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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

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#### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Gippner, O. (2016). Antipiracy and Unusual Coalitions in the Indian Ocean Region: China's Changing Role and Confidence Building with India. *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, 45(3), 107-137. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:gbv:18-4-9989>

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# Journal of Current Chinese Affairs

China aktuell

Topical Issue: Non-Traditional Security in Sino-Indian Relations  
Guest Editor: Sebastian Biba

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Gippner, Olivia (2016),  
Antipiracy and Unusual Coalitions in the Indian Ocean Region: China's Changing  
Role and Confidence Building with India, in: *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*,  
45, 3, 107–137.

URN: <http://nbn-resolving.org/urn/resolver.pl?urn:nbn:de:gbv:18-4-9989>

ISSN: 1868-4874 (online), ISSN: 1868-1026 (print)

The online version of this article and the other articles can be found at:  
<[www.CurrentChineseAffairs.org](http://www.CurrentChineseAffairs.org)>

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Published by  
GIGA German Institute of Global and Area Studies, Institute of Asian Studies and  
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# Antipiracy and Unusual Coalitions in the Indian Ocean Region: China's Changing Role and Confidence Building with India

Olivia GIPPNER

**Abstract:** Piracy and threats from non-state actors in the Gulf of Aden have triggered states to cooperate in securing waterways and the sea lines of communication, a development that is fundamentally transforming the region's maritime security environment. As a result, not only has this region's strategic importance been reaffirmed, but it has also gained tremendous importance through the presence of several actors, especially China and India. Since 2008, these two countries have been involved in larger global actions against piracy, which has led to increasing contact between their navies and more exposure of their capabilities. Will the broader Indian Ocean region emerge as an area of cooperation or competition between China and India? Drawing on interviews carried out with Chinese and European experts from 2012 to 2015, this article explores the reasons for and instruments of cooperation in antipiracy and the degree to which China uses antipiracy efforts as confidence-building measures.

■ Manuscript received 29 July 2015; accepted 27 April 2016

**Keywords:** China, India, antipiracy, collective action, confidence building, great power relations

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## Introduction

Piracy along so-called sea lines of communication (SLOC), such as the Strait of Malacca, the Gulf of Guinea, and even on the Amazon River, has seen an unexpected revival in public consciousness since 2000. Piracy in the Gulf of Aden, the region of focus for this paper<sup>1</sup>, has also become a threat to shipping and maritime security for the two major powers in this region, China and India. As the number of piracy events has declined significantly over the past few years, both countries – in particular China – have remained active in sending their navies to the region. Considering their antagonistic relationship in naval-security terms, this article asks the question of whether China considers antipiracy as a platform for confidence building vis-à-vis its Indian neighbour. Will the Gulf of Aden and the broader Indian Ocean region emerge as an area of cooperation or competition between China and India?

After the fall of the Siad Barre government in 1991, Somalia became a country without a government and is widely considered as a “failed state,” a “fragile state,” and assessed as economically very poor (The Fund for Peace 2015; Powell, Ford, and Nowrasteh 2006: 14). The international community reacted promptly, putting a number of multilateral antipiracy arrangements in place since 2008 – the Combined Task Forces 150 and 151, EU NAVFOR’s Operation Atalanta, and NATO’s Operation Ocean Shield. So-called “independent deployers” China, India, Japan, South Korea, and Russia, amongst others, have coordinated their navy vessels with these larger coalition forces. The early literature on countries’ involvement in antipiracy soon argued that antipiracy was going to be too expensive,

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1 I am grateful to my former colleagues Dr. Garima Mohan and Dr. May-Britt U. Stumbaum, the latter the head of the NFG research group “Asian Perceptions of the EU” at the Freie Universität Berlin, as well as to two anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments on previous drafts of the article. The research for this article was supported by the Dahrendorf Forum, a joint initiative of the Hertie School of Governance, the London School of Economics and Political Science, and Stiftung Mercator. The article has benefitted from interviews with policymakers and representatives from business, non-governmental organisations, and academia in the European Union and China from 2012–2015. I am grateful to all those who helped with the preparation of this research, but since anonymity was promised in most cases, their help cannot be acknowledged individually.

and if not supported by on-land measures towards state-building in Somalia, would not succeed (Lunsford 2008). The unwillingness by Western countries to take action on land in turn has been interpreted as a sign of countries' prioritisation of securing commercial interests (such as avoiding high oil prices) over ensuring human security in the region. Piracy peaked in 2011, with 736 hostages and 32 ships held (Winsor 2015). In the following years, the antipiracy coalition (along with increased private security on cargo ships) was successful and Somali piracy has declined in absolute terms. A survey of imprisoned pirates carried out by Oceans Beyond Piracy found the presence of international navies to be the main deterrent, followed by armed guards aboard vessels (Oceans Beyond Piracy 2015a). According to EU NAVFOR, as of July 2015 no vessels and 26 hostages were held by pirates in the region (European External Action Service 2015). A 2014 report by Oceans Beyond Piracy estimated the total economic cost of Somali piracy at USD 2.3 billion in 2014, down from USD 3.2 billion in 2013 and USD 6 billion in 2012 (Oceans Beyond Piracy 2014: 1).

