



ICAS MARITIME AFFAIRS HANDBILL

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Recent News in Global Maritime Affairs

[1] Climate Change and Blue Carbon Economy [1]

[Last year was the second hottest on record for the Gulf of Maine](#)

February 27 - *The Ellsworth American*
[United States]

The Gulf of Maine is undeniably heating up, “as much as 99 percent faster than the world’s other oceans,” severely threatening the region’s fish, kelp, phytoplankton, and other sea life at alarming rates. Data from the Gulf of Maine Research Institute shows the 10 hottest years in the Gulf happened in the last 11 years.

[“World’s first” salmon and kelp farm launched](#)

February 21 - *The Fish Site*
[Atlantic Ocean, Europe]

In Steigen, Norway, the world’s first combined salmon and kelp farm has opened via the joint collaboration between environmental and farming groups Folla Alger, Cermaq and SINTEF Ocean. “Fish farming and kelp farming are both industries for the future,” explained the chairman of Folla Alger.

[New expedition seeks to reduce risk of extracting metals on the sea floor](#)

February 20 - National Oceanography Centre
[Central America, Global]

A group of scientists from the United Kingdom National Oceanography Centre have begun a 7 week-long Seabed Mining And Resilience To Experimental impact (SMARTEx) project as part of their commitment to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The expedition will start in Costa Rica and conclude in the Central Pacific.

[Sea Ice Surrounding Antarctica Hit a New Record Low, Putting Ice Shelves at Risk](#)

February 17 - *Science Alert*

[The Antarctic]

The U.S. National Snow and Ice Data Center reported that Antarctica's sea ice fell to 737,000 square miles in mid-February; the lowest level since records first began being recorded in 1979, even with a "couple more weeks likely left in the melt season."

[Warming seas are carving into glacier that could trigger sea level rise](#)

February 15 - *The Washington Post* [Paywall]

[The Antarctic, Global]

A group of more than two dozen Antarctic scientists analyzing Thwaites Glacier, Earth's widest glacier, discovered that warm seawater is getting "channeled into crevasses...essentially, upside-down trenches" and accelerating risks of ice shelves breaking off and global sea levels rising.

[Rising seas threaten 'mass exodus on a biblical scale,' UN chief warns](#)

February 14 - *The Guardian*

[Global]

In an address to the UN security council, United Nations Secretary General António Guterres depicted the intense threat of the increasing pace of rising sea levels, calling it a "threat-multiplier" applicable to all continents and emphasizing the resulting "mass" of global refugees to come.

[Blue Carbon and Government of Zambia sign MoU to unlock the potential of carbon removal projects](#)

February 8 - *Gulf News*

[Africa, Middle East]

The Dubai-based company Blue Carbon, created by a member of the Dubai Royal Family to "support carbon removal projects across the world," has signed a memorandum of understanding with the Government of Zambia to initiate net zero carbon projects for Zambia's 8 million hectares of forest.

[Denmark awards first CO2 storage licences in the North Sea](#)

February 6 - *Reuters* [Paywall]

[Europe]

Denmark's Ministry of Climate, Energy and Utilities has awarded its first licenses to "capture and store carbon in the North Sea" to three domestic energy companies. Denmark regards carbon capture and storage technology as key to reaching its target of net zero carbon emissions by 2045.

[Japan looks beyond territorial waters for wind power amid green push](#)

February 5 - *The Japan Times* [Paywall]

[Japan, East Asia]

Japan is now looking into building wind power facilities beyond its territorial waters and into its exclusive economic zone. A panel of experts confirmed the concept's feasibility, thus initiating alterations or additions to domestic laws and Japan's holistic marine strategy.

[Brazil sinks aircraft carrier in Atlantic despite presence of asbestos and toxic materials](#)

February 4 - *The Guardian*

[South America, Global]

The Brazilian navy conducted a "planned and controlled sinking" of the decommissioned, six-decade old aircraft carrier *São Paulo* off the Brazilian coast in the Atlantic Ocean. The action invited the criticism of many environmentalists who protested the sinking due to ship's possession of "tons of asbestos, heavy metals and other toxic materials" that would enter the marine environment.

