



Coastguardsmen from USCGC *James* conduct boarding of fishing vessel in Eastern Pacific, August 3, 2022 (U.S. Coast Guard)

Combating IUU Fishing in the South American Pacific

An Opportunity to Counter Chinese Influence Closer to Home

By Alexander Goodno

In August 2022, USCGC *James* took evasive action to avoid a Chinese-flagged vessel that was attempting to

ram the cutter in the Pacific Ocean.¹ While most confrontations between the United States and China center around Taiwan or the South China Sea, this event took place off the coast of South America—nearly 10,000 miles (16,000 kilometers) from mainland China. The incident had little to do with Chinese

territorial expansion. Instead, it focused on illicit fishing activity, the Chinese vessel being a member of China's distant water fishing (DWF) fleet, the largest in the world.²

For many in the United States, news of this encounter was the first time they had heard of China's fishing activities in

Colonel Alexander Goodno, USMC, is Commanding Officer of Marine Aircraft Group 13.

the Western Hemisphere; however, high-stakes encounters between Chinese fishing vessels and South American authorities have been common over the past decade. In 2016, an Argentine coast guard vessel sank the *Lu Yan Yuan Yu 010*, and in 2019, it fired on the *Hua Xiang 801*; both were Chinese DWF vessels caught fishing inside Argentina's exclusive economic zone (EEZ).³ Similarly, the Ecuadorean navy confiscated the *Fu Yuan Yu Leng 999* in 2017 for fishing inside the Galápagos Maritime Reserve.⁴

With China's expanding presence in South America, these at-sea confrontations have tarnished the positive image China has tried to convey. They have also created an opportunity that the United States could exploit. By establishing itself at the forefront in combating illegal, unregulated, and unreported (IUU) fishing activities off the Pacific coast of South America, the United States could strengthen its role as a leader in the Western Hemisphere and counter growing Chinese influence in South America. To achieve this end, the United States must adopt a uniform approach to curbing IUU fishing, encourage the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation (SPRFMO)—an international treaty-based organization—to implement unambiguous regulations that nations could easily enforce, and strengthen counter-IUU fishing operations with South American partner countries as well as with China.

China's Growing Influence in South America

China's presence in the Southern Hemisphere is not new, but its reach and ambitions on the South American continent have expanded significantly over the past 15 years. At the turn of the millennium, as China's mineral resources depleted domestically, Beijing began significantly increasing trade with South America, importing its untapped raw materials.⁵ A decade later, China expanded the scope of its Latin American interests, incorporating South America into its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and encouraging increased investment on the continent.⁶ These Chinese

investments have largely focused on infrastructure, such as China's plan for the Twin-Ocean Railway, which would connect Brazil's Atlantic coast to Peru's Pacific coast, or its newly completed megaport in Chancay, Peru.⁷ China has similarly encouraged companies to invest in South American utilities. Huawei, China's premier telecom company, was awarded separate contracts to build out a national 5G network in Ecuador, Chile, and Peru, and in 2024, China finalized its purchase of equity stakes in two of Peru's largest power suppliers.⁸

While many of these projects appear primarily focused on economic opportunities, they also support Beijing's goal of increasing its influence and cooperation on the South American continent. China has been open about these objectives. In the 2010s, Beijing established the China-Comunidad de Estados Latinoamericano y Caribeños (CCF), outlining a desire to bolster Sino-Latin American cooperation across multiple endeavors: space technology, disaster prevention, and climate change, among others.⁹

Their plan for expanded collaboration and partnership on the South American continent has had success. Consider China's relationship with Chile. At the start of the 21st century, China's relationship with Chile primarily focused on copper exports; today, their relationship is much more intertwined. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the two countries partnered in developing a coronavirus vaccine.¹⁰ More recent, the two countries have been moving forward on a joint venture to build a 10-square-mile (26-square-kilometer) astronomical park in the Chilean Ventarrones Mountains that will house over 100 telescopes, including a 12-meter telescope.¹¹ While China's initial forays in South America may have been transactional, its future on the continent appears politically much broader in scope.

