

Forgotten

A look at the changing roles of the Chinese militia system in the Communist era from its inception to the present.

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“No matter how warfare has changed and how many new weapons have been developed, the great truth that the “militia is the basis of victory” remains unchanged.”²

Imagine a force of millions of Chinese civilians armed with assault rifles, guided missiles, artillery, and the ability to possibly use it, all directed by the Chinese Communist government. Such a force exists in China today in the form of the Chinese militia. Yet there is very little information on such a large well-armed force. For the last two decades the militia has fallen off the radar in both the Western media and in scholarly works. In the past two decades, few if any articles have been published on the militia and fewer still scholarly works have been written about this subject. As a result, the Chinese militia has become a relatively unknown organization. One might think that this lack of attention simply shows that the militia has become unimportant and or has no where near the influence it once did. But such a conclusion would be a major mistake. Throughout Chinese history, from ancient times to modern Communist rule, the militia has played a number of roles in both Chinese society and its defense strategy that have helped shape the China we know today while at other times the militia has appeared dormant. But the militia has always remained a resource available for use by the Chinese government in times of need. This paper argues that although the Chinese militia in some ways seems to have faded into the background again, it would be a mistake to conclude that the militia has become irrelevant.

The goal of this paper is to provide an in depth look into one of China’s most mysterious organizations and to explain what roles it plays in Chinese society and its defense policy today. The paper first looks at the history of the Chinese Communist

² Roberts, Thomas C. The Chinese People’s Militia and the Doctrine of People’s War. Washington D.C: National Defense University, 1983. 15

militia to provide the reader with a thorough understanding of what roles the militia was originally created to play and how these roles changed in different periods. This provides a basis for understanding the range of functions that could be potentially performed by the Chinese militia. The second part of the paper, then, tries to explain the militia's organization today and the roles it plays in its modern form. The lack of media articles or scholarly works focusing on the current situation of the militia in China, makes it difficult to provide as a clear picture of the militia as one might want. But references to militia in passing in the Chinese media reveals some of the roles it continues to perform and why it can not simply be ignored.

Militia and the CCP in History

Kiangsi Soviet period

The militia has a history in China all the way back to the Zhou dynasty in the 11th century BC. The militia has also played a role in many of China's major historical events even into the modern era, from the suppression of the Taiping Rebellion to participation in the civil wars of China's Republican period. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) built on these historical traditions when it began to organize militia in Communist base areas in the late 1920. But this militia, like much of China's development of communism, was also influenced by other sources and then adapted for its own purposes. A Marxist imprimatur for the use of militia was provided by Lenin, in his "Third Letter From Afar," where he outlined a people's militia that would be one with the people and would also provide services such as law enforcement and military training to protect civilians. Lenin

however has a fairly limited view of such forces, seeing them as mainly fighting against local troops such as those employed by landlords in the countryside. Such an idea did not exactly fit the situation faced by Chinese Communists inhabiting the Henan-Kiangsi border areas in 1928, where the Nationalists were pressuring them with regular army troops. Mao therefore modified Lenin's idea by creating both a regular army force and a militia. In creating this militia, though, Mao borrowed an idea from Lenin that such a militia force should incorporate all men and women from the ages of 18-65. This militia ideal was very different from the small militia units more common in Chinese society at this time. Thus, mixing his ideas with Lenin's, Mao created a militia force that incorporated almost all the inhabitants of the borderlands area and so was able to mobilize the populace to play a number of different roles.

This original Communist militia consisted of a number of different parts: Red Guards, Insurrection Detachments, Self-Defense Armies, Young Pioneers, and Small Devils. The Red Guards were trained by regular army forces and were equipped with rifles. They had some limited combat capabilities, but mainly provided local law enforcement as well as providing reserves and combat support to Red army forces. The Red Guards were assisted by unarmed, clandestine, Insurrection Detachments which were assigned the task of identifying local "bullies" and "counter-revolutionaries". These detachments would identify these "bullies" and "counter revolutionaries" so they could be dealt with by Red Guard forces. While the Red Guards and the Insurrection Detachments were taking the offensive in securing the area, the Self-Defense Armies were to defend these areas from outside aggression. Consisting of a large number of peasants armed with hoes, spears, swords, and crude muskets these forces were to protect

areas that were dominated by the Communists. Young Pioneers, smaller in number than other types of militia, were the most class pure and ideal militia candidates, ranging in age from 18 to 23. They were used to augment the Red army forces in roles similar to the Red Guards, but were much more reliable troops due to their younger age, and more pure class background. Finally, there were also auxiliary units consisting of women and forces of children called Small Devils. It is unknown though what role these forces played.

The forces described above came to encompass much of the population in the Communist areas and were used to secure and defend the areas the Communists worked in. However, the militia force was also used to augment the regular army in times of need, which the militia often did superbly. When augmented with army troops the militia played a number of roles, including reconnaissance, deception, and masking troop movements, as well as guarding prisoners, and taking care of and moving the wounded.³ This initial stage of militia development was fundamental for later Communist victories against the Nationalists, and the Japanese, providing the Communists the ability to build a strong reserve force as well as supplemental forces to secure and protect regions after being taken by Communist forces.

But more than just securing and mobilizing in Communist areas, the militia provided the Communists social control over the people in the areas they occupied. By incorporating the whole population into the militia the Communists were able to indoctrinate, mobilize, and spread information at an incredible rate. All this experience in

³ Griffith, Samuel B. The Chinese People's Liberation Army. New York: McGraw Hill, 1967. 265-266

organizing and forming the militia into effective forces would be incredibly important when the Japanese invaded China in 1937.

The War of Resistance:

The Kiangsi, Soviet period had given Mao a chance to form the militia and the war against Japan would give him the ability to use them fully. Mao's hypothesis on the usefulness of militia was proven correct beyond his greatest expectations. Not trained to fight in a conventional manner the militia rarely fought the Japanese, leaving that role to the Communist 8th Route Army and the guerilla forces. But the militia took on roles to support the guerilla forces and harass the Japanese in their own way.