[2] Maritime Economy and Shipping [2]

[Sheikh Mohammed issues law renaming Dubai Maritime City Authority](#)

February 22 - *Zawya*

[Middle East]

Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates, issued Law No. (3) of 2023, which renamed Dubai Maritime City Authority to Dubai Maritime Authority and formally affiliated it with the Ports, Customs, and Free Zone Corporation.

[US-Made Rare Earths to Skip China In Supply Deal With Japan](#)

February 22 - *Bloomberg* [Paywall]

[United States, Japan, China]

America's only rare-earths producer, MP Materials Corp., has agreed a deal to ship output from its new processing plant directly to Japan. The adjustment is part of a larger effort by the U.S. to "stabilize, diversify, and strengthen a supply chain of critical importance" by reducing China's role.

[Cosco Shipping in 3m teu expansion at Quanzhou port](#)

February 20 - *Seatrade Maritime News*

[China, Global]

China's shipping giant Cosco has invested in two berths projects at Quanzhou port that involve "smart port and green low-carbon" solutions developed internally. Once completed, the annual handling capacity of the Shihu port area will increase by 40% to 3 million twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs).

[Cyprus pushes for EU support over shipping industry sanctions impact](#)

February 20 - *Seatrade Maritime News*

[Europe]

Cyprus has stepped up efforts to shore up support for the shipping industry hit by sanctions on Russia. The EU's third largest shipping power has approached Belarus, which is currently in deep need for support to counterbalance the impact of an oil price cap on Russian crude shipments.

[US: EU's largest maritime freight partner in Q2 2022](#)

February 15 - *Eurostat*

[Europe, United States]

In the second quarter of 2022, the U.S. surpassed Russia and became the EU's largest maritime freight transport partner with a total of 61 million tonnes. Compared with the same quarter of 2021, maritime transport between the EU and Russia declined by 22.1%, while traffic between EU and the U.S. increased by 21.1%.

[PIMEC 2023: Mushahid proposes '5-point action plan to promote Blue Economy' worth \\$100b](#)

February 12 - *Pakistan Today*

[Middle East, Global]

Pakistan's Chairman of the Senate Defence Committee, Senator Mushahid Hussain, proposed a 5-point action plan to promote the blue economy. He suggested that developing the China Pakistan Economic Corridor and building a strategic partnership between Pakistan, China and Saudi Arabia would be an alternative approach for Islamabad to establish its new development path.

[Biggest Shipping Companies Signal Global Trade Slowdown](#)

February 8 - *The Wall Street Journal* [Paywall]

[Global]

A.P. Moller-Maersk A/S, one of the world's largest ocean freight companies, warned that the global shipping industry could suffer an 80% in earnings due to weakening demand to ship containers. The company saw a sharp demand falling from both the U.S. and Europe during the pandemic, which changed the landscape of global shipping.

[FMC Orders MSC to Justify Fees as Reform Act Enforcement Increases](#)

February 7 - *The Maritime Executive*

[Europe, United States]

The U.S. Federal Maritime Commission (FMC) continues its aim of cracking down on fees and unreasonable business practices of major ocean carriers. In a "showcase" order against Mediterranean Shipping Company (MSC), the FMC seeks to investigate MSC's conduct, fee, and charges that it believes violate the U.S. Ocean Shipping Reform Act of 2022.

Morocco, Mauritania to Improve Collaboration in Fisheries Research

February 5 - *Morocco World News*

[Africa]

On February 4, Morocco and Mauritania signed a protocol on cooperation in fisheries research. The protocol seeks to improve the cooperation between the two countries's fishery research agencies and work to harmonize their methods of collecting information, and focus more research on common problems in aquaculture that are of importance to both countries.

India cuts customs duty on shrimp feed

February 2 - *Aquafeed*

[South Asia, Global]

With the end goal of supporting the income of seafood exporters and promoting exports, the government of India announced a reduction of customs duty on shrimp feed. About 50% of the shrimp feed and fishmeal used in India are imported.

