

South Korea's Counterpiracy Operations in the Gulf of Aden

Terence Roehrig

In March 2009, the South Korean National Assembly approved the first foreign deployment of South Korea's naval forces to join the U.S.-led Combined Task Force (CTF-151). The purpose of CTF-151 is to conduct antipiracy operations in the Gulf of Aden and off Somalia's east coast by the Horn of Africa. South Korea joined the navies of twenty-four other countries that participate in the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) through one of three combined task forces, CTF-150, CTF-151, and CTF-152, to help ensure maritime security in this region. The CMF is an international effort to conduct maritime security operations in the Gulf of Aden, the Arabian Sea, and the Indian Ocean.

South Korea has been a regular participant in CTF-151 with the important contribution of a destroyer, a helicopter, and special operations personnel to counterpiracy efforts in the region.¹ The Lee Myung-bak administration's most immediate concern has been the security of South Korea's commercial fleet and its citizens who work on shipping and fishing vessels, as it has seen an increasing number of its ships seized with demands for ever-higher ransoms. As a rising middle power with increasing economic and political clout, Seoul has assisted in a multilateral effort of the world's chief naval powers to address the challenge of piracy. Participation in CTF-151 and other international security initiatives has elevated the Republic of Korea's (ROK) status and reputation in the international community. Moreover, participation in these counterpiracy operations has provided valuable operational experience for its navy as a sole operator and in missions with international partners. The ROK navy has considerable experience to share with partners, given the work it must do for peninsular security, but these operations have also been able to improve these skills as well as the navy's ability to coordinate operations with others.

South Korea's participation in counterpiracy efforts in the Gulf of Aden has been a valuable venture undertaken at a relatively tolerable

cost. Some analysts have argued that it needs to increase its involvement by sending one or two more ships. Seoul, however, should be reluctant to commit any further resources to these efforts at this time, given the serious security concerns it has to address closer to home with the North Korean threat. South Korean leaders will need to reconcile concerns regarding the serious defense challenges they face close to home and those in more distant oceans. South Korea's rising power and stature compel Seoul to contribute to the international efforts to bring security to the maritime commons. Indeed, the ROK has important interests to protect in foreign and domestic areas and must coordinate both without introducing unacceptable risk in either one.

However, the history of the task force begins several years earlier.

PIRACY AND SOUTH KOREA'S DECISION TO JOIN CTF-151

South Korean fishing and commercial vessels have a significant presence in the region, and as piracy increased, ROK ships traveling off the coast of Somalia also became more vulnerable. Approximately 29 percent of South Korea's maritime commerce traverses this region off the Somali coast; an estimated five hundred South Korean ships pass through the Gulf of Aden annually, and approximately one hundred and fifty of these are highly vulnerable to pirate attack because of their slow speed.²

In 2006, Somali pirates hijacked two tuna boats owned by the South Korean company Dongwon Fisheries. The crew of twenty-five that included eight South Koreans was released after four months of captivity for a ransom of close to \$800,000. In May 2007, pirates seized two more ROK ships with four South Koreans on a crew of twenty-four. The ship was held for six months and released after paying another sizable, though undisclosed, ransom.

In 2008, piracy in the Gulf of Aden, including incidents involving ROK ships and citizens, escalated further. In May, pirates hijacked two fishing boats with a crew of twenty-five from Daechang Fisheries, releasing them six months later. In September, another South Korean vessel was hijacked with eight South Korean crew members on board. This ship was released after being held for a month. Finally, in November 2008, pirates seized a Japanese freighter, the twenty-thousand-ton

Chemstar Venus, with five South Koreans in a crew of twenty-three. The ship was released in April 2009, but it was not clear whether a ransom was paid.