The heightened cooperation together with increasing involvement of private security providers by ship owners after 2011 can be evaluated as successful. The increasing numbers of countries participating, in addition to the unabated contributions by the present deployers, suggest a "bandwagon effect" of international cooperation (Anonymous 1 2015). There are two main puzzles raised by this effect. As mentioned above, there has been agreement among academics and some of the main players, such as the European Union, on the need for a more sustainable strategy against piracy, a so-called "comprehensive approach" which would include on-land operations, peacekeeping, and development cooperation (Neslen 2014). Providing prospects of stability and job opportunities for the young men who currently turn to piracy as a source of income, the logic goes, will remove the attractiveness of pirate attacks on international cargo ships. And yet, most countries focus on the seaborne escorts of trade vessels through the Gulf of Aden. So the first puzzle to figure out is why a large coalition of countries has collaborated on antipiracy regardless of the awareness that Somalia is a failed state. That question is especially relevant in the cases of the emerging great powers, China and India. The second puzzle is why there has been an uptick in anti-

piracy missions and participation since mid-2012 despite the significant, absolute reduction of piracy since then.

These two empirical puzzles lead us to a more theoretical debate on countries' participation and cooperation in antipiracy. While the official discourse legitimising antipiracy around 2008/2009 was built around securitisation (human security, commercial interests, terrorism), after the successful reduction of piracy from 2012 to 2015, other motivators for China and India could have been prestige and image creation, "recognition games," acting as a responsible stakeholder and norm entrepreneur, and public diplomacy. Another motivator is the importance of establishing a strategic presence in this critical part of the world. Furthermore, there are several stakeholders who even gain from piracy: navies, because it helps demonstrate their utility and justify their budget; private security companies; the media, because piracy makes for a good story; and for the Chinese people it provides "reassurance that their government is cognizant and capable with regard to protecting Chinese human and economic interests outside the Middle Kingdom" (Erickson and Strange 2015: 2).

What is the effect of this changed motivation from the perspective of two emerging, often antagonistic powers, China and India? Situated in the discourse on great power relations and non-traditional security, this paper asks the question: Will the Gulf of Aden emerge as an area of cooperation or competition between China and India?

Drawing on interviews carried out with Chinese and European experts from 2012 to 2015, the article explores the reasons for and instruments of cooperation in the field of antipiracy, along with the degree to which China uses antipiracy as a confidence-building measure. The article critically assesses the changing nature of and increasing coordination on antipiracy globally, focusing particularly on the Chinese perspective. It then tests Chinese participation in antipiracy efforts corresponding to three steps of securitisation identified in the following section. Special attention is paid to the instrumentalisation of antipiracy efforts as a confidence-building measure whose purpose goes beyond securing waterways. By looking specifically at the mechanisms and factors that could impact and explain intense Chinese participation in antipiracy, the article aims to provide a new narrative on why countries participate in international antipiracy activities. This might be particularly relevant in the context of rising tensions over the "Belt and Road" initiative. In this way, the article's findings may

be extended beyond the Horn of Africa to include maritime security in adjacent parts of the Indian Ocean.

## The Three Steps of Securitisation

The literature on antipiracy has applied several concepts to explain why countries participate in international coalitions to combat piracy:

- traditional security/regional strategic interests;
- idealism, public diplomacy, self-image as responsible stakeholders;
- postcolonialism, norm entrepreneurship (for example, by China and Japan); and
- securitisation.

Given this multitude of approaches to antipiracy, the following sections will need to address the theoretical question of what antipiracy is an instance of – whether it is a mere international issue; a non-traditional security issue; a confidence-building measure; a low-risk, high-visibility issue; or an avenue to assert power. While these approaches do not all directly answer the same question of why countries participate in antipiracy, they each provide a prism through which to view the interplay between domestic considerations and international security cooperation.

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

The second set of explanations in the literature relates to idealist theories focusing on the cooperation aspect of international missions.

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

Third, an emerging literature sees undertaking antipiracy measures as an avenue to act as norm entrepreneurs. Black and Hwang, for instance, situate themselves among culturalist and postcolonial perspectives, which see the “state’s self-identification [as informing] its foreign policy practice” (Black and Hwang 2012: 445). Chinese and Japanese involvement in antipiracy activities in the Gulf of Aden is considered an example of these countries’ intention to transform “the dominant norms in international society” (Black and Hwang 2012: 431). Japan holds up as a model its Coast Guard, a civilian maritime police and rescue organisation, reflecting Japan’s view of itself as a mediator between East and West.

