our nation or any port around the globe, you will bear all of our names and all of our history,"* said Lankford. *"You are capable of operating in all environments. Your mission is to protect our seas and deter aggression, but when deterrence fails, we also know you are fully capable of restoring the peace. Your actions, your words, your faith, your discipline and your power will reveal to a curious world just who we are as Americans. You are our ambassadors for freedom and you bear the name Tulsa and the United States of America."* **Tulsa** will join the Fleet at a time of expansion of capability as well as increased demand on the Navy forces. Secretary of the Navy James Guertz noted **Tulsa** is the fifth ship the Navy has commissioned in the past 50 days and one of 13 ships slated to be commissioned this year-- up from eight a year ago--as part of broader efforts to ensure the nation's maritime freedom. *"Having the right mix of ships with the right number of ships, to include **Tulsa**, makes us ready to execute prompt and sustained combat operations at sea to fight and win against any adversary,"* said Adm. John C. Aquilino, the commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet. *"Let there be no doubt, that is what **Tulsa** is ready to do."* After the ceremony, the ship will transit to San Diego to join Commander, Littoral Combat Ship Squadron One (COMLCSRON ONE) and eight other littoral combat ships currently homeported at Naval Base San Diego. **Tulsa** is the 15th littoral combat ship and the eighth of the Independence variant. Littoral combat ships are high speed, agile, shallow draft, mission-focused surface combatants designed for operations in the littoral environment, yet fully capable of open ocean operations. As part of the surface fleet, LCSs have the ability to counter and outpace evolving threats independently or within a network of surface combatants. Paired with advanced sonar and mine hunting capabilities, LCSs provide a major contribution, as well as a more diverse set of options to commanders, across the spectrum of operations.

Source: Maasmond Clippings



The **Russian 82** southbound the Sound. Photo : **Lars-Eric Frennesson** ©

Three Iranian Navy ships visited Sri Lanka

Three Iranian Navy ships, **Bushehr**, **Lavan** and **Bayandore** arrived at the port of Colombo on a training and goodwill visit. The Commanding Officers of the ships, Lieutenant Commander Mahmood Badvi, Lieutenant Commander Hasan Beygi and Lieutenant Commander Mohammad Bagher Rahnama called on the Commander of the Western Naval Area, Rear Admiral Nishantha Ulugetenne. Talks were held between both sides and mementos were also exchanged to mark the occasion. During their stay in the island the crew members of ships took part in a number of programmes including cultural events and

friendly sporting activities organized by the Sri Lanka Navy. On completion of their official tour, the ships left from the Colombo harbour on the 18th
source : Colombo Gazette

Saudi naval forces rescue sick French sailor

Royal Saudi Naval Forces and the Saudi Arabian Border Guards rescued a 72-year-old French sailor after he fell ill while on a yacht in international waters. A Border Guards spokesman, Lt. Musfer Al-Quraini, said the search and rescue coordination center in Jeddah (JMRCC) had been contacted by the French Gris-Nez Maritime Rescue Coordination Center to report that a crew member on the yacht had experienced a severe medical condition requiring evacuation. He was suffering from internal bleeding and was 112 kilometers east of the Farasan Islands, a group of 84 coral islands that form an archipelago in the Red Sea. The JMRCC located the boat, contacted its captain and liaised with a doctor at Jeddah's King Fahd Hospital to provide medical guidance until the evacuation could be carried out. Maritime units were deployed to provide medical assistance and coordinate the rescue effort. The patient was evacuated by helicopter and moved to Prince Mohammed bin Nasser Hospital in the southwestern port city of Jazan, where he received medical treatment. He is in a stable condition. The yacht was accompanied to Jazan, following coordination with the port's administration. The French Gris-Nez Maritime Rescue Coordination Center thanked the JMRCC for rescuing the sailor.
Source : Arabnews



The A 833 Zr.Ms **Karel Doorman** arrived under tow of the tugs **Brent & Triton** from Den Helder Naval base between the IJmuiden breakwaters and was safely delivered at **Damen Shiprepair (Shiphdock)** in Amsterdam

