

## Chapter 5: China's Maritime Militia<sup>141</sup>

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### Introduction

An important component of China's local armed forces is the militia. It supports China's armed forces in a variety of functions, and is seeing expanded mission roles as the People's Liberation Army (PLA) continues to modernize. While the maritime militia is not a new addition to China's militia system, it is receiving greater emphasis since China now aspires to become a great maritime power and because maritime disputes in China's near seas are a growing concern.

No official definition of the maritime militia exists in the many sources the authors examined. However, in late 2012 the Zhoushan garrison commander, Zeng Pengxiang, and the garrison's Mobilization Office described it concisely: "The Maritime Militia is an irreplaceable mass armed organization not released from production and a component of China's ocean defense armed forces [that enjoys] low sensitivity and great leeway in maritime rights protection actions."<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> 曾鹏翔, 傅志刚, 连荣华 [Zeng Pengxiang, Chuan Zhigang, Lian Ronghua], "科学构建海上民兵管控体系" [Scientifically Build a Maritime Militia Management System], *National Defense*, No. 12 (2014), pp. 68-70.

The only estimate of the size of the maritime militia obtained during the course of this research was from a source published in 1978, which put the number of personnel at 750,000 on approximately 140,000 craft.<sup>143</sup> In its 2010 defense white paper, China stated that it had 8 million primary militia members nationwide.<sup>144</sup> The maritime militia is a smaller unique subset since it performs many of its missions at sea. However, an accurate number is not available. It is important to note that the maritime militia is distinct from both China's coastal militia (shore based) and its naval reserve, although some coastal militia units have been transformed into maritime militia units.<sup>145</sup>

## History of China's maritime militia

China's militia system originated before the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) came to power, but the system of making numerous state-supported maritime militias out of the coastal populations was not fully implemented until the Communists began to exercise greater control of the coastline in the 1950s. This segment of China's population had been relatively isolated from events on land and was subject to Japanese and Nationalist control in the decades before CCP rule was established. The CCP targeted the fishing communities, creating fishing collectives and work units, enacting strict organizational control, and conducting political education.<sup>146</sup> Factors motivating and shaping this transformation included:

- The PLA's early use of civilian vessels
- The need to prevent Nationalist Chinese (ROC) incursions along the coast
- The need to man the maritime militia with fishermen, as there were too few other experienced mariners

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<sup>143</sup> Stephen Uhalley, "China in the Pacific," *Oceans* (May 1978), p. 33; David G. Muller, Jr., *China as a Maritime Power* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1983), p. 90.

<sup>144</sup> *China's National Defense in 2010* (Beijing: State Council Information Office, March 2011), [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2011-03/31/c\\_13806851.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2011-03/31/c_13806851.htm).

<sup>145</sup> 戴佳辰, 耿跃亭 [Dai Jiachen and Geng Yueting], "海上维权民船动员需求与对策研究" [Research on Requirements and Measures in Civilian Vessel Mobilization for Maritime Rights Protection], *国防* [National Defense], No. 10 (2015), pp. 41-44.

<sup>146</sup> Bruce Swanson, *Eighth Voyage of the Dragon* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1982), pp. 216-23.

- Confrontations with other states' fishing and naval vessels, due to the depletion of fishery resources.
- The need to fish farther from shore, in contested waters.
- The transformation from coastal defense militias to the at-sea maritime militia.
- Overall trends in militia development, including specialization, emergency response, technological units, and increased orientation towards supporting each of the PLA branches.

Chinese fishing boats attempting to frustrate South Korean Coast Guard attempts to board and inspect



Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/10/chinese-fishing-boat-captain-dies-in-south-korea-sea-clash>.

The maritime militia has played significant roles in a number of military campaigns and coercive incidents over the years, including:

- The 1950s support of the PLA's island seizure campaigns
- The 1974 seizure of the western portion of the Paracels
- The 2009 *Impeccable* incident

- The 2011 harassment of Vietnam’s survey vessels (*Viking II* and *Binh Minh*)
- The 2012 Scarborough Shoal standoff (Tanmen Militia present)
- The 2014 Haiyang Shiyou-981 oil rig standoff.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Detailed analysis concerning these and related issues is available in the authors’ other publications. See Conor M. Kennedy and Andrew S. Erickson, “Model Maritime Militia: Tanmen’s Leading Role In The April 2012 Scarborough Shoal Incident,” Center for International Maritime Security (CIMSEC), 21 April 2016, <http://cimsec.org/model-maritime-militia-tanmens-leading-role-april-2012-scarborough-shoal-incident/24573>; Andrew S. Erickson and Conor M. Kennedy, “Trailblazers in Warfighting: The Maritime Militia of Danzhou,” Center for International Maritime Security, 1 February 2016, <http://cimsec.org/trailblazers-warfighting-maritime-militia-danzhou/21475>; Andrew S. Erickson and Conor M. Kennedy, “China’s Daring Vanguard: Introducing Sanya City’s Maritime Militia,” Center for International Maritime Security, 5 November 2015, <http://cimsec.org/chinas-daring-vanguard-introducing-sanya-citys-maritime-militia/19753>; Christopher P. Cavas, “China’s ‘Little Blue Men’ Take Navy’s Place in Disputes,” *Defense News*, 2 November 2015, <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/naval/2015/11/02/china-lassen-destroyer-spratly-islands-south-china-sea-andrew-erickson-naval-war-college-militia-coast-guard-navy-confrontation-territorial-dispute/75070058/>; Andrew S. Erickson and Conor M. Kennedy, “Irregular Forces at Sea: ‘Not Merely Fishermen—Shedding Light on China’s Maritime Militia’,” Center for International Maritime Security, 2 November 2015, <http://cimsec.org/new-cimsec-series-on-irregular-forces-at-sea-not-merely-fishermen-shedding-light-on-chinas-maritime-militia/19624>; Andrew S. Erickson, “Making Waves in the South China Sea,” A ChinaFile Conversation, Asia Society, 30 October 2015, <http://www.chinafile.com/conversation/making-waves-south-china-sea>; Andrew S. Erickson and Conor M. Kennedy, “Directing China’s ‘Little Blue Men’: Uncovering the Maritime Militia Command Structure,” Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 9 September 2015, <http://www.andrewerickson.com/2015/11/chinas-daring-vanguard-introducing-sanya-citys-maritime-militia/>; Andrew S. Erickson, “New U.S. Security Strategy Doesn’t Go Far Enough on South China Sea,” China Real Time Report (中国实时报), *Wall Street Journal*, 24 August 2015, <http://blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2015/08/24/new-asia-pacific-maritime-security-strategy-necessary-but-insufficient/?mod=WSJBlog>; Andrew S. Erickson and Conor M. Kennedy, “Tanmen Militia: China’s ‘Maritime Rights Protection’ Vanguard,” *The National Interest*, 6 May 2015, <http://www.nationalinterest.org/feature/tanmen-militia-china%E2%80%99s-maritime-rights-protection-vanguard-12816>; Andrew S. Erickson and Conor M. Kennedy, “China’s Island Builders: The People’s War at Sea,” *Foreign Affairs*, 9 April 2015, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/east-asia/2015-04-09/china-s-island-builders>; Andrew S. Erickson and Conor M. Kennedy, “Meet the Chinese Maritime Militia Waging a ‘People’s War at Sea,’” China Real Time Report (中国实时报), *Wall Street Journal*, 31 March 2015, <http://blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2015/03/31/meet-the-chinese-maritime-militia-waging-a-peoples-war-at-sea/>.

