

NAVY NEWS WEEK 48-1

28 November 2021

Danish Frigate Kills Four Pirates in First Gulf of Guinea Engagement

Published Nov 25, 2021 11:27 AM

by [The Maritime Executive](#)



Danish frigate **Esbern Snare** which is operating in the Gulf of Guinea (Anders Fridberg photo courtesy of Danish Armed Forces)

Less than a month after beginning its patrols in the Gulf of Guinea, the Danish frigate **Esbern Snare** killed four suspected pirates and took four others into custody. The incident, which is the first involving the newly arrived international presence in the region, is being widely hailed as a potential turning

point in the regional fight against piracy. Forsvaret, Denmark's defense ministry, reports that on Wednesday, November 24, the **Esbern Snare**, which had been sailing to Tema, Ghana, responded to reports of increased risk in the area dispatching its helicopter for surveillance. The crew of the helicopter reportedly that afternoon found "a fast-moving motorboat with eight suspicious men on board in an area with a number of merchant ships." On board the boat, the helicopter crew could see a number of the tools associated with piracy, including ladders. During the evening, **Esbern Snare** was close enough to launch a fast-moving boat with its detachment from the frogman corps with orders to board the suspected pirate boat. The ministry reports that the **Esbern Snare** called the pirates to bring them to a halt so that the Danish soldiers could get on board. When the pirates did not react, the Danish forces fired warning shots and the pirates then opened fire on the Danish soldiers. A brief firefight ensued with the Danish soldiers acting in self-defence responding to the fire from the pirates. No Danish soldiers were injured, but five pirates were hit before the gun battle ceased. The Danes then boarded the pirate vessel finding that four have been killed, one was wounded, and the remaining three surrendered. "The incident involving the Danish Navy and the death of four pirates represents a key milestone in the evolution of piracy within the Gulf of Guinea," writes analysts at security consultants Dryad Global. "In the short-term pirates continuing to target commercial vessels operating within the Gulf of Guinea are unlikely to be significantly deterred from conducting such operations in future as a result of this activity. However, this incident shows the Danish government's intent to have an enforcement impact in the region." Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen happened to be visiting the region and had been scheduled to visit the frigate today. Speaking to reporters in Ghana she said that the Danish vessel had likely prevented a pirate attack against a merchant ship highlighting that the vessel and her country were making a significant contribution to regional safety. The **Esbern Snare**, which had previously been deployed on security missions in East Africa, [departed Denmark at the end of October](#) for a six-month deployment to the Gulf of Guinea. In anticipation of the Prime Minister's visit Forsvaret, a day earlier described the first steps the vessel was taking working to develop an understanding of ship traffic in the region. The captain explained that they were learning about the level of activity "to establish a picture of what is normal and what is abnormal." He pointed out that there was likely illegal fishing, as well as vessels that sell fuel to the illegal fishermen, and probably are also a number of smugglers. "We sit in the ship's operating room and use all the means we have available to collect information and build a normal picture of the area in which we operate. We also obtain all the intelligence we can and thus build a picture of how ships, fishermen, oil platforms, and so on act in the area," explained Lieutenant Captain Lars Kenneth, who is an operations officer on the **Esbern Snare**. Forsvaret said that the vessel was working to "clarify where the risk of pirate attacks is greatest, and where the **Esbern Snare** must therefore position himself to prevent pirate attacks or, if they do occur, be able to intervene

as soon as possible." They are also observing merchant vessels in the area to determine the ones at the highest risk from pirates. The Danes plan to remain on patrol till April 2022 in the region. At the mid-point of the deployment, they will relieve some members of the crew with replacements from a sister vessel.

Source: <https://www.maritime-executive.com>

Reported before, but more information included.

BIMCO calls for continued naval support in Gulf of Guinea after piracy incident

Following the incident in the Gulf of Guinea on 24 November involving the Danish frigate **Esben Snare** and a suspected pirate vessel, BIMCO called on all naval forces in the area to further increase the pressure on piracy groups in the hope that a continued naval presence will act as a deterrent. According to the Danish Armed Forces, Danish frigate **Esben Snare** has been involved in an incident involving suspected pirates on 24 November in the waters south of Nigeria. The Danish navy further announced that the frigate was close enough to send a team to the suspected pirates with the aim to board, but the vessel did not react when ordered to stop. The team issued warning shots after which the suspected pirates opened fire directly at the Danish soldiers who responded in self-defence. After a brief exchange of fire, four suspected pirates died, and one was injured. None of the Danish soldiers were hurt. BIMCO has persistently called for international support in the area and in May launched the Gulf of Guinea Declaration on Suppression of Piracy together with the industry. Following the incident, BIMCO's Secretary General and CEO, David Loosley says: *"BIMCO is grateful to the Danish Navy for their firm actions to stop suspected pirates in the Gulf of Guinea. While every loss of life is tragic, we note the Danish special forces – acting in accordance with international law – were forced to fire in self-defence directly against the suspected pirates."* The Danish frigate left Denmark for Gulf of Guinea at the end of October 2021. The aim is that the visible presence of the **Esben Snare** in the area will be a deterrent for pirates, but Danish authorities have announced that the frigate will also try to actively locate pirates and intervene where possible if pirate attacks occur. *"We hope this incident will have a deterrent effect on pirate groups considering attacking shipping in the Gulf of Guinea. For too long Niger Delta based pirate groups have been allowed to operate almost unhindered in the world's number one piracy hotspot: The Eastern Gulf of Guinea. We continue to call for all naval forces in the area to further increase the pressure against the pirate groups and act with determination and in accordance with international law,"* says BIMCO's Head of Maritime Safety and Security, Jakob Larsen. Denmark is not the only country to react to the problem of piracy attacks in the Gulf of Guinea. In November 2020 an Italian warship disrupted a pirate attack on a tanker, and in October 2021 a Russian warship chased off a pirate group attacking a container ship. Other countries support the efforts through capacity building and joint patrols with regional navies. In mid-October, the UK announced that it would deploy a naval vessel plus a contingent of Royal Marines to the Gulf of Guinea to help in the battle against piracy. The Gulf of Guinea continues to be particularly dangerous for seafarers with 32% of all reported incidents of piracy in the first half of 2021 taking place in the region, according to the International Chamber of Commerce's International Maritime Bureau.