Photo : Machiel Kraaij www.machielkraaijfotoografie.com ©

IDEX 2019: Carlo Margottini joins warship host at Port Zayed

19th February 2019 - 07:00 GMT

by [Richard Thomas](#) in Port Zayed, Abu Dhabi



Currently conducting multiple port visits in the GCC and wider Indian Ocean region alongside other maritime duties, the Italian Navy's **INS Carlo Margottini** currently finds herself at Port Zayed to take part in [IDEX 2019 in Abu Dhabi](#). An ASW-focused FREMM frigate, the near-7,000t vessel has returned to the region in 2019 [having been present the previous year](#). This year's schedule is part of the wider **MOMA 2019** (Middle East Arabian Sea 2019) deployment that will see **Carlo**

Margottini head to Damman, Kuwait, Muscat and Jeddah before returning to the Mediterranean Sea. In between port visits, the vessel will also join EUNAVFOR's [Operation Atalanta counter-piracy mission](#) in the Indian Ocean, acting as a deterrent to any would-be pirates operating from remote locations along the Horn of Africa. The vessel will rely on its sensor fit during night-time operations, and sail with its AIS turned off. While AIS aids navigation and de-risks night-time operations, it is also

a public source tracking system and renders the vessel visible to any users, pirate or otherwise. There is also an embarked VBSS team that can utilise a 9m Hurricane RHIB for interdiction missions, while an embarked [NH90](#) has been fitted with a fast rope to aid air-to-ship insertions. However, as an ASW frigate the vessel is also equipped with significant anti-submarine and underwater sensors, including a second embarked but ASW-roles NH90 helicopter. Ship's officers confirmed that they would utilise the ASW equipment during the tour but would not be drawn as to whether this would entail searching for Chinese or Russian submarines potentially operating in the Indian Ocean. The frigate is likely to conduct a series of exercises with allied vessels operating in the region, with a significant US presence in Bahrain providing the most likely source of platforms. Interestingly, **Carlo Margottini** will be receiving its EUNAVFOR orders from Rota in Spain, after the current command HQ in Northwood, UK, [moves at the end of March](#). With the UK's impending departure from the European Union, the country has lost its long-held position as [home of the HQ facility for the mission](#). The guided missile frigate is equipped with a 16-cell VLS for [ASTER-15](#) and [ASTER-30](#) missiles, two 76mm main guns and two torpedo launch systems. Sensor fit includes a multifunctional air search radar, SPS-791 surface radar, SPN-753 navigation radar and individual bow and mine avoidance sonars. The vessel is also fitted with the CAPTAS 4249 variable depth sonar. The Italian vessel was joined at Port Zayed by a variety of other vessels from foreign navies, including those of Australia, Korea and China.

Source: <https://www.shephardmedia.com>

Warship row: why Britain can't afford to be on China's bad side

When the UK voted to leave the EU in a 2016 referendum, it became apparent Britain needed China more than China needed it

[Hilary Clarke](#)

Updated: Monday, 18 Feb, 2019 8:36pm



The Royal Navy's new aircraft carrier, **HMS Queen Elizabeth**. File photo: AP

UK Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson's announcement he would send a warship to the Pacific could cost the British government more than just its reputation as a serious player on the international stage. As the country

prepares to leave the European Union next month, currently with no deal on trading arrangements, it will need all the friends it can get. Prime Minister Theresa May, the Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt and the finance minister Philip Hammond have been bending over backwards to court Beijing in the hope of a preferable post-Brexit trading deal. Number 10 Downing Street was still decorated with red lanterns and cherry trees for the Spring Festival when Williamson [dropped his firecracker last week](#). In a widely circulated speech, he said that as part of the UK's post-Brexit global ambitions he would deploy the UK's new aircraft carrier **HMS Queen Elizabeth** to the Indo-Pacific. The ship will have US F-35 fighter jets embedded *"enhancing the reach and lethality of our forces reinforcing the fact the United States remains our very closest of partners"*.

Source: <https://www.scmp.com>

Iran to Build 6,500-Ton Destroyer, Official Says

TEHRAN (Tasnim) –

Head of the Iranian Defense Ministry's Marine Industries Organization Rear Admiral Amir Rastegari said construction of a heavy destroyer weighing 6,500 tons is on the agenda of the organization.

