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Preface

Xi Jinping, the Chinese People's Liberation Army Supreme Commander, has revitalized Chinese military mobilization. With an understanding of the necessary integration of China's military and civilian infrastructure to effect both deterrence and preparation for future war, his policies demonstrate a certain knowledge that the ability of the Communist Party of China to retain support depends on mobilizing the masses for political purposes—generating combat power and logistics support from the militia and industries. With this in mind, Xi Jinping has created new reserve units and upgraded the training for traditional militia. Such tactics are not by any means a novel approach to warfare in China; indeed, military mobilization has historically been one of their strengths.

Since World War II, there have been a number of limited conflicts whose events provide pertinent case studies of China's ability to mobilize in the face of threats, i.e., to involve their economy, armed forces, industry, weapons and equipment, posts, air defense, telecommunications and a rallying of support from the populace. This paper looks at five of these instances, both large-scale and localized. Based on the ideological and political work invested in mobilization by the Communist Party, China's leaders probably believe that they are in a good position to withstand a long war or protracted conflict. In contrast, the United States has not had any large-scale mobilizations since World War II; the American military is out of practice in this regard, and the freer structure of American society means that civilian resources and energies cannot be so readily employed in the service of the state. U.S. military leaders would do well to note this significant mobilization ability of a great-power competitor, examine the corresponding shortcomings in U.S. capabilities and adjust the training of American forces accordingly.

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Military Mobilization in Communist China

Introduction

One of the foundational concepts in Mao Zedong's thinking about politics and war is that mobilization and the "People's War" (人民战争) are intrinsically linked.¹ The ability of the Communist Party of China (CCP) to retain support depends on mobilizing the masses for political purposes, generating combat power and logistics support from the militia and industries.² Mobilization also contributes to deterrence and preparation for potential protracted war.³

Xi Jinping, CCP General Secretary, Central Military Commission Chairman and Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Supreme Commander (统帅), has breathed new life into mobilization with policies that emphasize the integration of China's military and civilian infrastructure. He also has created new reserve units and upgraded the training for traditional militia.

Given all the money poured into the PLA, a reliance on militia and reserves might seem a thing of the past. This is not the case. U.S. Army leaders should understand that China's military can now be augmented by reserve units around China, modernized forms of militia. The case studies in this article provide useful examples of how quickly the People's Republic of China (PRC) could mobilize and how militias and paramilitary forces have contributed to China's military conflicts.

Mobilization as a National Effort

National defense mobilization is a centrally-planned, systematic effort designed to maintain readiness and training levels in peacetime with the objective of providing for limited or general mobilization in times of war or national emergency.⁴ It is a strategic effort designed to support the nation, its security and its interests in war through the management of national resources.

General Secretary Xi Jinping's effort is to bring the "People's War" into the 21st century with "military-civil fusion" (军民融合).⁵ This means collective efforts by the militia, reserves, state-owned enterprises, government organizations, private enterprises and the populace, especially people in the fields of science and technology.⁶

The People's War, Protracted War and Mobilization

One must remember that, in its early history, the CCP and its PLA were continuously at war. From 1927 to the end of the Korean War in 1953, except for brief reprieves, they were fighting either the nationalist government (*Kuomintang*, or KMT) or Japan—and sometimes both.⁷ After the PRC was established in 1949, there was no break from war. In 1950, while Mao Zedong was establishing control over peripheral areas of China, the Korean War broke out. He saw the presence of U.S. and United Nations forces in South Korea as a threat to China; consequently, the PLA transitioned into fighting a “war to resist America and aid [North] Korea (抗美援朝战争).” The Chinese People’s Volunteer Army entered the fight on 25 October 1950, after a long period of secret mobilization and deployment. With this perspective, it is clear that China’s political leadership and the PLA see the ability to mobilize and manage a conflict, even a long conflict, as one of their strengths.