[3] Ocean Governance and Maritime Cooperation [3]

Russia Amends Arctic Policy Prioritizing 'National Interest' and Removing Cooperation Within Arctic Council

February 26 - *High North News*

[The Arctic, Russia]

On February 21, Russia's Kremlin officially revised its Arctic policy, previously published in March 2020. Among other adjustments, the amended version removes any mentions of the Arctic Council and replaces the call for the "strengthening of good neighborly relations" with an emphasis on self-reliance, bilateral relations, and the protection of the Russian Federation's national interests.

Cyprus and UK ink agreement to strengthen shipping relations

February 24 - *Seatrade Maritime News*

[Europe, The Mediterranean]

On February 21, top representatives from the United Kingdom and Cyprus signed a memorandum of understanding on bilateral shipping relations. The British representative described the agreement as "a new chapter in [bilateral] relations" while the minister from Cyprus called collaboration a perpetual "cornerstone of Cyprus' vision."

[Indonesia Tells Beijing It Wants Actionable Code on South China Sea](#)

February 22 - *Jakarta Globe*

[Southeast Asia, South China Sea]

Indonesia, the current ASEAN chair, told Beijing's Qin Gang during his visit to Jakarta that it wants an actionable Code of Conduct (CoC) on the South China Sea after years of delay. During a joint press briefing, Indonesia's Foreign Affairs Minister Retno Marsudi explained "we will resume the CoC negotiations, and also intensify the talks in person"; an idea that Ambassador Qin Gang echoed.

[Republic of Korea Assumes Command of Anti-Piracy Task Force](#)

February 17 - U.S. Navy

[Africa, Global]

In February, the Republic of Korea Navy assumed command of the Combined Task Force (CTF) 151 from the Brazilian Navy. CTF 151, headquartered in Bahrain, is one of four task forces under Combined Maritime Forces that bring together 38 member-nations and partners and specifically works to "deter, disrupt and suppress piracy and armed robbery at sea, outside the Horn of Africa."

[PACFLEET CO Paparo Talks Combat Logistics, Chinese Coercion](#)

February 14 - *USNI News*

[United States, China, Global]

In a conference keynote address, U.S. Pacific Fleet commander Adm. Samuel Paparo said the world is living in "a period of intense competition and high stakes." Paparo emphasized the "intentional malign behavior by the PRC and the Chinese Communist Party...see[n] in the form of territorial aggression...[and] unprofessional and unsafe behavior at sea" cannot be normalized.

[MARAD finds many breaches of law during checks on Essequibo, Mazaruni rivers](#)

February 11 - *Stabroek News*

[Africa, Global]

During a series of spot checks on the Essequibo and Mazaruni rivers in North Africa, the U.S. Department of Transportation's Maritime Administration Department (MARAD) encountered "many cases of non-compliance with the Maritime Law." The exercise was conducted with support from the Guyana Coast Guard.

[China pulls back from global subsea cable project as US tensions mount](#)

February 10 - *Financial Times* [Paywall]

[China, Europe, Global]

Amidst another rise in strained U.S.-China relations, China has decided to rescind its participation in the internet cable project 'Sea-Me-We 6'; a subsea pipeline project that would physically connect

Southeast Asia's internet with that of Western Europe through 19,200 kilometers of cables. Another partner in the US\$500 million project called China's participation "important but not critical".

[Senegal, Liberia ink MoU to curb illegal fishing](#)

February 8 - *North Africa Post*

[Africa]

In Dakar, Senegal, the top representatives from Senegal and Liberia on fisheries and the maritime economy signed a memorandum of understanding to jointly counter "illegal and unauthorized" fishing both within their maritime borders and at international levels.

[House tackles Blue Economy Act; PH eyed as maritime 'powerhouse'](#)

February 7 - *Manila Bulletin*

[Southeast Asia]

On February 7, the Philippines' House Committee on Economic Affairs initiated deliberations on the newly proposed 'Blue Economy Act', also known as "An Act Establishing a Framework for Blue Economy, Promoting Stewardship and Sustainable Development of Coastal and Marine Ecosystems and Resources". The Act would bring a variety of structural and focus changes to the Philippines.

[National Assembly passes Pakistan Maritime Zone Bill 2021](#)

February 3 - *Dunya News*

[Middle East]

On February 3, Pakistan's National Assembly passed the Pakistan Maritime Zones Bill, 2021. This 2021 bill was designed to amend and/or revise the 1976 Territorial Water Maritime Zone Act (amended in 1997) that is currently in force.