With piracy on the rise off the coast of Somalia, on June 2, 2008, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) passed Resolution 1816 unanimously with the consent of Somalia's transition government that provided authorization to use "all necessary means" to "enter the territorial waters of Somalia for the purpose of repressing acts of piracy and armed robbery at sea, in a manner consistent with such action permitted on the high seas with respect to piracy under relevant international law."³ In October 2008, UNSC Resolution 1838 requested specific assistance from "states interested in the security of maritime activities" to assist "by deploying naval vessels and military aircraft, in accordance with international law."⁴ Since then, the UNSC has passed three resolutions, 1897 (2009), 1950 (2010), and 2020 (2011), to reauthorize the UN mandate to continue counterpiracy operations in the region for another twelve months.⁵ Ironically, because the Somali government has granted permission for the operations, the UN Security Council resolutions are technically unnecessary. However, UN approval provides important political cover and is necessary for some states to commit military forces to an international operation.⁶

To implement these UN resolutions, states agreed in January 2009 to form CTF-151. As piracy incidents mounted and UNSC resolutions called for an international response, the cabinet at the Blue House approved a plan to send a naval unit to participate in international counterpiracy operations in January 2009, and the National Assembly approved the motion in early March. The unit was named *Cheonghae* for a naval base established by General Jang Bogo during the Silla dynasty to protect the kingdom's commercial ships and coastal population from pirates.⁷ While ROK leaders were considering a final decision, a team of navy and foreign ministry officials inspected the facilities in the region and Commander Choi Soo-yong at the Joint Staff concluded that "conditions at the port of Djibouti, in Bahrain and other support situations there were quite good. There will be no problem regarding logistics support because we can use the services of local companies contracted with other navies, such as the United States, Britain and Germany."⁸ South Korea was now set to deploy naval forces away from the Korean peninsula for the first time in its history.

ROK NAVAL CAPABILITY

An important prerequisite for participation in a multilateral maritime operation of this sort is to possess the necessary naval capability. It was particularly important to have blue-water assets that could deploy long distances and operate in the open ocean. In March 2001, President Kim Dae-jung declared in a speech to the graduating class of the Korean Naval Academy that South Korea would pursue the development of a blue-water navy with a “strategic mobile fleet that protects state interests in the five big oceans and plays a role of keeping peace in the world.”⁹ In March 2008, Defense Minister Lee Sang-hee delivered a statement from President Lee Myung-bak to another graduating class at the academy, emphasizing the importance of naval power for South Korea's interests:

The 21st century is the era of the ocean. We have to build a state-of-the-art force that can protect our maritime sovereignty. With a vision for an advanced deep-sea Navy, our Navy should become a force that can ensure the security of maritime transportation lines, and contribute to peace in the world. Sea is the turf for our survival and national prosperity. Only if we efficiently defend and use the sea can peace and economic growth be secured.¹⁰

As a result, South Korea embarked on a major ship-building effort to develop an ocean-going navy under the banner “To the Sea, to the World.”

The effort began with a three-phase construction program to build destroyers. The first phase was the development of the *Gwanggaeto the Great*-class DDH-I light destroyers, the first of which was commissioned in 1998.¹¹ At 3,800 tons each, the ships are considered by some to be in the smaller frigate class. The DDH-I destroyers are configured for strike operations, antisubmarine warfare (ASW), screening and convoy duty, and support for amphibious operations. Ships of this class are capable of carrying two helicopters, but space is tight to realistically deploy with both.

Central to South Korea's participation in CTF-151 has been its fleet of DDH-II destroyers, the *Chungmugong Yi Sunshin*-class ships. The first of these vessels, the namesake of the class, was commissioned in 2003 with additional vessels commissioned each year through 2008. South Korea's DDH-II destroyers and the dates in which they were commissioned are presented in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2. SOUTH KOREA'S DDH-II DESTROYERS

	<i>Ship</i>	<i>Commissioned</i>
DDH 975	<i>Chungmu-gong Yi Sunshin</i>	2003
DDH 976	<i>Munmu the Great</i>	2004
DDH 977	<i>Daejoyoung</i>	2005
DDH 978	<i>Wang Geon</i>	2006
DDH 979	<i>Kang Gam-chan</i>	2007
DDH 981	<i>Choi Young</i>	2008