A number of different types of strategies were employed by the militia in this period.⁴ "Tunnel war" involved the building of elaborate tunnel systems, sometimes connecting dozens of villages, which were able to move guerilla forces and supplies without being noticed.⁵ This gave the militia and the guerilla forces the ability to strike from any number of places at once, and with a number of exits for each tunnel, it made it virtually impossible to trap or capture those inside.⁶ These tunnels were constructed by villagers who were most likely members of Self-Defense armies. The militia also took on minor combat roles in so-called "sparrow war," which took its name from the harassment tactics that would wear down the Japanese like small attacks from sparrows. The militia would form itself into groups of three or four men and would hide in a field. They would then let out a murderous fusillade on small Japanese security patrols and quickly retreat. The militia troops also took on roles in cities such as sniping at Japanese

⁴ Griffith 267

⁵Ting, Li. Militia of Communist China. Hong Kong: Union Research Institute, 1954. 66

⁶ Ting Li 68

forces. The final strategy was called “demolition war” and included the use of mines and sabotage. This method of mine warfare was used in a number of ways. In the most obvious way, it was used to destroy Japanese forces on roads by blowing up trucks and other vehicles with homemade box mines.⁷ Another method was to mine villages, towns, and cities occupied by the Japanese with both real and imaginary mines, so as to restrict Japanese movement. Imaginary mines were interspersed with real ones, allowing the Japanese to know that mines had been placed but leaving them unaware as to where the real mines had been placed.⁸ Such tactics were invaluable in containing Japanese forces and hampering their ability to respond rapidly or to move forces quickly. Other tactics were to sabotage roads, railroads, and bridges so as to also prevent Japanese forces from movement across the country. One example from the southern area of Hopei province states “...the highway system was broken up by numerous ditches of ten feet in depth and eight feet wide.” Similar tactics were used with railroads: “The steel rails would be removed, taken to hills about 20 li’s away and there buried in the ground.” To understand the effects of such tactics one only needs to look at pre-war and post-war statistics.

“Before the Anti-Japanese War, the country had in all some 126,000 kilometers of highways. While the war was in progress some 68,178 kilometers were estimated to have been destroyed or rendered useless. Similarly of the 30,305 kilometers of railway lines in the country, the portion wholly or partially destroyed or with the rails taken away came to some 4,590 kilometers.”⁹

⁷ Griffith 267 Different sources have separated the use of mines from other sabotage tactics employed by the militia. For simplicity’s sake I have combined both here under the title “Demolition war”.

⁸ Ting Li 59

⁹ Ting Li 62-63

This evidence proves that Mao's militia was capable of taking on non combat roles as well as playing vitally important roles in combating aggressors in the militia's area of operations.

One of the largest roles played by the militia had nothing to do with either sabotage or combat. Military commanders throughout history have known that one of the most important elements to victory in war is information. Communist success in ambushing, harassing, and bogging down the Japanese can be directly related to the actions of the militia in conducting surveillance on the Japanese and passing this information along to CCP forces. The militia was able to report exactly when and where the Japanese were moving and give guerilla forces an incredible advantage on when and where the best place for ambushes would be or where defenses at Japanese installations would be weak. The militia's intelligence gathering gave the Communists the ability "to see a 1000 li" and "to hear voices far away."¹⁰ To best understand how such a process would work an American reporter observing militia action put it best:

"If the enemy should make a move, people in the villages would at once receive a message from the mounted guards posted usually in the vicinity or at the entrance of barracks housing the Japanese soldiers. Warning bells would ring. The villages would keep their foodstuffs in secret places and hide themselves in nearby hills. The militiamen would busy themselves laying mines and set in readiness the traps beforehand... A simple method of communication carries the message to other villages. This method may be lighting of beacons or lowering signal posts on hill-tops."¹¹

These roles taken on by the militia proved invaluable to the Communist effort against the Japanese and seemed to cement Mao's ideas about their importance. The Communist's militia in areas occupied by the Japanese gave them the ability to mobilize

¹⁰ Griffith 267

¹¹ Ting Li 54

massive numbers--approximately 2.2 million militia during the war.¹² Such a large amount of troops would prove invaluable to the Communist effort in fighting the Nationalist forces in the years after World War II.

The Chinese Civil War:

As they had done before and during World War II, militia played key support roles for the Communists in the civil war against Chiang Kai-Shek's Nationalist forces. The tactics and organization of the militia did not change, mainly because the Nationalist took on the same tactics as the Japanese had. The Nationalists held cities, railroads, and other key points, while leaving the rural areas of the country to Communists. The tactics employed by the Nationalists forces allowed the Communists to expand their power base in the country side and eliminate landlords, rich peasants, and those who held Nationalist sympathies.¹³ It was estimated that the Communist militia at the end of the civil war constituted between eight and ten percent of the population of the areas they controlled.¹⁴ It was this ability to mobilize large amounts of the population to the Communist war effort that helped the Communists defeat the Nationalist forces in the civil war. But changing circumstances at the war's end caused the roles of the militia to change.

1949-1957: Militia Neglect

The years after the civil war changed the militia system as China went from a long period of war to one of relative peace. That is not to say that the militia was looked

¹² Ting Li 55

¹³ Griffith 268

¹⁴ Wang, James C.F. "The Urban Militia as a Political Instrument in the Power Contest in China in 1976." Asian Survey 18 (1978): 541-559. 542

at as less important. On the contrary, in November 1950 the militia was ordered to expand to include 5% of the population, or 23,750,000 people. But the militia's roles, drastically changed as they went from directly supporting the regular army against the Japanese and Nationalists to "maintaining local order" and "playing a key role in land reform." During the Korean War, some militia were recruited into regular army forces and those not recruited into the army took on roles providing law enforcement duties in the countryside. In coastal areas the militia took on defensive and security roles that the regular military forces could not do, even being excused from production work and formed into battalions and regiments.¹⁵ Land reform was also a key part of the militia's role as they came to help redistribute almost 700 million mu of land.¹⁶

But as the militia's role changed it seems attention to the militia also declined. The plan to recruit five percent of the population into the militia failed as official estimates in September of 1951 only showed a recruitment of 12,800,000, which at the time was only about 2.5 percent. The achievement of original target numbers was never announced. This failure to meet expectations most likely occurred for two reasons. First, the Korean War made recruitment into the regular armed forces more important than the militia and so, as stated, some militia members were recruited into the regular army.¹⁷ Second, militia work suffered as PLA modernization was looked at as more important than militia work. The Minister of National Defense at the time, Peng Dehuai, was not a

¹⁵ Gittings, John. "China's Militia." *The China Quarterly* 18 (1964): 100- 117. 102, Griffith 268-269

¹⁶ Ting Li 42

¹⁷ It is important to note that it is unknown if a militia member recruited into the regular armed forces is still counted as a militia member.

fan of the militia, believing more emphasis should be put on the development of regular armed forces.¹⁸ As one scholar has noted,

After July, 1953 Peng made a major assault on the institutional foundation of the Maoist military line by ordering a 10-30 percent reduction in the militia and less regular military concern for their training. He abandoned all major elements of the Maoist line in favor of the Soviet model. Allegedly calling the militia “a heap of flesh” he then set about abolishing the political commissar system, the party committee system within the PLA, and the doctrines of “people’s war.”¹⁹

Peng believed that the Soviet model of the time of modernizing the military was more important to national security than that of a “heap of flesh.” This would explain why there was also a lack of information on the militia from 1954-57 with the only militia information coming from a few reports from Fukien area along the coast across from Taiwan.²⁰ Thus the early and mid fifties was a time of neglect for the militia as they came to be put second to the needs of the PLA. But all that was about to change as Peng was removed from his position and Mao was about to enact a policy that would affect everyone in China.