Source: www.navybooks.com

The approach differs somewhat from that followed in the Horn of Africa.

Royal Navy joins international counter-piracy efforts in West Africa

River-class offshore patrol vessel, HMS Trent, has joined the international fight against piracy in West African waters to help protect more than £6 billion of UK trade that passes through the region, the Royal Navy announced.

HMS Trent is in the Gulf of Guinea – one of the world's piracy hotspots – as the UK looks to improve security and help prevent widespread piracy which has seen international shipping suffer, seafarers' lives put in danger and damage caused to the economies of nearby nations. The patrol ship has visited Nigeria, Ghana and Senegal to foster ties and train local forces, equipping them in the fight against illegal activity, and spoken to local fishermen to understand patterns of life during security operations in the Niger Delta. **HMS Trent** carries a specialist team of Royal Marines from 42 Commando who are experts in boarding

operations, known officially as Maritime Interdiction Operations. The commandos have been sharing knowledge and expertise in the skills needed to board, search and – if needs be – seize suspect vessels. **Trent**'s mission also included French-led multinational exercises, known as **Grand African Nemo**, during which the ship worked closely with the Togolese, Nigerian and Benin Navies, while also operating with the Italian frigate **Marceglia** as part of international efforts. The deployment of the patrol vessel is a clear signal of the UK's commitment to the region. **HMS Trent**'s Commanding Officer, Commander Tom Knott, said: *"I am extremely proud that **HMS Trent** is spearheading the Royal Navy's return to West Africa and the Gulf of Guinea. My Sailors and Royal Marines are highly trained in the delivery of Maritime Interdiction Operations and are working alongside regional partners to re-establish our understanding of this complex and vast water space. "Alongside the UK's 2021 co-chairing of the G7++ Friends of Gulf of Guinea we are targeting a collaborative approach to improving maritime security and to reassure the merchant shipping community. "This will be an enduring commitment to West Africa. So far we've already enjoyed hosting school children, conservation groups, government representatives and military leaders on board Trent to build stronger links with the community and explain exactly why the Royal Navy is deployed to this region."* The UK co-chaired the G7++ Friends of the Gulf of Guinea conference with hosts Senegal during **HMS Trent**'s stop in Dakar this week. The meeting brings together nations to deal with illegal activities at sea in the region and Armed Forces Minister James Heappey visited Trent in the Senegalese capital. **HMS Trent** will soon visit Cape Verde where sailors and marines will train the Cape Verde Coast Guard in how to plan and conduct vessel boarding operations to support counter-narcotics missions. The ship will continue to The Gambia before continuing her long-term deployment to the Mediterranean that has seen her operate as far east as the Black Sea since she left the UK six months ago.

Source: Naval Post

U.S. Coast Guard Offloads \$504 Million Worth of Seized Drugs in Port

Everglades

[Mike Schuler](#)

November 26, 2021



The U.S. Coast Guard this week offloaded approximately 26,250 pounds of cocaine and 3,700 pounds of marijuana from the **USCGC Hamilton**, marking the largest drug interdiction in the ship's history. The drugs, worth approximately \$504 million, were offloaded Monday at Port Everglades, Florida. The drugs were interdicted in international waters of the Eastern Pacific Ocean off the coasts of Mexico, Central and South America, including contraband seized during eight interdictions of

suspected drug smuggling vessels by **USCGC Hamilton**, **USCGC Vigilant** and Canada's **HMCS Harry DeWolf**.



U.S. Coast Guard Cutter **Hamilton** (WMSL 753) on scene with a Low-Profile Vessel (LPV) in the Pacific Ocean, Nov. 15, 2021. The **Hamilton** is homeported in Charleston, South Carolina. (U.S. Coast Guard photo)

"I could not be prouder of this crew and their determination to keeping more than 26,000 pounds of cocaine from reaching the shores of Central and North America," said Capt. Matthew Brown, Commanding Officer Coast Guard

Cutter **Hamilton**. *"It has been a dynamic two and half months for this ship with some very difficult law enforcement cases. But at the core of these capabilities is a true culture of trust*

and respect for each other which enabled the safe apprehension of 14 suspected traffickers. Each one of our cases represented the teamwork and partnerships not only domestically but with our partners in the Western Hemisphere."