The DDH-II is a 4,500-ton stealth destroyer with a hull design capable of deflecting radar and possessing other antidetection techniques. The ship is equipped with top-level combat systems that include advanced air defense and antisubmarine warfare capabilities, Harpoon ship-to-ship missiles, RAM MK-31 ship-to-ship guided missiles, and the Goalkeeper system for antiship torpedoes and missiles. DDH-II destroyers are also built to function as the command ship in a combat task force. For deployment to CTF-151, the DDH-II was well suited in that it had a helicopter deck and storage facilities capable of handling two Lynx helicopters. The Lynx helicopter is a multipurpose platform and crucial for counterpiracy operations. It can carry a team of sea, air, and land (SEAL) personnel and other weapons systems to reach targets more quickly, which greatly extends the reach and response time of the destroyer. The DDH-II was also constructed with extra berthing space to accommodate additional personnel, such as the SEAL teams that are part of the *Cheonghae* unit.

The third phase of South Korea's destroyer program was the construction of the DDH-III Aegis-class destroyer, *King Sejong the Great*. The ship is a 7,600-ton multipurpose vessel equipped with the latest technology, including SPY-1D radar that can track close to nine hundred targets and engage seventeen of them simultaneously. The ship also has advanced torpedo- and missile-launching systems, an anti-air and antimissile defense system more advanced than the Phalanx Close-In Weapons System (CIWS), and an advanced anti-ballistic missile system to deal with North Korea's ballistic missile threat. In addition to the *King Sejong the Great*, Seoul has built and

commissioned two other Aegis-class ships, *Yulgok Yi I* and *Seoae Yu Seong-ryong*, and has plans to build others.

ANTIPIRACY OPERATIONS IN THE GULF OF ADEN

In March 2009, South Korea deployed the *Cheonghae* unit for the first time to operations in the Gulf of Aden. (A complete list of South Korean DDH deployments as part of CTF-151 is presented in Figure 3.) The deployment consisted of one DDH-II destroyer, the *Munmu the Great*, under the command of Commander Jang Sung-woo with a crew of three hundred that included thirty ROK SEALs, along with a Lynx helicopter. ROK naval officials planned on rotating the DDH-II destroyers every six months.

The *Cheonghae* unit conducts weekly convoys, largely for South Korean ships traveling through the Gulf of Aden, and participates in other CTF-151 operations. Despite these efforts, the ROK warship is able to accompany only 13 percent of South Korean vessels that pass through the region.¹² Yet, during the first thirty months of operations in the region, South Korean forces rescued ten civilian vessels.¹³

The South Korean force operates under a bifurcated chain of command reporting first to the ROK Joint Staff and ROK navy headquarters but with loose tactical control by the leadership of CTF-151. The *Cheonghae* commander's first priority is to protect ROK vessels that traverse the Gulf of Aden. Based on shipping schedules provided by the ROK Joint Staff, the ROK DDH commander knows which South Korean commercial ships are passing through the Internationally Recommended Transit Corridor and escorts them on this journey. If no South Korean ships are scheduled, the coalition staff of CTF-151 will direct the ship to proceed to a particular sector of the IRTC for an open patrol, or sweep mission, to protect any ships within the sector from pirate attacks. If an attack should occur during an open patrol, the *Cheonghae* commander contacts the ROK Joint Staff and ROK navy headquarters, with simultaneous notification to CTF-151 staff. To act, the ROK commander must first receive authorization from ROK command authority at the joint staff and navy. If there are no other competing priorities to protect ROK ships or people, permission is likely to be

granted. Then, should the ROK warship be the closest and best asset to send to the impending operation, CTF-151 will assume a coordination role to direct the ROK ship or other CTF-151 assets to the area.