The Everyone a Soldier Movement:

1958 was a pivotal year in Chinese militia history as the Communists under Mao came to enact a far reaching military and social policy which was to have huge repercussions on China thereafter. This policy was the Everyone a Soldier Movement (EASM). After touring the Yangtze River Valley in September of 1958 Mao made a statement to reporters describing the importance of the militia in national defense and

¹⁸ Gittings 103, Ting Li 41

¹⁹ Whitson, William. The Military and Political Power in China in the 1970's. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972. 99

²⁰ Gittings 103

called for the “all out organization of militia divisions.”²¹ Soon after, the Central Committee approved a resolution forming a nationwide commune system. As the commune system was put in place, people were automatically recruited into the militia which was subsequently titled EASM. The EASM was also an important part of Mao’s idea of Peoples War that made the militia a key part of China’s defense policies, a drastic change from years earlier where it was neglected in favor of a modernized PLA.²²

This idea for People’s War and for the EASM was not a sudden idea that came to Mao but was affected by a number of issues China faced at the time, both internally and externally. Internally China’s agricultural output was suffering, and its industrial output was far behind that of the West. Agriculturally, small plots and a lack of irrigation were affecting total agricultural output. Industrially, Mao wanted China to overtake Britain in steel production in fifteen years. To offset these problems policy makers enacted the Great Leap Forward to increase industrial and agricultural output. To the Communist leaders, the best way to complete the projects such as the transition to communes from cooperatives and the completion of large irrigation projects was a mass movement.²³ Militarization seemed to be a logical step as it gave the party leaders the ability to impose its line on and control the masses, and to use them to stimulate production.²⁴ Therefore as communes were formed, people were simultaneously recruited into the militia. Militia organization was then used to mobilize people with military regimentation to meet production needs necessitated by lagging agriculture and industrial output.

²¹ Ting Li 46, Gittings 104

²² There are a number of works on Mao’s idea of People’s War and a full understanding of the idea is beyond the scope of this paper.

²³ Ting Li 44

²⁴ Griffith 269-270

Organization of the militia was also seen as a solution to a number of external threats China faced in 1958. The first was a block on Chinese military modernization by the Soviet Union. The Soviets were unwilling to give the Chinese nuclear weapons or other advanced weapons without surrendering command to the Soviets. Mao at the time had a falling out with the Soviets over economic ties and ideological leadership. This situation forced the Chinese to rely on other defensive measures other than PLA modernization. This led to Mao's idea of People's War that would utilize regular, local, and militia troops to offset by numbers the advantage that "Imperialists countries" had with their modern armies.²⁵ Besides issues with the Soviets, the U.S. intervention in Lebanon and Jordan seemed to point to a possibility of a "U.S. imperialist armed provocation."²⁶ This U.S. threat was reinforced by US insistence on its policy of non-recognition of the PRC. This situation was made much worse by the PRC's decision to bombard Jinmen and Mazu islands and a subsequent full mobilization of Chinese armed forces six days later. In this context of increasing tensions with the Soviets and the U.S., the EASM was explained not just as a result of domestic needs but as a response to external threats as well.

In 1959, Fu Ch'iu-t'ao, the commander of the militia, announced the objective of the EASM was achieved as 225 million people had been recruited. This was a staggering number that would make any invader "be drowned in an ocean of a whole nation turned into soldiers." In actuality this new militia took on few military roles other than patrolling the coasts, railroads, bridges, and working to track down counter revolutionaries, spies, and saboteurs. Most of their "attacks" were against manure piles,

²⁵ Ting Li 43-45

²⁶ Gittings 104

creating “battle plans” to work on fields, and “storming the heavens” to plow, and harvest the crops.²⁷ As the Great Leap Forward went on into 1959 the militia it seemed was not so much a traditional militia as much as a civilian organization mobilized for political purposes. Indeed it is hard to imagine that because 225 million people are called a militia in effect they are in fact a militia. Few of these people were essentially militia since most had little if any military training. Even more important was the fact that whether physically or mentally capable, all people were recruited into the militia.

1960-1964: Problems and Organization

As the 1960's began it became increasingly obvious that there were a number of flaws within the militia system. In late 1960 Fu Ch'iu-t'ao, the overall commander of the militia, inspected the militia in Honan. Fu found that many people were no longer actually incorporated into the militia. As many peasants stated, “In 1958 I was a militia man, but now I am not.” The militia had also become twisted to an image unlike that which it had been dreamed of by party planners. It was said the militia organization was “very impractical”, and that a number of “rightist elements held cadre office.” Also when it came to training only 400,000 of the 20 million eligible for militia training had undergone training by mid 1960, only two years after the implementation of the EASM. Members of the militia also had committed a number of crimes including robbery, rape, and muggings. Ordinary peasants when asked their view on the militia called them such things as “gangsters” and “bandit kings”. This abuse of the militia was not limited to isolated incidents either, as in one county 11 of the 13 militia commanders took part in or were leading such activities. Meanwhile, many weapons used by the militia had been lost

²⁷ Ting Li 46, Griffith 270-271

and or destroyed. Some were even sold off to “bandits” and in one place sold weapons had been used for highway robberies. Fu also found that militia reports had been falsified, militia work had become lackadaisical, and that militiamen had deliberately avoided training. What came out of all this though was not that the party had failed, or that the widespread organization of militia has been misguided, but that “reactionary elements” had infiltrated the militia in a widespread manner and undermined it.²⁸

It is not surprising though that the EASM had in fact failed. The spring of 1960 brought on a number of disasters as famines became common in the countryside. In Honan, for example, which originally had been a rich farming area before, the communes had collapsed and there were shortages of food. Many people in the countryside were facing a number of demands at the time including quotas on agriculture and iron from the Great Leap Forward. When it came to eating or militia work it was obvious what would be prioritized. Militia work therefore suffered as a result. Given the famines and other disasters brought on by the Great Leap Forward it is not surprising that militia work suffered and banditry increased as food shortages racked the countryside.