China's increasing presence in South America has not gone unnoticed. Although Beijing claims that its motive behind BRI investments and CCF collaborations is to bolster developing nations, Western policymakers believe otherwise. As an example,

analysts at the International Institute for Strategic Studies and Asian-Latin American professors collectively suggest that specific infrastructure projects, like a South American transcontinental railway, could be a means for China to bypass the Panama Canal or provide a gateway for future naval logistics bases, similar to China's foreign military base in Djibouti.¹² Similarly, U.S. investigative journalists have highlighted that the proposed Chilean Ventarrones observatory could also serve as a military node, monitoring U.S. satellites and space operations, and complete China's network of five global sites needed for it to scan the entire northern and southern hemispheric skies every 30 minutes.¹³

In concert with Washington's apprehension, skepticism is percolating through the South American populace over Chinese intentions on their continent. South American manufacturing laborers, whose factories began closing due to low-cost imports, strongly oppose increased trade with China.¹⁴ Additionally, Peruvian military leaders and business officials have argued that economic dependency on China and near-total Chinese control over Peruvian utilities create a national security liability in the region.¹⁵

Something Fishy on the High Seas

In parallel with South American concern over China's impact on the continent, discord over China's fishing operations is also garnering increased attention. China's South American DWF fleet—which began as a relatively small enterprise three decades ago, responding to dwindling Chinese squid fisheries—has grown exponentially and now numbers more than 500 vessels.¹⁶ In an industrial-like operation, the at-sea fishing vessels rely on refrigerated mother ships to store their catch, transport fish to ports, and sustain the vessels with food and fuel. The fleet operates for months on end and can resemble an island city-state, covering swaths of the ocean nearly 200 miles (300 kilometers) long, equivalent to the length of the entire coastline of South Carolina.

The imposing presence of Chinese DWF creates a growing problem for the Pacific coastal nations of South America. Though China's DWF vessels claim to operate outside each country's EEZ, their practices are questionable: turning off their automatic identification systems to traverse into EEZs unnoticed, casting expansive fishing nets underwater into an EEZ while keeping the ship outside of the EEZ's boundary, or fishing for protected or regulated species.¹⁷ As an example, in 2017, the Ecuadorean navy discovered 7,639 unreported sharks aboard the *Fu Yuan Yu Leng 999*, a Chinese vessel registered to catch squid.¹⁸ More concerning is the impact that industrial-scale fishing has had on the ecosystem, disrupting migratory patterns of fish along the South American coast and depleting species necessary to support local artisanal fisheries.¹⁹ For countries like Ecuador, the seventh-largest tuna-fishing nation in the world, or Chile, where fish is its largest export after copper, the impact is tremendous.²⁰ In 2020, IUU fishing accounted for a nearly \$2.3 billion drain on South America's economy, with \$600 million of these losses coming from individual incomes.²¹ Left unchecked, the situation in the southern Pacific could gut the South American fishing industry, to say nothing of the ripple effects it will have across global fish stocks.

South America's Pacific countries are not standing idly by. As the problem has grown, many of these nations have begun strengthening their capacities to surveil and patrol their EEZs. Already a regional leader in surveillance, Chile has invested significantly in unmanned aerial vehicles and satellite technology to further increase its ability to monitor maritime protected areas farther offshore.²² Like its neighbor to the south, Ecuador has expanded its surveillance capabilities. Leveraging technology used by Canada's Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Quito has begun using satellites and artificial intelligence to find and track "dark vessels"—that is, ships that turn their transponders off to evade detection when crossing into an EEZ unauthorized.²³