Soon after arriving in the region, the *Munmu the Great* conducted several rescue operations. One of the most interesting was the rescue of a North Korean iron-ore freighter, the *Dabaksol*, a 6,400-ton vessel en route to India from the Red Sea. On May 4, 2009, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea ship was chased by pirates and sent out a distress call. The ship was located about twenty-three miles south of Aden, the chief port in Yemen. According to Captain Jang, the ROK ship had twenty to thirty minutes to reach the vessel if it hoped to prevent capture. The ship dispatched its Lynx helicopter and a team of snipers, which arrived within five minutes. The pirates decided to flee when the snipers began preparations to fire. Captain Jang remarked, "South Korea's navy is trained for a quick response, including routine antispy drills. Training continued while we were on the move, and I think the exercises paid off because of our efficiency and speedy response."¹⁴

Later in the month, the *Munmu the Great* chased off a pirate ship pursuing an Egyptian vessel on its way to India. Similar to the *Dabaksol* operation, the *Cheonghae* unit sent out its Lynx helicopter and a team of snipers to chase away the pirate craft. A U.S. Navy helicopter also joined the effort, making this the first joint operation with the United States since South Korea joined CTF-151. It was also the fourth rescue operation conducted by the *Cheonghae* unit since it arrived in April, the vessel having rescued Danish and Panamanian ships in addition to the *Dabaksol*.¹⁵ On returning from his deployment, Captain Jang noted that "allied forces gave high marks to the Korean navy's capabilities and assigned us the most pirate-infested area of northern Bosaso off Somalia. We are proud to raise South Korea's reputation in the international community."¹⁶

The *Cheonghae* unit faced another difficult task in spring 2010. On April 4, the 300,000-ton ROK supertanker *Samho Dream* was hijacked 932 miles southeast of the Gulf of Aden. The ship was not under escort at the time, believing that it was traveling in waters relatively safe from piracy. The tanker was carrying two million barrels of crude oil, worth \$160 million to \$170 million, and was bound for the United States from Iraq with a crew of five South Koreans and

nineteen Filipinos. Because of the nature of the cargo, crew members did not carry weapons. After receiving the hijack report, ROK authorities dispatched the ROK's *Yi Sunshin*, the DDH-II destroyer assigned to the *Cheonghae* unit at the time. The *Yi Sunshin* intercepted the hijacked vessel in two days but kept its distance. The pirates warned the destroyer to stay away, and when the pirates began negotiating with the ship's owner, the Busan-based Samho Shipping Company, the destroyer pulled back and returned to port.¹⁷ After more than seven months of captivity, the *Samho Dream* and its crew were released for a \$9.5 million ransom. According to a Reuters report, the pirates had initially demanded \$20 million but settled for the lesser amount, which was a record for a ship's ransom paid in the region.¹⁸ Before this incident, the highest ransom paid for an oil tanker had been \$5.5 million. According to another report, though the ROK government did not provide the ransom money, the Lee administration viewed the events as a national embarrassment that signaled the country's weakness to deal with these situations, a particularly stinging indictment in the wake of the *Yeonpyeong* incident.¹⁹

On April 21, 2010, South Korea assumed command of CTF-151 under the lead of Rear Admiral (RADM) Lee Beom-rim, the first time Seoul led a CMF task force. During his tenure, RADM Lee sought to improve coordination with the EU and NATO contingents, along with other states that had naval assets present in the region but operated independently of any of the international task forces. On September 1, 2010, South Korea turned command responsibility over to Turkey. RADM Lee remarked:

The Republic of Korea Navy is proud to have been at the forefront of CMF's efforts to help to confront piracy over the last four months. The men and women from twenty-one ships from seven different countries who have served under my command have performed their duties with skill and dedication. . . . It is important for us to share the latest strategic operations and tactical knowledge and I believe that we have worked seamlessly together toward our mutual goals.²⁰

South Korea took the lead of CTF-151 a second time on June 18, 2012, when Rear Admiral Chung An-ho assumed command of the task force.

FIGURE 3. SOUTH KOREA'S DDH DEPLOYMENTS TO CTF-151

<i>Ship</i>	<i>Dates Deployed</i>
<i>Munmu the Great</i>	March–July 2009
<i>Daejoyoung</i>	July–November 2009
<i>Chungmugong Yi Sunshin</i>	November 2009–May 2010
<i>Kang Gam-chan</i>	May–September 2010
<i>Wang Geon</i>	September–December 2010
<i>Choi Young</i>	December 2010–May 2011
<i>Chungmugong Yi Sunshin</i>	May–November 2011
<i>Munmu the Great</i>	November 2011–May 2012
<i>Wang Geon</i>	May 2012–

He will lead a staff of twenty officers from South Korea, the United States, the Netherlands, Thailand, Jordan, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia.