Given these findings, in the beginning of 1961 the Military Affairs Committee enacted a number of policies to reform the militia, including a rule that weapons should be handled only by reliable persons and a call for an increase in ideological training. Later that year a special conference was put together to look at militia work. The conference came up with a number of solutions to the problems listed above, detailed in *Regulations Governing Militia Work*, including having the militia revert back to its original purity with screening to keep the “rich” and “rightists” from joining the militia. Control of the militia was taken from commune leaders who had been given

²⁸ Gittings 113-114, Griffith 272-273

responsibility for these organizations when EASM was implemented and reverted back to local military commanders. Realizing the natural choice the peasants would make, one of the biggest changes was that where production work and militia work interfered, militia work would give way to production. In areas hard hit by famine or natural disaster militia training would be kept on hold altogether. Finally militia duties were returned to their original roles after the end of the civil war, including aiding local law enforcement, assisting security forces, and guarding strategic points. It became clear that only a small proportion of militia could take on these roles as the majority was needed for production.

The organization of the militia therefore drastically altered due to the 1961 reforms described above. How well these reforms worked is difficult to ascertain, though, as, similar to what has occurred in the mid fifties, from 1961 to 1963 few reports on the militia came out of the mainland other than articles on coastal defense. At the end of 1963 and 1964 a number of conferences met to discuss militia work and came up with a number of policies that were to be enacted in the following years including a reassertion of militia work in law and order and the implementation of greater political education, which had been lacking in previous years. These reforms were enacted in 1966 and as it seemed the militia was finally asserting itself and finding its place in a peaceful China. Then the Cultural Revolution started.²⁹

Cultural Revolution and After:

For the militia, the Cultural Revolution was a confusing time as militia played a variety of conflicting roles . Even who exactly the militia was during the Cultural Revolution seems to have caused confusion. Thus, Red Guards, students organized by

²⁹ Gittings 115- 117, Wang 543-544, Griffith 272-276

Mao to push his political agenda, were sometimes labeled as militia. As one source notes, “Red Guards were trained in schools throughout China in military and political training and it was classified as militia training.”³⁰ It is probably safe to say that these Red Guards were not militia in the traditional sense we have outlined in this paper since they were ordered to remove party committees in cities and rural areas and not take on auxiliary roles such as supporting the PLA. What became clear though is that Party leaders at provincial and regional levels also came to use the militia or organize their own to work against the Red Guards.

Most of the regional and provincial party authorities had also remained in their positions. In a number of places they had organized their own “Red Guards” and “Red Workers’ Militia Units” in order to defend themselves against the teen-age battalions of the left wing.³¹

Therefore, 1965 saw the first time in Communist history that militia were actively working against each other.

It is important to point out that militia units organized by provincial authorities in this period were not under orders from the militia higher authorities like the PLA and military commanders who controlled militia actions after 1961. Therefore the militia involved were organized and implemented outside the regular chain of command. It was not till 1967 that the Liberation Army Daily published an editorial that called the militia “a partner and assistant to the PLA” and called for the militia with the PLA and public security forces to suppress and smash the “reactionaries” and “revisionists”. But just because the PLA called for the militia’s help in restoring order does not mean it always occurred. Often times it depended on the stand taken by local and PLA authorities in a

³⁰ Whitson, William, Ed. The Chinese High Command – A history of Communist Military Politics. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973. 449

³¹ Domes, Jurgen. The Cultural Revolution and the Army. Asian Survey 8 (1968): 349-363. 353

local area. If the party's authority was upset then the militia seemed to disappear. But when the local authorities had built close ties with the militia the militia would often support them in showdowns.³² There are a number of accounts that point to stands taken by the local forces against central authority, "...in southern China, transports of Red Guard were attacked by local militia."³³ Using the militia against central authority is an interesting development considering this also had occurred during the EASM where militia forces were abused by local commanders. This case though is different as the militia was used by local authorities not to expand their power or wealth but to protect it from forces at least in theory under central authority.

In 1969 an external threat caused a dramatic shift in militia and PLA activity as the Cultural Revolution died out. Militia troops in the Sinkiang Autonomous Region, in concert with regular border troops, clashed with Soviet troops. This threat from the North caused the Party to call for a national campaign to reactivate and strengthen the militia for war preparation. A number of provincial work conferences on the militia were enacted which argued that the militia must be under the command of local party committees. Their argument was that these committees had a better grasp of the militia's role in Mao's idea of Peoples War. This argument seemed to win out as local party committee members were designated to serve as leading cadres of the militia and only party members could serve as militia commanders. This threat from the North continued to consume militia activity into the seventies as the main efforts were recruiting able

³² Wang 544

³³ Domes 357

bodied men and women into the militia, with training from the PLA, in preparation for a possible Soviet invasion.³⁴

Power Struggles and the Militia:

While the threat from the Soviets caused a resurgence in the militia's importance, the militia would be irrevocably changed by other developments in the mid seventies. The mid seventies saw a struggle for power between Deng Xiaoping and his opponents, the radical "Gang of Four." In the military realm, the struggle was over a long debated question in Chinese defensive strategy and PLA modernization. Specifically, the conflict centered on whether or not defensive strategy should be based more on a modernized PLA (Deng) or People's War as outlined by Mao (the position taken by the Gang of Four). While a decision on which strategy to follow would directly affect how the militia was organized, it also involved the militia politically. As one scholar, Thomas Roberts, states "...the militia to a very large extent meant control of political power at the local level in the provinces."³⁵ This was the result of the shift of control of the militia at the local level to party leaders due to changes after the Cultural Revolution. And the Cultural Revolution had showed that controlling the militia helped protect local leader's positions. The debate itself started upon Deng's return from exile in 1973 and the subsequent re-staffing of veteran cadres into central and regional PLA positions. Along with his return the PLA started a program to undo damage done by the Cultural Revolution such as instilling professionalism and discipline and increasing training.

³⁴ Wang 545

³⁵ Roberts 51

At the same time as this professionalism was occurring in the PLA, the “Gang of Four” in Shanghai were trying to build their own armed force of militia not under the control of the PLA.³⁶ This new militia was called the “Shanghai experience” because it had originally started in Shanghai, but it later spread to other cities. This was a militia organized by mobilizing urban workers that would patrol streets and take up guard duties, which had been done by the PLA during the Cultural Revolution.³⁷ This is similar to the roles the militia had taken on in the late 1940’s and early 1950’s described above. But this militia was vastly different from the militia in the fifties because its purpose was to give the radicals their own military force. This was seen in a number of ways. First the urban militia was being diverted more and more away from production. Thus at the Jilin Iron and Steel Plant it was noted that, “Over the three year period of radical ascendancy (1973-1976), the effect on the plant’s production was said to have been “equivalent to the 260-member rolling mill workshop being idle and unproductive for fourteen months.” And not only were workers being diverted from production. Some production was being diverted in factories to producing weapons.³⁸ Aside from losing production due to their new roles, the militia also was not under the control of the PLA anymore in at least a number of cities. As one editorial from the Liberation Army Daily stated in disbelief, “They actually dissolved the Armed Forces Departments.” These departments had been given the task of training, and organizing the militia and were under the command of military or veteran military cadres. (Though the militia was under the command of local party leaders, the PLA in theory was still in charge of its training and organizing). Not only had they cut out the PLA from militia command they “deployed without

³⁶ Roberts 52-55

³⁷ Wang 548-549

³⁸ Roberts 54-57

authorization militia units and their weapons from one locality to another.”³⁹ This was a drastic escalation in the power struggle as the radicals tried to solidify their position by removing PLA control from the chain of command.