At the same time as they seek to find offending fishing vessels from the sky, these countries are also expanding

their naval capacity to patrol the oceanic commons. In April 2024, Peru signed a deal with South Korea's Honda Heavy Industries to build one multirole and one offshore patrol vessel. Lima hopes to add these to the eight Peruvian-built patrol boats it recently purchased, which have been successful in aiding Peru's efforts against IUU fishing.²⁴ Columbia and Ecuador are also expanding their navies, adopting similar plans to increase the number of multipurpose and offshore patrol vessels within their fleets.²⁵

Nevertheless, despite these noteworthy efforts, large-scale IUU fishing in the South American Pacific persists. Part of the problem is a lack of adequately trained personnel. Multiple reports highlight that Ecuador lacks the necessary staffing to monitor its offshore waters properly and that its existing maritime enforcement personnel do not fully understand available legal tools against IUU fishing.²⁶ Chile is in a similar predicament. Consider that while Santiago invests more in its navy than nearly every other Central and South American country, its ratio of navy personnel to square mile of coastline is lower than half of these same countries.²⁷ Chile simply does not have the resources to cover its vast territorial waters.

The South American Pacific's demonstrated desire to curb IUU fishing, combined with its existing resource shortfall, presents a window of opportunity for Washington. To date, many of the U.S. efforts to counter China's global influence have focused on the Western Pacific. In the South American Pacific, Washington could both challenge Beijing's behaviors on this side of the globe while also strengthening relations with its partner countries to the south. In short, combating IUU fishing in the region requires deliberate action: South American countries cannot do it alone, it serves U.S. interests, and it is an effort that the United States can take the lead in delivering on.

Leading the Effort to Combat IUU Fishing

To succeed as a leader in countering IUU fishing in South America, Washington should focus on three lines of

effort—each tailored to combat IUU fishing and build trust among its southern peers. These lines of effort include consistent messaging, regional fisheries management organization (RFMO) measures, and inclusive multinational training and operations.

1. Consistent Messaging. Adopting an even-handed approach will be essential for the United States to assert itself as a leader in South America's campaign against IUU fishing. In the past, Washington's attempts to enforce international policy have been inconsistent, holding one nation accountable while disregarding another. To avoid this perception in the Latin American South Pacific, consistency in America's messaging and enforcement will help legitimize its cause.²⁸

Regarding messaging, the United States must implement a precise information operations campaign to voice concerns over all forms of IUU fishing. All too often, countries and spokespeople reduce the term *IUU fishing* to *illegal fishing*. The concept is much broader than that. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations defines *IUU fishing* as *illegal*—fishing in sovereign waters without permission, *unreported*—not fully explaining in which type of fishing a vessel is engaging or misreporting the number of fish caught, and *unregulated*—failing to abide by national or international regulations and responsibilities focused on preserving maritime life.²⁹ Careless language creates ambiguity and provides a scapegoat for governments whose vessels are the offenders. This is particularly the case on the high seas (the oceanic area outside of an EEZ), where most infractions are not necessarily illegal—since vessels are not fishing within sovereign waters—but rather violate reporting or regulation requirements laid out by RMFOs, the United Nations, or other international fishing agreements.

The United States also needs to focus on combating *all* IUU fishing. While the introduction of this article highlights multiple standoffs with China's DWF fleet, China is not the only offender. China accounts for roughly half the DWF activity off the coast of South



Coastguardsmen's view looking aft across deck of squid jigger vessel during boarding inspection, with USCGC Alder in background, during Operation Southern Shield 2023, October 2023 (U.S. Coast Guard)

America, with DWF fleets from South Korea, Taiwan, and Spain making up the other half.³⁰ While Chinese fleets may be making the most headlines, coast guards and navies should not focus solely on Chinese DWF fleets but also on regulating *all* DWF activity. Beyond DWF activities, U.S. efforts should also consider those infractions by traditional small-scale fishing fleets closer to shore, especially since such infractions may be a more pressing concern to a local population than DWF violations hundreds of miles away. For example, Peru has voiced as much concern about Ecuadorean fishing vessels within its EEZ as it has over Chinese DWF.³¹ The key throughout must be consistency, not just in messaging but also in enforcement.