The *Cheonghae* unit made a particularly good accounting of itself on January 21, 2011, when a detachment of twenty-one ROK SEALs rescued the 11,500-ton chemical carrier *Samho Jewelry*, owned by Samho Shipping, the same owner as the *Samho Dream*. (A map of the areas where the hijacking and rescue occurred are presented in Figure 4.) The drama began on January 15, when Somali pirates seized the *Samho Jewelry* in waters between India and Oman. The following day, the ROK's *Choi Young*, the DDH-II on duty at the time, was sent to the area and eventually caught up with the *Samho Jewelry* in the evening hours. Soon after, a Mongolian ship passed within eleven kilometers of the hijacked ship and four pirates boarded a small boat that headed toward the ship. With the pirates separated, ROK authorities decided to act. The Lynx helicopter went after the small boat and killed all four pirates on board. At the same time, a ten-member SEAL detachment traveled by speedboat to overtake the pirates on board the *Samho Jewelry*. As the SEALs approached the ship, the pirates opened fire, wounding three of the commandos and foiling the rescue attempt. The SEALs received medical treatment for non-life-threatening injuries and were flown to Oman for further treatment.²¹

During this rescue attempt, ROK officers on the *Choi Young* realized the pirates were not heavily armed and later attempted to negotiate

FIGURE 4



Source: <http://www.seanews.com.tr/article/PIRACY/49738/South-Korea-Piracy-Navy-Samho--Jewelery/>.

with them. However, the *Samho Jewelery* began moving again, most likely toward Somali waters. With few options remaining, the SEALs on the *Choi Young* struck again. With the ROK warship providing covering fire, the SEALs attacked and retook control of the ship in a five-hour operation that required them to move cabin by cabin to root out the pirates.²² Code-named Gulf of Aden Daybreak, the assault freed the ship's crew of twenty-one with none of them killed and only the *Samho Jewelery's* captain wounded. The *Samho* captain, Seok Hae-kyun, later received the Dongbaek Medal, a civilian award for bravery in recognition of his actions during the ordeal. Eight of the thirteen Somali pirates on board were killed in the operation; five were captured and bound for trial in South Korea.

After the operation, South Koreans collectively swelled with pride over the *Cheonghae* unit's success. ROK minister of foreign affairs and trade Kim Sung-hwan noted, "It would be troubling to give the pirates money so easily. They must realize that South Korea isn't so soft."²³ In nationally televised remarks, President Lee Myung-bak proclaimed, "This operation demonstrated our government's strong will that we won't tolerate illegal activities by pirates anymore."²⁴ Regarding the navy's performance, President Lee exclaimed, "Our military flawlessly carried out the mission under difficult circumstances."²⁵ The successful rescue operation also had important political implications. After criticism for a relatively tepid response to the shelling of *Yeonpyeongdo*, one

commentator noted that the president “could ill-afford the public perception of a leader afraid to fight back.”²⁶ The successful raid helped boost the reputation of the ROK navy and support for the Lee administration.

In the wake of the rescue operation and impressed with South Korea's response, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) asked for ROK assistance to train its special forces in counterpiracy operations. In July 2011, Seoul sent ten SEALs to provide the training. South Korea already had a contingent of 130 special operations personnel in the UAE since January 2011 for counterterrorism training and joint operations. Because the original authorization was for 150, adding ten more did not exceed the legislative mandate and did not require National Assembly approval.²⁷