In an even bolder move the radicals rapidly built up the number of their militia forces. In 1973 Shanghai had almost 800,000 militia members, and by 1976 a number of cities including Shanghai and Beijing were saying they had upwards of a million militia members in each city. Not only were the numbers impressive but so were the weapons they used. They not only had small arms such as AK-47s, but they were also being equipped with AA guns, howitzers, and even tanks.⁴⁰ Meanwhile, Deng’s faction consisting of the main line army was able to keep the radical new militia model from spreading to the countryside by ignoring the model or even making sure PLA commanders became more involved with the local militia.⁴¹

This struggle continued on into 1976 and included a number of propaganda campaigns back and forth between the sides. The struggle reached a climax in 1976. The death of Zhou Enlai, a long time fixture in Chinese politics, and a supporter of Deng, left Deng very vulnerable. This vulnerability became apparent soon after an incident in Tiananmen Square where a number of protests arose as large crowds gathered to mourn Zhou’s death. The majority of mourners were Deng and Zhou supporters and they had started to beat local urban militia members who were guarding sites within Tiananmen. As the day went on the crowd eventually began to disperse, but not before the urban militia was called in to the square where they made an “assault” against the

³⁹ Roberts 53, 56

⁴⁰ Wang 549

⁴¹ Roberts 57

demonstrators ending the incident.⁴² Deng was ultimately blamed for this incident and subsequently exiled for the second time. But then the radicals themselves were later arrested by Hua Guofeng and the struggle was put to rest. Many of the militia in the cities were put back to work and the PLA took back their security roles. What is important to understand is how the militia was abused by the radicals for their own political power. They had used the militia to build a counter force to the PLA and had used them to put down the people. A serious change from the original Communist conception of the militia, where they had been one with the people and closely linked to the PLA.

Post Gang of Four and War with Vietnam:

In the months following the arrest of the “Gang of Four,” the military moved to regain control of the militia forces in radical areas. As soon as the militia was under control, it was reformed, starting in 1977, to include more political indoctrination, and purges.⁴³ The following year’s goal was to bring the militia into line with the way it had been before the radicals had taken power. Along with emphasizing production, a new stress was placed on military readiness, modernizing weapons, and increasing training for armed units and increasing specialized units. Most importantly was an emphasis the dual leadership of both the PLA and the party over the militia. To achieve this, the military took on a big brother role called “Learning from the PLA” where PLA platoons would train two or three militia platoons in their area. This not only helped cement the PLA’s

⁴² Wang 553

⁴³ Purges seem to be a recurring theme whenever the militia or the party had failed and it seems an easy solution was to purge “bad elements”.

role in controlling the militia but also would help better prepare the militia for any events it might have to face.⁴⁴

For years the militia had been trained for a possible war with neighbors, but the war with Vietnam in 1979 was not an application of a People's War strategy in defense of their homeland but an offensive move against a neighbor. The war against Vietnam in 1979 arose from a number of issues including policy conflicts over Cambodia, and expulsion and treatment of ethnically Chinese residing in Vietnam. Yunnan and Guangxi provinces mobilized 80,000 militia members to serve in the conflict. In the buildup to war a number of these militia forces had had their weapons modernized. The militia took part in a number of military actions, mainly defensive in nature, but also built roads, provided artillery support, and repulsed probes. Their main role was to provide logistical support for the PLA and this they seemed to achieve even in adverse conditions. The militia moved ammunition and supplies, took care of the wounded, escorted prisoners, and even served as guides for regular army forces.⁴⁵ All these roles were originally found in the initial development of the militia, and this conflict showed that it still could be effective in these roles. So, while they did not do much of the fighting, the militia was able to prove its worth as they had done in both the Chinese civil war against the Nationalists and against the Japanese during World War Two. Nonetheless it seems as if this was the militia's last gasp before falling again into relative obscurity.

Chinese Militia Today

⁴⁴ Roberts 79-94

⁴⁵ Roberts 101-103

Any attempt to outline the role of the Chinese militia system as it exists today is hindered by a serious lack of information in the English language media. The Chinese militia has become a relatively unknown subject over the past 25 years because of this lack of attention. Nonetheless, there are two main sources that can be used to reconstruct a picture of militia in China today. The first are Chinese government sources, including the series of Chinese White Papers that provide an official description of the militia as it supposedly exists in ideal form. These White Papers have been issued every two years since 2000 and provide some insight into what sort of roles the Chinese government see the militia as playing. Along with the White Papers, Chinese government websites such as PLADaily.com provide government articles on activities of the militia. To help understand how the militia performs in practice, though, this paper has relied on a careful examination of articles from non-governmental media sources over the past twenty-five years. Mentions of Chinese militia in the press provide a more accurate depiction of actual roles taken on by militia than can be seen in official publications.

The Chinese militia today is still organized along similar lines of that from the sixties but with some very distinct changes. The force is organized into a two group system of basic and primary militia.⁴⁶ Basic forces generally receive about one to two weeks of militia training in basic military skills. The largest amount of militia members are in these units.⁴⁷ The age of militia members in these units was originally fairly broad from 18 to 60. In the early eighties this range of ages was reduced to 18 to 35 so as to

⁴⁶ There seems to be some debate in older literature on whether or not there were three groups of militia forces of basic, armed, and some more advanced armed force. Other sources say there are only two and so that is what this paper will go with the two force structure as that is what the White Paper states the Militia as being.

⁴⁷ Roberts 19

reduce the size of the militia and streamline it.⁴⁸ The role of women in the militia also seems to have become more restrictive over time. In 2000 the militia was referred to as consisting of both men and women. The 2002 white paper though, states that the militia can have women in primary militia roles if needed. And the 2004 White Paper makes no mention of women whatsoever in militia forces.⁴⁹ This omission suggests that the government is trying to possibly phase women out of the militia force.

