



Poor Training and Insufficient Personnel Hamper Chinese Maritime Militia Development

OE Watch Commentary: As China continues to shift from a focus on ground forces to greater emphasis on air, sea and space domains, the importance of militia (海上民兵) is growing. This accompanying excerpted article discusses the evolving role of the militia and the challenges faced by the current force. According to China's 2013 Defense White Paper, the militia are "tasked with participating in the socialist modernization drive, performing combat readiness, support and defensive operations, helping maintain social order and participating in emergency rescue and disaster relief operations."

In particular, maritime militia (海上民兵) have historically taken on important combat and support roles for the PLA Navy. This article highlights the fact that during the Yijiangshan Campaign (一江山战役), against Nationalist Chinese (KMT)-held islands in the East China Sea from 1954–1955, China's first (and only) joint air, sea and ground campaign, "more than a thousand coastal fishermen" participated in the fighting with a modified gunboat and used fishing boats to transport soldiers to the islands. Over the past decade, militia has also helped China advance its political goals by taking on missions the PLA could not. In 2009, they harassed the *USNS Impeccable* in international waters, helped occupy Scarborough Reef in 2012, and participated in China's increased activity around the Senkaku Islands in 2016.

While Western media attention has focused on the militia based at Tanmen, on the eastern coast of China's southern Hainan Island, every coastal province appears to have multiple maritime militia units. However, despite playing an important support role for the PLA and Chinese maritime law enforcement, the maritime militia is facing shortfalls in personnel, training and equipment. Traditionally, militia supporting the ground forces have been given priority for resources. For example, Beihai, a city in China's southern Guangxi province, has 10,000 regular army militia, but only 200 maritime militia—despite the area having more than 10,000 ships.

The article questions whether China's current maritime militia is up to the tasks required under the "new situation"—China's present security challenges. During a recent call up at an unnamed military district for example, only 120 fishermen on 48 boats—less than half the necessary force—showed up due to the ongoing fishing season. Participation in militia training can cost ship-owners thousands of *yuan* (hundreds of USD) per day due to insufficient subsidies, and the pay for individual militia members is also low.

Another reason is that many Chinese fishing vessels now ply the seas far from Chinese shores in search of richer stocks of fish. In an unnamed city given as an example, 20 out of 49 appropriate ships are long-distance fishing vessels. For these ships and their crews, simply returning to port to take part in militia activities can take more than a month, limiting the amount of time they can realistically participate. In response, the Chinese government is undertaking modernization, training and legislative actions to ensure the maritime militia remains an effective force. Maritime militias are being reorganized to better make use of existing resources, pooling personnel and ships from neighboring areas. Training is being shifted to seasons when more fishermen are available to participate, and course materials are being updated. Funds are also being allocated to ensure that militia have access to satellite locators, navigation radars, ultra-short-wave radios and similar equipment.

At the governmental level, China has also updated relevant laws, including the Civil Transport Capacity National Defense Mobilization Regulations (民用运力国防动员条例) and the Defense National Defense Mobilization Law (国防动员法) to ensure that the government can make better use of civilian assets during a war. Given China's lengthy coastline and complicated maritime borders, if trained appropriately and given sufficient support, these ad hoc forces could act as an important backstop for the rapidly-modernizing PLA Navy. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**

“The maritime militia has been out fishing on ocean-going operations for seven or eight months a year.”

Source: “新形势下海上民兵建设要冲破哪些思想藩篱? (In the ‘New Situation,’ What Are the Ideological Barriers That Must Be Broken Through For the Construction of Maritime Militia?)” *China Defense News*, 31 August 2017. http://www.81.cn/mb/2017-08/31/content_7071612.htm

The leaders of the Zhejiang Military Region stated frankly that previously militia reserve forces training and modernization was mainly focused on the battlefield and island emergency response. Today, the construction of maritime militias has given new strategic role. To support the protection of joint operations, it is necessary to break the traditional “continental [army-centric] thinking”, expand the perspective of preparing for war to militia training for the maritime and air [domains]...

There is pain in change. The further out to sea you, the more you encounter the difficulties and “pain points” of realistic maritime militia training under the conditions of informationization.

Organizing training is difficult. The maritime militia has been out fishing on ocean-going operations for seven or eight months a year. Civilian ships are subordinated to various departments such as fishery administration, transportation, and maritime affairs. They are caught between various groups, and personnel organization, management, and training are difficult. Training equipment is missing. In some places, the maritime militia detachments are mostly equipped with maintenance equipment, and it is difficult to carry out the necessary professional training. Training topics are out of date. There are fewer trainings with the Navy; there are fewer faculty members and teaching skills for the maritime training courses are weaker. Training subsidies are low. The current militia training subsidy standard is low, the funding guarantee gap is large, and the militias of the militia are not enthusiastic.