February, 18, 2019 - 10:58

Speaking to the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) Sunday night, Rear Admiral Rastegari highlighted Iran's progress in manufacturing subsurface vessels and said the Islamic Republic is among the world's top 11 countries in terms of building submarines. The official added that the country has indigenized the knowledge of manufacturing submarines. He went on to say that the Marine Industries Organization has an extensive plan to build heavy vessels, and that the construction of a 6,500-ton destroyer is on the agenda. The remarks came after a new domestically made submarine dubbed "**Fateh** (Conqueror)" joined the Iranian Navy's fleet on Sunday. The submarine submerged at a ceremony in Iran's southern port city of Bandar Abbas, attended by Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, Army Commander Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi, Defense Minister Brigadier General Amir Hatami, and Navy Commander Rear Admiral Hossein Khanzadi. The watercraft has been developed by the Defense Ministry in collaboration with the Iranian academic centers

and knowledge-based centers. In comments at the unveiling ceremony, the defense minister said the 600-ton submarine is capable of launching torpedoes and anti-ship cruise missiles. The main mission of **Fateh** is to combat hostile vessels and submarines using torpedoes and missiles. It is also capable of laying naval mines and can be used also for reconnaissance missions. **Fateh** is also capable of carrying special forces during guerilla operations at ports and coastal areas.

Source: <https://www.tasnimnews.com>

FEATURE | No smooth sailing for China's aircraft carrier programme

February 18, 2019

Written by [Trevor Hollingsbee](#)

China's first aircraft carrier, the Ukrainian-built **Liaoning**, was commissioned into the PLA Navy in 2012, after the Chinese had carried extensive refurbishment and modernisation work, and China reportedly plans to establish a force of at least four large aircraft carriers. **Liaoning's** Chinese-built near sister ship, currently dubbed the Type 001A, has already undergone sea trials, and might be commissioned as early as April 2019. It will probably be named **Shandong**. Work, meanwhile, has reportedly commenced, in the Jiangnan Shipyard, on a third flat-top, designated Type 002. According to some reports, this ship might feature both nuclear propulsion, and the Electromagnetic Aircraft Launching System (EMALS). Neither **Liaoning**



nor the Type 001A are equipped with launching catapults, as they use the Short Take Off but Arrested Recovery system.

Type 001A. Photo: CG001213

Like other nations which have invested in such vessels, though, China is finding the operation of aircraft carriers to be a very challenging discipline. **Liaoning** has experienced mechanical difficulties, and its outmoded steam turbine propulsion system, reportedly, has had difficulty in maintaining the necessary speed for launching the carrier's embarked J-15 fighter bombers. There have also been

reports that the similarly-powered Type 001A is experiencing the same problem. Meanwhile, the Type 001A project's manager, Sun Bo, has been arrested and charged with corruption and abuse of power, and there has been media speculation that he will also face a charge of espionage. Recent reports, some quoting PLA navy sources, furthermore, allege that the Type 002 has been seriously delayed, due, at least in part, to the economic effects of the trade war between Beijing and Washington. Perhaps the strongest brake on China's aircraft carrier ambitions, though, is the feeble performance of the J-15, which is an unauthorised copy of a Russian Su-33 aircraft which was illicitly acquired from Ukraine. It is overweight and underpowered, and therefore only able to carry a small payload. It is also reputedly unstable in flight, while its WS-10H Tahang turbojets have proved troublesome. At least three PLA Navy pilots have so far been killed in J-15 crashes, and the fighter-bomber was grounded for a long period in 2016. The PLA Navy is therefore looking for a replacement aircraft, with likely candidates being the projected navalised versions of the new J-20 and FC-31 stealth planes. These sophisticated aircraft will not, though, be ready for front-line service for some years yet. Despite its shortcomings, **Liaoning** has been very useful to the PLA Navy as a training platform for carrier operations. It appears though, that as the Type 001A is being prepared for service, China is now contemplating the future of the older carrier, a major factor being a shortage of suitably qualified pilots. According to Hong Kong's *South China Morning Post*, quoting a retired PLA Navy officer, **Liaoning** has been earmarked to be converted into an EMALS trials vessel. Such a conversion would require the installation of very powerful electricity generation machinery. Recent weeks, though have also seen multiple regional reports that the carrier is to be sold to the Pakistan Navy, in order to narrow the naval capability gap between Pakistan and India. The latter country already operates one carrier and has a second, indigenously-built, example at an advanced stage of construction. China is already building frigates and submarines for Pakistan, and some analysts, noting both the potential strategic benefit to China, and the lack of the usual vehemence in the official denials from Beijing, believe that these reports have credibility.

