



Building More Capable Overseas Chinese Security Forces: The Next Priority?

OE Watch Commentary: China seems to be facing an uphill battle in providing security for its Belt and Road initiative. The two accompanying excerpted articles from the Hong Kong-based *South China Morning Post* explain the situation. The first article describes overseas Chinese security teams as “doorkeepers.” China reportedly has more than 5,000 private security companies. Of these, only six are certified to operate overseas, and most of those six focus on escorting Chinese commercial ships. The article notes how more than 80 percent of these Chinese forces have only “a basic education... and are directly led by people who are just military enthusiasts and love playing war games.” While many are military veterans, they “lack the combat training and experience” seen in their international counterparts.

Because of the inability for Chinese security firms to meet security demands, in the past, Chinese companies overseas were turning to local and multinational sources to provide security services. However, this has been costly. According to the second article, some Chinese firms have leaned toward hiring special forces from India and Pakistan, because they could speak English, Arabic, and even French. Some Chinese security firms have also hired “veterans of the Chinese navy’s anti-piracy squad, Snow Leopard counterterrorism commandos, and other former Chinese special forces personnel.” However, they are at a disadvantage due to a lack of experience and low wages. Receiving roughly 10 times less than their foreign counterparts, they rarely stay long.

Language barriers have hampered the expansion of Chinese security companies overseas, because it impedes networking opportunities. As the second article explains, language skills can prove to be more beneficial than weapons selection because it allows the Chinese security companies to “have good relations with the local police, warlords, or even gangsters and terrorists.” With the massive Belt and Road initiative, there is an increased urgency to build up China’s security capabilities and, according to the first article, Beijing is currently looking at options to “establish a security agency to coordinate security for Chinese enterprises abroad.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

Source: Minnie Chan, “Into the Danger Zone: Why a Private US Military Firm is of Value to China’s Belt and Road Mission,” *South China Morning Post*, 15 July 2018. <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2155353/danger-zone-why-private-us-military-firm-value-chinas>

“Unlike the Chinese security teams who ... are like doorkeepers, the multinational and multilingual Blackwater guards were well trained and provided personnel and cargo protection services...”

“More than 80 per cent of Chinese security personnel have just a basic education ... and are directly led by people who are just military enthusiasts and love playing war games.”

Like the Blackwater guards, most Chinese security personnel are military veterans but they lack the combat training and experience of their international counterparts.

The need to close that yawning gap in expertise is becoming ever-more urgent as Chinese companies fan out along revived trade routes as part of Beijing’s “Belt and Road Initiative”, a massive infrastructure-driven plan to link economies into a China-centred trading network.

So much so that Beijing is exploring the possibility of establishing a security agency to coordinate security for Chinese enterprises abroad.

Huang Rihan, executive director of the Belt and Road Institute at the Centre for China and Globalisation, said just six of China’s 5,000-plus private security companies are certified to operate overseas.

Source: Minnie Chan, “The Soft Powers China Needs to Be a Global Force in High-Risk Private Security,” *South China Morning Post*, 16 July 2018. <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2155354/soft-powers-china-needs-be-global-force-high-risk>

“In terms of what I have witnessed, the foreign competitors of Chinese security companies have good relations with local police, warlords, or even gangsters and terrorists. Otherwise it’s impossible for them to survive in those high-risk areas,” [Fred] Wang, [senior manager from a Chinese state-owned hydropower engineering company investing in the Middle East and Africa] said.

Beijing-based military expert Zhou Cheming said some Chinese security firms preferred hiring special forces veterans from India and Pakistan because they could speak English, Arabic and even French, common languages in the Middle East and Africa.

“...most Chinese security personnel are military veterans but they lack the combat training and experience of their international counterparts.”