National Defense Mobilization: A Range of Actions

National defense mobilization is multifaceted; it involves the economy, the armed forces, industry, weapons and equipment, posts, air defense, telecommunications and transportation—it also requires rallying political or ideological support from the populace.⁸

The People’s Armed Forces Committees (人民武装委员会), established in 1952, and Armed Forces Departments (PAFD) are key links between the CCP and the government in the mobilization process. Today, the national civil defense program is well developed. One facet of that is overseen by the People’s Air Defense System.⁹ Training the populace for air defense dates to when the Communist Party was defending its fragile bases against attacks by Chiang Kai-shek’s nationalist government in the mountains of Jiangxi Province in 1933.¹⁰ Today, the program extends into every region, enterprise and institution in China.¹¹ The mobilization system and People’s Air Defense System give the CCP a means to ensure that the State Council, the Central Military Commission (CMC), the PLA and military organizations in the whole country are firmly under central control. The case studies below examine instances of mobilization where the system was put into effect to respond to national security threats.

Case Studies in Mobilization

After 1949, China conducted both large-scale and localized mobilizations a number of times. In each instance, mobilization was intended to rally the populace behind ideological objectives. Sometimes, mobilization was conducted in secret, but a large part of the activity was open. In order to avoid the complexities that came in the world war environments, this study looks at mobilization only in the following limited conflicts:

1. the Dongshan Island Campaign of July 1953;
2. the Yijiangshan Island Campaign of 1955;
3. the Sino-Indian War of 1962;
4. the 1975 campaign by the PLA to seize the Paracel Islands from Vietnam; and
5. the Chinese attack on Vietnam in 1979.

The Dongshan Island Campaign (东山岛战役): 1953

Dongshan Island is one of the two largest islands off the coast of Fujian in the vicinity of Taiwan.¹² It is an island only technically. In reality, it is a large peninsula separated from the

mainland only by a 500 meter-wide strait and connected to the mainland by a seawall.¹³ In 1953, the Bachimen Harbor (八尺门渡口), on the island side of the strait, was also a ferry port. Dongshan is about 70 miles southwest of the city of Xiamen along the coast and 110 miles from Taiwan. The distance from Xiamen to Jinmen (Quemoy or Kinmen), where major nationalist forces were based, is about 2,000 meters, or 1.2 miles.

As the Korean War Armistice was signed in 1953, Chiang Kai-Shek was in Taiwan as the leader of the Republic of China. He decided to attempt a major invasion to recover the mainland. According to nationalist paratroopers captured by PRC forces, this invasion was encouraged by the United States; some training was provided by both the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Joint-U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) in Taiwan.¹⁴ These allegations are substantiated by a former CIA officer stationed in Taiwan in the early 1950s. In *Raiders of the China Coast*, Frank Holder says that the idea was to “give the communists a bloody nose” by invading an island near the mainland that could be used as a stepping stone for wider fighting.¹⁵

Shortly before dawn on 16 July 1953, the nationalist commander Hu Lian (胡璉) had about 10,000 troops,¹⁶ comprising two Army divisions, with transport by 13 naval vessels and motorized junks.¹⁷ In addition to the two army divisions, a paratroop unit was trained for the mission. It was supposed to block reinforcements from the mainland at the Bachimen Harbor.¹⁸

The nationalist forces were initially opposed by the 80th Regiment of what was then the PLA Public Security Forces, a garrison unit.¹⁹ The first company of the 80th Regiment was a naval company, which engaged the paratroopers. Local militia assisted in the battle, in some cases using captured nationalist weapons. Having received a warning, Fujian Military Region commander Ye Fei (叶飞) also dispatched the 3rd Battalion, 272nd Regiment of the PLA's 91st Division, a main force unit, to reinforce the island.²⁰