## Role in China's goal of becoming a great maritime power

Since 2012, China's efforts to reach its strategic development goal of becoming a great maritime power have been greatly enhanced under Xi Jinping's leadership. The maritime militia's role in these efforts has received top-level leadership attention, from Xi on down. The fishing industry and the maritime militia built within it have been employed as political tools of the state to consolidate China's maritime claims, particularly in the South China Sea. Because the maritime militia is a grassroots movement in coordination with the nation's growing overall strategic emphasis on the ocean, its roles are as political as they are operational.

In 2013, He Zhixiang, director of the Guangdong Military Region (MR) Headquarters Mobilization Department, specifically pointed out three roles of the maritime militia:

- It forms a certain embodiment of national will (*guojia yizhi*) of the people in implementing maritime administrative control.
- It helps shape public opinion, as a group of "model" mariners meant to inspire both enterprises and the masses to get involved in maritime development and travel out to China's possessions (disputed islands and reefs).
- It is a guarantor of maritime safety, with its members often serving as the first responders in emergencies since they are already distributed out across the seas.<sup>148</sup>

Director He also states that the maritime militia is an important force for normalizing China's administrative control of the seas, since it is on the front lines of rights protection. He calls for all areas within the nine-dashed line to have maritime militia presence.<sup>149</sup> Despite the maritime militia's role as a reserve force to be called on when needed, its use is increasingly routine.

The primary role of China's militia is to be an external defense force; its secondary role, to be a domestic security force.<sup>150</sup> It is also an important reserve force

<sup>148</sup> 何志祥 [He Zhixiang], "谈海上民兵建设'四纳入'" [Discussion on the "Four Integrations" in Maritime Militia Construction], *National Defense*, No. 4 (2013), pp. 36-37.

<sup>149</sup> He Zhixiang, "适应海防安全形势--建强海上民兵组织" [Adjusting to the Security Situation in Sea Defense—Strengthen Maritime Militia Organization], *National Defense*, No. 1 (2015), pp. 48-50.

<sup>150</sup> Dennis Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Routledge, 2012), p. 23.

responsible for mobilizing in times of emergencies and war (*yingji yingzhan*). The maritime militia retains this orientation, serving external defense while assisting domestic security forces at sea. Domestic security roles take the form of conducting marine rescue operations and assisting maritime law enforcement (MLE) forces, while external defense roles entail performing a variety of operations to assist the PLA Navy (PLAN) as well as conducting independent operations.

The maritime militia is assigned a variety of missions, from more traditional logistics support for ground forces, to more advanced missions in support of the navy. Relatively new missions for the maritime militia include those focused on protecting China’s maritime rights. The following list of mission roles is not exhaustive, but rather a summary of those detailed in Chinese sources:

- In “support the front” (*zhiqian*) missions, the maritime militia has roles in assisting the PLA and PLAN. It augments transport capacity through the loading and delivery of troops, vehicles, equipment, and materials; conducts medical rescue and retrieval of casualties; provides navigational assistance; conducts emergency repairs or refitting of vessels, docks, and other infrastructure; provides fuel and material replenishment at sea; and conducts other various logistical functions. It also prepares for engaging in cover and concealment operations (*weizhuang*) for army and naval units through the use of smoke, corner reflectors, and chaff grenades. The maritime militia also trains to conduct mine warfare and assist in blockade operations. As in many modern militia units, the areas of construction, information, and electronic warfare are becoming increasingly emphasized.
- Many new units have been formed for emergency response (*yingji*)—that is, to handle “*tufa shijian*,” a broad term that includes a variety of fast-erupting contingencies loosely defined as natural disasters, accidents, public health incidents, and societal security incidents that develop rapidly, harm the public, and require unconventional means of response.<sup>151</sup> In 2007, the National People’s Congress passed the “Emergency Response Law of the People’s Republic of China,” which requires the militia to participate in relief efforts. Maritime militia emergency response units are tasked with handling sudden incidents at sea, such as rescue and relief operations. They make good first responders, as they may be near any incidents at sea—as expressed by the

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<sup>151</sup> “中华人民共和国突发事件应对法” [Emergency Response Law of the People’s Republic of China], Chapter 3, Articles 3 and 17, Retrieved from Baike, 1 November 2007, [http://www.baike.com/wiki/%E3%80%8A%E4%B8%AD%E5%8D%8E%E4%BA%BA%E6%B0%91%E5%85%B1%E5%92%8C%E5%9B%BD%E7%AA%81%E5%8F%91%E4%BA%8B%E4%BB%B6%E5%BA%94%E5%AF%B9%E6%B3%95%E3%80%8B&prd=so\\_1\\_doc](http://www.baike.com/wiki/%E3%80%8A%E4%B8%AD%E5%8D%8E%E4%BA%BA%E6%B0%91%E5%85%B1%E5%92%8C%E5%9B%BD%E7%AA%81%E5%8F%91%E4%BA%8B%E4%BB%B6%E5%BA%94%E5%AF%B9%E6%B3%95%E3%80%8B&prd=so_1_doc) .

phrase *jiudi jiu jin*, referring to responses made by nearby local forces. This tends to be a peacetime endeavor but is also certainly involved in a wartime setting.

- A more recent evolution in maritime militia responsibilities is to conduct “rights protection” (*weiquan*) missions. In 2013, the former commander of the Zhoushan garrison outlined the specific missions of the maritime militia in rights protection. These missions are meant to display presence, manifest sovereignty, and coordinate with the needs of national political and diplomatic struggles. They involve actions such as law enforcement in coordination with MLE forces, island landings, and work in disputed waters.<sup>152</sup> As China’s non-military maritime forces, such as the China Coast Guard (CCG), are being built up rapidly with larger and more capable vessels, the maritime militia is being assigned a special role within what it refers to as the “Maritime Rights Protection Force System” (*weiquan lilianq tixi*).<sup>153</sup>
- The maritime militia also trains for some independent missions, such as anti-air missile defense, light weapons use, and sabotage operations. Reconnaissance and surveillance are strongly emphasized, as China anticipates potential gaps in its intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) coverage, and can have the maritime militia loiter around targets of interest or report sightings during its regular operations at sea.