Source: <https://gcaptain.com>

Philippines Rejects China's Demand To Remove BRP Sierra Madre From Disputed Shoal

[Reuters](#)

November 26, 2021



The **BRP Sierra Madre**, a marooned transport ship which Philippine Marines live on as a military outpost, is pictured in the disputed Second Thomas Shoal, part of the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea March 30, 2014. REUTERS/Erik De Castro/File Photo

The Philippines will not remove a dilapidated navy ship grounded on an atoll in the South China Sea, its defense chief said on Thursday, [rejecting a demand by China after it blocked a mission to resupply the vessel's crew](#). Defence Secretary Delfin Lorenzana dismissed China's assertion on

Wednesday that the Philippines had committed to remove the **BRP Sierra Madre**, which was intentionally grounded at the Second Thomas shoal in 1999 to reinforce Manila's sovereignty claims in the Spratly archipelago. The 100 meter-long (330-ft) tank landing ship was built for the U.S. Navy during World War Two. *"That ship has been there since 1999. If there was commitment it would have been removed a long time ago,"* Lorenzana told reporters. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian on Wednesday said Beijing *"demands the Philippine side honour its commitment and remove its illegally grounded vessel."* The Second Thomas Shoal, 105 nautical miles (195 km) off Palawan, is the temporary home of a small contingent of military aboard the rusty ship, which is stuck on a reef. China claims the majority of the South China Sea as its own, using a **"nine-dash line"** on maps that an international arbitration ruling in 2016 said has no legal basis. The Second Thomas Shoal is within the Philippines' 200 nautical mile exclusive economic zone, as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), to which China is a signatory. *"We have two documents attesting that we have sovereign rights in our EEZ while they don't, and their claims have no basis,"* Lorenzana said. *"China should abide by its international obligations that it is part of."* President Rodrigo Duterte on Monday told a summit hosted by Chinese President Xi Jinping that he *"abhors"* China's recent actions at the shoal.

Source: <https://gcaptain.com>

Royal Navy in the News

US Marine Corps bid farewell to HMS Queen Elizabeth as they depart Carrier Strike Group

The US Marine Corps' VMFA-211 squadron – known as the Wake Island Avengers – which operates the same B variant as the UK, have now departed the UK Carrier Strike Group after six months of operations and exercises.



The USMC has departed **HMS Queen Elizabeth** after 6 months on deployment with the UK Carrier Strike Group.
Photo: Crown Copyright/MoD/Jay Allen

The American jets and her personnel worked side-by-side the RAF/Royal Navy 617 Squadron, the 'Dambusters', carrying out 1,278 sorties, clocking up more than 2,200 hours in skies around the globe. They also carried out 44 missions in support of the US-led **Operation Inherent Resolve** – conducting

air strikes against Daesh. As well as the US Marine Corps, US Navy ship **USS The Sullivans** also joined the UK Carrier Strike Group on its maiden operational deployment. The Arleigh Burke-class destroyer left the task group recently, returning to Mayport in Florida. Commodore Steve Moorhouse, Commander UK Carrier Strike Group, said: "The CSG21 deployment has seen VMFA-211, a US Marine Corps F-35B squadron, integrated throughout."

Royal Navy continues to head up Operation Sentinel keeping goods and fuel flowing through the autumn

More than 200 ships a month – carrying oil, gas, cars, food and consumer goods – have sailed safely through Middle East hotspots this autumn thanks to a Royal Navy-led task force.



HMS Montrose follows a line of three USCG patrol boats
Photo: Crown Copyright/MoD

Operation Sentinel – directed by international staff from Bahrain under Commodore Gordon Ruddock – draws on the military assets and expertise of eight nations to deter state-sponsored threats to the security of seafarers passing through

Middle East waters – especially the 'choke points' of the Strait of Hormuz (gateway to the Gulf itself) and the Bab-al-Mandeb at the foot of the Red Sea. Should either become blocked or unsafe for merchant shipping the impact on the UK alone – which relies on regular supplies of liquid natural gas from the Gulf for example – would be severe. The task group uses a combination of small and major warships from the participating navies – including the Royal Navy's Bahrain-based frigate **HMS Montrose** – to monitor daily goings-on and watch over shipping, particularly merchantmen flying the flags of the eight nations committed to **Operation Sentinel**'s parent body, the International Maritime Security Construct: UK, US, Albania, Bahrain, Estonia, Lithuania, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. In addition, maritime patrol aircraft and task force helicopters have flown more than 3,300 hour of patrols – more than 19 weeks in the air – keeping a close eye on activity below.

Royal Marines air defence experts lead the way as they successfully complete Mojave Desert foray

Royal Marines, experts in defending against attacks from the air, destroyed 'enemy' air superiority during a five-day battle across the Mojave Desert.



