

For Immediate Release
NDU No. 10-024
December 16, 2010

New Study Released: China's Out of Area Naval Operations: Case Studies, Trajectories, Obstacles and Potential Solutions

Washington, D.C. – The National Defense University's Institute for National Strategic Studies, Center for Strategic Research, is pleased to announce a new publication: *China Strategic Perspectives #3: [China's Out of Area Naval Operations: Case Studies, Trajectories, Obstacles and Potential Solutions](#)* by Christopher D. Yung and Ross Rustici, with Isaac Kardon and Joshua Wiseman.

This study seeks to understand the future direction of the People's Liberation Army-Navy (PLAN) with regard to out of area deployments and power projection. The assessment is based on the history of past PLAN out of area deployments and an analysis of out of area operations of other military forces. Both short- and long-term lenses are employed to understand the scope and direction of China's defense planning and strategic decisions. Examination of the history of China's out of area operations indicates that the Chinese have been operating out of area since the mid-1970s, they tend to "overprepare" for each out of area deployment, and they conduct deployments not only for operational reasons, but also for carefully calculated political benefits.

The study identifies five categories of challenges that confront all navies operating at long distances from home ports: distance, duration, capacity, complexity of coordination, and hostility of environment. The recent PLAN Gulf of Aden deployment illustrated some of these difficulties. In the absence of a nearby facility or military base, that original task force had difficulty maintaining its ships; the ships had difficulty maintaining supplies of fresh vegetables, fruits, and potable water; and personnel did not have access to comprehensive medical care. From the case studies of other militaries, we derived specific lessons about how other militaries met the five challenges in conducting out of area operations and assessed whether the Chinese leadership is likely to follow their example. The five groups of options are: access to a facility or a base for maintenance, repair, and other logistical support; self-protection (for example, carrier support, out of area anti-submarine warfare); use of mobile supply depots and floating bases; intra-task force lift assets (helicopters, lighterage, and landing craft); and extensive use of satellite communications.

The conclusions and operational and strategic implications of our findings are as follows: The PLAN still has some ways to go before it can operate effectively out of area; the PLAN appears to be expanding its out of area operations incrementally; China has an even longer way to go before it can be considered a global military power; experience gained through out of area operations will help make the PLAN somewhat more effective in some of its other operations, however, most of the tasks performed and lessons gained from out of area operations are not directly transferable to either a Taiwan contingency or

some other notional major out of area contingency; and a more capable and active PLAN will present new challenges for U.S. policy.

The National Defense University is the nation's premier center for joint professional military education. The university is an accredited graduate-level institution that provides an educational and research environment to prepare future leaders of the armed forces and other civilian agencies for high-level policy, command, and staff responsibilities.

The mission of the Institute for National Strategic Studies is to conduct strategic studies for the Secretary of Defense, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Unified Combatant Commands to support the national strategic components of the academic programs at NDU and to provide outreach to other US governmental agencies and to the broader national security community.

###

Contacts:

Mr. Dave Thomas, Public Affairs Officer
National Defense University
Phone: 202-685-3140
Email: ThomasD2@ndu.edu

Ms. Kimberley L. Berlin, Outreach Director Institute for National Strategic Studies
Phone: 202-433-4560
Email: BerlinK@ndu.edu
Web site: <http://www.ndu.edu/inss>
Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/ndu-inss>
INSS Blog: <http://inss.wordpress.com/>