As local leaders of coastal provinces look to the ocean for new areas of development and China’s military strategy focuses more on maritime power,<sup>154</sup> the Chinese practice of civil-military integration will necessarily be at the foreground of Chinese sea power. The mobilization of China’s mariner population into the maritime militia is one aspect that helps extend this civilian-military integration out to sea. Over the past decade, coastal governments, parties, and military headquarters have decided to shift their focus in militia building from urban defense out onto the seas and from inland to coastal towns and villages.

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<sup>152</sup> 王治平, 汪勇健 [Wang Zhiping and Wang Yongjian], “民兵参加海上维权斗争的几点思考” [Some Thoughts on Participation of Militia in Maritime Rights Protection Struggle], *National Defense*, No. 6 (2013).

<sup>153</sup> 张荣胜, 陈明辉 [Zhang Rongsheng and Chen Minghui], “关于组织动员海上民兵参与维权行动的几点思考” (Some Thoughts on Organizing and Mobilizing Maritime Militia to Participate in Maritime Rights Protection Actions), *National Defense*, No. 8 (2014).

<sup>154</sup> China’s first defense white paper on strategy stated explicitly, “The traditional mentality that land outweighs sea must be abandoned.” Section 4, 中国的军事战略 [China’s Military Strategy], (Beijing: State Council Information Office, May 2015), [http://www.81.cn/dblj/2015-05/26/content\\_6507373.htm](http://www.81.cn/dblj/2015-05/26/content_6507373.htm).

Many local governments along China's coast are constructing integrated coastal defense systems meant to better implement administrative control over their local waters. Places such as Weihai City in Shandong Province and China's newest prefecture, Sansha City, are organizing military-police-civilian joint/integrated defense systems (*junjingmin lianfang tixi*), which include maritime militia units. Sansha City's committee has been a focal point for military-police-civilian joint defense projects, with "three lines of defense" (militia, MLE, and military, in that order). The city has also established a joint defense coordination center, an integrated monitoring command center, and a "Hainan Province Paracels Islands Dynamic Monitoring System."<sup>155</sup> In economic terms, maritime militia organizations are explicitly meant to boost the marine economies of local areas and are considered an important force in creating "Great Maritime Provinces." maritime militia vanguard units demonstrate a willingness to enter disputed waters at the risk of being intercepted by foreign maritime forces; this boosts morale in local fishing communities and encourages them to venture farther from shore.

## Command and control

First and foremost, the leadership of the maritime militia follows the dual military-civilian structure under which most militia organizations in China operate, with responsibilities for militia building falling on both local military organs and their government/Party counterparts (*shuangchong lingdao*). This dual-leadership system begins at the Provincial Military District (MD) level and goes down to the county/township People's Armed Forces Department (PAFD) level.<sup>156</sup>

In early 2014, one MD Mobilization Division head wrote an article in the *National Defense* magazine explaining the command relationships for the maritime militia:

- Units independently conducting intelligence gathering and reconnaissance at sea are commanded directly by the MD system.

<sup>155</sup> 丛黎明, 马绍惠 [Cong Liming and Ma Shaohui], "威海军民推进海防建设融合发展" [Weihai Advances in Civil-Military Integrated Development in Sea Defense], *National Defense News*, 28 January 2015, [http://www.mod.gov.cn/mobilize/2015-01/28/content\\_4567330.htm](http://www.mod.gov.cn/mobilize/2015-01/28/content_4567330.htm); "三沙市推动军警民联防机制--构建三线海上维权格局" [Sansha City Promotes its Military-Police-Civilian Joint Defense Mechanism—Constructs a Three-line Maritime Rights Protection Structure], 中国新闻网 [China News], 21 November 2014, <http://www.chinanews.com/gn/2014/11-21/6803776.shtml>.

<sup>156</sup> Bo Zhiyue, "The PLA and the Provinces," in *Civil-Military Relations in Today's China: Swimming in a New Sea* (Routledge, 2006), pp. 106-17; 严朝君任儋州市人武部党委第一书记 [Yan Chaojun Serves as Danzhou People's Armed Forces Department's First Party Secretary], *Danzhou News Network*, 3 March 2015, <http://www.danzhou7.com/a/a/c/03032A242015.html>.



- Emergency response units are organized by the local government or search-and-rescue agencies with MD participation.
- Rights protection units report to a command organized by their MD and relevant agencies, under the unified leadership of local government and Party officials.
- Units involved in law enforcement missions are commanded by the China Coast Guard with the cooperation of their MD, under the unified leadership of local government and Party officials.
- Units involved in supporting naval missions will be under the unified command of the PLAN with cooperation by the MD.<sup>157</sup>

Control of individual vessels in the maritime militia seems to be along the following lines. First, grassroots-level cadres (*zhuanwu ganbu*) with strong political qualities and organizational capabilities are recruited directly into maritime militia detachments in order to strengthen fishing vessel command and control. Second, maritime militia personnel with “strong character” will receive focused training to improve their political work in order to create political forces within the maritime militia. Third, specialized “active duty boat cadres (*xianyi chuanting ganbu*) and signalmen (*tongxinbing*)” are recruited into the maritime militia in order to strengthen fishing vessel piloting and communication controls. Although *boat cadre* as a term may seem ambiguous, many local PAFDs have targeted fishing vessel captains, owners, and exceptional crew members to serve as cadres for the maritime militia.<sup>158</sup>

Other sources refer to the cadres as “boat bosses/skippers” (*chuan laoda*, 船老大), or simply “captains” (*chuanzhang*). Former active duty personnel are given priority for entrance into the maritime militia, and likely assume unit leadership roles, becoming cadres. Cadres make up an important group that helps maintain unit cohesiveness and helps ensure that militia building conducted by the PAFD is carried out at the grassroots level. Cadres often serve as squad or platoon leaders. They are especially critical for riding herd over potentially under-disciplined maritime militia units that might otherwise abdicate responsibilities while at sea. Many militia training outlines

<sup>157</sup> 徐海峰 [Xu Haifeng], “适应新形势 全面规范海上民兵建设” [Adapting to New Circumstances—Comprehensively Standardize Maritime Militia Construction], *National Defense*, No. 2 (2014).