Air Defence Troop of 30 Commando in action in the desert
Photos: Crown Copyright/MoD

Air Defence Troop of Plymouth-based 30 Commando Information Exploitation Group deployed to California to stress test new tactics as part of the commando element of the newly-formed Littoral Response Group (South). The new response group will focus on world events east of the Suez

Canal when it becomes operational next year with the addition of amphibious ships and aircraft. Air Defence Troop are part of 30 Commando, the eyes and ears of 3 Commando Brigade who were formed in the Second World War by a team of Naval Intelligence Officers (including Ian Fleming, author of the James Bond novels). The troop is made up of 53 marines equipped with high velocity missiles and lightweight surface-to-air missiles who defend their commando brethren from enemy air attack on land and around coastlines. They lead the way in UK Defence in their area of expertise and are embracing new ways of working to counter the threats of a modern era. It was the finale of two months of exercises,

known as **Green Dagger**, which sharpened the commandos for operations next year at one of the largest military training facilities in the world at the vast US Marine Corps training facility at Twentynine Palms. Air Defence Troop were fed intelligence that their 'enemy' were likely to strike hard and fast with their air superiority, using Super Cobra attack helicopters, Osprey tiltrotors and Sea Stallion helicopters. The troop had three teams carefully deployed in positions across the battlefield, 'destroying' three Super Cobras and a Sea Stallion in the first few hours of the exercise. The commandos – with small teams deployed across a wide area – continued to have success, hitting helicopters in the mock battle but also convoys with surface-to-surface missiles. They trialled the MRZR vehicle for their purposes too. The American-made Polaris MRZR-D4 is an ultralight 4x4 off-roader that can carry up to four commandos and reach speeds of 60mph for rapid movement across the battlefield. It is ideally equipped for raiding missions that Royal Marines are now focusing on as part of their modernisation and restructuring, which will ensure they are ready to counter the threats of a modern era. Air Defence used the vehicle to keep moving into positions and hamper 'enemy' efforts, eventually forcing them to change tactics with air superiority lost. The troop also helped Charlie Company of 40 Commando take a key position and foiled a counter-attack by their 'enemy' and engaging two more Super Cobra helicopters.

Source: www.navybooks.com

Simon's Town's significance in SA military history showcased

Written by defenceWeb -
25th Nov 2021



Middle North Battery cannon firing. Picture: Cmdr Leon Steyn.

The most senior warrant officers' course in the SANDF (SA National Defence Force), the Joint Warrant Officers' Programme (JWOP) based at the Warrant Officers Academy, Military Base Wonderboom, visited historic Simon's Town earlier in November. As part of the JWOP, a new military culture short course was developed

by Professor (Dr) Ian van der Waag – and presented for the first time from 4 to 12 November, SA Naval Museum curator Commander Leon Steyn writes. The short course, weighing 20 credits, is presented through the Faculty of Military Science of Stellenbosch University with the residential phase at the Military Academy in Saldanha. *"Two days were set aside for a practical 'field trip' to Simon's Town, where the SA Naval Museum hosted ten senior warrant officers with their facilitators from the military history department. They were Van der Waag, Dr Evert Kleynhans, Louis Makau and Anri Delport. Set piece work and assignments were given to the students before leaving Saldanha."* The Simon's Town tour kicked off at the SA Naval Museum where the group was welcomed by Steyn who also introduced the visitors to the concept of military museums, uses and functions as well as an overview of the history of military museums in South Africa. *"The visit," Steyn writes, "was planned to coincide with Armistice Day (also known as Poppy Day) and the group travelled to Middle North Battery where the museum's old Rifled Muzzle Loader cannon is. At exactly 11h00 the cannon was fired by Cannon Association of SA members, in observance of members of South African armed forces who died in the line of duty. The Last Post was sounded by a SA Navy band bugler, after which a two-minute silence was observed by all present". "Simon's Town provides a wonderful example of military fortification and the different layers of coast defence and artillery through the years. For a better understanding of its history and functions the group moved to Scala Battery where retired SA Navy captain Chris Dooner provided a guided tour of one big 9.2 inch cannon installation. The group descended into the – little known – underground bunkered operations room that formed an important part of the coastal artillery setup during the Second World War. "The afternoon was spent at the old naval cemetery (old burial ground) in Simon's Town where Van der Waag organised*

activities to uncover the oft-hidden, social military history of the naval base. This led to a discussion of the sinking of the Birkenhead, of twelve imperial Russian sailors buried in the graveyard and of a young man who fell to his death while on construction works in the dockyard at the turn of the last century. The important work of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission was not missed. "The next day the group visited the Martello Tower at Naval Base Simon's Town. The tower dates back to 1796 and is said to be the oldest British built structure in South Africa. WO1 Harry Croome (retired) provided an informative talk about the fortification, its original function and preservation efforts through the years. "The tour concluded with a visit to the frigate **SAS Isandlwana (F146)**. En route to the ship, there was time to go past the historic Selborne Graving Dock. The dry dock was opened in 1910 and apart from its important function to maintain ships today, it features a historic collection of 140 ship badges along its walls – a tangible record of our naval history. "The group returned to the naval museum for much needed stand-easy and to reflect on a totally absorbing and enjoyable two days in Simon's Town." Published with attribution and appreciation to Cmdr Leon Steyn, SA Naval Museum.

Source: <https://www.defencweb.co.za>

Turkey, Spain Discuss Sale of Aircraft Carrier, Submarine

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan says his country hopes to increase defence cooperation with NATO ally Spain through the purchase of a second aircraft carrier and possibly a submarine.

