

## China's "Invasion Barges" Spotted in Beach Logistics Exercise



Image via Chinese social media

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Guangzhou Shipyard's new jackup bridging barges have been deployed for their first known over-the-shore logistics exercise at Zhanjiang, China. Three of the barges were lined up perpendicular to the shoreline, jacked up, and then connected using their bridging ramps to create an expeditionary "pier" extending far out into the water.

Beachfront photos and videos of these "invasion barges" have been circulating on Chinese social media since last week. Open-source analyst Damien Symon identified the new exercise location in Zhanjiang using background imagery and synthetic aperture radar.

It is not the first time that the unusual special-purpose jackups have been spotted by Western analysts. In January, H.I. Sutton (and others) [noticed](#) at least three of the unique vessels at Guangzhou Shipyard, and quickly identified them as amphibious logistics enablers - uniquely designed to bridge the surf zone and transfer high volumes of military cargo to a secured beachhead. The bridge section is hinged and affixed to the bow, and when lowered, it spans about 400 feet. Three of the barges installed back to back would reach a substantial distance offshore, well back from the surf zone into deeper water.

Like the "Mulberry Harbors" installed in Normandy after D-Day, the vessels would likely be deployed after a successful amphibious assault secured a beachhead on hostile territory and established a defensive perimeter. In a cross-strait assault to retake Taiwan, they could open up a larger menu of possible invasion landing zones: if they function as designed, they would allow Chinese forces to

deliver heavy military equipment ashore early in the conflict, without the need to seize a major seaport first - so long as the beachhead could be defended from a counterattack.

The U.S. Army/Navy equivalent to this system, Joint Logistics Over the Shore (JLOTS), centers on a floating "trident pier" tethered to shore. A floating deck barge located offshore helps offload cargo from deep draft ro/ro ships; that cargo is rolled onto Army ro/ro landing craft; and the landing craft deliver the cargo the final mile to the end of the floating pier. This carefully orchestrated system was designed for calm waters, and it is fragile above Sea State 3, as demonstrated during the [relief mission to Gaza](#) last year. That operation was [called off](#) after repeated setbacks in open-ocean weather conditions.

The Chinese "invasion barges" are elevated on jackup legs, and appear less vulnerable to wave action than the U.S. Navy/Army JLOTS system.