Fourth, antipiracy can be looked at through the lens of securitisation. The protection of the United Nations World Food Programme ships – humanitarian motivations – led to the creation of the European Union’s antipiracy mission. “Securitising” diplomatic and economic interests that are negatively affected by lost cargo and increasing insurance premiums would mean that countries use military and foreign policy resources and instruments to protect these interests (King 2008). Furthermore, economic, trade, human and environmental security, and many other considerations are included in national security strategies and all of them have been employed to justify participation in antipiracy efforts.

I have separated the process by which China has developed antipiracy strategies and begun to undertake antipiracy measures into three analytical steps: securitisation of the issue, localisation of an



international practice, and instrumentalisation in great power politics. Steps 1 and 2 will be presented only briefly, since they have already been covered in the existing body of literature on Chinese antipiracy efforts. To illustrate the concept of instrumentalisation of an international practice for great power relations, China–India relations will be used as a test case.

## Step 1: Securitisation and the Rise of Global Powers

Securitisation of global threats that are not immediately security-related, including so-called “non-traditional” challenges, is a phenomenon that has been analysed in detail over the past 20 years, with the Copenhagen School being dedicated to understanding and extracting the mechanisms and reasons for securitisation. Concurrent with the international trend, China has also been getting more active in non-traditional security (NTS), encompassing areas such as counterterrorism, cyber warfare, financial turmoil, and climate change (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998; Watson 2009). In the domestic academic debate, the SARS epidemic of 2003 reoriented much government and research focus towards the new area of NTS studies. In this context, China, through not only diplomatic actions but also increased investment into and attention directed towards theoretical and policy research, has become more involved on the global stage.

Singapore-based Li Mingjiang predicts that

China will become more proactive in its multilateral diplomacy, in many cases selectively, and increase its influence in global multilateral settings, [but] various concerns and constraints will make it unlikely for China to completely overhaul or even dramatically reshape the multilateral architecture at the global level. (Li 2011: 9)

Therefore, while many would agree that there has been a steady increase in multilateral engagement, some claim that this has taken place on a rather issue-based level and case-by-case basis, making China a “selective multilateralist” (Kastner, Pearson, and Rector 2010; Shambaugh 2013).

The new Chinese security concept of 1996 acted as a “catalyst for the domestic debate on NTS,” in particular as it countered the China threat theory (Morton 2011). Furthermore, the emphasis on “new historic missions” and military operations other than war (MOOTW) by Hu Jintao in his December 2004 speech saw antipiracy

overseas as one of its core components (Kamphausen 2013: 3). Thus antipiracy had emerged as a securitised issue in China even before the international coalition began coordinating its efforts in 2008.

## Step 2: Localising International Practice

An increasing body of literature is looking exactly at questions of localisation and “norm entrepreneurship,” influencing the way international relations are carried out (Black and Hwang 2012: 437). On non-traditional security, this level of analysis traces how a shared complex challenge is justified and included in mainstream strategic culture.

Localisation is conceived as a long-term and evolutionary assimilation of foreign ideas, while some forms of adaptation in the rationalist international relations literature are seen as [a] “short-run policy of accommodation” [Hopf 1998]. Thus, while adaptation may be tactical and to some extent forced on the target audience, localisation is voluntary and the resulting change likely to be more enduring. (Acharya 2004)

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

## Step 3: Collective Action as an Instrument of Great Power Relations

Beyond the decision to address a non-traditional security challenge, governments and scholars also view multilateral platforms or ad hoc collaborations as creating networks of interdependence. Without going into the theoretical foundations for collective action towards a public good (for example, Ostrom 2014), according to psychological and interpersonal theories by Kelley and Thibaut, closeness of relationships in itself can be a goal of cooperation (Kelley and Thibaut 1978). In the European literature on the Cold War, the concept of adversaries taking mutual confidence-building measures corresponds to this logic. While, traditionally, confidence is seen as a precondition

for collective action, the early history of countries' participation in antipiracy suggests the opposite sequence. Collective action on a low-risk issue, such as antipiracy, thus becomes a platform for confidence building in great power relations.

What makes China's accelerating involvement in antipiracy ever more salient for research is its coinciding with the country's economic "rise" and its prospects of becoming a "great power" (Kastner, Pearson, and Rector 2010). The term "great power" has yet to be defined in a consistent manner. A most general definition encompasses economic and political power that allows a state to exert influence on a global scale (Waltz 1993). Theorist John Mearsheimer developed an entire theory of international relations based on the idea of "Great Powers," subsequently publishing *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. Somewhat paradoxically, he is one of the key proponents of the "China threat" camp of US analysts (Mearsheimer 2001). The negative connotation of the term, however, is far from widespread throughout Chinese academic and policy circles. While there is an ongoing conceptual debate, there are significant differences of opinion on whether China can already be seen as a great power and even whether it actually stands a realistic chance at getting there, considering rising domestic pressures (Itzkowitz-Shifrinson 2009: 2). Kastner, Pearson, and Rector have already started looking at how "multilateral regimes adapt to rising powers" (2010: 2). Part of this analysis will contribute to the question of whether China as a rising power can in fact be analysed on the basis of universal theories on multilateral cooperation, whether it has to be treated as a "sui generis" case, or whether, indeed, its emergence during an era dominated by paradigms of cooperation will have the world witness a new kind of great power, socialised in unprecedented levels of global interdependence.