2. Strengthening RFMO Regulations. As has been previously touched on, successfully enforcing fishing practices on the high seas depends on the regulatory measures of the relevant RFMOs, which are international organizations that provide regulations governing fishing practices on the high seas in a specific area.³² Their membership includes nations located near the maritime region or with a vested fishing interest in the region.³³ The high-seas area off the western coast of South America falls within SPRFMO's jurisdiction, and the organization includes the United States, China, Taiwan, and the European Union among its nonlocal members.³⁴ The problem with RFMOs is that regulations can be ambiguous, and since the responsibility for taking

punitive action against an offending fishing vessel falls on the flagged nation of that vessel, how these countries interpret the regulations and impose penalties can vary. For example, in certain instances, Beijing has been reluctant to impose penalties on Chinese DWF vessels, citing a lack of sufficient evidence to meet its threshold for violating SPRFMO's regulations protecting fish stocks.³⁵ As an SPRFMO member, the United States should lead efforts with fellow member nations to enact regulatory measures that achieve the organization's conservation aspirations but are less subjective in interpretation.

Inspiration to better direct SPRFMO's future conservation measures is available among its fellow member states. The West and Central Pacific



During Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Peru 2024 Forum, China's President Xi Jinping meets with Peru's President Dina Boluarte in Lima to strengthen their strategic partnership and celebrate inauguration of Chancay megaport, November 14, 2024 (Fotoholica Press Agency/Alamy Live News)

Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) and the North Pacific Regional Fisheries Commission (NPFRC), two historically strong RFMOs, are good examples.³⁶ Six years ago, the WCPFC enacted a comprehensive measure restricting the overfishing of bluefin tuna and has since seen bluefin tuna populations rebound dramatically, surpassing the WCPFC's initial 5-year target within its first year.³⁷ SPRFMO could enact similarly stringent fishing conservation measures targeting specific species.

Other measures from peer RFMOs have targeted more transparent illicit activity associated with DWE. For example, by targeting human labor abuse at sea, a crime with strong ties to IUU fishing, governments have been able to curb IUU fishing in certain parts of the globe. Consider that, under pressure from the

European Union, Thailand enacted a series of stricter labor laws for its fishing industry in the 2010s, indirectly reducing the number of Thai fishermen engaging in IUU fishing.³⁸ SPRFMO attempted such an indirect approach in 2024; however, its regulation only *encourages* nations to comply with international labor standards.³⁹ Instead, it should follow the WCPFC's lead by enacting regulations that establish a *legal requirement* for minimum labor standards on board fishing vessels within its waters.⁴⁰ In addition to looking at regulations regarding human labor rights, SPRFMO might also consider examining the NPFRC's regulations combating pollution caused by DWE, or focusing on drug trafficking, an illicit activity that the Ecuadorean navy has regularly observed aboard IUU fishing vessels in the South American Pacific.⁴¹

Beyond arguing for the United States to leverage SPRFMO as a force enabler, Washington will need to overcome enforcement challenges inherent in the structure of RFMOs. For example, adding new conservation measures typically requires approval from a supermajority of RFMO members, making it challenging to pass measures with teeth.⁴² SPRFMO faced this roadblock in 2021, when numerous South American countries proposed various measures, all of which China vetoed.⁴³ At impasses such as these, the United States must take the lead and work with China to find common-ground measures that can still effect change. Proposing fishing moratoriums, a regulation China openly supports, backed by scientific inputs from SPRFMO members, is a start.⁴⁴ The United States can also leverage

China's global status and membership in numerous other RFMOs to identify proven measures to which China is already a party or has already approved elsewhere. China's membership in the WCPFC and NPFC means that some of the examples highlighted in the preceding discussion could be suitable options.