It is unknown how many people actually serve in the basic militia and numbers vary greatly, though the 2004 White Paper states that all men from 18 to 35 should be members. One must be skeptical of the roles a basic militia force could play in a wartime setting other than taking part in logistics since they have little if any military training. It is questionable if they have even fired weapons considering the number of militia forces supposedly in service. The costs of training each year would be astronomical just for ammunition. This is why it is likely most militia training is concentrated on the Primary Militia.

The main military force of the militia is actually the Primary Militia, which consists of men (and possibly women) from ages 18 to 22 and is made up of ten million members.⁵⁰ The Primary militia according to the 2002 Chinese White Paper is made up of those who were released from active military service and those “selected” (possibly from the ranks of the basic militia). One article from *Xinhua* in 1983 states that militia are composed of men of good “political” qualifications. These qualifications are most

⁴⁸“PRC Militia Reform Achieves “Desired Results”.” BBC Summary of World Broadcasts. March 1983: The Far East; B.

⁴⁹People’s Republic of China. Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China. “China’s National Defense.” Beijing: 2000, 2002, 2004. <<http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/index.htm>>

⁵⁰ The 2002 White Paper states the ages as being from 18 to 28. But the 2004 White Paper states the age range to be from 18 to 22.

likely similar to earlier era qualifications that militia men be party members, not have “rich” or “reactionary” family histories and be loyal to the party. These primary forces receive between 30 and 40 days of training each year. They are the elite of the militia and are most likely trained to use a number of weapons including rifles, sub-machine guns, machine guns, and a wide assortment of other weapons. It seems that militia forces generally do not carry weapons with them at all times, except possibly in border or dangerous areas. A system of warehouses has been set up all over the country to store militia weapons, most likely to avoid the abuses experienced in the early sixties.⁵¹

The Primary Militia consists of a number of different types: rapid reaction detachments, infantry detachments, specialized technical detachments and detachments with corresponding specialties. The rapid reaction detachments are sometimes seen as a separate third element of the militia, since these forces most likely are paid a salary and excused from some regular work. The 2004 White Paper states that Infantry detachments had been reduced in order to increase technical detachments. These technical detachments consist of AA artillery (machine-guns), missiles, field artillery, communication, chemical defense, engineering, reconnaissance and information detachments. Several sources, including Sinodefence.com and a study by Thomas Roberts, notes that these technical forces are comprised of troops from factories or plants. Thus chemical plant workers form chemical warfare detachments, and electrical workers form signal troops or communication experts. These detachments, according to the 2004 White Paper, receive extended training in their specialized fields and that “In some provinces and municipalities specialized technical training centers and people's military

⁵¹“The Militia: “A Powerful Mass Force with Various Types of Technical Soldiers.” BBC Summary of World Broadcasts. June 1987: The Far East; B.

schools have been set up.” As for artillery, A.A., and missiles, Thomas Roberts states that a number of militia AA companies underwent live fire exercises on a large scale in 1979. There are claims that some radar stations in urban areas are also operated under militia forces control, with the assumption that operators are retired servicemen.⁵²

What information is available seems to show the importance of these units, but some questions might be raised as to the effectiveness of these technical detachments. The first major question is if workers at a chemical factory can be expected to deal with chemical attacks in a war. It is unlikely that the experience of a worker at a chemical or electric plant is enough to meet the demands of the modern battlefield with only the four weeks training per year the Primary Militia receives. It is unknown though how long militia members attend technical schools. If it is an extended amount of time, maybe they could be used on a modern battlefield. This might support the idea that these groups are indeed expected to take on the roles they are supposedly trained for. But this extended training also would need to be extended to other detachments as well, such as artillery, AA, and missile units, all of which would require extensive training. Artillery detachments have to know some form of trigonometry to figure out ranges and angles when using mortars and other artillery pieces. Therefore to be used effectively at all these specialty detachments must be given some form of extensive training if they are to be effectively used. In the absence of more detailed information on actual training, questions must remain as to what roles these technical detachments might really play.

The command structure of the militia is fairly well outlined in the official 2004 White Paper,

⁵² Feng, Dong. Militia and Reserve Forces. 2005. 23 Jan. 2006.
<<http://www.sinodefence.com/army/orbat/reserve.asp>> and Roberts 26-27

“The nationwide militia work comes under the centralized leadership of the State Council and the CMC. The provincial commands (garrison commands); military sub-commands (garrison commands) and the people's armed forces departments of counties, autonomous counties, cities and municipal districts are responsible for militia work in the areas under their respective jurisdictions. The people's armed forces departments at the level of townships, ethnic townships, towns and sub-districts are responsible for militia work in their own areas. The people's armed forces departments of enterprises and institutions, set up in accordance with relevant provisions of the government, are responsible for their own militia work. Enterprises and institutions with no people's armed forces department shall designate a department or personnel to handle their militia work.”

Although the Peoples Armed Forces departments are responsible for militia work, the militia is also under the command of the party.

Internally, the militia is organized along military lines with platoons, companies, battalions, regiments and divisions. Thomas Roberts states that most militia units seem to be company size or smaller, with battalions rarely coming together. The size of any force is regulated by the number of militia members organized in the area. Basic and Primary militia units are generally combined together to form units. Thus a company of Basic militia members might contain one platoon of Primary militia members interspersed throughout the company. If the Primary militia forces are needed, they leave the company and form their own separate platoon.⁵³ There was some question by scholars in the late seventies as to how high the organization of the militia goes. For example, do regimental and division militia headquarters actually exist? Some kind of higher headquarters would indeed be necessary for the military combat readiness system and military exercises described by the 2002 White Paper. It is possible, though, that this coordination could be provided through the PLA command structure and not by the militia itself. In the end, much is still missing from our understanding of Chinese militia organization on issues such as how high the command authority goes, and if the units are

⁵³ Roberts 20-21

organized at higher levels such as battalions and regiments, and if so then who commands them? Are commanders recruited from within the militia or are they commanded by PLA officers? There is still much more that needs to be uncovered for a fuller understanding of the Militia's organization.

The militia plays a number of roles in China today with some similarities to their traditional roles, but some differences as well. The first and most historically important role for the militia has been to support and aid the PLA. The 2004 White Paper states the militia is "... an important component of the Chinese armed forces and the assistant and backup forces of the PLA." Whether this is true in practice, though, is open to question since over the past 20 years the government has also established a reserve force. Similar to the US Reserve system, the Chinese reserve system consists of active and retired soldiers supporting the Army, Navy, and Air Force. Therefore the training and importance of the militia in supporting the PLA has to be brought into question. What role would the militia play as a backup force under this situation? Could the militia possibly exist for the same reasons that the US has both a reserve force and a National Guard? Or it could be that the militia is planned to be used in supplementary and supporting roles in PLA operations. For example, militia technical units could be attached to main line PLA forces in the field, which would explain the new emphasis on militia technical units.