After the rescue operation, ROK authorities transported the five captured Somali pirates back to South Korea for trial in the Busan District Court. All five were convicted by a South Korean jury and received sentences that included life in prison for the pirate who had shot the *Samho Jewelry* captain. The others received sentences that ranged from thirteen to fifteen years in prison. Few countries have chosen to prosecute hijackers for piracy, and the trial attracted international attention.²⁸ The Somali pirates appealed their sentences, and the Busan appellate court upheld the convictions, but most of the sentences, including the life sentence, were reduced. However, in September 2011, it was announced that the case would be heard by the South Korean Supreme Court for a final decision, though the case has yet to be heard.²⁹ Prosecuting captured pirates has been a difficult task given the legal and jurisdictional issues. Consequently, approximately nine out of ten have been released.³⁰ In 2009, for example, ROK forces captured seven pirates in a rescue operation of a Bahamian freighter but released them after giving them warnings.³¹

Although many praised the rescue operation, critics also expressed concerns. In particular, some worried for other ROK hostages still held by pirates or any future captives. In a phone interview with Reuters after the *Samho Jewelry* raid, a Somali pirate warned, “We never planned to kill but now we shall seek revenge. We shall never take a ransom from South Korean ships; we shall burn them and kill their crew. We shall redouble our efforts. South Korea has put itself in trouble by killing my colleagues.”³² Indicating that the operation may have been more about politics, a South Korean professor lamented, “It's been a campaign to get credit from voters. The government should be more concerned about the hostages still out there. What is it doing for them? The

reaction to the rescue should have been more muted.”³³

Another incident involving a South Korean vessel was the hijacking of the *Keummi* 305, also known as the *Golden Wave* No. 305, a 241-ton fishing trawler taken by pirates off the Somali coast in October 2010. The crew of forty-three was composed of two South Koreans, two Chinese, and thirty-nine Kenyans; some feared these captives would be the target of the pirates' revenge. There was also some intense discussion among ROK officials about arranging a swap for the crew of the *Golden Wave* for the five pirates captured in the *Samho Jewelry* rescue. The foreign ministry rejected the plan, however, most likely based on a refusal to negotiate with the pirates.³⁴ Three weeks after the *Samho Jewelry* assault, the pirates released the ship with the crew unharmed and no ransom paid. According to one report, it appeared that the pirates released the ship because it was becoming exceedingly unlikely that any ransom would be paid for such a small ship, one owned by the ship captain rather than a large shipping firm. Moreover, feeding the crew of forty-three was becoming difficult.³⁵

The *Cheonghae* unit continued to contribute to maritime security following the successful rescue of the *Samho Jewelry*. Early on April 21, 2011, Somali pirates fired small arms at the 75,000-ton container ship, the *Hanjin Tianjin*, owned by the ROK Hanjin Shipping Company. The captain of the vessel sent out a distress call and ordered the engines shut down. The crew proceeded to lock itself inside the citadel, an emergency, bullet-proof panic room for protection during pirate attacks. In February, the Ministry of Land, Transport and Maritime Affairs had mandated all commercial vessels traveling through the region to install a citadel and an independent communications system within the room.³⁶ Though the *Hanjin Tianjin* had the citadel, it had not installed the communications system. ROK authorities immediately dispatched the *Choi Young* to the ship's aid. However, a Turkish warship only eighty miles away was able to reach the *Hanjin Tianjin* eight and a half hours sooner and may have also played a role in chasing away the pirates. Apparently, the pirates had vanished by the time the Turkish ship and later the *Choi Young* arrived, but shell casings and footprints from bare feet were evident on the ship, sure signs of the pirates' presence. It was also clear that the pirates had attempted to restart the engines but had failed. With the crew safe in the citadel and the ship immobile, the pirates left.³⁷

In early July, the *Cheonghae* unit responded again to three pirate ships believed to be moving in to seize the 17,000-ton chemical

freighter *Azalea*, owned by the ROK firm STX POS. The ship had a crew of twenty-four with four South Koreans and was carrying 28,000 tons of sulfur from Egypt to Singapore. The *Chungmugong Yi Sunshin* was escorting another vessel when the distress call arrived. As a result, the ROK warship transferred its mission to a nearby Spanish warship and steamed off to rescue the *Azalea*. When in range, the ROK warship dispatched its Lynx helicopter and upon reaching the pirate ships, the helicopter fired flares to warn the pirates. All three pirate ships sped off before the *Yi Sunshin* arrived.³⁸