<sup>158</sup> 邓伟余, 赵赵继承 [Deng Weiyu and Zhao Jicheng], “海上民兵’崛起在蓝色国土” [The Rise of “Maritime Militia” on Blue Territory], *National Defense*, No. 2 (September 2007); 廖刚斌, 王牌, 熊睿 [Liao Gangbin, Wang Pai, and Xiong Rui], “海上民兵分队建设存在的问题与对策” [Issues and Measures in Maritime Militia Unit Construction], *National Defense*, No. 8 (2014), pp. 14-15.

and plans drafted by counties and villages require more intense training of cadres and platoon/company commanders; thus, those personnel may be sent to Military Sub-District (MSD) - or MD-level collective militia training.<sup>159</sup> The cadres at each unit's headquarters or embedded within units are critical for ensuring that maritime militia personnel abide by the commands of the military and serve the interests of the Party.

When MLE forces employ and command the maritime militia for missions involved in rescue, law enforcement, or rights protection, it becomes a matter of who will fund or materially support the units being mobilized. Many sources use the phrase “whoever employs the troops must support the troops” (*shei yongbing, shei baozhang*), meaning that departments such as MLE forces who want to use the maritime militia to conduct particular operations must support the militia in those operations. It is unclear exactly what this support entails, and whether the funds compensate vessel owners or only pay for the actual materials necessary for the operation. What it does suggest is that the broad spectrum of missions conducted by the maritime militia requires support from multiple agencies, alleviating some of the burden on local military commands and governments.

## Informatization in action

As early as 2007, the need for a civilian vessel and militia maritime surveillance network and information support system that would cover the country's vast fishing fleet was recognized by the PLAN. It wanted the satellite navigation and positioning services provided by a combination of the Beidou positioning, navigation, and timing satellite system and automated short-wave radio transmission to be fused in a way to create near-real-time data connectivity so that China's large fishing fleet could supplement the PLAN's maritime domain awareness (MDA) efforts.<sup>160</sup> That same year, the Yuhuan County maritime militia “battalion” reported completion of a maritime militia surveillance and early warning network, formed between the far seas, near seas, and shoreline, calling the vessels “militia recon vessels.” Xiangshan County of Zhejiang Province operates a large maritime militia reconnaissance detachment that

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<sup>159</sup> “大冶市2012年度民兵军事训练计划” [Daye City 2012 Annual Militia Military Training Plan], <http://www.wenku1.com/view/272D31DB2ED82D24.html>.

<sup>160</sup> 刘七虎, 郑一冰 [Liu Qihu and Zheng Yibing], “依托海上民船民兵建立侦察信息体系” [Establish a Reconnaissance Information System Based on Civilian Vessels and Militia], *National Defense*, Vol. 6 (2007).

follows the same pattern as laid out by the PLAN HQ, with 32 “motherships” acting as nodes for 150 vessels forming a network of surveillance.<sup>161</sup>

Issues of approval authority, command relationships, mobilization processes, and command methods are especially prominent when it comes to its role in rights protection. PAFDs have set up command and control systems between the dispatch offices of marine enterprises and the China Coast Guard. The communications systems already in use by the coast guard—such as the Beidou Satellite Navigation System, VHF radios, the Automatic Identification System (AIS), cellular coverage when available,<sup>162</sup> and satellite phones—are used to ensure reliable command and control when at sea.<sup>163</sup> The equipment is provided to the maritime militia by the MSD, which coordinates with fisheries departments to purchase and distribute satellite navigation terminals, navigational radar, radios, and other electronic equipment.<sup>164</sup>

According to Ju Li, director of the Fisheries Law Enforcement Command Center, a blend of capabilities form an important part of the nation’s emergency response and early warning system: 14 shortwave shore stations, 78 UHF shore stations, 15 provincial fishing vessel position-monitoring centers, 30 fisheries AIS base stations, and 59 fishing port video surveillance branches established nationwide.<sup>165</sup> This is a redundant and presumably robust communications network built to maintain reliable communications with militia fishing vessels many miles at sea.

Beidou terminals have been widely installed on China’s fishing fleets,<sup>166</sup> allowing the agencies to track their position and have two-way message transmission of up to 120

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<sup>161</sup> Zuo Guidong, Li Huazhen, and Yu Chuanchun, “Heroic Primary Militia Battalion, Strengthening Construction of Maritime Specialized Detachments.”

<sup>162</sup> 3G Cellular coverage has been provided by China Telecom for the Spratly Islands since June 2013. “中信卫星携手中国电信实现南沙群岛3G信号全覆盖” [CITIC Satellite Together with China Telecom Achieve Full 3G Signal Coverage of the Spratly Islands], CITIC Group Corporation, 31 July 2013, <http://group.citic/iwcm/null/null/ns:LHQ6LGY6LGM6MmM5NDkzOGI0MDJmMTMyZjAxNDZzMjQ5NDRmZTAwMTEscDosYTosbTo=/show.vsm>.

<sup>163</sup> Zeng Pengxiang et al., “Scientifically Build a Management System for the Maritime Militia.”

<sup>164</sup> 吴广晶, 李永鹏 [Wu Guangjing and Li Yongpeng], “打造蓝色大洋支前精兵” [Creating Blue Ocean Elite Support Troops], *Liberation Army Daily*, 29 November 2013.

<sup>165</sup> 居礼 [Ju Li], “北斗卫星导航系统在海洋渔业的应用” [Applications of the Beidou Satellite Navigation System in Marine Fisheries], Chengdu Guowei Communications Technology Co., Ltd., 4 February 2014, <http://gwsatcom.com/Trends/inform/2015-06-23/79.html>.

<sup>166</sup> “福建: 3800艘渔船将装北斗终端” [Fujian: 3,800 Fishing Vessels will Install the Beidou Terminal], *Fujian Daily*, 13 June 2014, <http://www.beidou.gov.cn/attach/2014/07/25/20140725.pdf>.

Chinese characters<sup>167</sup>—enough to dispatch orders to fishing boats as far away as the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea. In some areas, Beidou has become an important supplement to the AIS vessel tracking system that uses shore-based stations to receive ship positioning and identification information; when fishing boats are beyond the range of shore based AIS stations, Beidou’s AIS transceiver automatically turns on—it also turns off when within range of the shore station, which helps avoid duplicate tracks.<sup>168</sup> The widespread implementation of Beidou’s Vessel Monitoring System, which includes a marine fisheries integrated information service,<sup>169</sup> permits greater levels of control of at-sea maritime militia vessels.<sup>170</sup> The head of Zhejiang MD’s Mobilization Division, Xu Haifeng, writes that military organs use these systems for monitoring fishing vessel safety and rescue in order to build a maritime militia-FLE-MSD-Navy information-sharing channel.<sup>171</sup>

Obviously, providing the means to report surveillance information is important—but so is the quality of information being reported. Selected militia members are trained as reporting specialists, i.e., information personnel (*xinxiyuan*), within units.<sup>172</sup> These personnel collect intelligence at sea, and use the Beidou and other reporting systems to ensure that the information is sent up the chain. Fu’an, a county-level city of Fujian Province’s Ningde Prefecture, recently held a week-long collective training session for its maritime militia information personnel, covering target identification, essentials of collection methods, and operation of the maritime militia vessel

<sup>167</sup> “Report on the Development of Beidou Navigation Satellite System (Version 2.2),” *China Satellite Navigation Office*, December 2013, <http://www.beidou.gov.cn/attach/2013/12/26/20131226fed336adf2184d52843d5bf81832e82c.pdf>.