Some critics also cite RFMOs' inability to enforce regulations.⁴⁵ However, SPRFMO's recent passage of a measure authorizing high-seas boarding inspections could be a game-changer.⁴⁶ Although still gaining acceptance in RFMOs worldwide, these inspections have proved highly effective in fostering a culture of compliance.⁴⁷ In short, with dedicated effort, SPRFMO has the potential to be an effective partner for U.S. operations against IUU fishing on the high seas.

3. A Multinational Approach.

Whether enforcing SPRFMO regulations or South American national law, identifying IUU fishing violators and holding them accountable must be a multinational effort. Given its vast resources, the United States has a distinct opportunity to emerge as a leader in providing this capacity at sea. South American nations have routinely demonstrated a willingness to conduct boardings within their EEZ; however, they are less inclined to do so on the high seas.⁴⁸ Part of the problem is due to the limited number of Latin American naval vessels that can travel beyond the EEZ, and as highlighted previously, another part is due to a lack of personnel trained in countering IUU fishing.⁴⁹

The United States can assist with the former by dedicating more of its vessels to counter-IUU fishing operations in South America. The desire within recent White House administrations to draw down in the Middle East and refocus on the Pacific could provide this opportunity, diverting U.S. Coast Guard cutter deployments from U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) to U.S. Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM). Perhaps more feasibly and with far-reaching impact, the United States can help the latter through increased training efforts and shiprider agreements. Unfortunately, despite the *Maritime Security and Fisheries*

Enforcement Act of 2019 (16 U.S.C. § 8001–8041) directing the increase of bilateral agreements to make shipriding a reality, little action has been taken toward this effort.⁵⁰ The U.S. Department of State must be more aggressive in establishing mechanisms for these invaluable cross-training opportunities.

In contrast to the inaction on bilateral shipriding agreements, USSOUTHCOM and the USCG have been aggressive in building robust programs to address needed multinational training on countering IUU fishing. Leveraging its U.S. Pacific Regional Fisheries Training Center, the USCG has established a mobile training course designed for partner nations.⁵¹ The course trains foreign sailors and coastguardsmen on boarding procedures, evidence collecting, authorities, case studies, and mock boardings.⁵²

In tandem with these training initiatives, the United States should also increase opportunities to conduct counter-IUU fishing drills within multinational military exercises and operations in Latin America. Participation not only would achieve the goal of training more South American partners in counter-IUU fishing operations but also could provide a temporary infusion of U.S. counter-IUU fishing assets in the South American Pacific. Consider USSOUTHCOM-sponsored exercise Resolute Sentinel. Started in 2021, this U.S.–South American exercise, which includes all four South American Pacific countries, focuses on joint military training and readiness in humanitarian assistance and disaster response, cybersecurity, space domain awareness, and counterthreat training.⁵³ Though combating IUU fishing is not among these listed lines of effort, in 2023, the U.S. Coast Guard embedded its IUU fishing mobile training course within the exercise's construct.⁵⁴ Leveraging exercise assets, the U.S.-led multinational training course included a capstone event, where students and instructors flew onboard a U.S. C-130 over the Peruvian EEZ and high seas to put their training into practice.⁵⁵ USSOUTHCOM has since maintained counter-IUU fishing training within Resolute Sentinel's

framework, adding USCG-led counter-IUU fishing ship boardings during its 2024 exercise.⁵⁶

Ecuador's exercise Galapex, a 2-week effort focused entirely on combating IUU fishing near the Galapagos, holds even greater promise in demonstrating U.S. commitment to multinational training on countering IUU fishing. Comprising 14 countries, this exercise places significant emphasis on a partnered approach to decreasing IUU fishing within the South American South Pacific. USSOUTHCOM has been an active participant since the exercise's inception. However, during the exercise's 2024 edition, the United States conducted only one shipriding partnership, between the USCGC *Benjamin Bottoms* and the Ecuadorean navy. USSOUTHCOM should further expand such opportunities by including additional maritime assets to expose even more nations to U.S. tactics, techniques, and procedures.⁵⁷