By [Associated Press](#)

Nov. 17, 2021



Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, left, and Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez speak during a welcoming ceremony at the presidential palace, in Ankara, Turkey, Wednesday, Nov. 17, 2021. (AP Photo/Burhan Ozbilici) The Associated Press

ANKARA, Turkey (AP) —

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Wednesday that his country hopes to increase defence cooperation with NATO ally Spain through the purchase of a second aircraft carrier and possibly a submarine. Erdogan said Turkey and Spain

had already cooperated on the construction of a Spanish assault ship. "The first aircraft carrier was not a large-scale one. We have agreed on the construction of a large scale (carrier,)" Erdogan said at a joint news conference with visiting Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez. "And perhaps, we will also enter (cooperation) for a submarine." "There is so much we can do in the defence industry, including (concerning) armed and unarmed unmanned aerial vehicles," Erdogan said without elaborating. Erdogan and Sanchez earlier oversaw the signing of six agreements, covering cooperation in renewable energy, disaster response and sports. Erdogan, meanwhile, refused to comment on reports that Russia had begun transferring technology to Turkey for its S-400 missile defense systems, following the controversial sale of the anti-aircraft missiles to Turkey in 2017. The United States strongly opposed Turkey's purchase of the Russian technology and pushed Ankara out of its F-35 fighter jet program. It also imposed sanctions on several Turkish defence officials. Washington and Turkey's other NATO allies insist that S-400s pose a threat to the F-35 project. Turkey rejects that argument. See the video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gqRUaAD2uOU>

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

Astute versus Virginia: which nuclear-powered sub is the best fit for Australia?

25 Nov 2021

[Sam Goldsmith](#)



Image: [Department of Defence](#).

Picking the right design for the Royal Australian Navy's nuclear-powered submarines is extraordinarily complex and difficult choices will need to be made. There are two contenders, the Royal Navy's Astute-class submarine and the US Navy's Virginia-class submarine, which refers to the 'Block V' variant of the boat. Both designs are very good, and in some respects they're equal. Both are fitted with reactors

that never need refuelling, both feature advanced pump-jet propulsors, both support Tomahawk cruise missiles and both will [require Australia](#) to field a rigorous no-fail regulatory and safety regime. There are also numerous issues that will need to be considered by government, including fleet size, submarine service life, Australian defence self-reliance and Australian industry content. This article highlights eight salient differences that will need consideration: design risk, size, crewing, payload, delivery, sustainment and operations, training regimes, and export controls. **First**, the design risk. The Virginia natively supports the RAN's presumably preferred AN/BYG-1 combat system and Mk-48 torpedoes, whereas the Astute doesn't. Modifying the Astute to accommodate the RAN's preferences could upset the fine-tuned space, weight, buoyancy, balance, power and cooling attributes, potentially triggering a cascade of unintended issues. Modifying existing designs can cost hundreds of millions and take years: if it ain't broke, don't fix it. Alternatively, the RAN could accept the British combat system and Spearfish torpedoes. **Sizewise**, both the Astute- and Virginia-class boats are larger than the conventionally powered Collins class. Accommodating either of them may require significant upgrades to Australian assembly halls, slipways, dry docks and berths, and that won't be cheap. Astute-class vessels are 97 metres long and displace [7,800 tonnes](#), while Block V Virginias are 140.5 metres long and displace [10,364 tonnes](#). By contrast, Collins-class boats are 77.8 metres long and displace [3,407 tonnes](#). A lower **crew** requirement is also desirable because finding crews of around 60 for Collins has been difficult. Astutes require a crew of around 90, whereas Virginias require a crew of around 130. Block V Virginias have a significantly larger **payload** than the Astutes with the bonus ability to ripple-fire dozens of Tomahawks and support likely future payloads. The British sub only supports torpedo-tube-launched weapons, with [a magazine](#) of 38 Spearfish torpedoes and Tomahawks. The Virginia Block V carries [around 65 weapons](#): 25 torpedo-tube-launched weapons, plus 12 Tomahawks in two payload tubes forward of the sail and 28 Tomahawks in four wide-diameter payload tubes aft of the sail. The Virginia's wide-diameter payload tubes can also support future payloads such as autonomous vehicles, AIM-9X [surface-to-air missiles](#) and [hypersonic boost-glide missiles](#). If the US agreed, an initial batch of Virginia Block Vs could be acquired off the shelf and brought into Australian service relatively quickly, to facilitate RAN nuclear-safety and crew training, command courses and nuclear qualifications. Concurrently, a full production run of eight boats could take place in South Australia. A 2018 ASPI report determined that a '[critical mass](#)' of 10 Australian SSNs would be required to sustain sufficient certified personnel, at sea and ashore. This plan would require USN support in terms of reactor supervision, at least in the early years, and the allocation of USN production slots to the RAN—but only if the US amended its priorities. The USN operates 19 Virginia-class boats with [plans for 66](#). This concept could work with the Astute, but it would require the UK to keep building them beyond the [planned seven boats](#) and to delay production of its new [Dreadnought-class](#) submarines. The Virginia class might be easier to **sustain** and operate, given the USN's rapidly expanding fleet and its resupply interoperability. Research and development of leading-technology upgrades is always costly and justifying high R&D costs might be more difficult if there are fewer boats of a certain type. If we assume that Australia eventually acquires eight to 10 SSNs, that would mean a total fleet of [17 Astutes](#) versus [76 Virginias](#). In fact, the USN is already planning for a stealthier Virginia [Block VI](#). Wartime resupply is another issue for consideration: picking the Virginia would allow RAN