The nationalist airborne force of “about 500 people” took off from Taiwan's Hsinchu Airport in 18 C-46 transport aircraft to support the landing, along with eight Republic of China air force fighters.²¹ The airborne operation had problems from the start. “Two planes developed engine trouble and had to be left behind with their human cargo.”²² After 105 minutes in the air, the paratroopers jumped before dawn in high winds, causing some troops to miss the drop zone and others to land in the water, many losing their weapons.²³ After a two-hour battle, a number of the Nationalist paratroopers were killed or wounded; 400 of them were captured by the 80th Garrison Regiment's 1st company and mobilized local militia.²⁴

The nationalist landing force, on the northeast side of the island, had its own problems. They expected no resistance from the communists, but they ran into the battalion from the 91st Division, sent by Military Region Commander Ye Fei.²⁵ Further inland, another company of the defending 80th Garrison Regiment held against 18 assaults on the hill it occupied. The company killed 400 Nationalist troops and later was awarded a citation for its heroism.²⁶ Ye Fei had also mobilized and sent to the island the 82nd Division of the 28th Army and the 122nd Division of the 41st Army, sealing the invasion's fate.²⁷

The landing force had trouble because the nationalists failed to reconnoiter the amphibious landing sites, disembarking in deep water, causing serious problems.²⁸ Instead of admitting defeat, the nationalist forces evacuated after a day and called it a success.²⁹ Overall, it was a significant operation for the PLA, involving militia, public security garrison forces and mobilized main force PLA units.

In modern times, the campaign is celebrated as a major victory for the PLA. On a regular basis, on or near the date of the original victory, the PLA conducts large-scale exercises on Dongshan Island. These exercises may involve amphibious landings, airborne assaults, heavy artillery and air defense support. In recent decades, they have also sometimes included air attacks and missile attacks.

Attack on Yijiangshan Island: 1955

The Yijiangshan Islands, off the coast of Zhejiang Province in the Taiwan Strait, were one of the island groups that the KMT retained control of during its retreat to Taiwan after the Chinese Civil War. After 1949, the PRC continued planning to seize the KMT-controlled islands and bring them under communist control. This culminated in an amphibious landing on Yijiangshan Island and its capture by the PLA after a three-day battle.

The Yijiangshan Island campaign is remembered as the PLA's first "joint" amphibious operation.³⁰ The numbers of forces used were small: four infantry battalions, nine artillery battalions, 137 ships and 184 PLA navy and some PLA air force fighter aircraft.³¹ However, the mobilization is an important example of China's ability to mobilize maritime resources, something that the PLA is doing today in the South China Sea. PLA analysts cite it as an example showing that mobilization of civilian vessels to support the PLA is still important in high-technology conflicts.³²

The campaign was preceded by extensive preparation by the PLA, which drew on Korean War experiences and the Dongshan Island Campaign.³³ Senior leaders believed that the complexity of the operation made careful preparation especially important.³⁴ Reconnaissance for the campaign involved lessons learned in Korea.³⁵ In early 1954, the CMC began preparing for the assault: it established a front line command headquarters, commanded by Zhang Aiping, later the PRC's defense minister;³⁶ in August, the services began individual training for the attack in dispersed locations to maintain operations security;³⁷ and in December, the forces began joint rehearsals while they waited for good weather.³⁸

The plan required secret mobilization of civilian resources. Local vessels were requisitioned and, at dispersed shipyards, were outfitted with weapons—only select personnel did the work.³⁹ Command centers for the services were all set up in property that had been confiscated by the public security bureau and local residents were relocated. In all, planners wanted 400–500 vessels, which were assembled and readied over a two-month period. Through the Military Region and Shanghai government, PLA logistics planners put out a discrete notice to local authorities to select the vessels to be requisitioned as well as to attempt to come up with any repair materials or spare parts; between 21 November 1954 and 15 January 1955, the PLA repaired 466 vessels.