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

## Methodology

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

Interview partners were first asked a set of questions designed to investigate the unilateral motivation for participating in antipiracy:

- What principles is participation based on (economic, security, international, competition)?;
- What is the domestic perception by the public and decision-makers?
- Has actual participation led to an adjustment and principles guiding international cooperation?

The second set of questions was focused on the role of antipiracy as a confidence-building measure, specifically in the Chinese–Indian context:

- To what extent do China and India actually interact?
- Is antipiracy considered a trust-building measure?
- How do China and India perceive each other’s participation?
- Are there any observable implications for changing relations because of antipiracy coordination?
- How does international socialisation impact their bilateral relations?

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

is the one with the strongest threat perception of Chinese naval presence.

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

## Protecting Sea Trade, Universal Agreement on the “Somali Pirate Enemy,” and Chinese Participation

Piracy in the Gulf of Aden has triggered countries to cooperate in securing waterways and the SLOCs. For seven years, China and India have been involved in the effort, which is loosely characterised by three multilateral task forces colloquially known as the “Three Forces”: the US CMF’s Combined Task Forces (CTF) 150 and 151, the EU’s Operation Atalanta, and NATO’s Operation Ocean Shield (see Table 1). China and India are independent employers, yet coordinate alongside these task forces. Within this “coalition of the willing,” the actors China, India, the United States, and the European Union view maritime cooperation as crucially important.

Table 1. International Antipiracy Coalitions in the Gulf of Aden

Antipiracy initiative	Start date	Under the coordination of
Combined Maritime Forces (CMF)	12 January 2009	multinational force, UNSC mandate
Operation Ocean Shield	17 August 2009	NATO, rotating leadership (since October 2015: Turkey)
EU NAVFOR Atalanta	December 2008	European Union

According to article 101 of 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, acts of piracy include

any illegal acts of violence or detention, or any act of depredation, committed for private ends by the crew or the passengers of a private ship or a private aircraft [...] on the high seas, against another ship or aircraft, or against persons or property on board such ship or aircraft [...] in a place outside the jurisdiction of any State. (UN Convention on The Law of the Sea 1982: Article 1)

China considers piracy to be a non-traditional security threat, as opposed to its traditional threats from the United States, Japan, and India (Craig 2015: 19).

Motivations for countries to take part in antipiracy missions are often very pragmatic: for instance, interest in training their own navies and being exposed to and learning about others' navy systems (Erickson and Strange 2014: 191). From 2008 to 2015, the PLAN deployed personnel totalling nearly 16,000 on 68 ships (including destroyers and comprehensive supply ships) with 28 helicopters in 18 task forces, escorting approximately 6,000 individual ships and 800 groups (Erickson and Strange 2015: 81; Chen 2013; Zhao 2012). In January 2016 China deployed its 22nd escort task force. While naval exposure is a particular interest for countries such as China, which declared as goals the development of a blue-water navy and the "protection of the open seas" (Ministry of National Defense PRC 2015), other countries, such as Luxembourg and Lithuania, can be understood to participate for similar reasons (Anonymous 1 2015).

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

will have to develop new means to address its burgeoning overseas interests. (Erickson and Strange 2015: 1)

China, and to some extent India, had little experience with their growing blue-water navies; their interest in participating in manoeuvres has increased. China, for instance, acts very adaptively; also, as “a global power it will increasingly have to deal with the challenges of securing international waterways, while lacking the necessary capacities” (Anonymous 2 2012). Because of the novelty of this sort of naval cooperation, neither country takes part in the existing international arrangements. Neither is a member of existing alliances, such as NATO or the European Union. Furthermore, naval control is considered an important part of both countries’ sovereignty, and cooperation would also mean sharing information about one’s own capabilities – sharing more than, for instance, when sending troop contingents for UN peacekeeping. The PLAN’s rejection of the European Union’s request that they establish a bilateral framework agreement in January 2009 exemplifies this (Barton 2013). Despite this reluctance to take direct part in international arrangements, antipiracy efforts and the creation of mutual dependence have led to several areas of information sharing and informal institutionalisation between China and the European Union.

Within the EU NAVFOR mission, there are interactions on operation, planning, and training through the European Security and Defence College (Anonymous 3 2013). The EU Crisis Management and Planning Directorate has both military and civilian meetings with China, but also with India, particularly in the field of counterterrorism (Anonymous 4 2013). Both Chinese and European interviewees suggested that there is clarity on how antipiracy missions benefit Europe and China, facilitating the actual cooperation on the ground (Anonymous 4 2013; Anonymous 5 2012), though a French diplomat pointed out that the strategic consequences differ drastically: while the Chinese focus on escorting ships, the Europeans “actually fight and prosecute” pirates (Anonymous 6 2012). During the operations, China agreed to use the European Union’s information system Mercury, rejecting the CENTRIXS, the US-operated alternative.