and USN submarines to be resupplied with ordnance in Australia, Japan, Guam, Hawaii and San Diego. However, the UK is also part of AUKUS, so holding a cache of Spearfish torpedoes at select RAN/USN facilities would be advantageous at any rate. Choosing the Astute class could potentially shorten the time required to grow the pool of Australian commanding officers and executive officers. RN COs and XO's are seaman officers who have completed the requisite nuclear systems course and are supported by specialist RN nuclear reactor engineers who don't go on to command submarines. By contrast, USN COs and XO's are all nuclear reactor engineers who have stood watch over a submarine reactor at some point in their careers. This difference is significant because it could take 15 years for an Australian nuclear engineer to gain sufficient at-sea experience to become an [Australian SSN CO](#). The export-control factor is where choosing the Virginia might run into serious problems. The US State Department's International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR) rigorously govern the transfer of all American military technology. Under ITAR, naturalised Australian citizens could be deemed dual nationals and [might have difficulty](#) in obtaining US government approval. A person who is a dual national from a proscribed country would likely be rejected outright. Ignoring ITAR isn't an option because penalties are severe and extraterritorial—for example, a US\$1 million fine per breach and/or 10 years in jail and/or placement on US government denial lists. Ultimately, the ITAR dual-national restriction is problematic because Australia is a country of immigrants. By contrast, the UK government's export controls might be more flexible concerning dual nationals and particularly naturalised Australian citizens. Regardless of the viewing angle, picking the optimal nuclear-powered submarine for Australia is incredibly technical, complex and difficult. Even the most optimistic delivery timeline will take years, and it's likely to be 15 years before qualified Australians are able to run the boats in a self-reliant manner. Getting this decision right will determine how difficult it is for Australia to operate, sustain and maintain its SSNs well beyond the 2060s. Few government decisions have so many long-term implications with so little margin for error. This is one of them.

Author: *Sam Goldsmith* is the director of Red Team Research, has a PhD on Australian defence industry innovation and has published through the US Naval War College.

Source: <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au>

Beyond Competition: Why the U.S. Must Cooperate with China and Russia for Maritime Stability

[November 9, 2021](#)

By Jan Stockbruegger and Christian Bueger



An oil tanker is on fire in the sea of Oman, Thursday, June 13, 2019. Two oil tankers near the strategic Strait of Hormuz were reportedly attacked on Thursday, an assault that left one ablaze and adrift as sailors were evacuated from both vessels and the U.S. Navy rushed to assist amid heightened tensions between Washington and Tehran. (Credit: AP Photo/ISNA)

Great power competition with China and Russia dominates debates in Washington. Few analysts therefore paid attention when U.S.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken joined Russian President Vladimir Putin and other leaders at the UN Security Council for a high-level debate on [“Enhancing Maritime Security — A Case for International Cooperation”](#) (China was represented by its UN ambassador). As expected, disagreements over basic maritime rules and norms dominated the debate. While the United States criticized Russia and China for unlawfully restricting freedom of navigation, China accused the United States of escalating conflict in the South China Sea. Yet the debate also demonstrated that the leading states share a common view on other maritime threats. The United States agreed with China and Russia not only that piracy, smuggling, and climate change undermine stability at sea, but also that states need to work closely together to address these threats and protect global maritime trade. What does this consensus suggest for U.S. strategy? We argue that the United States should build on the consensus reached during the UN Security Council debate to enhance global maritime security, working

multilaterally with China, Russia, and other states to address criminal and environmental threats at sea. The United States has traditionally [protected trade routes and freedom of navigation](#). Securing the maritime commons is also part of the [2020 Tri-Service Maritime Strategy](#) to maintain order at sea. Yet the U.S. Navy cannot secure the world's oceans without the support of other states, including China and Russia. Certainly, little agreement can be expected with China and Russia on maritime disputes or their use of gray zone tactics to undermine international rules. However, China and Russia depend on seaborne trade, and they are keen to fight piracy and other threats to shipping and stability at sea. Strengthening collaboration with China and Russia on diplomatic and technical levels will therefore be vital to protect global maritime trade.

The case of maritime security has broader implications for U.S. strategy. The United States needs to defend the rules-based order against China and Russia, but it also needs to work with its adversaries to address transnational challenges such as [climate change](#) and pandemics. The maritime security case demonstrates that this balancing act is possible. The United States can – and must – both compete and cooperate with its adversaries to secure the global commons. Below we draw on the Security Council debate to analyze the maritime security landscape. We identify the joint interests of China, Russia, and the United States in protecting maritime trade, and we show how the United States can cooperate with its adversaries to ensure safety and security at sea.