In contrast to the role assigned to the militia in official documents such as government White Papers, where militia are cited in actual operation in publications such as the PLAdaily.com, one most often sees them taking on a different role, as a natural disaster reaction force. This is a new role for the militia not often seen in older

publications. Citations of this nature are numerous. For example, one article noted that, "...740 militiamen had been sent to the disaster area and they had helped to evacuate more than 30,000 people to the safe areas." Another claimed that the militia had implemented a new system called, "militia earthquake rescue 110." Another reported on the use of militia to deal with a long running coal field fire: "with nearly 4 years of struggle by the militias of all nationalities, the biggest coalfield fire area in China, the Liuhuanggou Coalfield Fire was put out." Other publications state that militia members fought forest fires, and helped with flood relief."⁵⁴ This new role the militia has taken on seems to make it seem more and more like the U.S. National Guard, which is also mobilized to help in natural disasters.

Along with reports on the role of militia in natural disaster relief, other accounts also state that the militia takes part in construction and rebuilding efforts. Thus, one report notes, "The militia and reserve force have participated in and supported 23 key projects of Tianjin and they've used more than 30, 000 person/times and 330 vehicle/times to help Tianjin's economic construction." Along with these Tianjin efforts, the militia has worked with, "...trade unions, and has set up more then 47000 cultural centers, spare-time schools, associations for the popularizations of science and other cultural and educational facilities."⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Wang, Xiangmin, Sun, Xingwei. "Militias put out century-long coalfield fire." PLA Daily. October 2003. <http://english.chinamil.com.cn/site2/militarydatabase/2004-09/17/content_19415.htm>, Zhang, Wanjun, Li, Honggang, and Jiang, Xinghua. "The militia way of combating earthquake proved effective." PLA Daily. October 2003. <http://english.chinamil.com.cn/site2/militarydatabase/2004-09/17/content_19416.htm>, Shui, Li and Jiang, Xinghua. "PLA troops and militia in Chongqing rush to disaster area to help with rescue and relief operation." PLA Daily. December 2003. <http://english.chinamil.com.cn/site2/militarydatabase/2004-09/17/content_19432.htm>

⁵⁵ Tang, Shangluo, and Guo, Jianyue. "Militia and reserve force contribute to Tianjin's construction." PLA Daily. November 2003. <http://english.chinamil.com.cn/site2/militarydatabase/2004-09/17/content_19418.htm>, "Other Economic Reports; A Smaller Militia with a Change of Emphasis in its Work." BBC Summary of World Broadcasts. August 1986. The Far East; B.

These roles taken on by the militia seem to do two things. First, they release the PLA from the duties taken on by the militia and allow it to concentrate on other matters such as training and combat readiness. It also provides a way to show the militia in a good light under new economic conditions. Before the new free market type economy militia members were often shown working in the fields, helping to harvest crops, and picking fruit or building irrigation ditches. These activities highlighted organized government assistance to “socialist production” with an emphasis on cooperative labor. As the free market became more important the government has de-emphasized government intervention in the economy. Thus participation in natural disaster relief and other economic and civic activities allow the militia to keep their face in the media and show how they are still a part of people’s lives and an important asset to the structure of Chinese society.

Militia also has important security roles. The militia’s main security role is in public security. A traditional role they have played in the past: public security is preventing crime, protecting commerce, and border security. Public security is a role the militia had taken on after the Civil War and also one the urban militia took on in the cities in later periods. A number of examples of militia involvement in this kind of activity can be seen in the 1990’s. Thus, in 1992 the militia took on this role as they started patrolling train tracks in Sichuan and Guizhou provinces so as to stop train robbers and common criminals. They seem to have been somewhat successful helping to confiscate 31 guns and recover more than 30 million Yuan.⁵⁶ In the border areas they also have taken on a number of more dangerous roles. In 1983 on the Vietnam border the militia killed four

⁵⁶ “More crimes cracked down in the railways.” The Xinhua General Overseas News Service. January 1992

Vietnamese intruders after Chinese artillery strikes.⁵⁷ In 1988 Militia members killed more than 20 Vietnamese raiders who had terrorized the countryside.⁵⁸ Along the Burma border the Chinese have supposedly used border militia to aid insurgents and have engaged Burmese government forces.⁵⁹ The militia also patrols in areas where the presence of the PLA might cause problems. One example is along the Soviet border, where the PLA is stationed several miles from the border so as to reduce tensions. Thus, in this area militia take the place of the PLA on border patrols.⁶⁰

Reports of militia activity also help us to see militia roles in two other areas that are not often discussed directly by the government. The first is using the militia as a tool for political control. An example of this that was the Tiananmen incident of 1976. Another prominent example occurred in 1987 when uprisings erupted in Lhasa, the capital of Tibet, over the 37th anniversary of China's invasion of Tibet. The Chinese government reported "Peking has flown into Lhasa some 1000 crack Chinese militia reinforcements armed with AK-47 rifles and electric powered prods."⁶¹ One might question whether the forces identified by the media as militia troops were in fact actually militia. It would be easy to confuse these troops with the Chinese Peoples Armed Police, which is also a paramilitary force and plays exactly this type of role. But a picture shown on Sinodefence.com shows a number of troops holding police batons and riot shields who

⁵⁷ "China Says Militia Killed Vietnamese Who Infiltrated." The Washington Post. April 1983. First Section; Around The World; A12.

⁵⁸ "Vietnamese troops provoke border clashes." The Xinhua General Overseas News Service. September 1988.

⁵⁹ "Vietnamese Journal on Chinese Sabotage in South-East Asia." BBC Summary of World Broadcasts. November 1983. The Far East; A.

⁶⁰ Nguyen, J.T. "Chinese foreign minister to visit Soviet Union." United Press International. September 1988.