Source: <https://www.bairdmaritime.com>

China's Far Seas Naval Operations, from the Year of the Snake to the Year of the Pig

February 18, 2019

By Ryan D. Martinson

Every year, about this time, the leaders of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) send their regards to Chinese sailors deployed overseas during the Lunar New Year. Every year these messages are covered by the Chinese press. Few in

China pay attention to these reports. Fewer foreign observers even know of them, but they should. This annual ritual tells the story of China's emergence as a global naval power.



Leading by the amphibious dock landing ship **Kunlunshan** (Hull 998), vessels attached to a landing ship flotilla with the South China Sea Fleet under the PLA Navy steam in formation during the maritime live-fire training in waters of the South China Sea from January 17 to 19, 2018. (eng.chinamil.com.cn/Photo by Liu Jian)

A Tradition is Born

PLAN leaders made their first Lunar New Year's call in the second year of China's anti-piracy escort mission in the Gulf of Aden. On the afternoon of February 11,

2010 PLAN Commander Wu Shengli and Political Commissar Liu Xiaojiang met in the PLAN Operations Command Center. There they held a video teleconference (VTC) with the members of China's 4th escort task force. According to Chinese press reports, the two leaders expressed their "*holiday wishes*" and "enthusiastic regards" to all Chinese sailors who were "*fighting on the frontlines*" in China's anti-piracy mission.¹ This VTC established the pattern for future lunar salutations. Admiral Wu praised the sailors for all that they had achieved while abroad. After 105 days, they had escorted 359 commercial ships, rescuing three from pirate attack. In doing their duty, they had portrayed an image of China as a responsible great power and "*won wide acclaim both at home and abroad.*" Wu entreated his sailors to faithfully implement the policies and instructions of the Central Military Commission and its Chairman, Hu Jintao. He warned them against complacency—they can and should strive to do better. Liu Xiaojiang followed with more praise, and orders for the task force commander to arrange fun activities so that sailors could have a safe, auspicious, and happy Spring Festival.² During the two years that followed, only the anti-piracy mission kept Chinese sailors in the "*far seas*" (远海) during the Lunar New Year.³ Every year, about this time, the leaders of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) send their regards to Chinese sailors deployed overseas during the Lunar New Year. Every year these messages are covered by the Chinese press. Few in China pay attention to these reports. Fewer foreign observers even know of them, but they should. This annual ritual tells the story of China's emergence as a global naval power. From their station off the Horn of Africa, these forces helped protect Chinese commercial vessels and personnel transiting the Gulf of Aden. They also performed other non-combat operations, such as evacuating Chinese citizens from [Yemen](#) in 2015. Meanwhile, the Chinese Navy was developing another far seas mission set—[high-intensity combat operations](#) east of the first island chain. In 2013, this objective brought Chinese sailors to sea on the most important holiday of the year.

Year of the Snake (2013)

On February 6, 2013, Wu Shengli and Liu Xiaojiang held two VTCs—a first in the history of New Year's salutations. They called Task Force 570, which was conducting escort operations in the Gulf of Aden, China's 13th escort task force to date. For their second call, they connected with [Task Force 113](#), then doing far seas training in the Philippine Sea. It comprised three vessels from the North Sea Fleet: the destroyer **Qingdao** and two frigates, the **Yantai** and **Yancheng**.⁴ Deployments to the Philippine Sea were not unusual. The PLAN [routinized operations](#) east of the first island chain in 2007. Task Force 113 represented just [one of six](#) (or more) far seas deployments in 2013, and it was certainly not the biggest. Indeed, in October of that year elements of all three PLAN fleets—North, East, and South—congregated in the Philippine Sea for [MANEUVER-5](#), the PLAN's first large-scale confrontation exercise in the far seas. But Task Force 113 was the [first to conduct](#) far seas training during the Spring Festival. With this decision, Wu and Liu showed that China was serious about its plans to transform the PLAN into a force capable of conducting high-intensity operations east of the first island chain, against the only potential adversary that could conceivably be there—the U.S. Navy.⁵ The years since have seen a dramatic acceleration in the pace of this transformation.