The United States should not limit collaborative multinational efforts to exercises alone; instead, it should include partner nations in limited enforcement operations. Consider the USCG's Operation *Southern Shield*, which focused on countering IUU fishing and took place in October 2023. The operation had SPRFMO's backing, involved multinational partners in its intelligence and coordination, and included partner nations in its after-action distribution; however, it fell short of including partner-nation vessels at sea alongside USCG vessels.⁵⁸ The United States should avoid unilateral patrols to the maximum extent possible. Demonstrating multinational resolve through actual enforcement will make it much easier for SPRFMO nations to hold one another accountable and ensure that the United States does not project an overbearing image.

A Multinational Approach Should Include China

Besides working alongside South American naval forces, Washington should also consider partnering with China to combat IUU fishing. Desiring to be a maritime leader, China has openly stated it has "zero tolerance for illegal

fishing” and has enacted stiff penalties on its DWF vessels that turn off their automatic identification systems, fail to comply with inspectors, or commit other violations.⁵⁹ With this being the case, the United States must use this rare opportunity to reach across the table and work together.

Collaborative efforts may initially involve inspection training as previously described, participation in a future counter-IUU fishing exercise, and possibly limited shiprider opportunities. Over time, the United States might also encourage Chinese coast guard vessels to participate actively in regulatory operations in the South American Pacific, either alone or alongside the USCG.

Given the current political climate between the two nations, such collaboration may prove complex. However, it has precedent. During the height of the Cold War, the United States and Soviet Union set aside their political differences to establish an agreement that permitted Soviet DWF vessels access to U.S. ports in exchange for limiting the number of fish that Soviet vessels caught on the high seas off the U.S. Pacific Northwest.⁶⁰ In a more recent example specific to Sino-U.S. relations, China and the United States partnered in the multinational effort to crack down on piracy in the Gulf of Aden. Even during President Barack Obama’s strategic reprioritization to limit Chinese geopolitical influence, the two countries successfully collaborated on the African coast, sharing limited intelligence on piracy operations, agreeing to emergency landing rights for Chinese helicopters on U.S. Navy vessels, and achieving success as a team.⁶¹

To be clear, such a partnership will not be easy. Relations between the two countries have only regressed further in the decade since Obama’s Presidency. To succeed, both countries will have to overcome growing mistrust and build on small gains, such as confining intelligence sharing to open-source information, like monitoring of automatic identification systems. These impediments, however, are constraints, not barriers. As demonstrated by the 2023 statement at Sunnylands, California, in which the

United States and China reaffirmed their commitment to jointly work toward addressing climate change, even amid increased saber-rattling, these two countries are willing to work together to address specific transnational issues.⁶²

Thus, proposing a collaborative effort in the South American Pacific should not be dismissed for its audacity. If anything, by including a nation whose DWF vessels have routinely come under question, Washington would further legitimize efforts to police IUU fishing, be better positioned to ensure that China’s proclamations against IUU fishing are not empty rhetoric, and perhaps even create an avenue by which to ease political tensions between the two global powers.

A Partner That South America Can Rely On

To ensure that lines of effort directed toward combating IUU fishing have the secondary effect of strengthening the United States as a leader within the Western Hemisphere, they must emphasize fully integrated multilateral efforts. Undoubtedly, reducing IUU fishing boosts the economics of all affected nations: protecting local artisanal fishermen, national fishing exports, and wildlife tourism (such as in the Galápagos). However, a key enabler in establishing trust between nations occurs when foreign militaries work closely together.⁶³ Studies have shown that when militaries work together in collaborative efforts—specifically exchanging tactics and doctrine—it creates linkages among participants that extend military familiarity to political cooperation.⁶⁴ By directly assisting in a cause through mutual partnerships with Western Hemisphere nations, these secondary and tertiary effects can double U.S. positive return across the region.

