

CHAPTER 4

Exercises and Interdictions – The Story So Far

Ultimately, the success or failure of the PSI will be judged in terms of its effectiveness on the ground: is it resulting in concrete actions to stem the flow of WMD materials and delivery systems to those states and non-state actors with ambitions to procure illicit unconventional arsenals? Is it increasing the political and economic costs of trafficking in WMD materials and delivery systems, or is it simply a gimmick dreamt up in a White House under pressure to act? Although the initiative is still in its infancy, with most attention having been focused on planning and organisational matters, the participants have also undertaken a series of training exercises and interdiction operations.

4.1. Training exercises

At least ten training exercises have been undertaken by PSI participating states since the adoption of the interdiction principles in September 2003 (as shown in Table 1). After some criticism from China in advance of the first training exercise in the Coral Sea in September, the US administration was quick to dispel the notion that the exercises are limited to the US and a few key allies like Australia and Japan, and expressed confidence that all PSI countries would be involved "in some capacity".¹⁹⁰

The Coral Sea exercise involved aerial searches for a simulated Japanese-flagged commercial merchant vessel suspected of carrying WMD-related items. The vessel was trailed by combined military and law enforcement assets from the four participating nations: The Japan Coast Guard, working with French, US and Australian counterparts, requested and executed a boarding and search of the vessel on the high seas.

Table 1: PSI Training Exercises (2003-2004)

LEAD NATION	OTHER PARTICIPATING NATIONS	TYPE OF EXERCISE	DATE OF EXERCISE
Australia	France US, Japan	Maritime training interdiction in the Coral Sea	Sept 2003
Britain	Not known	Air interdiction command post exercise in London	Oct 2003
Spain	Not known	Maritime training interdiction in the Mediterranean Sea	Oct 2003
France	Not known	Maritime training interdiction in the Mediterranean Sea	Nov 2003
US	Singapore, Australia, Canada, France, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Spain, UK	Maritime training interdiction in the Arabian Sea	Jan 2004
Italy	Not known	Air interdiction training exercise	Feb 2004
Germany	Not known	International airport exercise	March 2004
FUTURE ACTIVITIES			
Poland	Not known	Ground interdiction training exercise	Spring 2004
Italy	Not known	Maritime training interdiction in the Mediterranean	Spring 2004
France	Not known	Air interdiction training exercise	Spring 2004

Sources: Various media and government open sources

However, recent press reports indicating that Japan postponed the hosting of a naval interdiction exercise in the Western Pacific in May 2004 reveal the sensitive nature of these activities. Concerns about the reactions of Asian neighbours, and especially the impact on relations with China and North Korea, were cited as the reason for the postponement.¹⁹¹

4.2 Interdiction activities

US Under-Secretary of State John Bolton has acknowledged that some interdictions have already taken place,¹⁹² but for operational reasons such interdictions are rarely announced or discussed in public. The exception was the successful interdiction in October 2003 of centrifuge parts bound for Libya (as described in Box 4), which undoubtedly contributed to Libya's decision three months later to terminate its WMD programmes.

It is expected that future interdiction activities will focus on key “choke” points – strategic passages and harbours on the busiest trade routes, although the geographic limitations of the current ‘membership’ suggests that many sea routes between the countries of proliferation concern are not presently covered. The fact is that most current PSI interdictions will be limited to the territorial waters of participating states.

Moreover, although these activities demonstrate that the PSI is not just a series of meetings, such exercises and interdictions were being carried out prior to the arrival of the PSI, and it is hard to see what value-added it brings. Canada, for example, has recent pre-PSI experience of high-seas interdictions—and is seeking legal changes to allow such interdictions, following on its efforts in the mid-1990s to save the fish stocks of the North Atlantic.

The French and German governments have also been actively cooperating in interdiction efforts for some time, successfully intercepting several cargoes of dual-use materials suspected of being part of North Korean unconventional weapons acquisition programme.¹⁹³ Similarly, NATO has been engaged in maritime interdiction training exercises for decades, and as part of operation ‘Active Endeavour’ NATO ships have been patrolling in the Eastern Mediterranean monitoring shipping to detect and deter terrorist activity since October 2001.

In April 2003, NATO's mission in the Mediterranean was expanded to include the systematic boarding of suspect ships, but only with the compliance of the ships' masters and flag states. And as discussed in section 2.3 above, 33 boardings took place between April and November 2003. NATO is also to open a Maritime Interdiction Operations Training Centre in Crete.¹⁹⁴ Despite being in its infancy, the PSI does seem to have had some impact in halting the spread of WMD. If the PSI is to meet the challenge of improving its operational effectiveness, it will need to extend the scope of the initiative beyond its current ‘patchwork’ membership.

CHAPTER 5 The Future of the PSI

On 27 January 2004, the US and Polish presidents issued a joint statement in which they noted with satisfaction “...the growing support worldwide for our shared efforts to implement the Proliferation Security Initiative, announced by President Bush in Krakow in May 2003”.¹⁹⁵

The initiative can be strengthened in various ways. The most obvious is by increasing the ‘membership’ and securing the participation of key flag states and states that control geographically important areas, such as international straits. To say that the PSI has ‘worldwide’ support is a gross exaggeration of the current state of play, however. The participants need to secure support in the Middle East, in Africa and in South America, and to expand support in South and South East Asia, in order to claim that the PSI has become a worldwide movement.

However, given that many ‘flags of convenience’ are located in developing countries, many of which rely on the registration of ships to boost foreign currency earnings, convincing them to join the PSI will not be easy. In Panama, for instance, the fees charged for the registry in 1996 contributed five percent of the national budget.¹⁹⁶ In Liberia, where revenue from the registry accounted for approximately ten percent of the national budget before the civil war, in 1998 it contributed to up to 30 percent.¹⁹⁷

The current participants are mainly rich ‘first world’ nations in the North, and they may need to consider offering economic or other security incentives in order to widen participation to the South. It is not known, if Liberia and Panama received any such incentives from the United States in exchange for the recent bilateral boarding agreements, but Panama has just elected a new president and is currently negotiating a free trade agreement with the United States. Thus, the opportunity for horse-trading on this issue was certainly a possibility in the case of Panama.

Also, it is not only a matter of broadening participation, but deepening links between members, especially in relation to law enforcement and intelligence cooperation. As in any new regime or intergovernmental framework, getting the right balance be-