Year of the Horse (2014)

As Chinese citizens prepared to celebrate the year of the horse, hundreds of PLAN personnel were abroad. Wu and Liu made two calls on January 27, 2014. Aside from the 16th escort task force, they talked to Task Force 989, then pioneering a new model for far seas training.⁶ Up until then, PLAN far seas training mostly involved forays into the Philippine Sea. Task Force 989 conducted the PLAN's [first](#) "*two-ocean*" (两洋) deployment. The task force—which comprised [three surface combatants](#) from the South Sea Fleet—departed Sanya, Hainan on January 20th.⁷ It sailed through the South China Sea, where it drilled with China's submarine force, sharpening skills and tactics needed to [break an enemy blockade](#). After that, the task force continued south, lingering at the James Shoal to [hold a ceremony](#) marking the southernmost extent of claimed Chinese territory. It then sailed through the Sunda Strait, into the Indian Ocean. After training in waters south of Java, the three ships next proceeded north into the [western Pacific](#) via the Lombok Strait, Makassar Strait, and Celebes Sea. After operating in the Philippine Sea, Task Force 989 crossed the first island chain at the Miyako Strait, before heading home to



Zhanjiang, Guangdong, where it arrived on February 11th. During its 23-day deployment, the task force conducted “realistic” (实战化) training along the strategically-important waterways connecting the Pacific Ocean and Indian Ocean.⁸

Task Force 989 (January 20-February 11, 2014)

Year of the Goat (2015) and Year of the Monkey (2016)

The years 2015 and 2016 saw increased emphasis on noncombat operations in the far seas. In the past, anti-piracy escort task forces relieved before the Lunar New Year always arrived home before the

holiday. This changed in the year of the goat. When Admiral Wu and the new PLAN Political Commissar, Miao Hua, called the navy’s overseas forces on February 15, 2014, Task force 547 was on its third month of escort operations in the Gulf of Aden.⁹ Meanwhile, the 18th escort task force was then in [Piraeus, Greece](#), on a four-day port visit.¹⁰ It would not [arrive home](#) until March 19, 2015. Wu and Miao also connected with Task Force 138, led by the East Sea Fleet’s *Sovremenny*-class destroyer **Taizhou**, which spent the Lunar New Year training in the Philippine Sea. The year of the monkey looked much the same. When Wu and Miao called on the afternoon of February 2nd, they spoke to three different PLAN task forces operating abroad. Task Force 57, the 21st escort task force, was then just pulling into India to participate in an [international fleet review](#). Its relief, Task Force 576, was conducting anti-piracy operations off the Horn of Africa. Meanwhile, a task force led by the North Sea Fleet’s destroyer **Harbin** was deployed somewhere in the Western Pacific.¹¹

Year of the Rooster (2017)

No PLAN surface forces operated east of the first island chain during the 2017 Lunar New Year—at least none that Beijing cared to admit.¹² The PLAN’s new Commander, Vice Admiral Shen Jinlong, and Political Commissar Miao Hua made the annual New Year’s call on the morning of January 20, 2017. They spoke to two escort task forces: the 24th (then preparing to arrive in [Qatar](#)), and the 25th (on station off the Horn of Africa).¹³ Shen and Miao inaugurated a new tradition on this day. They held a VTC with PLAN personnel involved in the construction of China’s massive new military bases in the disputed Spratly Islands. In his remarks, Shen described them as operating “on the front lines of island/reef construction.” He praised the sailors for “*resolutely implementing Chairman Xi’s policy*” and achieving the “*strategic aims*” (战略目标) of the new construction, which he did not define. Why did Shen and Miao conduct a VTC with sailors in the Spratly Islands in 2017, when PLAN personnel had been there since the 1980s? Why only the Spratlys, not the Paracel Islands, which were also in the midst of a [construction boom](#), or naval forces operating along other parts of China’s maritime frontier? This decision suggests that PLAN leaders regarded the new Spratly bases as more than just installations with which to influence events in the South China Sea, but also as key components of the Navy’s far seas force structure.