<sup>168</sup> “东海航保中心成功研发北斗AIS一体化船载终端” [East Sea Navigational Safety Center Successfully Develops Beidou and AIS Integrated Vessel Terminal], *China Water Transport*, 7 January 2014, <http://www.beidou.gov.cn/2014/01/08/20140108b55319901d3f4d2f80f136a4fa66c51a.html>.

<sup>169</sup> Kevin Pollpeter et al., “The Research, Development, and Acquisition Process for the Beidou Navigation Satellite Programs,” *SITC Research Brief* (January 2014).

<sup>170</sup> “Report on the Development of Beidou Navigation Satellite System (Version 2.2),” China Satellite Navigation Office, December 2013, pp. 9-10.

<sup>171</sup> Xu Haifeng, “Adapting to New Circumstances—Comprehensively Standardize Maritime Militia Construction”; “浙江省加强海上民兵建设” [Zhejiang Province Strengthens Maritime Militia Construction], Xinhua Wang, 4 December 2013, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/mil/2013-12/04/c\\_125806747.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/mil/2013-12/04/c_125806747.htm).

<sup>172</sup> “宁德市人民政府办公室宁德军分区司令部关于做好2014年度民兵预备役工作的通知” [Ningde City Government Office and Ningde Military Sub District Command Notice on the Completion of 2014 Militia Reserve Work], Ningde City Government, 16 March 2014.

management platform and the Beidou notification terminal.<sup>173</sup> In short, the maritime militia has created a cadre of specifically trained fishermen, in order to ensure that a degree of expertise and professionalism exists in the reconnaissance function of the maritime militia. Being able to properly classify the type of ship or aircraft that one spots at sea is very important. Having specially trained militiamen helps eliminate some of the uncertainty by higher headquarters regarding what specific types of ships or aircraft are actually operating in the South China Sea.

In sum, the Navy utilizes the maritime militia in both peacetime and wartime when needed. MLE forces can also call on maritime militia to support their own missions, but would likely have to provide the funding, i.e., fuel and labor, for such operations. In all cases, the MD military and civilian leadership would be involved, either directly or in a supervisory role. New institutions and technologies are being incorporated into the mobilization system in order to increase the speed with which local commands can transfer warfighting potential into warfighting force. From theater-level exercises, to orders to mobilize, and from Beidou messages received by captains operating fishing vessels at sea, all the way down to notifications received by individual militiamen from their local PAFD via a specifically designed app on their mobile phones, the ability to reliably employ the maritime militia is growing in sophistication and effectiveness. It is an interesting example of informatization at the micro level.

## Tailored organization

Local military and civilian leaders appear to have a degree of autonomy in the way they organize militias. For example, Guangxi Province has a “maritime militia Construction Plan for 2020” that was agreed on at a provincial military affairs meeting attended by the principal leaders of the provincial National Defense Mobilization Committee (NMDC). Militia building is based on the common sense guideline that the militia should be based on the sort of militia capabilities that are necessary and the capacity of a locality to satisfy the requirement.

At the center of the maritime militia organization are the county- and grassroots-level PAFDs, who are directly involved in the normal management and organization of the units. PAFDs “scientifically organize” (*kexue bianzu*) militia forces on a scale

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<sup>173</sup> “福安市人武部组织海上民兵信息员集训” [Fu’an City PAFD Organizes Maritime Militia Information Personnel Collective Training], Fujian National Defense Education Network, 19 September 2014, [http://mil.fjnet.cn/2014-09/19/content\\_14905500.htm](http://mil.fjnet.cn/2014-09/19/content_14905500.htm).

matching the mobilization potential that exists in that locality.<sup>174</sup> Specifically, MSD military commanders place the maritime militia into three general unit formations: reconnaissance detachments, emergency response detachments, and support detachments.<sup>175</sup>

From 2013 to 2015, He Zhixiang, head of the Guangdong Military Region Mobilization Department, addressed the construction of the maritime militia in depth. In 2013 he brought up four aspects of integrating maritime militia into national strategic management of the seas and the country's overall maritime strategy. Then, in 2015, He proposed a maritime militia force organization that lays out the geographical mission areas of different types of units, combining near, middle, and far areas:

- Reconnaissance forces are deployed to distant islands, reefs, and areas around important waterways.
- Maritime militia assisting MLE forces are primarily deployed around disputed islands, reefs, and sea areas.
- Maritime militia support forces are deployed to naval stations, ports, piers, and predetermined operational sea areas.
- Emergency response forces make mobile deployments to sea areas around "traditional fishing grounds."

He opines that units could be organized according to their operational destinations: forces assigned to law enforcement and reconnaissance missions would be organized based on the sea areas in which they normally conduct productive activities. This likely means that maritime militia units composed of fishing vessels would be organized within their normal fishing areas, allowing them to be conveniently mobilized there. Conversely, maritime militia forces responsible for security or loading operations would be organized in the coastal areas in which they are needed. In accordance with this type of approach, He also proposed a mixture of stable unit organization and flowing organization: units formed out of stable enterprises would develop marine resources or work on island and reef construction, while also serving as mobile militia sentry posts in distant waters. Lastly, He discusses moving away from units that combine fishing enterprises with individual fishermen, and instead creating concentrated, linked organizations in coastal areas that contain numerous

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<sup>174</sup> He Zhixiang, "Adjusting to the Security Situation in Sea Defense—Strengthen Maritime Militia Organization."

<sup>175</sup> "三沙海上民兵连" [Sansha Maritime Militia Company], *Baidu Baike*, <http://baike.baidu.com/view/10797320.htm>.

large-scale marine enterprises, including a dispersed ad hoc method of recruiting when personnel with specialized skills are needed.<sup>176</sup>

He's views reflect the degree to which the military leadership is experimenting with different forms of maritime militia organization, as most who write on the subject use words such as “exploring” (*tansuo*) or “development path” (*jianshe zhilu*). The reality is that the maritime militia is a flexible instrument whose employment is sensibly left to the desires of the MR (now Theater Command) staff. There is no uniform model for maritime militia organization.