[4] Maritime Security and Defense [4]

[Japan, NZ to speed up intel sharing pact amid China concerns](#)

February 27 - *The Washington Post* [Paywall]

[East Asia, Indo-Pacific, United States, Global]

During a meeting on February 27 in Tokyo, the foreign ministers of New Zealand and Japan agreed to accelerate talks regarding an intelligence sharing pact. A statement released by Japan's Foreign Ministry also explained that the two nations pledged to ensure the "rights, freedoms and sovereignty of all countries [in the Pacific Island region] regardless of size or power are protected."

[Philippines eyes South China Sea patrols with US, Australia](#)

February 22 - AP

[South China Sea, United States]

The top defense officials of the Philippines, Australia, and the United States are in discussions over establishing joint patrols in the South China Sea amidst “increasingly aggressive actions” by China in the disputed waters. U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin visited Manila in person earlier this month.

[Multinational exercise AMAN to enhance cooperation with world navies](#)

February 22 - *Daily Times*

[Middle East, Global]

From February 10-14, Pakistan’s navy hosted 52 nations for the 8th multinational, biennial naval exercise “AMAN-23” in the North Arabian Sea, led by the slogan “Together for Peace.” The 1st International Maritime Expo and 10th International Maritime Conference (IMC-23), held in Karachi, both coincided with AMAN-23.

[Japan, South Korea and U.S. stage rare joint naval drill after North Korean launches](#)

February 22 - *The Japan Times* [Paywall]

[East Asia, United States, Pacific Ocean]

The Japanese, South Korean and U.S. navies conducted a rare, joint naval exercise in the Sea of Japan. The exercise, which took place days after North Korea reportedly fired a Hwasong-15 intercontinental ballistic missile off the shores of Hokkaido, was "focused on ballistic missile information-sharing" and promoting trilateral security cooperation.

[South Africa Criticized for Naval Exercise With Russia and China](#)

February 17 - *The Wall Street Journal* [Paywall]

[Africa, China, Global]

South Africa is drawing criticism for planning an 11-day trilateral exercise with Russia and China, held off South Africa’s east coast, that overlaps with the anniversary of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. It is the second exercise of its kind since 2019 between the three countries who also interact under the BRICS framework.

[China Harasses PCG Vessel Amid Increased Philippine Maritime Security Cooperation With Japan, U.S.](#)

February 15 - *Naval News*

[East Asia, Southeast Asia]

Coinciding with bilateral meetings between the Philippines and representatives of Japan and the United States, both of which resulted in strengthened bilateral naval partnerships, a China Coast

Guard vessel was reported harassing a Philippine Coast Guard vessel with lasers during a resupply mission off the coast of the Philippines.

[Navy Wants More Middle East Countries in Unmanned Maritime Awareness Network](#)

February 14 - USNI News

[United States, Middle East, Global]

Vice Admiral Brad Cooper, commander of the US Navy's 5th Fleet stationed in the Middle East, announced the US Navy's encouragement for Gulf Cooperation Council nations to expand their use of unmanned systems. Such systems, which Cooper noted already have the widespread interest of everyone in the Gulf council, can "essentially triple how far you can see."

[Japan, Philippines agree to boost defence ties amid China tension](#)

February 10 - Al Jazeera

[East Asia, Southeast Asia]

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. signed a formal defense agreement that will allow Japanese troops to join training exercises related to natural disasters and humanitarian projects. The agreement is seen as a positive step by the Philippines towards broader bilateral military cooperation, both with Japan and with other regional nations.

[US warship operates in Black Sea in first instance since Russian invasion of Ukraine](#)

February 7 - The Jerusalem Post

[Middle East, Europe, United States]

During the first week of February, U.S. Navy destroyer USS Nitze was seen operating in the Black Sea and visiting Turkey, marking the closest that a U.S. warship has been to Russia since the Russian invasion of Ukraine began last February.