Antipiracy as a platform for bilateral naval interaction even transcends the EU connection, as China, for instance, even carried out a joint antipiracy drill with the United States on 17 September 2012 (USS Winston S. Churchill Public Affairs 2012). Similarly, China

requested the EU take part in a similar joint drill, which eventually took place on 14 July 2014, marking the first time the EU – as a regional actor – conducted a naval drill with a third country (*People’s Daily* 2014). On 1 October 2013 China and India participated in a multilateral drill focusing on antipiracy and illegal immigration (Ray 2013). Thus, through regular coordination, ship-to-ship exchanges, combined exercises, and port visits, “Beijing has greatly expanded its naval diplomacy in the name of anti-piracy” (Erickson and Strange 2015: 6). Table 2 summarises these contact points between the task forces and the independent deployers as presented in the 2013 White Paper on the Chinese Armed Forces.

**Table 2. Chinese Coordination with International Antipiracy Providers**

■	joint escorts with Russian counterparts
■	joint antipiracy drills with naval ships from the Republic of Korea (ROK), Pakistan, United States
■	coordinated with the European Union to protect World Food Programme ships
■	exchanged boarding visits of commanders with task forces from the EU, NATO, Combined Maritime Forces, ROK, Japan, Singapore
■	active participation in Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS) and Shared Awareness and Deconfliction (SHADE) meetings
■	since 2012, China, India, and Japan have been conveying coordination, adjusting escort schedules, optimising available assets; ROK joined at the end of 2012

Source: Information Office of the State Council 2013.

The SHADE mechanism, however, seems to ameliorate the PLAN’s sovereignty sensitivities by focusing on facilitating tactical coordination:

a voluntary and horizontal command and control structure, where participants would not follow orders but simply coordinate their naval forces and, where possible, share best practice. (Barton 2013)

### Antipiracy as a Means of Confidence Building

The idea behind confidence-building measures is that more interaction, during which countries expose some of their naval capabilities in



a cooperative manner, will serve transparency and thus foster trust and confidence between two adversaries. There are several ways in which navies interact vis-à-vis antipiracy: first, on a very tactical level, they engage in ship-to-ship cooperation and, second, they coordinate on strategy and policy at the mission headquarters or in the capitals of the contributing countries. China interacts with other navies in several ways. First, through antipiracy drills, such as between EU NAVFOR and the Chinese PLAN (Ministry of National Defense PRC 2014). Besides being good practice in simple tactical aspects, these drills facilitate a very basic political framework for future drills between the two maritime actors. Furthermore, China's escorting of ships, especially those from the World Food Programme, meant resources were able to be freed up by the main multilateral missions. Finally, any involvement of China with other countries is driven by its goals of achieving visibility globally and reinforcing a public image domestically of being a global actor (Anonymous 7 2015).

The various multilateral task forces provide platforms for potential interaction and diffusion. In fact, antipiracy was one of the most frequently named non-traditional security areas when interviewees were asked in preparation for this research about any potential diffusion of practices from the European Union to China and India. The respondents saw potential on two levels: in socialising Indian and Chinese navies into a certain way of cooperating internationally, and for China and India to draw lessons on a more tactical level through the interaction with other navies. On a broader level, the EU also hopes to see China and other countries engage more in effective multilateralism (see its 2003 European Security Strategy): initial signs have pointed in such a direction. For example, Chinese willingness to take part but also shape the practice of international antipiracy operations is representative of a more proactive commitment to multilateralism. According to media reporting, China began lobbying in 2009 to chair the current "facilitating venue" for the three task forces, called the Shared Awareness and Deconfliction (SHADE) programme (Erickson and Strange 2013). Eventually, these intentions were withdrawn. The SHADE mechanism is considered a key coordinating mechanism to manage the multitude of actors present in the antipiracy efforts – NATO, EU, independent deployers, and the maritime industry. SHADE was designed to ensure the best use of assets and to "avoid redundancies," while deconflicting "ongoing military counter-

piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden and the western Indian Ocean” (Oceans Beyond Piracy 2015b).

Under SHADE, the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS) was formed so that force-deploying actors could share knowledge.

The CGPCS was set up in January 2009 to “foster closer international cooperation to address the scourge of piracy off the coast of Somalia,” following the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1851 (2008). (Tardy 2014: 7)

The CGPCS brings together more than 80 participants, including states, the European Union, and the International Maritime Organisation, as well as shipping industry and seafarers’ representatives and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

According to representatives from the EU military service, both SHADE and the CGPCS are considered to be “smooth,” well-functioning coordinating mechanisms (Anonymous 7 2015). The very structure, which has “none of the attributes of formal multilateral settings (secretariat, decision-making procedures, legal framework, budget, etc.)” and the fact that it is purely operational (“all navies talk without problem about how to avoid wasting resources”) and not political can be seen as one of the reasons for its success (Tardy 2014: 7). There are no reports of a national navy defecting and not escorting a vessel as agreed under SHADE coordination (Anonymous 7 2015).