The United States should also remain measured in its approach. Washington has had a complex and shifting relationship with its southern neighbors, who might argue against the United States assuming an active leadership role in combating IUU fishing off their respective Pacific coasts. Such concerns are not unfounded.

U.S. fishing vessels have been the subject of IUU fishing activity in South American fisheries since the 1950s, continuing up to as recently as 2001.⁶⁵ Throughout that period, Peru, Chile, and Ecuador regularly confronted the United States over these incursions, resulting in multiple signed agreements and a loss of faith in U.S. adherence to maritime law.⁶⁶ These infractions will certainly give South Americans pause about a renewed U.S. interest in fishing along their Pacific Coast.

Nonetheless, active interest in countering IUU fishing might allow Washington to repair previous grievances, mainly since its enforcement is focused on international rules and not on protecting U.S. fishing fleets. If anything, failure to assist might project an image of indifference to those impacted by these fishing violations, or, worse, demonstrate tacit approval to those nations that allow IUU fishing to go unchecked. So long as the United States enforces equitably against all offenders, it has more to gain from actively assisting and leading efforts to combat IUU fishing in South America than from otherwise abstaining.

Conclusion

This article highlights three broad lines of effort to curb IUU fishing in the South American Pacific: consistent messaging, strengthening RFMO regulations, and pursuing greater multinational collaboration. While some of these lines of effort, such as strengthening RFMO regulations, may take time to develop or receive foreign endorsement, there are specific actions that the United States can take now. First, increase U.S. participation in South American exercises with a focus on IUU fishing. Exercise Galapex 2024 included only one maritime vessel, the USCG *Benjamin Bottoms*. The current U.S. force posture may not have the capacity to sustain extensive patrols against IUU fishing patrols in the South American Pacific, but it should have the ability to commit more maritime assets temporarily toward counter-IUU fishing training in future South American exercises. Second, increase opportunities for South American mari-



Coastguardsmen from USCGC James conduct boarding of fishing vessel in Eastern Pacific, August 4, 2022 (U.S. Coast Guard/Justin Upshaw)

time enforcement personnel to receive counter-IUU fishing training in the United States. Schoolhouses, such as those offered by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the USCG, provide an affordable option by leveraging existing training facilities and curricula. Last, increase public awareness of this issue. Most Americans remain unaware of DWF fleet actions off the South American Pacific coast. As U.S. leaders have done to increase public awareness of China's role in feeding the fentanyl pipeline through Central America, they have an opportunity to bring greater awareness of the role of China's DWF fleet in IUU fishing on this side of the Pacific.

Though these actions are achievable, there will also be limitations on Washington's ability to execute the proposed lines of effort. As already highlighted, cooperating with China to counter IUU fishing in the South American Pacific will be foremost, likely requiring a graduated approach toward an eventual military partnership. Competing global demands and finite U.S. military resources are another limit. After two decades in the Middle East, the United States has voiced a desire to draw down its presence in the region. However, as current Israeli conflicts have shown, the U.S. military may not be able to withdraw from USCENTCOM as quickly as its strategists desire, hampering the U.S. ability to direct those assets toward areas of irregular competition with China.

Today, no single nation can combat every problem at sea. Doing so requires a collective effort.⁶⁷ Contesting IUU fishing activity in the South American Pacific, exacerbated in recent years by China's DWF fleet, is no different. It will require multinational collaboration in which the United States should play a key role. Furthermore, IUU fishing enforcement in the Southern Hemisphere presents the United States with a unique opportunity, particularly when viewed through the lens of America's global competition with China. Here, the United States can not only create greater security for South American fisheries,

strengthen relationships with South American countries, and assert its leadership role in the Western Hemisphere but also hedge against further Chinese influence in the region. **JFQ**

Notes

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