Maritime competition is back

One of the reasons for the new urgency of maritime matters is the rise of [maritime great power competition](#) and the proliferation of [gray zone tactics](#) and attacks at sea. China's growing [naval and anti-access/area denial](#) capabilities threaten U.S. dominance in the Western Pacific, but Iran and [Russia](#) have also increased their military operations at sea. China, Russia, and Iran have so far refrained from conducting aggressive maritime operations that could escalate conflict with the U.S. Navy. However, they increasingly conduct covert operations and deploy civilian or irregular forces – such as fishing vessels, coast guards, and militias – to intimidate other states and harass U.S. and allied forces at sea. An incident that is paradigmatic for this new trend is the drone attack on the Israeli owned oil tanker [MV Mercer Street in the Gulf of Oman](#) only days before the debate. The attack, in which two sailors were killed, was the latest in a series of maritime incidents in the [shadow war](#) between Israel and Iran. An Iranian vessel was hit by a mine in the [Red Sea in April 2021](#), for instance, and the United States believes that Iran's Revolutionary Guards were behind attacks on [four tankers](#) in the Persian Gulf in 2019. Yet China and Russia have also used gray zone tactics to secure contested waters. China has built [military outposts](#) in the South China Sea, and it regularly deploys its coast guard and [maritime militias](#) to protect Chinese fishing vessels in disputed waters. China's maritime forces have harassed Filipino and Vietnamese fishing vessels, as well as the [USNS Impeccable](#), a surveillance vessel operated by the U.S. Navy. Russia has deployed its coast guard to secure waters around the Crimean Peninsula, which it annexed from Ukraine in 2014. In 2018, the Russian Coast Guard captured [three Ukrainian Navy vessels](#) in the Sea of Azov. China's, Russia's, and Iran's gray zone tactics threaten vital U.S. and global interests in the maritime domain. U.S. Secretary of State [Blinken](#) therefore warned that “Conflict in the South China Sea or in any ocean would have serious global consequences for security and for commerce,” and that “States are (...) provocatively and unlawfully advancing their interests in the Persian Gulf and the Black Sea.” [Russia](#) largely ignored these accusations, but [China](#) responded angrily. China not only claimed that the “Security Council is not the right place to discuss the issue of the South China Sea,” but it also accused the United States of undermining “peace and stability in the South China Sea.”

Piracy is a major concern, but other crimes matter too

While China and Russia contest freedom of navigation, piracy remains a bigger threat to global shipping. From 2005 to 2012, Somali pirates attacked nearly 1,000 vessels in the Gulf of Aden and Western Indian Ocean. The World Bank estimated that piracy off Somalia cost the global economy [\\$18 billion annually](#). Somali piracy has since been eliminated, but piracy remains a major threat in [Southeast Asia](#) and [West Africa](#). According to the ICC International Maritime Bureau, an industry body, [195 ships were attacked by pirates worldwide in 2020](#). Last

year, pirates kidnapped 130 seamen in the Gulf of Guinea, which is the world's [epicenter for maritime kidnappings](#). Piracy is part of the larger problem of "[blue crime](#)," which also includes illicit migration, maritime smuggling, and other criminal activities at sea. Human trafficking is a major problem in the [Mediterranean](#), for example, where hundreds of migrants have drowned over the last few years. Smuggling of [narcotics](#) fuels corruption and drug abuse and led to increased rates of addiction, HIV/AIDS infection, and domestic violence in coastal [communities](#) in the Indian Ocean and other regions. Additionally, the smuggling of small arms and light weapons, which fuel conflict from Afghanistan to Somalia, often relies on maritime routes. A number of other illicit cargos are trafficked at sea, including counterfeit products, antiquities, wildlife, hardwood timber, and waste. Armed groups such as [al-Shababa](#) sometimes tax maritime smuggling activities to fund their operations. In contrast to gray zone tactics, there is broad consensus among leading states that blue crime is a major threat to stability at sea. Ambassador Dai Bing, [China](#)'s representative at the UN Security Council, noted that "*Criminal activities such as piracy, armed robbery, human and drug trafficking at sea, and maritime weapon smuggling are rampant, all of which have further destabilized relevant regions.*" U.S. Secretary of State [Blinken](#) agrees: "*Non-state actors also pose serious risk to maritime safety and security, from pirates and illicit maritime traffickers in the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean, to pirates and armed robbers in the Gulf of Guinea, to drug traffickers in the Caribbean Sea and the Eastern Pacific.*"

The environmental security agenda has arrived at sea

The emphasis on blue crime is not surprising given the centrality of piracy and trafficking to the maritime security agenda. Yet the degree to which Security Council members emphasized environmental challenges was noteworthy. Two issues featured prominently in the Security Council debate: **illegal fishing** and **climate change**. [Illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing](#) is perhaps the most prevalent environmental crime at sea. It includes not only fishing in the waters of a state without its permission, but also fishing in marine protected areas and other fishing practices that are prohibited under national laws or international conventions. Interpol has estimated that up to [USD 23.5 billion](#) is lost to illegal fishing each year. Illegal fishing also leads to overfishing and threatens the livelihoods of coastal communities. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi therefore [urged](#) council members to "*take joint steps against overfishing and marine poaching.*" Analysts also increasingly worry about the impact of [climate change](#) on the marine environment and coastal economies. The warming of the oceans, for instance, will weaken ecosystems and alter the abundance, diversity, and distribution of marine species. Furthermore, climate change increases the risk of flooding and other natural disasters, and threatens coastal ports, infrastructures, and communities. Other threats to the [marine environment](#) include pollution and oil spills from ships (e.g. the 2020 [Wakashio](#) oil spill) and offshore petroleum operations (e.g. the 2020 [Deepwater Horizon](#) oil spill). Vietnam warned the Security Council that "*climate change and sea level rise and pollution of the marine environment, especially by plastic debris and degradation of the marine ecosystem, have caused serious and long-term consequences.*"