## Case Study China–India Relations

As we have seen, there is an existing multilateral infrastructure creating interfaces between national navies involved in antipiracy, both at the practical and the policy level. Furthermore, the two countries have been working closely on combatting other non-traditional threats, such as terrorism. For instance, after a visit of the Indian Home Minister to Beijing in November 2015, the two countries issued a rare joint statement pledging intensified information exchange regarding terrorist activities (Patranobis 2015). But what does this mean for countries’ bilateral relations and how could “confidence-building” antipiracy play out in practice? As Kanti Bajpai argues, there is

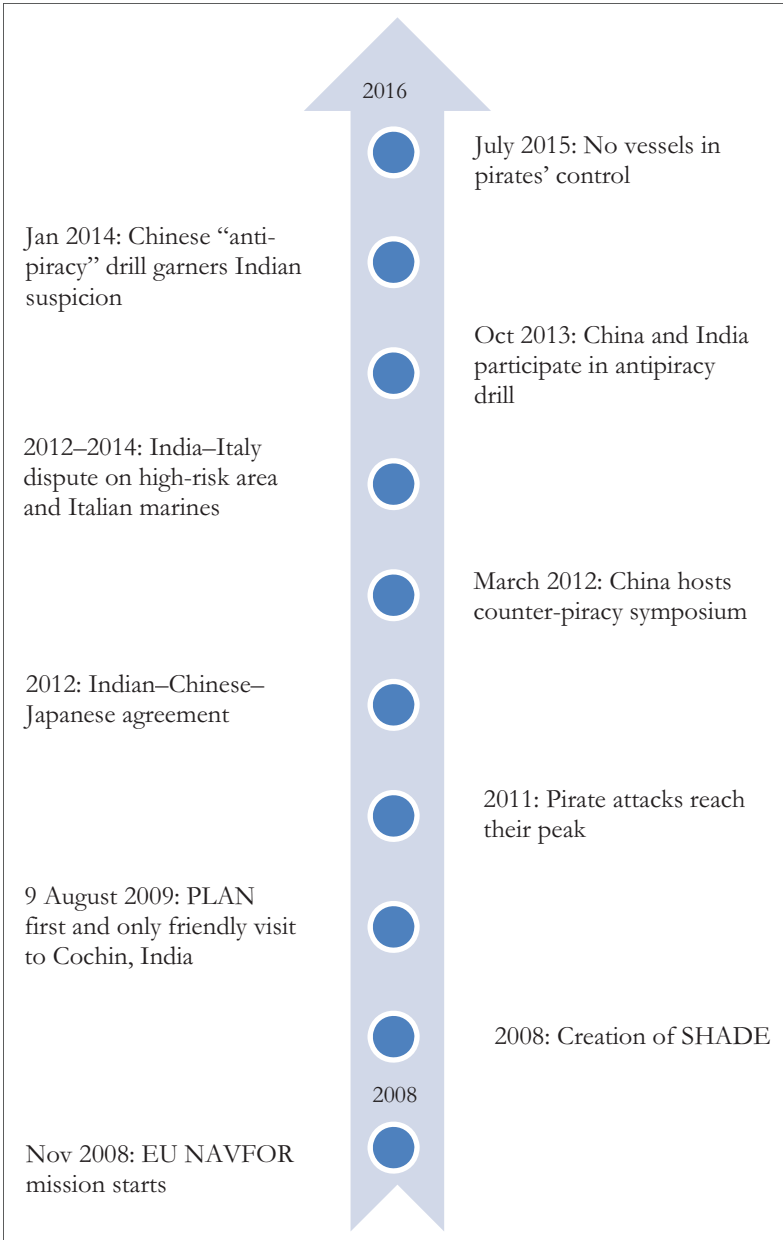
a growing view, fuelled by outsiders as well as commentators in China and India, that the two countries are in competition in the Indian Ocean region. (Bajpai 2013; Mohan 2012)

One of the visible areas of content is China's launch of the ambitious "Belt and Road" initiative (also known as the "Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-century Maritime Silk Road," or "One Belt, One Road"). Part of the project is designed to go from China's coast to the Indian Ocean region. New Delhi has been highly sceptical of the idea, distrustful of the true intentions of this initiative. Some counter-proposals from the Indian side have emerged, such as Project Mausam (2014–2019), which is meant to "re-establish communications between countries in the Indian Ocean world" and to foster "understanding national cultures in their regional maritime milieu" (IGNCA 2014).