Peer-Reviewed Research on Maritime Issues

- Government Release: U.S. Department of State - "[U.S. Support for the Philippines in the South China Sea](#)" [February 13]
- Government Release: U.S. Congressional Research Service - [U.S.-China Strategic Competition in South and East China Seas: Background and Issues for Congress](#) [Updated February 8]
- Government Release: Australia-UK Ministerial Consultations - "[Joint statement - AUKMIN Statement](#)" [February 3]
- Government Release: United States Arctic Research Commission - [Report on the Goals and Objectives for Arctic Research 2023-2024 for the US Arctic Research Program Plan](#) [January 2023]
- Press Release: Government of Ireland - "[New Measures to tackle pollution, biodiversity loss and climate impacts on Ireland's Seas](#)" [February 27]

- Press Release: U.S. Department of Transportation - [“USDOT Announces More Than \\$660 Million Available Through the Port Infrastructure Development Program”](#) [February 8]
- Speech: North Atlantic Treaty Organization - [“Speech by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at Keio University”](#) [February 1]
- Journal Article: [“Blue carbon sinks in South Africa and the need for restoration to enhance carbon sequestration”](#) [Science of The Total Environment - Volume 859, Part 1, February 10, 2023]
- Report: [“The Disruption of Arctic Exceptionalism: Managing Environmental Change in Light of Russian Aggression”](#) [German Council on Foreign Relations, Alfred Wegener Institute, and Wilson Center - February 2023]
- Report: [“Navigating Breakup: Security Realities of Freezing Politics and Thawing Landscapes in the Arctic”](#) [Norwegian Institute of International Affairs and Wilson Center - February 17]
- White Paper: [“Indian Coastal Green Shipping Programme”](#) [DNV - January 2023]
- Analysis: [“Russia, Ukraine in Black Sea Stalemate a Year Into Russo-Ukraine Conflict”](#) [USNI News - February 23]
- Analysis: [“Fighting DMO, pt. 1: Defining distributed maritime operations and the future of naval warfare”](#) [CIMSEC - February 20]
- Analysis: [“Indonesia-Vietnam EEZ pact sends firm message to China”](#) [Asia Times - February 17]
- Analysis: [“Sweden’s Arctic Advantages: Critical Minerals, Space, and Data”](#) [Wilson Center - February 14]
- Analysis: [“Navigating the new world of sanctions”](#) [Seatrade Maritime News - February 14]
- Analysis: [“Rules of engagement and undersea incursions: Reacting to foreign submarines in territorial waters”](#) [CIMSEC - February 6]
- Analysis: [“Can a French Shipping Giant Make Marseille the Capital of the Mediterranean?”](#) [Foreign Policy - February 4] [Paywall]
- Analysis: [“Prioritizing the Indian Ocean in US Indo-Pacific Strategy”](#) [Stimson - February 3]
- Analysis: [“The U.S. military has big plans for an Australian port. So does the Chinese firm that controls it”](#) [Los Angeles Times - February 2]
- Analysis: [“Egypt just seized part of Libya’s maritime zone. What’s the story behind the Egyptian decree no one is talking about?”](#) [Atlantic Council - February 2]
- Analysis: [“How US Marines are being reshaped for China threat”](#) [BBC - February 1]
- Opinion: [“Decarbonizing The Shipping Sector Is A Long Trip But Within Reach”](#) [Forbes - February 27] [Paywall]
- Opinion: [“China in crosshairs of new ocean shipping reforms”](#) [Freight Waves - February 17]
- Opinion: [“Environmental and political reconciliation needed for the South China Sea”](#) [Modern Diplomacy - February 8]
- Opinion: [“Why Even in a Crisis India May Not Block Maritime Trade With China”](#) [The Diplomat - February 4]
- Opinion: [“The United States must act to stop illegal fishing in 2023”](#) [Brookings - February 3]
- Opinion: [“The U.S. Needs a Black Sea Strategy”](#) [Barron’s - February 2]
- Opinion: [“China’s put-upon maritime neighbours are pushing back”](#) [The Economist - February 1] [Paywall]
- Opinion: [“Enforcement of Fisheries Rules Will Enhance Maritime Governance and Security”](#) [Pew Charitable Trusts - February 1]