The assault used 188 vessels, including four frigates, 10 torpedo boats, two gunboats, 24 patrol boats, six rocket boats and a variety of landing craft, fishing vessels and other support vessels. The total personnel contingent was over 3,700 people, the largest force that the PLA had ever used in a maritime environment.⁴⁰ All the counties and districts along Zhejiang's coast established organizations to support the operation.⁴¹ The PLA claims that over 2.47 million support personnel were mobilized and that 3,500 tons of military supplies, 5,100 tons of fuel and large amounts of emergency medical supplies were used.⁴²

Military analysts today emphasize the importance of political work in the run up to the battle. That included a campaign to help troops and leader understand the importance of the

joint nature of the operation. Another lesson applicable today is that requisitioning civilian vessels and support will be a key component of future Chinese wars.⁴³ PLA analysts emphasize that, although the PLA navy's capabilities are greatly expanded since 1955, civilian vessels will be a component of any future amphibious operation.⁴⁴

Mobilization for the Sino-Indian Border War: 1962

The Chinese “self-defensive counterattack (中印边境自卫反击)” in the Sino-Indian Border War of 1962 offers important lessons on mobilization. The border region had been in conflict for three years, from the time that the Dalai Lama escaped to India in 1959 to the time of the war.⁴⁵ Moreover, there was no local populace friendly to the PLA in either the eastern sector, on the border between Tibet and India, or the western sector, opposite Xinjiang.⁴⁶ Thus, the routine of mobilizing the local populace to support operations would not work. Still, the PLA mobilized both PLA border defense forces and main force units for operations.

The Sino-Indian border is some 3,380 kilometers (2,100 miles) long. China has two major claims and one smaller claim on what India considers its territory. In the western sector of the border, in the Ladakh District of Jammu and Kashmir, China claims the Aksai Chin, where the PRC holds about 43,180 square kilometers of what India claims as its territory.⁴⁷ The PRC built the Karakorum Highway there to connect China and Pakistan. In the middle sector, bordering the Indian states of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand and the PRC provinces of Xinjiang and Tibet, China claims 2,000 square kilometers of what India considers its territory.⁴⁸ In the eastern sector, China claims 90,000 square kilometers of the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, i.e., virtually the entire state.⁴⁹

The conflicting claims in the eastern sector are along the McMahon Line, a demarcation drawn by British foreign Secretary Henry McMahon during the Simla Conference held in Northern India from 13 October 1913 through 3 July 1914.⁵⁰ In the western sector and middle sectors, the conflicting claims stem from one survey by British officials in 1846–1847 and a later survey by W.H. Johnson, an officer of the British Survey of India, who traversed the Aksai Chin and Karakorum area in 1865.⁵¹ When Great Britain relinquished its claim to the Indian empire in 1947, the British tried to translate these surveys into maps. Unfortunately, the work was never completed, nor did China ever agree, and the new Indian government began its own policy of completing surveys while also moving forces forward.⁵²

In 1960, India formulated its “forward policy,” designed to place continuous pressure by Indian forces on Chinese troops along the disputed border.⁵³ The policy called for India to “assert its rights by dispatching properly equipped patrols into the areas currently occupied by the Chinese, since any prolonged failure to do so will imply a tacit acceptance of Chinese occupation.”⁵⁴ In July 1962, Mao Zedong instructed the PLA to counter what he termed India’s “nibbling policy” (蚕食政策, literally translated as a policy of nibbling like a silkworm) to “never make a concession, but try to avert bleeding; form a jagged, interlocking pattern [of positions] to secure the border; and prepare for long-term, armed co-existence.”⁵⁵

Basic Chinese policy from 1959 to 1962 was to focus on control of the eastern part of the disputed border while maintaining stability in the west.⁵⁶ However, as Nehru continued the Indian forward policy, by 1962, the PRC government was convinced that India was preparing for a major attack. After attempts by Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai to stabilize the situation through contacts with the Soviet Union had failed, the Politburo Standing Committee decided

to prepare the PLA for a counterattack.⁵⁷ The CMC ordered the troops already deployed near the border to secretly mobilize while Party and government cadre conducted political education to ready them to fight.⁵⁸ These final mobilization efforts were preceded by a general political department mobilization order, issued on 10 October 1962, to conduct propaganda work among cadre and troops for a war against Indian forces.⁵⁹ The PLA mobilized border defense forces and main force units, some of which had been deployed in the border areas for three years. PLA units were reinforced with engineers, mortars, pack howitzers and recoilless rifles. In those three years, the PLA had built a logistics and transportation infrastructure along the disputed border.⁶⁰