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

There are several constraints of an institutional nature, affecting in particular Indian participation in the missions. A common problem cited in recent strategic writings in India regarding cooperation with Europe for antipiracy operations is the lack of centralised coordination. Neither EU NAVFOR Somalia carrying out Operation Atalanta nor NATO's Operation Ocean Shield is deployed as a UN Peacekeeping Force. If they were under a unified command, operations could function more efficiently and successfully. Ships from countries including China, India, and Japan thus operate independently. Efforts towards SHADE by the United States under its Maritime Liaison Office in Bahrain are deemed "naturally inadequate" (Sawhney 2010: 137). If there were to be a unified command under the auspices of

Figure 1. Timeline of China–India Relations on Antipiracy in the Indian Ocean



the UN peacekeeping missions, as there is for land-based peacekeeping operations, India would be much readier to participate in its structure (Sawhney 2010; Mohan 2012). As a consequence, Indian participation under Atalanta has been much lower than that of China.

India’s core interests differ from China’s (see Table 3). This is particularly true in relation to antipiracy in the Gulf of Aden, which belongs to the Indian Ocean and thus to what India perceives its own sphere of influence. While their interests align in principle on the fact that antipiracy is a rather low-risk mission, for China it also contributes to its aspiration to shift from being a land-based power to being a so-called “oceanic power.” In 2008, however, the increase of Western and Chinese naval ships in the Indian Ocean under the banner of antipiracy was initially greeted with suspicion. India is more interested in cooperating with other countries on counterterrorism issues, which carry less relevance for India’s own territorial integrity. From a more pragmatic perspective, both countries want to protect their core trade routes. For China, this article claims, naval exposure through antipiracy can also serve as a platform for confidence building.

Table 3. Chinese and Indian Interests in Antipiracy Coordination

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

In practice, there are several core obstacles hindering closer cooperation between China and India in and through antipiracy: first, the interaction created through participation is more limited than it appears on paper; second, there have been international disputes on the effects of rising insurance premiums in waters close to the Indian coastline and disputes over the areas that can be controlled for antipir-

acy; and, third, Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean in itself constitutes a traditional security challenge for India.

The multilateral mechanisms described in the previous section evince India and China's only very limited interactions. China has, in general, been more active than India within SHADE, actively participating since its creation in 2008, while India has focused on its own missions (Anonymous 7 2015). The first official mention of antipiracy in bilateral talks between China and India took place in February 2012, when the two agreed to undertake joint operations against pirates. Steps taken have been slow, however. For instance, there would be benefits to also discussing antipiracy at multilateral BRICS meetings, but "tensions between China and India had long been identified as the major obstacle to including maritime security in discussions during the BRICS [Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa] summit" (Stuenkel 2012).

There is disagreement on the international or national jurisdiction of areas affected by piracy. These tensions were expressed in the Italy–India case of February 2012, when two Italian sailors, who were members of a military security team tasked with protecting a privately owned cargo ship, shot at a fishing boat in a situation they mistook for a pirate attack (*Al Jazeera* 2014). The Indian courts threatened to prosecute the Italian nationals outside of international law and for murder in the Indian system. The row was characteristic of an ongoing dispute of how close to the Indian coast international waters can be claimed and what threats there would be to India's local fisheries and its jurisdiction (Press Trust of India 2012). A similar incident occurred in October 2013, when the Indian coast guard stopped a ship operated by a US maritime security company which was carrying an international crew and arms but which failed to produce adequate documentation (Chandrasekaran 2014). According to a report by *Reuters*, this case highlights the "loosely regulated practice of placing private and military armed guards on ships for protection against pirate attacks" (Chandrasekaran 2014).

India views antipiracy activities in direct relation to its own maritime security in the Indian Ocean and such activities are perceived

as a direct challenge to India's commercial and strategic interests. Chinese companies have been building maritime and energy infrastructure in countries such as Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and Myanmar to decrease their dependence on the Straits of Malacca. In In-

dia, these actions have led to the view that China is encircling India by building commercial ports that it may develop into military bases in the future. (Dixit 2014)

From 29 January to 3 February 2014, a three-ship task force from the PLAN conducted antipiracy, search-and-rescue, and damage-control exercises near Indonesia, which were observed with suspicion by Indian commentators (Krishnan 2014). Similarly, in 2014 Chinese submarines publicly docked at ports in the Indian Ocean, including Colombo and Karachi. The Chinese said those submarines were on their way to take part in the antipiracy operations and needed to use the ports for re-supply. But, according to Pandit, it caused serious concerns in India, leading many to suspect that “China is practising long-range deployments of its nuclear and conventional submarines on the pretext of anti-piracy patrols” (Pandit 2015). This observation is echoed by external actors, such as US representatives, who also questioned the “logic” behind the submarine deployments (Peri 2016). Thus, Chinese antipiracy efforts are perceived as a cover for its true goal of increasing its overall naval presence in the Indian Ocean, which runs counter to the confidence-building hypothesis.