Events on the Maritime Domain



- On February 9, 2023, the Wilson Center Polar Institute and Center for Maritime Strategy held a virtual event on [“Deterring Russia at Sea in the High North.”](#) A full recording of the event is available online.
- On February 10, 2023, Brookings held a webinar on [“Geostrategic competition and US, Chinese, and Russian overseas basing.”](#) A full recording of the event is available online.
- On February 15, 2023, the Wilson Center Polar Institute and the US Arctic Research Commission held an event to discuss the [“Release of the US Arctic Research Commission 2023-2024 Goals Report.”](#) A full recording of the event is available online.
- From February 21-23, 2023, Arctic360 held its [“Arctic360 Annual Conference”](#) which focused on “Accelerating Cooperation, Innovation & Opportunity.”
- On February 22, 2023, multiple Wilson Center programs hosted an online event on [“Greening BRI Governance in Southeast Asia, Latin America and Beyond.”](#) A full recording of the event is available online.
- From February 27-March 1, 2023, the [“10th Annual World Ocean Summit & Expo”](#) will be held in-person in Lisbon, Portugal. “This year, the summit will steer progress by addressing the greatest challenges facing the ocean: climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. High-level policy discussions will continue to be at the heart of plenary sessions.”
- From February 27-March 3, 2023, the International Maritime Organization, the Australia Maritime Safety Authority, and the Pacific Community will hold both the [“Pacific Women in Maritime \(PacWIMA\) Conference”](#) and the [“Pacific Regional Maritime Search and Rescue \(PACSAR\) Workshop”](#) in Queensland, Australia.
- On March 1, 2023, the East-West Center will hold a hybrid event on [“Damming Rivers in Cambodia: Impacts of Water-Grabbing on Land and Resource Access”](#) out of Honolulu, HI.
- On March 3, 2023, the Wilson Center and the U.S. Department of State will co-host a hybrid event on [“Strengthening U.S. Cooperation on Marine Protection in Latin America.”](#) The event will be webcast live.
- From March 4-6, 2023, the Arctic Circle and the Sasakawa Peace Foundation will hold the [“Arctic Circle Japan Forum”](#) in Tokyo. Registration is still open.
- On March 6, the Center for Strategic & International Studies will hold a webinar on [“Deterring a Cross-Strait Conflict: Beijing’s Assessment of Evolving U.S. Strategy.”](#)
- From April 3-5, 2023, the Navy League of the United States will be conducting their [Sea-Air-Space 2023](#) convention in Maryland with multiple keynote speakers and other open forums.
- From June 5-8, 2023, the IEEE Oceanic Engineering Society and Marine Technology Society will be hosting the [“OCEANS 2023 Limerick - Blue Ocean Planet Earth”](#) in person in Limerick, Ireland; an event for “global maritime professionals to learn, innovate, and lead in the protection and utilization of the world’s largest natural resource – our Oceans.” Registration opens February 20, 2023.

Handbill Spotlight

Carrier Strike Group

Issue Background ¹

A carrier strike group (CSG) is a type of operational formation in the US Navy. While the most defining feature of the formation is its capital ship—the aircraft carrier—the inclusion of several surface and sub-surface escort ships gives CSGs the resilience to maintain a preeminent military presence wherever they may be deployed. As such, the Pentagon frequently uses carrier strike groups to project sea power in areas of strategic importance to the United States.

Today, the U.S. is unique among the world's nations in sustaining a [fleet of eleven](#) large-deck, nuclear-powered aircraft carriers—more than double that of its closest competitors.² However, the organization of aircraft carriers in formation with smaller escorts emerged ubiquitously during the Second World War out of practical necessity. Aircraft carriers are essentially fast and massive mobile airports. They can move anywhere that there is a deep enough ocean, and the aircraft which take off from their decks can out-range the cannons of any surface ship by over ten times. But, their powerful offensive capabilities make them prime targets for the enemy, further complicated by their conspicuous size. By the end of the Pacific War, informed by several key battles, the US Navy began to outclass Japan by grouping several carriers of different sizes with cruiser and destroyer escorts to inculcate the mobile runways against attacks from air, surface, and submarine vantage points.



¹ Image Source: [Nimitz Carrier Strike Group And Makin Island Amphibious Readiness Group Conduct Photoex Exercise](#), US Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Samuel Osborn, February 15, 2023, via DVIDS, Public Domain.