Year of the Dog (2018)

On the afternoon of February 12, 2018, PLAN leaders held four VTCs—more than ever before.¹⁴ Vice Admiral Shen Jinlong and new Political Commissar Qin Shengxiang talked to the 28th escort task force, which had just completed an [escort mission to Kenya](#). They also called Task Force 173, then in the eastern Indian Ocean conducting a “two ocean” deployment.¹⁵ This task force comprised [four ships](#) from the South Sea Fleet—the destroyer **Changsha**, frigate **Hengyang**, LPD **Jinggangshan**, and supply ship **Luomahu**. After the call, it would sail north into the Philippine Sea, disappointing widespread media [speculation](#) that it might head to the Maldives during the climax of that country’s political crisis. Task Force 173 [arrived home](#) on February 25, 2018. Shen and Qin also called PLAN sailors stationed at China’s first overseas military base. According to Chinese reporting, Shen praised the sailors for “*blazing the path for overseas base construction*,” clearly indicating that while Djibouti may be the first, it would not be the last. Shen and Qin also called Chinese sailors stationed in the Spratly Islands, which they now called the “*Spratly Garrison*” (南沙守备部队). Shen thanked them for “*their important contributions to guarding and constructing the Spratlys*.”¹⁶ Shen and Qin made four calls on that day; but they should have made a fifth. Chinese reporting on the VTC excludes any mention of Task Force 171 (i.e., the 27th escort task force). It comprised [three vessels](#)—the destroyer **Haikou**, the frigate **Yueyang**, and the supply ship **Qinghaihu**. In the second half of January 2018, after making port visits to [Tunisia](#) and [Algeria](#), Task Force 171 passed

through the Strait of Gibraltar before navigating south along the west coast of Africa. On February 7th, the warships held anti-piracy exercises somewhere in the Gulf of Guinea.¹⁷ Reporting on Task Force 171 then went quiet for 12 days, until February 19, when the ships arrived in Cape Town, South Africa, for a [two-day port visit](#). This timeline indicates that when Shen and Qin made their calls on February 12, Task Force 171 was somewhere in the South Atlantic. Shen and Qin almost certainly called Task Force 171—why would they exclude them? But if so, why choose not to publicize the call? There is no clear answer. Was the mere presence of the task force in the Atlantic judged too sensitive? Unlikely, since this was not the first time that PLAN ships had been there. Just six months earlier, Task Force 174 took the long way home from the Baltic, where it had held exercises with the Russian Navy.¹⁸ In mid-August 2017, it conducted simulated “*missile attack exercises*” somewhere in the Atlantic.¹⁹ But its activities were only publicized in the PLAN press, not the wider media, as New Year’s salutations always are. Perhaps the problem was that allowing press coverage of the VTC would require that PLAN leaders publicly explain what the task force was doing in the Atlantic, and why.

Year of the Pig (2019)

February 2, 2019 was a very busy day at the PLAN Operations Command Center. On the eve of the lunar holiday, Shen Jinlong and Qin Shengxiang [called](#) five different Chinese task forces operating abroad. Only one anti-piracy escort task force was on their list—the 31st. The 30th escort task force had arrived in Qingdao on [January 27](#), just in time to celebrate the Lunar New Year. As in 2018, Shen and Qin called the Spratly Garrison and the PLAN’s base in Djibouti. However, for the first time in PLAN history, two task forces conducted far seas training deployments during the Spring Festival. The first comprised [a task force](#) led by the East Sea Fleet destroyer **Zhengzhou**. Chinese press coverage did not indicate where Task Force 151 was, or what it was doing. The Chinese media did cover the movements of the other far seas training task force then at sea. Task Force 174 left Zhanjiang, Guangdong on January 16. It comprised the destroyer **Hefei**, frigate **Yuncheng**, LPD **Changbaishan**, and supply ship **Honghu**. When Shen and Qin contacted them, they were not in the Philippine Sea, but somewhere in the [Central Pacific](#)—that is, somewhere in the vast expanse of ocean between Guam and Hawaii. Also new, the Chinese press [described](#) Task Force 174 as a “*far seas joint training task force*” (远海联合训练编队). It was working in conjunction with [other services](#) under the Southern Theater Command—the PLA Air Force, PLA Rocket Force, and the PLA Strategic Support Force. Official Chinese [media sources](#) revealed that one of their aims was to “*explore methods and approaches for building joint operations combat capabilities to win modern war at sea.*”