However, in the case of China–India relations, such obstacles have not yet led to a similar confrontation. There is a history of making mutual port calls between the two countries and, in what can be considered a first, in 2013 they participated in a joint naval exercise on antipiracy, maritime security, and illegal immigration (Ray 2013).

Even though India and China are not on the same page on navigational rights in the South China Sea, the two navies agreed to increase ship visits, conducting joint maritime search and rescue exercises and cooperat[ing] in counterpiracy operations. (Ray 2013)

## Antipiracy as an Instrument of Great Power Relations: Cooperation and Competition

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

To partly answer the question posed by this special issue of whether there is more cooperation or competition between the two

countries: antipiracy acts as a platform for both. The 2012 agreement to develop a mechanism to coordinate Chinese, Indian, and Japanese navy ships – each of whom provides their own protection vessels – when escorting cargo vessels through the Gulf of Aden was a clear sign of cooperation (Information Office of the State Council 2013). Similarly, the first joint training exercise and the two countries' participation in the SHADE mechanism symbolised the rapprochement created within the multilateral setting of antipiracy.

However, antipiracy drills and activities involving China are perceived as an invasion of Indian areas of dominance; additionally, China's drills and its relations with certain countries, such as Seychelles, the Maldives, and Sri Lanka, are considered by many pundits to be signs of an encirclement (String of Pearls) strategy. Recent assertiveness by China concerning its maritime security interests in the South China Sea and the publication of the 2013 Blue Book on the Indian Ocean by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, a government think tank, reinforces the Indian wariness of Chinese objectives. The book states that

in the past, China's Indian Ocean strategy was based on "moderation" and "maintaining the status quo," but the changing dynamics of international relations necessitates China play a more proactive role in affairs of the region. (Kaplan 2013)

Thus, while no comparable open confrontations akin to India's previous one with the Italian marines in 2012 have taken place between China and India surrounding antipiracy, one cannot exclude the possibility of an emphatic reaction by India should a Chinese antipiracy ship be seen as interfering within Indian territorial waters. Thus the conclusive answer to whether antipiracy builds China's and India's mutual confidence must remain unsettled. As an Indian journalist put it,

New Delhi and Beijing undoubtedly realize the potential of a cooperative partnership on a vital issue like anti-piracy operations. But they are also fully aware of the limits of even this win-win situation. (Gokhale 2012)

There are several filter factors, such as history, personal background, political system, and culture (Gippner and Mohan 2015) that affect the potential for cooperation on antipiracy. The history of colonialism, cultural differences, the criticism of Western interventionist



structures, and developing country solidarity have created a general Chinese distrust towards a Western-led antipiracy alliance. The political context and slow decision-making structures explain the hesitant and step-by-step approach among Chinese foreign policy elites. Although China's willingness to take part in officer training and planning might be interpreted as an openness to deepening cooperation, China attaches greater importance to the principle of non-interference and the avoidance of risk. Hence, China views SHADE as a mere facilitating platform and rarely engages in bridge-to-bridge exchanges. Regardless, in line with its general neglect for India in its foreign policy, China is seen as a distinct actor in the area of antipiracy.

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

## Conclusion

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

engagement and an opportunity for confidence building between major countries.

The analysis has shown that there is no definite answer to whether the Gulf of Aden will become an area of competition or cooperation for China and India. So far, antipiracy has served as a platform of cooperation and led to intensified contact between the two navies. China has wholeheartedly embraced this process, exposing increasing numbers of navy staff to exercises and coordination mechanisms in the Gulf of Aden. India, however, continues to feel threatened by the Chinese presence in the region, and is fighting legal battles concerning the delineation of high-risk areas in its coastal zones to prevent foreign navies from using antipiracy to enter what it considers Indian waters. The opening of a Chinese refuelling point in Djibouti along with China's recent claims that the presence of its submarines in the Indian Ocean was necessary for antipiracy purposes are considered to validate this perception (Peri 2016). Hence, while China might consider antipiracy as a platform for increased cooperation and hence confidence building, India's perception of China's motivations has not changed.

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

This ambiguity could be explained by the fact that the relations between these two emerging great powers, India and China, are constantly evolving, with neither of them having reached a status quo position. Antipiracy might be special, because it is at the interface between traditional and non-traditional security relations. While Chinese and Indian cooperation is slowly moving forward in the context of BRICS – for example, with the creation of the BRICS Development Bank (now known as the New Development Bank) in July 2015 – regular border disputes and an increasing Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean through submarine port visits to Sri Lanka and Pakistan reinforce India's threat perceptions.

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

Future research would have to further verify these findings by analysing the discourse on antipiracy in both countries and the perceptions communicated in official documents of each other's participation. As the issue of antipiracy is still evolving and international cooperation will likely be considered along the "seven piracy chokepoints," we can expect both countries to take stronger coordinating roles using platforms like this and the Malacca Straits Patrols network (Maritime Insight News Network 2016). The positive mode of interaction between the EU, NATO, and independent force deployers China and India in the Gulf of Aden might thus serve as a template for cooperation.

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