In addition to contributing to counterpiracy operations, the South Korean government has also provided financial support to UN counterpiracy efforts. In April 2011, Seoul provided \$500,000 to a UN fund for the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS). As of November 2010, the fund had received \$3.66 million from member countries.³⁹ The group was established by the UN in January 2009 following UNSC Resolution 1851 and maintains five working groups to address various dimensions of the piracy problem, including legal issues, information sharing, and financial dealings.⁴⁰ The CGPCS is a “voluntary, ad hoc international forum of approximately seventy countries, organizations and industry groups with a common interest in combating piracy in the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean, and bringing to justice pirates and their financiers and facilitators.”⁴¹ At South Korea’s suggestion, the group will also maintain a website operated jointly by South Korea, the United States, and the United Kingdom to act as an information-sharing and communications hub between the group members.

BENEFITS OF SOUTH KOREA’S COUNTERPIRACY EFFORTS

South Korea’s participation in CTF-151 has yielded a number of benefits. First, the presence of the *Cheonghae* unit has helped protect both ROK commercial interests in the Gulf of Aden and Arabian Sea and its citizens involved in maritime commerce there. ROK warships have escorted many South Korean ships through the region and moved in to ward off pirate attacks. The most dramatic of these was the rescue of the *Samho Jewelry*. It is difficult to calculate in monetary terms the

benefit of the *Cheonghae* unit's presence; but given South Korea's dependence on ocean-borne shipping, the approximately \$33 million spent annually to fund the deployment is money well spent. The deployment also put an end to an apparent wave of ransom demands in which South Korean ships became priorities for the hijackers. According to one report, the high ransoms paid by ROK shipping companies, particularly the \$9.5 million paid for the *Samho Dream*, may have singled out South Korean ships.⁴²

As a rising middle power that depends heavily on the oceans to maintain its export-driven economy, South Korea bears some responsibility to help protect the global maritime commons. South Korea's assistance in these efforts provides an important boost to its international standing. Moreover, operations such as the *Samho Jewelry* rescue demonstrate that South Korea is willing and able to use force when necessary, making it a valued partner. As one analyst noted, "This incident has left a strong impression on countries in the region ... that South Korea is not a paper tiger on the piracy issue and is willing and able to use hard power to protect its nationals and property."⁴³

Finally, CTF-151 operations also have provided South Korea with a chance to share its operational experience gained through its preparation for North Korean actions, while also gaining from participating in and leading multilateral operations. Gulf of Aden actions provide the ROK navy with valuable operational experience. In addition, successful counterpiracy operations, especially the *Samho Jewelry*, may have helped to send a deterrence message to the pirates and North Korea, while allowing the navy and the Lee administration to redeem its reputation in the wake of the *Cheonan* sinking and the *Yeonpyeongdo* skirmish. However, it is unclear whether ROK counterpiracy operations had a significant deterrent effect and, if so, it is likely to be limited. The financial gain to be had in piracy in the Gulf of Aden and the difficulty of policing such a large area make deterring piracy a difficult task. The deterrent effect on North Korea may be slightly greater in that it was a demonstration of a more determined ROK government willing to use force in response to a future provocation. However, ROK efforts to aid North Korean ships in trouble in the Gulf of Aden may have had an even greater effect in softening inter-Korean relations; but in all these cases, it is difficult to ascertain the ultimate effect in Pyongyang.

QUESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

The year 2012 marks the third year of ROK participation in CTF-151, and operations such as the dramatic rescue of the *Samho Jewelry* raise some important questions regarding South Korea's participation and the overall value of the venture for ROK interests. Three issues are of greatest concern: increasing the size of the *Cheonghae* unit, sustaining the cost and public support of the operation, and the use of force in rescue operations.

INCREASING THE SIZE OF THE CHEONGHAE UNIT

Some critics have argued that given the success of the ROK deployment and that other countries such as Japan, China, and the United States have sent larger contingents of two or three warships to fight piracy in the region, South Korea should deploy more ships as well. Moreover, given the size of the region and the ongoing threat of pirate attacks, more needs to be done to protect ROK shipping.