## Training

Training of militia is not overly intense, because of the militia members' normal “day jobs.” To compensate, the PAFD active duty personnel, cadres, battalion/company militia unit commanders, and militia information personnel receive focused training. This is essentially a matter of “training the trainers” since these individuals are expected to train individual militia members in turn. Having well-trained supervisors is necessary, because it is rare for any given region to have its entire maritime militia force available for training at a single event. For example, Mawei District was only able to train one-fourth of its emergency response militia personnel during a given exercise.<sup>177</sup> This reality of limited training availability is one reason that demobilized active duty soldiers and Party members are considered priority recruiting targets because of their exposure to following rules and regulations. If they can be recruited, they are often given positions of responsibility within the maritime militia units.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> He Zhixiang, “Discussion on the ‘Four Integrations’ in Maritime Militia Construction”; He Zhixiang, “Adjusting to the Security Situation in Sea Defense—Strengthen Maritime Militia Organization.”

<sup>177</sup> “关于做好2014年度民兵组织整顿和兵役登记工作的通知” [Notice on the Completion of 2014 Militia Reorganization and Military Service Registration Work], issued by Tingjiang Township, 12 May 2014.

<sup>178</sup> “关于印发《2015年党江镇民兵组织整顿工作实施方案》的通知” [Notice on the Issue of “Dangjiang Township 2015 Militia Consolidation Implementation Plan”], Document no. 15, issued by Dangjiang Township, 25 March 2015, <http://219.159.197.85:8080/govinfo/documentAction.do?method=toDocView&docId=059e53c4-c7a5-45d2-b58e-3720e6291dc5&moduleId=046f299f-f5c2-49c3-833c-3651c836a3d4>.

## Examples of recent maritime militia activities

The following sample set of recent maritime militia activities focuses on paramilitary functions. Therefore, it omits a large number of cases in which the maritime militia rescued other fishing and domestic vessels.

### Guangzhou MR:

May 2015 — In Guangdong Province, Jiangmen MSD organized a training exercise for the maritime militia detachments, focusing on their wartime missions. Exercises involved assembly and mobilization, maritime rights protection, patrolling, logistics, and emergency repairs of piers hit by the enemy.<sup>179</sup>

May 22, 2015 — In Hainan Province, the Dongfang City PAFD militia training base held an award ceremony for a maritime militia skills contest, granting awards to advanced units and personnel. City officials attending the event emphasized strengthening the maritime militia units and training them to become a force for protecting territorial sovereignty and maritime interests, and for supporting active duty forces.<sup>180</sup>

April 20-25, 2015 — In Hainan Province, the Danzhou City MSA assisted the city PAFD in holding a Danzhou City-wide maritime militia contest/demonstration in the basic skills of maritime rights protection. The MSA strengthened communications with the city PAFD; cooperated with port authorities; offered its own pier as the site for this activity; ensured security during the event; and made sure that the PAFD issued timely navigational warnings, provided management for transportation, and cordoned off the sea area for the activities.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> 刘方超 [Liu Fangchao], “江门军分区组织海上民兵分队开展实战训练” [Jiangmen Military Subdistrict Holds Realistic Combat Training for Maritime Militia Units], *Liberation Army Daily*, 19 May 2015, [http://www.81.cn/mb/2015-05/19/content\\_6496450.htm](http://www.81.cn/mb/2015-05/19/content_6496450.htm).

<sup>180</sup> “东方市表彰海上民兵技能比武先进个人和单位” [Dongfang City Recognition Ceremony for Maritime Militia Individual and Unit Skills Contest], Dongfang City Broadcast Station, 23 May 2015, <http://www.dongffc.cn/news/20150523/26918.html>.

<sup>181</sup> “洋浦海事局提前作好协调海上民兵比武观摩活动的准备工作” [Yangpu Maritime Safety Administration Completes Preparation Work Ahead of Coordinated Maritime Militia Training Exercise Tournament], Publicity Department of Hainan Maritime Safety Administration, 17 April 2015, [http://www.hnmsa.gov.cn/news\\_6478.aspx](http://www.hnmsa.gov.cn/news_6478.aspx).



December 2014 — Along with Sansha City’s establishment of PAFDs in Yongxing Village, North Island, as well as somewhere in the Crescent Group of the Paracels and somewhere in the Spratlys, the city also held an integrated maritime administrative law enforcement exercise involving the maritime militia, CCG, and FLE. The exercise was meant to raise the city’s capabilities in maritime administrative control, specifically focusing on inspection of illegal fishing boats and rescue operations. The exercise ended with a seven-day joint law enforcement patrol.<sup>182</sup>

August 2014 — In the Gulf of Tonkin, a maritime garrison of the South Sea Fleet organized a large-scale area defense joint exercise involving forces from the navy, naval aviation, air force, FLE, CCG, and maritime militia elements. This exercise simulated protection of a drilling rig. Exercises included joint escorting of supply ships by the PLAN and CCG, and responses to enemy incursions with multi-wave missile attacks from warplanes and missile boats. When a suspicious enemy armed fishing trawler approached the defensive lines, the command ordered a maritime militia reconnaissance boat to go out and inspect it under the over-watch of a naval submarine chaser, with a CCG patrol vessel assigned to intercept the enemy boat. Simulated frogmen heading towards the rig were dealt with by live fire from naval guns and light weapons. A nearby observation and communications station monitoring the exercise used a unified command platform to deliver early warning information to the command center.<sup>183</sup>

## Nanjing MR:

May 19, 2015 — In Zhejiang Province, the Ningbo City NDMC held a maritime mobilization “support the front” exercise. Xiangshan District’s PAFD displayed its maritime militia reconnaissance detachment, with over 182 fishing vessels forming a reconnaissance network. There were 32 “motherships” forming nodes, and 150 vessels subordinate to these motherships forming a network.<sup>184</sup>

March 2015 — In Zhejiang Province, Wenzhou MSD held “realistic” training exercises for its naval militia detachments, emphasizing informatized support using satellite

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<sup>182</sup> “中国南海四岛出现新情况: 整个南海紧张” [A New Situation on Four Chinese Islands in the South China Sea: Tension throughout the South China Sea], 10 January 2015, <http://www.junying.com/jstd/932fe5b5.html>.

<sup>183</sup> 张毅根, 何鹏责 [Zhang Yigen and He Pengze], “保护钻井平台: 军警民南海演练围歼” [Protecting the Drilling Platform: Military-Police-Civilian Exercise to Surround and Annihilate], *National Defense News*, 23 August 2014, [http://www.81.cn/jmywyl/2014-08/23/content\\_6107899.htm](http://www.81.cn/jmywyl/2014-08/23/content_6107899.htm).