² The UK, Indian, and Chinese navies each operate only two aircraft carriers of comparable size to their U.S. counterparts.

With the end of open hostilities and the transition into the Cold War period, the battle capabilities of multi-carrier formations became less important to the U.S. in comparison to global deterrence and the need to protect Transatlantic supply routes from Soviet submarines lest open conflict break out between the superpowers. In this context, the contemporary CSG was born. These formations [typically consist of](#) one nuclear-powered ‘supercarrier’ (over 1,000 feet long with 70-80 aircraft on deck), two guided-missile cruisers, two anti-aircraft destroyers, one frigate, two submarines, and a supply ship. The Navy currently maintains eleven CSGs: two³ are tasked with training and certifying the Atlantic and Pacific fleets, five are based in Virginia, three are based in California, and one—Carrier Strike Group 11—is forward-deployed in Japan.

Recent Events

With such substantial operational diversity and depth, CSGs have been involved in several practical engagements since the end of the Cold War. One such application is their use as mobile bases for air strikes on land targets as in: the [1995 NATO bombing of Yugoslavia](#), the [2003 invasion of Iraq](#), and the [2017 missile strikes in Syria](#). However, due to their unmatched power, CSGs have also been deployed more symbolically to signal American commitment to a given cause, or resolve to deter a rival. Take, for example, the involvement of CSGs in the humanitarian response to the [2004 Indian Ocean tsunami](#), the [2006–2016 NATO anti-piracy operations off the coast of Somalia](#), and various annual joint exercises (such as [RIMPAC](#)) in the Western Pacific and South China Sea.

Recently, CSG-10, with the USS *George H.W. Bush* as its flagship, has been operating in the eastern Mediterranean. A destroyer attached to the formation, the USS *Nitze*, made news on February 3 when it made [a port call](#) in the Bosphorus Strait; the closest that a U.S. vessel has come to entering the [Black Sea](#) since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine last year. Additionally, the formation sailed towards Antakya and was placed on standby to [assist with humanitarian efforts](#) following the devastating earthquake that hit the Turkish-Syrian border region earlier this month. The Sixth Fleet described the activities as signals of U.S. commitment to Türkiye, the main NATO ally in the region.

And halfway across the world in Asia, CSG-11, headed by the USS *Nimitz*, made headlines for its operations in the South China Sea. In a joint exercise with an amphibious ready group (ARG) of the Marine Corps, the *Nimitz* CSG conducted [“integrated expeditionary strike force operations”](#) near the Spratly Islands on February 11. China, which [claims sovereign rights and jurisdiction in large swathes of the South China Sea](#), released footage on February 16 from the deck of an aircraft carrier of its own, the *Shandong*, issuing [warnings in Chinese and English](#). It is yet unclear whether these announcements were in response to the ongoing U.S. exercises or simply part of the Chinese Navy’s own drills preparing for a potential future encounter with the U.S. Nevertheless, this ‘like-for-like’ response to a CSG is certainly a novel signal of China’s disquiet with U.S. operations in the region. Coming amid a period of heightened tensions, this may have implications on how Washington utilizes the formation going forward.

³ CSG-4 and CSG-15, respectively.

Keep In Mind

Since 2020, U.S. maritime strategy has revolved around [countering threats posed by “determined rivals” Russia and China](#) with a particular emphasis on the latter as “the most pressing, long-term strategic threat.” In this strategy, and [subsequent documents](#) released by the Navy, the Pentagon emphasizes the continued relevance of carrier strike groups in its “sea control and power projection” aims. Joined by this, however, is a sensitivity to China’s growing ability to counter American naval operations in its near-abroad through asymmetric military modernization.