Although a reasonable idea, it would be difficult for South Korea to deploy other naval assets to the Gulf of Aden, given the size of its current force and its defense needs at home. One option would be to increase the *Cheonghae* unit from one to two *Chungmugong Yi Sunshin* DDH-II destroyers. Although South Korea has six ships in this class, and thus seemingly might be able to spare one more for antipiracy duty, such a conclusion is incorrect. Sending one DDH-II ship to the Gulf of Aden is equivalent to committing three ships. While one ship is conducting operations, another is either on its way to the theater and training for the mission or returning from a deployment. A third DDH-II would be in port, undergoing maintenance after the regular six-month deployment. Thus, the commitment of one destroyer to actual counterpiracy operations is really the commitment of three DDH-II vessels. Moreover, the remaining three destroyers in this class are needed for operations around the Korean peninsula, making it difficult to deploy more of these ships to the counterpiracy mission.

Other ships in the ROK fleet are not as suitable for antipiracy operations. The DDH-III *Aegis*-class destroyers are costly to deploy and not designed to be counterpiracy platforms. When South Korea began its commitment to CTF-151, the *King Sejong the Great* had only been recently commissioned and was still conducting training exercises.

Furthermore, these ships are more valuable for their ballistic missile defense capabilities against North Korea. The other possible additions to the *Cheonghae* unit are the DDH-I destroyers or the *Ulsan*-class frigates. However, deploying these to the Gulf of Aden is also problematic. The frigates are good for coastal patrol but do not have a helicopter deck. They are also too small to carry the extra SEAL teams and support personnel necessary for the operation. The DDH-I destroyers are equipped with a helicopter deck but lack the space to accommodate the additional personnel. Moreover, there are only three of these ships in the fleet, and they are needed for defense at home. One possible answer is the new *Incheon*-class frigate, but only one has been launched, and it will be a few years before others are available for service. Thus, it is unlikely that South Korea will be able to increase the size of the *Cheonghae* unit in the near term, but doing so could be part of a longer-range plan to combat piracy once more ships are constructed.

SUSTAINING THE COST AND SUPPORT OF THE CHEONGHAE UNIT

The annual cost of the *Cheonghae* unit deployment is approximately \$33 million of a total \$27.6 billion ROK defense budget.⁴⁴ The cost is relatively modest, one-tenth of 1 percent, but as with most governments in the midst of the global economic slowdown, budgets are tight and all line items are competing for scarce resources. In addition, ROK politics remain intensely divided, including support for the counterpiracy mission. However, the success of the *Samho Jewelry* operation seems to have tipped the scale somewhat; and at least for the moment, sufficient support remains for continuing ROK participation in the operation.

USE OF FORCE IN RESCUE OPERATIONS

Following the *Samho Jewelry* rescue, critics raised concerns that the use of deadly force had set a dangerous precedent that might make it an easier decision next time and could jeopardize the well-being of the hostages. Rescue operations are clearly dangerous, and there can be no guarantee that they will be free of casualties. These are important concerns, and authorities of any country should consider the circumstances and the likelihood of success carefully before ordering a rescue attempt. However, the addition of more measures—such as a citadel—would reduce

the danger. If opportunities exist to rescue hostages from an uncertain fate, they should be considered. Nonetheless, successful rescue operations remain difficult and should be contemplated only reluctantly. It is therefore critical that seizures be prevented, which would reduce the need to conduct rescue operations in the first place.

CONCLUSION

Counterpiracy operations are one part of a solution to address a problem that is rooted in a lack of effective governance and poverty.⁴⁵ These dimensions will need to be addressed as well for any hope of a more permanent solution. Increasingly, transnational challenges like piracy will require multilateral solutions such as CTF-151. ROK participation in these efforts helps to provide greater global security and advance South Korean interests. Moreover, as South Korea's power and influence in the international system increases, it will be incumbent on Seoul to play a proportionate role in providing security for the global commons. Participation in CTF-151 is an important contribution South Korea should make as a rising power to help address transnational challenges.