⁶¹ Tyson, Ann Scott, Tyson, James L. "Tibet's David meets China's Goliath. Lhasa's legacy of resistance." Christian Science Monitor. October 1987. World Edition.

are identified as a Xinjiang militia rapid reaction unit.⁶² So it seems that the forces involved did include militia forces—proving the use of militia in this role. During the uprising the militia killed and put down rioters, “...including an instance in which Chinese militia burst into homes and killed at least five people.”⁶³ The militia also arrested Tibetan monks, “Some 300 Chinese militia armed with AK-47 rifles and electric prods descended yesterday on 80 monks in the largest publicly known arrest of Tibetan Buddhist priests in more than a decade.”⁶⁴ This incident in Tibet though is only one of many. Another occurred as uprisings broke out in April 1990 in Xinjiang. There it was reported, “...that some fifty people were killed by the militia after putting down a revolt in the town of Baren.”⁶⁵ Another area of Xinjiang, Yining, in 1997 was shut down by militia forces, where militia forces shot 30 people.⁶⁶ Even in Beijing in 1992 Reuters reported, “At least three people have been viciously beaten by Chinese militia outside the gates of the United States embassy in Beijing.”⁶⁷ And just last year in December 2005, an incident occurred in Guangdong, where militia put down an uprising over demonstrators protesting a coal plant.⁶⁸ All of this evidence points out the fact that the militia has been involved in a role that is not often discussed. Along with this political control there is also some evidence that the militia provides some form of social control.

⁶² Feng

⁶³Pomfret, John. “Martial Law Imposed in Lhasa; China's Army Rolls In.” Associated Press. March 1989.

⁶⁴Tyson, James L, Tyson, Ann Scott. “Chinese tighten grip in Tibet.” Christian Science Monitor. October 1987. International; Pg. 7.

⁶⁵Rashid, Ahmed. “China extends a hand across the border; Peking has forged new trade and economic relations with the former Soviet Central Asian states despite some Misgivings.” The Independent (London). January 1992.

⁶⁶ “Chinese troops seal off Moslem border town after racial riot.” Agence France Presse. February 1997.

⁶⁷Vines, Stephen. “China Admits Listing Hong Kong Activists; Democrats fear victimization after Beijing takes over.” The Guardian (London). April 1992.

⁶⁸Watts, Jonathan. “Chinese militia open fire on demonstrators opposing coal plant.” The Guardian. December 2005.

Since the militia was to start receiving political training again in the late 1970's. If the militia is still receiving political training today, which it possibly and most likely is, then it provides the government with a large force of government supporters. Such a force would give the government the ability to not only control the country politically but also have a large base of government supporters as well.

Conclusion:

Looking at the militia today it becomes obvious that though it still retains traditional roles it has also taken on new ones. It is a force that has changed in many ways from the one Mao originally had created in the Kiangsi Soviet period. Its unclear how some of these new roles were originally created but it is likely they were created at times to deal with specific problems as they arose. That is why it is so difficult to understand exactly what the militia is today. If it is constantly changing over time to deal with new roles, what really is the militia today? Is it a force for political control, an integral part of defense strategy, or a force to help production and protect the people? It seems that it is possibly all three, but if it is, it seems clear that this force has not actually been neglected in the eyes of Chinese policy makers. Thus in 2002 the Chinese government held a conference on Suggestions on Strengthening and Improving Militia Work in Cities, showing that militia development is still important.⁶⁹ Therefore what is more likely is that rather than neglect, the militia has switched from competing with the PLA on Defense strategy to a symbiotic relationship, whether in roles the militia takes on to support the PLA or in roles that give the PLA more time to train and prepare for war. Thus, the militia has taken on roles of aiding production and disaster relief so as to give

⁶⁹ People's Republic of China 2004

the PLA the opportunity to train more. And the role of political control allows the militia to take on a role the PLA would most likely rather avoid after the backlash after Tiananmen Square in 1989. The militia providing political control has common people suppressing common people and not soldiers.

The lack of focus by the Western media and scholarly community on the militia is a major mistake. The fact the militia still holds a place on China's defense White Paper, and has its own section of the PLA Daily website shows it is still important to Chinese policy makers. A number of other facts point to its importance. The Primary militia alone consists of almost 10 million members, a major threat in any eventual conflict with Chinese forces, and that is not even including the basic militia. One can also not forget the warehouses of weapons the militia has throughout the country. An understanding of the placement and control of those warehouses is very important to see how the militia might be mobilized and its capabilities. It is also important for the West to understand exactly what roles the Primary militia technical detachments play in defense strategy. It is unlikely that these technical detachments serve with Basic militia forces. But, given the amount of time spent in training and the defense expenditures to outfit militia forces, it is most likely that the forces do plan on playing some role in potential conflicts. It is possible that the forces are to be attached to Reserve forces or even main line PLA forces. It is even possible that Chinese defense planners see some large usage of the militia on the horizon (possibly for use in a conflict with Taiwan?) and the technical and infantry detachments of the Primary militia will provide a force that it is better than average militia. But there is also another alternative.

It is well known that the Chinese spend a great deal of time and money studying open source US military strategy, training, and organization. It is likely that Chinese policy makers are modeling the militia, and more so the Primary militia, on the US National Guard. The National Guard is given training throughout the year in small amounts, and recruits are given longer training for technical and more advanced branches. It is not intended to fight overseas but to protect the US, and is often called up to help in rescue and recovery efforts during natural disasters. It is called in to provide security in times of crisis such as after 9/11, rather than the Army or Marines. And it also has played law enforcement roles during and after times of crisis such as in New Orleans during and after Hurricane Katrina. It is possible that Chinese policy makers see the Primary militia and militia as a whole as a force that can provide similar roles as the National Guard does in the US. This way it gives the PLA more time to train and become a more professional military force. It is important to understand if this is the true purpose of the Chinese militia for a couple reasons. The first being that if it is and the militia is to become more and more a force like that of the National Guard then it would not be to far fetched to see such a force providing disaster relief in conjunction with other International forces, especially as China tries to assert itself as a greater regional player and leader in Asia. Western forces must understand how such a force works and its capabilities if indeed they will need to cooperate with Chinese “militia” in such operations in the future. If the militia is to become more like a National Guard force then it must be looked at to understand what capabilities and roles it will play in defense strategy. It could well be that the militia take on other new roles not described in this paper under such circumstances. As described throughout this paper there is a severe lack

of information on the Chinese militia in the Western media. One can not but wonder, then, if the Western intelligence community understands or even acknowledges the major roles the militia plays in China. The fact that the subject has rarely been touched by open sources in the past 25 years, however, suggests that the intelligence community has also failed to give the Chinese militia much attention. Given China's rise to a world power, it seems essential that this neglect come to an end so that the potential role of the Chinese militia in any future conflict, or even cooperative activity, will be known.

It has been almost 75 years since the Communist militia was formed and it has gone through much in its short history. It has performed admirably in war, and gone through a number of changes and crises in peacetime. It has played its part in civil war, political struggles, and domestic crises, and yet has always survived. It is unknown what roles the militia will play in the future. What is known is that the militia will continue to be a part of Chinese society as long as the Communists are in power. Therefore it is important that the West takes a more in depth look at this major part of Chinese society if it is to fully understand what China is today and what it will be in the future.

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