<sup>184</sup> “A Thousand Vessels Go out to the Blue Territory Together,” *National Defense News*, 25 May 2015.

navigation, long-range command and control, and even new techniques to interfere with electronic surveillance.<sup>185</sup>

December 2014 — In Xiangshan Harbor, in Zhejiang Province, a reserve minesweeper unit of the East Sea Fleet organized a military-civilian minesweeping exercise, involving fishing vessels. Over the years, this unit has trained and harnessed the abilities of fishermen to deploy and sweep sea mines as well as perform reconnaissance. In a departure from the usual maritime militia nomenclature, the personnel of this force were referred to as “reservist officers and soldiers.”<sup>186</sup>

January 27, 2014 — Shanghai Jiangnan Shipyard’s maritime militia ship repair battalion held a training exercise commanded by both the city mayor and the garrison commander. Upon receiving the mobilization order from a truck-based satellite National Defense Command Center, using data stored on the National Defense Mobilization Command Information Network, orders were sent out to the mobilization group at Jiangnan Shipyard. Within three hours, 200 militia members reported for duty and set out on an East Sea Search and Rescue Bureau ship. They repaired a leak in a naval vessel; conducted firefighting, coordinated by the rescue vessel’s helicopter; and performed dredging and salvage operations for a sunken, sand-laden vessel. The units of this group had received training in repairing naval vessels and using naval tools to carry out repairs.<sup>187</sup>

September 2012 — In Jiangsu Province, Taicang City’s militia emergency response group’s recon and transport detachment responded to a distress call from two cargo vessels that had collided 80 nautical miles out. Using its “satellite navigation command system” (likely the Beidou system, which features message transmission capabilities), it located the vessels. The detachment took on the vessels’ goods and personnel, and conducted emergency repairs.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> 徐守洋, 孟晓飞 [Xu Shouyang and Meng Xiaofei], “海上支援作战能力逐浪攀升” [Maritime Support Operations Climbing the Waves], *National Defense News*, 7 April 2015.

<sup>186</sup> “东海大批渔船编入海军 条条渔船是战舰” [A Large Number of Fishing Vessels Enter the Navy in the East China Sea—Each Fishing Vessel is a Warship], 人民海军 [People’s Navy], 8 December 2014, p. 4.

<sup>187</sup> “Maritime Support the Front, Advancing toward the Deep Blue—A Record of Shanghai City’s Support the Front Maritime War Fighting Mobilization Exercise,” *National Defense News*, 27 January 2014.

<sup>188</sup> 王绍云, 王军钢, 庄明霞 [Wang Shaoyun, Wang Jungang, and Zhuang Mingxia], “江苏省太仓市打造海上民兵应急支前先锋队掠影” [Glimpse of Jiangsu Province’s Taicang City Maritime Militia Emergency Support Vanguard], *PLA Pictorial*, No. 8 (2013), <http://www.plapic.com.cn/txt/201308b/20130811-1B.html>.

## Jinan MR:

October 2014 — In Shandong Province, Rizhao City, Lanshan District, training exercises, which were arranged by the PAFD in coordination with army and navy units, involved 10 maritime militia specialized detachments utilizing various types of vessels. maritime militia recon, equipment, and technical support detachments engaged in joint training with a naval unit, and maritime militia transport and logistics detachments supported a PLA Army beach landing exercise. Military and civilian authorities jointly organized exercises for the maritime militia emergency response and rescue detachments.<sup>189</sup>

November 2013 — In Shandong Province, Weihai MSD, Rushan City, several hundred maritime militia members of the enterprise Zhengyang Group participated in an exercise “under gunfire” for loading and unloading, and rescue and repair. The group received military and civilian approval for its amphibious war-fighting capabilities. In May of that year, the city’s first marine fishing cooperative had established a “group army” out of 70 fishing vessels.<sup>190</sup>

## Incentives

Vessels mobilized for military purposes can vary widely, from fishing trawlers to oil tankers, as was recently publicized in China’s new classification standards for civilian shipbuilding. For example, Fuzhou City’s “Temporary Regulations on Fuzhou Civilian Vessel and Militia Crew Mobilization and Requisition” states that all fishing vessels of 50-ton displacements or higher must register with the city’s national defense transportation authorities.

Vessel owners complain about the opportunity cost from being held up at a dock for militia obligations. Local governments and regulations concerning vessel mobilization and requisition allow for monetary compensation to vessel owners and personnel for lost income.<sup>191</sup> To resolve the costs of the maritime militia and

<sup>189</sup> 曹树建, 刘健 [Cao Shujian and Liu Jian], “大海成为民兵练兵备战主战场” [The Seas Have Become the Main Battlefield for Militia Combat Readiness Training], *National Defense News*, 3 November 2014, [http://www.81.cn/gfbmap/content/2014-11/03/content\\_91820.htm](http://www.81.cn/gfbmap/content/2014-11/03/content_91820.htm).

<sup>190</sup> 谭磊, 于安丰, 管水锁 [Tan Lei, Yu Anfeng, and Guan Shuisuo], “千舟竞发, 护卫千里海疆安宁” [A Thousand Boats Set Off to Guard the Peace of One Thousand Li of Coast], *Liberation Army Daily*, 10 February 2014, [http://www.81.cn/jmywyl/2014-02/10/content\\_5764774\\_2.htm](http://www.81.cn/jmywyl/2014-02/10/content_5764774_2.htm).

<sup>191</sup> “福州市人民政府关于修改《福州市民用船舶和船员民兵动员征用暂行规定》的决定” [On Fuzhou City Government’s Revisions to “Temporary Regulations on Fuzhou Civilian Vessel

convince its units to sail to more distant locales such as the Spratlys, many local governments subsidize the fuel for these boats. Taishan City of Guangdong Province recently garnered considerable attention from military leaders, and received a visit from MOD Minister Chang Wanquan. In 2013, the Guangdong MD commander visited Taishan to inspect its maritime militia construction and meet with fishing representatives. That year, Taishan's city government provided 194 million RMB in fuel subsidies to its 2,650 fishing vessels (this came out to about 3,850 RMB per ton).<sup>192</sup> Hainan's famous Tanmen Village also provides fuel subsidies to its maritime militia, meant to mitigate the expense of travel to the Spratlys.