Military commentators are divided over the extent to which Chinese defensive capabilities could neutralize the offensive advantage of a U.S. carrier strike group in open conflict. These arguments revolve around whether Chinese [hypersonic anti-ship missiles](#), [fifth generation fighters](#) and [stealth bombers, cyber weapons](#), and [forward submarine bases](#) give it an asymmetric advantage against American carriers which denies their ability to operate in the South and East China seas.⁴ Aware of this potential vulnerability, U.S. officials are prioritizing research and development and are experimenting with new tactics aimed at denying China’s defensive advantage. For example, last August, the Navy [deployed an amphibious assault ship](#)⁵ to the South China Sea with a deck full of F-35B stealth fighters, widely regarded as far more [useful and resilient against Chinese defenses](#) than helicopters. The USS *Makin Island* amphibious assault ship also hosted several F-35s in its joint exercises with the *Nimitz* CSG earlier this month. This suggests that Washington may intend to counter China’s A2/AD capabilities in part through further enhancing U.S. carrier dominance; introducing smaller carriers into CSGs that allow them to ‘flood the zone’ with short-takeoff fifth-generation aircraft like [the F-35](#).

Nevertheless, the concerns of wargamers over how a potential conflict with Beijing could play out miss the fact that U.S.-China military competition hitherto (and hopefully forever) has been limited to the ‘gray zone’—conflict short of open war. Carrier strike groups continue to operate with great frequency on China’s doorstep which has a deterrent value in times of peace and crisis response that should not be understated. The near-continuous U.S. presence in the South China Sea over the past year shows that the Pentagon is not practically averse to operating in range of China’s defenses and can sustain this pressure through nuclear-powered CSGs unfettered by refueling range. This conspicuous American naval power must factor into Chinese calculations regarding Taiwan and the South China Sea.

It remains to be seen whether the pace of Chinese military development could eventually give the U.S. pause in how it uses carrier strike groups. Currently, China’s ability to directly counter CSG-type operations is limited by the reliance of its surface vessels on diesel fuel (though China’s indigenous carrier development efforts are [likely focusing on nuclear propulsion](#)). Nevertheless, the counter-exercises of the Chinese carrier *Shandong* and its escorts this month show that Beijing likely intends to step up its responses to U.S. operations in its near-abroad if bilateral relations continue to sour. In the words of the Chinese Navy, the show of force after a perceived incursion [“gives people an overwhelming sense of security.”](#) These drills and resolute language show that the

⁴ This strategy is called “Active Strategic Counterattacks on Exterior Lines” (ASCEL) by the PLA, and “Anti-Access/Area Denial” (A2/AD) by the U.S.

⁵ A smaller class of carrier that usually holds helicopters due to the limited room for takeoff.

deterrent effect of CSGs on China is steadily deteriorating, though their timing during the [‘balloon saga’](#) could point to factors beyond regional balance of power.

Does this mean that American CSGs can no longer operate with impunity in China’s backyard? One needn’t be so hasty, as there is still no demonstrable threat to U.S. forces in the gray zone beyond increased Chinese resolve. Additionally, pulling back the *Nimitz* CSG at this stage would only further weaken its deterrent effect. China’s heightened response, however, does entail a change in Washington’s optics calculations. The U.S. has not positioned an aircraft carrier in the Taiwan Strait [since the crisis of 1995](#). This is not because Washington now believes that a carrier in these waters would be immediately destroyed by Chinese defenses: it believes that the diplomatic fallout and indirect danger of such a move would outweigh its deterrent effect on a cross-strait invasion. Without any diplomatic and military-to-military efforts to restore U.S.-China relations in general, American carrier strike group operations in the South China Sea could also drift into this area of undue risk and limited effect—forcing the Pentagon to reconsider their efficacy.

This issue’s Spotlight was written by Alec Caruana, ICAS Research Assistant Intern.

ICAS Maritime Affairs Program: New and Upcoming

— MAP Commentary —

As war in Ukraine freezes the Arctic Council, how will Asia break the ice?

By Nong Hong
February 25, 2023



Geopolitics is complicating cooperation in the resource-rich, climate-critical Arctic region. The five Asian observer states of China, Japan, South Korea, Singapore and India need to examine their engagement in a globalised Arctic in flux.

The Ukraine crisis has changed the world in many ways, one of which is the functionality of the Arctic Council, a forum that Russia currently chairs. The decision by the other seven council members in March last year to stop joining its meetings is a grave impediment to international cooperation in the Arctic. Concerns have also been raised over the role of the observer states, including China, Japan, South Korea, Singapore and India...

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