Cooperation is the Strategy

No state, not even the United States, is strong enough to protect the world's oceans alone. The oceans cover [70 percent of the earth's surface](#). Every day, thousands of vessels pass through contested waters, and maritime smuggling, illegal fishing, and rising sea levels threaten coastal communities and maritime operations around the world. These threats are transnational. Pirates attack vessels in international waters, smugglers operate across national jurisdictions, and oil spills and illegal fishing operations often take place in internationally recognized protected areas. Securing the world's oceans therefore requires states to cooperate and build international maritime infrastructure. This includes coast guard and maritime patrol vessels, communication and surveillance networks, and systems to manage marine resources and respond to accidents and environmental disasters at sea. The United States has long led international efforts to enhance safety and security at sea. The United States initiated the [Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia](#), for example, and it also facilitated the adaptation of the 2004 International Ship and Port Facility Security Code at the International Maritime Organization. In [West Africa](#) and [Southeast Asia](#), the United States helps regional states strengthen their maritime capacities and protect their waters

against piracy and illicit fishing and trafficking operations. Yet China and Russia have also joined international efforts to protect maritime trade. They have participated in the Contact Group on Somali piracy and deployed naval forces [to protect](#) international shipping in the Gulf of Aden. Moreover, China is a member of the [Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia \(ReCAP\)](#), while Russia has participated in debates on maritime security at the [ASEAN Regional Forum](#). During the Security Council debate, [China](#) promised *"to deepen pragmatic cooperation in combating piracy and maritime law enforcement in our joint efforts to achieve peace and tranquility in the oceans."* And [Russian President Vladimir Putin](#) not only reaffirmed Russia's commitment *"to the common task of countering crime at sea in all its forms,"* but he also proposed the creation of a *"special structure within the UN that would directly address problems related to combatting maritime crime in various regions."*

Beyond competition

The United States should take Russia's and China's offers seriously and work with its adversaries to protect the maritime commons. China and Russia will not support efforts to address maritime disputes, gray zone tactics, or illegal fishing in contested waters. Yet they are interested in working with the United States and other states to tackle piracy and maritime crime, and perhaps also to address environmental threats such as climate change and pollution. Maritime security cooperation with China and Russia can be difficult. China was initially reluctant to share information and coordinate closely with U.S.-led counter-piracy efforts [in the Gulf of Aden](#). The United States should therefore follow up on Russia's proposal at the UN Security Council and establish a high-level political framework for maritime security operations. The United States could, for example, help construct a new technocratic mechanism at the UN to facilitate information sharing and the exchange of best practices in [maritime governance and capacity building](#). The organization's mandate would be limited to non-controversial issues such as piracy, trafficking, pollution, and climate change. China might agree to discuss maritime security in the Persian Gulf, where most of its oil originates; but illegal fishing and maritime disputes in the South China Sea would need to be excluded to ensure its support for the mechanism. International organizations, civil society, and industry groups should also be included to reinforce the technocratic and problem-driven nature of the initiative. The UN mechanism would complement ongoing regional efforts by providing a forum for global coordination and helping to form a broad consensus on maritime security governance across regions. Critics might argue that China and Russia will exploit maritime security cooperation to project naval power and increase their geopolitical influence. China, for example, used counter-piracy operations to practice forward deployment and establish its [first overseas naval base](#) in Djibouti. China and Russia are also trying to dominate [international organizations](#) and undermine U.S. interests by supporting authoritarian regimes. Moreover, critics might argue that the proposed mechanism does not address China's and Russia's efforts to undermine the rule of law at sea, which are the greatest threat to order and stability on the world's oceans. These counterarguments are valid, but they ignore the fact that China and Russia are too powerful and important to be excluded from global maritime governance. China is already the largest investor and trading nation in [Africa](#) and [Southeast Asia](#), and Russia has increased its [global influence](#) in recent years. Moreover, China's and Russia's large navies can help protect dangerous shipping lanes and support coastal management and maritime capacity building activities. Working with China and Russia on countering maritime crime does not prevent the United States from defending its interests and protecting global maritime rules and norms. The United States can continue its freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea, for example, and mobilize like-minded nations through initiatives such as the [Quad](#) or the [G7](#). Finally, facilitating global maritime security cooperation under U.S. leadership with support from like-minded states, including the EU and India, would legitimize and help stabilize international order. It would demonstrate that U.S.-leadership is not exclusively directed against China or Russia, or about dominance. Instead, the United States would show that it takes seriously the concerns and problems of other nations, and that it is prepared to work with its adversaries to provide global public goods. The maritime security case shows that the Biden administration needs to move beyond [great power competition](#) as its guide to foreign policy. Challenging threats to

the rules-based order, no matter where they originate, is vitally important; but the United States also must cooperate with its adversaries, especially China and Russia, to secure the global commons and tackle other transnational threats, such as climate change and global pandemics.

[Jan Stockbruegger](#) is a Dean's Faculty Fellow at Brown University's Department of Political Science.

[Christian Bueger](#) is a Professor of International Relations at Copenhagen University and the Director of [SafeSeas](#).

Source: <https://cimsec.org>