Because the PLA was in minority-dominated areas, it could not depend on the civilian populace for support. Most of the mobilization assistance came from Han Chinese work units and production brigades during the conflict.⁶¹

Li Xiaobing provides a more realistic picture of how the Tibetan populace reacted to mobilization.⁶² From interviews with an uncle who fought in Tibet, Li writes, “Sergeant Li Weiheng recalled that he and his [PLA] comrades felt as if they were entering a foreign country when they went to Tibet.”⁶³ The religious differences and language barriers with the local populace prevented any communication, and there was a good deal of “separatist” propaganda directed at Tibetans from India. The population was generally hostile to the PLA, but willingly provided comfort and assistance to Indian soldiers held captive by PLA forces.⁶⁴ Production Construction Corps (PCC)⁶⁵ units and some PLA main forces in Xinjiang had families at their garrisons.⁶⁶ These families provided the troops with haversacks, bedding, socks and food in the pre-war mobilization period.⁶⁷ The PCC also increased production to support military needs.⁶⁸

PLA mobilization was hampered by the lack of support from the local populace in Xinjiang and Tibet. Both areas have predominantly minority populations; the Communist Party went to great lengths to suppress the indigenous religions, Tibetan Buddhism and Islam. This reinforced the need for strong ideological efforts in CCP programs. This experience is also one of the reasons that the PRC continues to push Han Chinese into Tibet and Xinjiang.

Paracel Island Conflict with Vietnam: 1974

The Paracel Island “self-defensive counterattack” campaign of 1974 (西沙群岛自卫反击战) involved significant mobilization of civilian resources in a naval and amphibious operation. It was the PLA’s first naval clash with a foreign country and a complex joint battle involving the PLA navy, marine corps, PLA air force and ground forces, as well as fishermen and militia.⁶⁹ It is also proudly cited as an example of “smaller [Chinese] boats beating larger ships.”⁷⁰ The PLA’s approach was to conduct an operation that was a “maritime people’s war” because military assets alone were insufficient without mobilizing civilian vessels to support them. Fishing vessels assisted with surveillance of the battle area and the rescue of wounded personnel, landing over 400 troops ashore and transporting over 50 tons of materiel.⁷¹

The conflict began in January 1974, when South Vietnam announced its intention to explore for oil around the Paracel Islands. On 16 January, China dispatched two minesweepers from the navy base at Yulin, with a platoon of soldiers and seven truckloads of materiel, which arrived at Woody Island (永兴岛) the next day. One destroyer from South Vietnam was already in the area, and South Vietnam dispatched an additional destroyer. This prompted the CMC to order two anti-submarine craft and two minesweepers to the island chain, along with civilian fishing vessels as maritime militia. After a brief naval engagement on 19 January, South Vietnam’s naval forces withdrew, and the PLA launched an amphibious landing on 20 January to take

the islands.⁷² The CMC also sent four platoons of militia to occupy other islands in the Paracel chain, along with PLA navy and air force aircraft from South Sea Fleet bases.⁷³ This small contingent was reinforced the same day with over 500 PLA Marines and militia personnel to occupy the islands.⁷⁴

There was extensive preparation for the campaign to seize the Paracel Islands. For months prior to the engagement, PLA sailors dressed in plain clothes, and signals intelligence personnel secretly infiltrated the island, blending in with armed militia from China's South Sea Fishing Company, operating from the Paracels.⁷⁵ Political mobilization was also a significant part of the PLA mobilization plan.⁷⁶ A political education campaign taught sailors and soldiers the campaign's rules of engagement. This included patriotic education, propaganda and reinforcing the Party's control of the military.⁷⁷