Conclusion

The information shared in the PLAN’s annual New Year’s greetings does not account for everything the service is doing abroad. The case of Task Force 171 proves that. These short news reports tell us nothing about the expansion of Chinese [submarine operations](#) into the Indian Ocean. Nor do they acknowledge other naval activities best kept secret, such as intelligence collection and hydrographic surveys. Still, the short history of China’s Lunar New Year’s deployments tells us much about the key events in China’s rise as a global naval power. This history shows a growing emphasis on both the combat and non-combat elements of China’s far seas naval strategy. It highlights the geographic expansion of China’s overseas deployments—where once Chinese ships were concentrated in the northwest Indian Ocean and the Philippine Sea, they now operate as far away as the Atlantic Ocean and the Central Pacific. In the year of the snake, China’s far seas force structure comprised small task forces largely reliant on at-sea replenishment and the expensive hospitality of foreign ports. In the year of the pig, it included significant shore-based infrastructure, including the country’s first—but not last—overseas military base in Djibouti and colossal new installations in the Spratly Islands. This chronicle of the PLAN’s New Year’s deployments also shows how China’s growing emphasis on jointness is affecting naval operations abroad, and informing Beijing’s preparations for high-end conflict at sea. All of these things have happened in a single decade. This history is far from over. By all accounts, the Chinese Navy has a long way to go before fully realizing its nautical ambitions. Xi Jinping has told the PLAN to set its sights on becoming a “[world-class navy](#)” by mid-century. What that means is impossible to tell. The PLAN has not shared its benchmarks for success. What is clear is that the decisions of PLAN commanders on the eve of each Lunar New Year will continue to serve as a useful gauge for progress in this journey, wherever it ends up.

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2. Ibid
3. In Chinese military discourse, the term “near seas” (近海) refers to the Bohai Gulf, Yellow Sea, East China Sea, and South China Sea. The term “far seas” refers to all waters beyond the near seas.
4. 蒲海洋 [Pu Haiyang] 海军首长视频慰问570、113编队官兵 [“Head of Navy Holds Video-Teleconference to Send Regards to the Officers and Enlisted of Task Force 570 and Task Force 113”] 人民海军 [People’s Navy] February 8, 2013, p. 1.
5. During the VTC, Admiral Wu told the sailors that their sacrifice “held important significance for strengthening the concept of readiness embodied in the phrase ‘being able to fight and win’ exploring and putting into practice a mechanism for normalizing far seas training, exercising and improving the service’s ability to conduct far seas missions and tasks, and realizing a good start to the surface fleet’s annual far seas training.” See Pu Haiyang, “Head of Navy Holds Video-Teleconference,” op. cit.

6. 梁庆松 [Liang Qingsong] 海军首长视频慰问546, 989编队官兵 ["Head of Navy Holds Video-Teleconference to Send Regards to the Officers and Enlisted of Task Force 546 and Task Force 989"] 人民海军 [People's Navy] January 28, 2014, p. 1.
7. The task force included the LPD *Changbaishan*, the destroyer *Haikou* and the destroyer *Wuhan*.
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10. The task force was in Greece from February 16-20, 2015. Perhaps because the crew were too busy ashore, Wu and Miao sent their New Year's salutations via written message. See Wang Yuanyuan, "Head of Navy Holds Video-Teleconference," op. cit.
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14. 王元元 [Wang Yuanyuan] 海军领导视频慰问海上任务编队, 驻南沙岛礁和海外保障基地官兵 ["Navy Leaders Hold Video-Teleconference to Send Regards to Sailors from Task Forces at Sea, Located at Spratly Islands/Reefs, and Overseas Support Base"] 人民海军 [People's Navy] February 13, 2018, p. 1.
15. The *People's Navy* newspaper reports that on February 13, 2018 the task force was operating in the eastern part of the Indian Ocean, doing an anti-piracy exercise. See 周启青 [Zhou Qiqing] 大洋深处的"飓风营救" ["A 'Hurricane Rescue' in the Depths of the Ocean"] 人民海军 [People's Navy] February 26, 2018, p. 1.
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Source: <http://cimsec.org>

China is working on killer robot ships of its own

By: [David B. Larter](#)

