

The Emergence of the PLA Navy's "Jiaolong" Commando Unit

OE Watch Commentary: As the PLA Navy has become more active globally, it has needed to participate in a much greater range of missions, as reported by the accompanying excerpted article from the *PLA Daily*. In 2008 the PLA Navy made public the existence of its "Water Dragon" or "Jiaolong" Commando Unit [蛟龙突击队] during its anti-piracy missions in the Gulf of Aden. Although only founded in 2002, the unit has already participated in a number of high-profile operations.

In 2015, Jiaolong commandos participated in the evacuation of 571 Chinese citizens and over 200 other foreign nationals from Yemen after a Saudi-led coalition began airstrikes against the Houthi rebel group. In April 2017 a Tuvalan-registered cargo ship "OS35" was hijacked by Somali pirates in the waters of the Gulf of Aden. At the time, the PLA Navy's *Yulin* [玉林], a Type 054 Destroyer in China's South Sea Fleet was participating in anti-piracy patrols. Gong Kaifeng [龚凯峰], a special forces platoon-leader, led a group of 16 Navy SOF aboard the "OS35", rescuing the crew.

Although the unit has provided ample fodder for Chinese Navy recruitment videos and propaganda, it should not detract from the fact that naval special forces have important roles to play in how China could conduct wars across a range of theaters. Video of Jiaolong unit training show them operating in a wide range of environments, from desert to frozen mountains and conducting airborne, surface and underwater infiltration missions. In a 2015 interview (in Chinese, see: http://www.81.cn/syjd/2015-08/03/content_6611441.htm), Captain Li Yerui [李烨睿], a Jiaolong company commander, explained that his training included 52 hours of continuous mock capture and resistance training, as well as regular exposure to tear gas training. According to Li, the course boasts an 88.8 percent washout rate.

China's first anti-piracy patrol in December 2008 marked its first major mission outside home waters in its modern history. Since the beginning, patrols have since been used to train shipborne aviation and accompanying submarine units. Comments from members of these branches highlight the value of such long-distance training in complex environments and with real-world issues. Conspicuous inclusion of the Jiaolong commando units since that first mission should highlight the progress in training and professionalism that is also being made by China's maritime special forces. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**

“The Jiaolong commando's appearance on the world's stage indicates that the Chinese military is becoming more confident and more open.”



People's Liberation Army Navy Special Forces.

Source: By U.S. Department of Defense Current Photos, July 2016.
https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/19/140716-G-HN254-571_%2814714332244%29.jpg, Public Domain.

Source: “蛟龙突击队的世界亮相 (Jiaolong Commando Unit Worldwide Debut),” *PLA Daily*, 26 February 2018. http://navy.81.cn/content/2018-02/26/content_7952015.htm

According to Sun Hao [孙浩], a PLA Navy Marine Commander the birth and growth of the Xiaolong commando team can be described happening at “Just the right time to maximize its potential”. This “time” is the creation of the Jiaolong commando unit as the result of China's military transformation. This “potential” is the growth of the Jiaolong unit that reflects the steady increase in pace of the Chinese military becoming stronger. The Jiaolong commando's appearance on the world's stage indicates that the Chinese military is becoming more confident and more open. “This is the mission and opportunity offered to the Jiaolong unit by the new era,” says Sun. To Sun, making the Jiaolong unit public is a part of a process of constant learning and improvement. “The gap between us and the foreign special forces is still very large. Whether it is army building, personnel selection training, or actual combat experience, we are all elementary school students,” he said.