The Paracels conflict is cited in PLA literature today as important because the Chinese fishing vessels reporting on the locations of the South Vietnamese ships and militia effectively repelled a South Vietnamese attempt to land troops, reducing the pressure on PLA navy regular forces.⁷⁸ One factor in the PLA planning was that South Vietnam had not anticipated that militia on the ground and on fishing vessels were armed with rockets, hand grenades and small arms.⁷⁹ Study of the Paracels conflict is a useful exercise in thinking about what may happen in other disputed island areas in the South China Sea and East China Sea. The campaign is an example both of effective mobilization maritime resources into naval militia in a contingency and of the use of PLA marines and militia for amphibious assault. The clandestine infiltration of PLA navy personnel among fishermen also played a significant role in the PLA's success.

"Self-Defensive Counterattack" on Vietnam: 1979

China conducted a major offensive along the entire Sino-Vietnam border between 16 February and 16 March 1979.⁸⁰ The attack was characterized by Chinese publications as a "limited self-defensive counterattack" in response to border incursions.⁸¹ However, most western analysts believe that the attack was, in part, a response to Vietnam's military offensive in Cambodia.⁸²

Although initial reactions to alleged Vietnamese incursions was from border defense units and militia, once the decision was made to conduct a "punishing" counterattack, there were "large-scale troop deployments and mobilization" in January 1979.⁸³ A forward command headquarters was set up near the Sino-Vietnam border, and civilian rail traffic moving toward the Sino-Vietnam border was diverted or held up for extended periods of time while trainloads of PLA equipment moved toward the border.⁸⁴

The CMC established two "fronts (战区)," or theaters of war. One was on the southern, Sino-Vietnamese border, the other on the Sino-Soviet border, in the event that the Soviet Union came to Vietnam's aid.⁸⁵ Local forces and militia were activated along with regular PLA main force units. The Chinese evacuated 300,000 people from the immediate border area in the north, should hostilities break out with the Soviet Union.⁸⁶ The PLA also activated local militia groups, civilians, vehicles and drivers in the border area.⁸⁷ Inside Vietnam, logistics support for the Chinese forces was poor; they lacked adequate food and water, primarily because the PLA system was historically organized to depend on local support.⁸⁸ This was a vestige of a history of preparing for attacks on the homeland by the PLA, where forces could depend on a mobilized populace. The local PAFD organized thousands of militiamen and women in support of the PLA, of which a number were sent inside Vietnam.⁸⁹ Militia units conducted "mopping-up operations" and conducted rear area security patrols for the PLA group armies.⁹⁰ Troops were

moved extensively by rail.⁹¹ The PLA combat service support system, for decades after the establishment of the PRC in 1949, had railway engineer units dedicated to military mobility and logistics.⁹² Railway engineer units were notified of mobilization on 5 February 1979, 11 days before the start of the attack.⁹³

In all, the PLA employed several hundred thousand troops.⁹⁴ The Chinese attack was conducted along ten major corridors, primarily against Vietnam's cities of Lai Chau, Lao Cai and Ha Giang in the western sector and against Cao Bang and Lang Son in the eastern sector.⁹⁵ Nearly every military region in China contributed forces, which included over 20 divisions (about 300,000 troops), a thousand tanks and more than 1,500 artillery pieces.⁹⁶ A recollection from one PLA participant, however, gives higher PLA strength figures: "the total number of participants exceeded 700,000. Before the day came, more than 300,000 participating troops had been transported, and tens of thousands of artillery pieces were waiting."⁹⁷ The 300,000 personnel citation is probably the accurate number of main forces troops. It is impossible to know how many militia or local forces may have been activated for the fight. For Vietnam, there were about 100,000 regular army personnel in eight divisions and 75,000 to 100,000 militia deployed against the Chinese.⁹⁸ Casualties were heavy on both sides; estimates run as high as 28,000 Chinese dead and 43,000 wounded, with Vietnamese dead estimated at 10,000 to 20,000 personnel.⁹⁹