18 Feb 2019



Company representatives say China has a working prototype of the JARI USV, which is equipped like a mini DDG, but details beyond that are scant. (Photo by David B. Larter)

ABU DHABI –The Chinese shipbuilder China Shipbuilding and Offshore International Company is developing a small unmanned surface vessel that China wants to function essentially like the uninhabited baby brother of a U.S. Arleigh Burke destroyer. The JARI USV is a 20-

ton, 15-meter boat that is orders of magnitude smaller than the [People's Liberation Army Navy's](#) manned Type -55 destroyer but has all the same mission areas: anti-submarine, anti-surface and anti-air warfare. A model of the drone was on display at the [International Defense Exhibition and Conference](#) in Abu Dhabi. 'The JARI comes equipped with electro-optical sensor atop a superstructure, a phased array radar, a dipping sonar, eight small vertical launch system cells, a torpedo launcher and a forward mounted machine gun and rocket launcher for counter-surface engagements, according to a model displayed at the International Defense Exhibition and Conference. The U.S. Navy has been increasingly discussing its desire to pursue unmanned technologies to fight on the surface and subsurface, employing a network of sensor and shooter drones to penetrate anti-access environments such as the South China Sea. The JARI seems to be at least part of China's response to that kind of warfare. According to the product video, the drone appears to be modular and reconfigurable for the different mission areas, but it's unclear what missions are permanently integrated into the system. In the video, JARI is shown alternately shooting down an aerial drone, sinking a submarine, machine-gunning a RHIB full of adversaries trying to steal it (after firing warning shots) and sinking a surface ship that looked a little like a littoral combat ship. The boat tops out at 42 knots and has a range of about 500 nautical miles. Last year, when China unveiled the design at a show in Africa, a representative [told Navy Recognition](#) that the drone was for use by the PLAN and for foreign sales and that a working prototype was being tested in China. The drone can be controlled by either a shore station or from a mother ship, Navy Recognition reported. There is no word on what kind of communication link the boat would have and where exactly humans

would be in the loop. In the video it appeared that at least the forward-mounted machine gun would fire automatically at rapidly closing surface targets after firing a round of warning shots. In an interview with Defense News, the U.S. Navy's Surface Warfare director said the service was looking to field a family of drones that can network back to larger manned combatants, which could remain passive and not give away their position with larger sensors such as ballistic missile defense phased array radars lit off.

Source: <https://www.defensenews.com>

Stellar Daisy wreck located by Ocean Infinity



Seabed exploration company Ocean Infinity has located the wreck of the lost South Korean very large ore carrier **Stellar Daisy** in the South Atlantic Ocean approximately 1,800 nautical miles due west of Cape Town, South Africa. The wreck was found in 10 days after Ocean Infinity's vessel **Seabed Constructor** sailed from Cape Town on 8 January to begin the search. **Stellar Daisy**, which sank on 31 March 2017 while transporting iron ore from Brazil to China, was located at a depth of 3,461 metres in South Atlantic Ocean.

Working from **Seabed Constructor**, the search operation involved the deployment of four autonomous underwater vehicles (AUVs) which over 72 search hours explored approximately 1,300 sq km of seabed. *"We are pleased to report that we have located **Stellar Daisy**, in particular for our client, the South Korean Government, but also for the families of those who lost loved ones in this tragedy,"* said Oliver Plunkett, CEO of Ocean Infinity. *"Through the deployment of multiple state-of-the-art AUVs, we are covering the seabed with unprecedented speed and accuracy,"* Plunkett said. Ocean Infinity said that its AUVs are capable of operating in water depths from five metres to 6,000 metres, and they are not tethered to the vessel during operations, allowing them to go deeper and collect higher quality data for the search. The AUVs are equipped with a side scan sonar, a multi-beam echo-sounder, a sub-bottom profiler, an HD camera, a conductivity/temperature/depth sensor, a self-compensating magnetometer, a synthetic aperture sonar, and a turbidity sensor. The sinking of the Polaris-owned VLOC **Stellar Daisy** had resulted in the deaths of 22 crew members. Source: <http://www.seatrade-maritime.com>

Workhorses of the sea



Van Oord **Aeolus** at the SIF terminal at Rotterdam Maasvlakte II Photo : Arie Boer ©