The CMC was apparently opposed to the operation against Vietnam, but Deng Xiaoping prevailed. He was worried about Soviet-Vietnamese cooperation, Vietnam's strong presence in Cambodia and an alliance that this created pressuring Thailand. Deng claimed at the end that Vietnam had been taught a lesson, and, from a strategic standpoint, had showed Vietnam and the Soviet Union that China would stand up to Soviet expansion and would react to Vietnam's expansion from Cambodia into Thailand.¹⁰⁰

Lessons for Today

Since World War II, China has mobilized on a large scale several times—and the United States has not. The scale and speed of their mobilization is easier to achieve for a number of reasons; their economy, industry, infrastructure and populace are more conducive to such endeavors. The above case studies show transportation and communications mobilization to be particularly effective, while deployed PLA navy and air force units are likely to receive combat logistics support from the militia and reserves. Communist Party leaders are in charge of an authoritarian, Marxist-Leninist, one-party state. Merely the ability to mobilize on that scale is a deterrent to invading China.

One would expect that, with all the money poured into PLA modernization and new weapons, the use of militia and the reliance on "people's war" would be a thing of the past. However, Xi Jinping has reinvigorated the system, strengthened PAFD and extended reach into key public and private businesses.¹⁰¹ The emphasis on civil-military integration by Xi Jinping facilitates effective mobilization and is not without its own tensions;¹⁰² however, there are now reserve units at airports, ship repair yards and important factories, all designed for forms of military logistics support or to supplement the active PLA.¹⁰³ The strong Party/state relationship and its integration at all levels of Chinese government also helps mobilization efforts. For China's adversaries, there is room to exacerbate these tensions. Over the long term, there is a tendency to over-mobilize, which could drain resources from a war effort.

U.S. leaders should consider that political mobilization in China has been a key precondition to successful civilian or military mobilization. The recent use of militia and maritime

militia as part of “gray zone” tactics in the South China Sea and East China Sea is instructive for contingencies in those places. The United States and its allies and partners, such as Japan, the Philippines and Taiwan—as well as Vietnam and Indonesia—can expect to encounter these militia. Based on the ideological and political work invested in mobilization by the Party, China’s leaders probably believe that they are in a good position to withstand a long war or protracted conflict. Xi Jinping emphasizes nationalism and pride, building on what the CCP calls China’s “century of humiliation,”¹⁰⁴ i.e., the period after the Opium War in 1842, when foreign powers insisted that some cities and areas were extraterritorial zones controlled by that power and its own laws and institutions, not the ruling dynasty or China’s laws.¹⁰⁵ Scholars note, “The birth of the People’s Republic of China was not only the beginning of a new regime, but it also marked the ending of the Century of Humiliation (1839–1949), in which foreign powers subjected, manipulated, colonized and occupied China.”¹⁰⁶ Essentially, parts of China were carved out and turned into foreign extraterritorial zones.

For this reason, sending foreign expeditionary troops into China would likely create more support for the CCP, binding the population into the nation’s defense. However, the ideological basis for mobilization may blind leaders to problems that would be imposed by resource shortages. Vulnerabilities may well develop among troops or civilians as conditions deteriorate over time. This is especially true today, when the Party depends on its ability to deliver improving standards of life for its legitimacy.

The United States must be aware of the military implications of the comprehensive nature of Party control and its penetration to all levels of government and society. These, combined with a relatively disciplined central planning system, mean that the Party and the PLA can orchestrate mobilization relatively easily. U.S. military leaders would do well to note this significant ability of a great-power competitor, examine the corresponding shortcomings in U.S. capabilities and adjust the training of American forces accordingly.

Notes

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