A system of rewards and publicity is set up to encourage the maritime militia, with events usually held during provincial military affairs meetings. A series of awards recognize advanced militia units, advanced captains and cadres, and other outstanding individuals; such accolades are meant to instill pride and a sense of national duty in the maritime militia. Other efforts are meant to prevent abuse or neglect of militia obligations, requiring each fishing vessel and its crew to have the appropriate certificates for national defense and mobilization. These are reviewed annually, to ensure that all the militia National Defense Obligation Certificates are up to date and sufficient. If crews violate their obligations, their fuel subsidies will be reduced or eliminated, and their fishing permits could even be cancelled.<sup>193</sup>

## Implications

China's maritime militia plays an important supporting role for the PLAN and MLE in the Yellow, East and South China Seas. It has the advantage of recruiting its members

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and Militia Crew Mobilization and Requisition"], issued by Fuzhou City Government, 14 November, 2014, <http://law.law-star.com/cac/4140096684.htm>; “广东省海上民用船舶动员征用规定”[Regulations on Guangdong Provincial Mobilization and Requisition of Civilian Marine Vessels], issued by Guangdong Provincial Government, 13 May 2002, [http://zwgk.gd.gov.cn/006939748/200909/t20090915\\_11195.html](http://zwgk.gd.gov.cn/006939748/200909/t20090915_11195.html).

<sup>192</sup> 石江龙 [Shi Jianglong], “2650艘渔船分享1.94亿燃油补贴” [2650 Fishing Vessels Receive 194 Million in Fuel Subsidies], <http://paper.oeeee.com/nis/201311/29/145728.html>; “台山市委书记张磊获得广州军区第七届“国防之星”殊荣” [Taishan City Committee Secretary Zhang Lei Receives Guangzhou Military Region's Seventh “National Defense Celebrity” Distinction], 16 June 2015, <http://news.tsbtv.tv/2015/0616/39266.shtml>; “省军区司令员台山调研海上民兵建设工作” [Provincial Military District Commander Investigates Tanshan's Maritime Militia Work], *Taishan Station*, 27 November 2013, <http://www.jmtv.cn/news/a/e/2013-11-27/1385552619943.shtml>.

<sup>193</sup> Zeng Pengxiang, Chuan Zhigang, and Lian Ronghua, “Scientifically Build a Maritime Militia Management System.”

and vessels from an enormous fishing fleet that is also routinely active in contested waters around China. The maritime militia also enjoys very high level support. For instance, in 2013, when Xi Jinping visited Qionghai City in Hainan Province, he met the maritime militia and told them that “Maritime Militia members should not only lead fishing activities, but also collect oceanic information and support the construction of islands and reefs.” He went on to also praise fishermen for protecting China’s maritime interests in the disputed waters in the South China Sea.<sup>194</sup>

Amid the rising tensions in the South China Sea and East China Sea, renewed attention is being given to the development of maritime militia. Some Chinese scholars and security experts have been advocating that maritime militia should be China’s first line of defense in the South China Sea and East China Sea.<sup>195</sup> Since Xi’s April 2013 visit to Hainan, numerous articles have been published in the *PLA Daily* and *National Defense Magazine* urging for more support to develop maritime militia forces. More financial resources were allocated to provide training for the fishermen and subsidize the building of new fishing vessels.<sup>196</sup> In the past, China’s maritime militia forces have normally relied on renting the fishing vessels of the fishermen or fishing companies, but it appears that China is building a state-owned fishing fleet for its maritime militia force in the South China Sea. China’s Hainan Province has ordered the building of 84 large militia fishing vessels for Sansha City; 10 fishing vessels were scheduled to be delivered in 2015, with 4 reportedly delivered by August 2015.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> “President Pays Visit to Hainan Fishermen,” *China Daily*, 11 April 2012, [http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/2013-04/11/content\\_16394643.htm](http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/2013-04/11/content_16394643.htm).

<sup>195</sup> Additional details at “专家：10万渔民民兵化 南海 诸国都不是对手” [Expert: 100,000 Fishermen Become Militia, South China Sea Countries Are Not Rivals], 环球时报 [Global Times], 28 June 2012, <http://mil.huanqiu.com/Observation/2012-06/2862590.html>; “将渔民编人民兵保家卫国” [Incorporating Fishermen into Militia Will Defend the Homeland], 南国都市报 [Southern Metropolis Daily], 27 January 2013, [http://ngdsb.hinews.cn/html/2013-01/27/content\\_5\\_6.htm](http://ngdsb.hinews.cn/html/2013-01/27/content_5_6.htm).

<sup>196</sup> Wang Xinhai, “推进新型海防建设军民深度融合发展的路径选择” [Paths to Push Forward New Model of Marine Border Defense and Civil Military Cooperation], *National Defense*, No. 3 (2014), <http://kns55.en.eastview.com/kcms/detail/detail.aspx?recid=&FileName=GUOF201403008&DbName=CJFD2014&DbCode=CJFD>.

<sup>197</sup> “通报市领导班子专题民主生活会情况 分析上半年工作部署下半年工作” [Circular on City Leadership’s Special Meeting on the State of Democratic Life—Analysis of Work Plan from the First and Second Half of the Year], Sansha City News Office, 24 July 2014, <http://www.sansha.gov.cn/page.php?xuh=1624>; “关于在文昌木兰头规划建设三沙战略腹地 and 民兵渔船停泊港的建议” [Proposal on the Planning of Construction of a Strategic Interior and Militia Fishing Vessel Berths for Sansha in Mulantou of Wenchang], Hainan Government Website, 12 February 2015, <http://www.hainan.gov.cn/tianprint-rdgy--5740.html>; “外媒称三沙拟建84艘大型民

The militia provides a low-tech peacetime adjunct to China's space-based surveillance systems. Since the key to what the Pentagon has called China's anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) system is the ability to closely monitor China's seaward approaches, it is hardly surprising that the PLA has elected to capitalize on the on-hand capabilities that its fishing fleet offers. In addition to the obvious surveillance advantages, other low-intensity peacetime scenarios include supporting rights protection (presence missions, obstruction, reef/island development, "cabbage strategy"-style envelopment, etc.) and dealing with fishing-fleet-related skirmishes over maritime claims. Medium-intensity scenarios could include involvement in conflicts between China and its smaller regional neighbors. In these cases, the maritime militia might be charged with greater strategic employment (mine warfare, ambush, false landings, etc.). High-intensity conflict, involving war between great powers—which is the least likely scenario to occur in practice—might witness maritime militia providing support to active duty forces (in the form of mine laying, replenishment of island bases, transport of troops and ammunition, rescue, repair, concealment, sabotage, etc.).

Given the increased focus on the maritime militia by Chinese commentators and the way it has already been employed in the seas proximate to China, it seems clear that the Maritime Militia is a key element of Beijing's overall vision of acting as a maritime power, at least in what it considers home waters. The militia work with other instruments of Chinese sea power—the military and the coast guard—to defend and advance China's position in its disputes—its maritime rights and interests. Operating in civilian fishing vessels, they allow China to be obnoxiously aggressive in the harassment of foreign fisherman and the defiance of other coast guards operating in what China considers its near seas; as the PLA's official newspaper states, "Putting on camouflage they qualify as soldiers, taking off the camouflage they become law abiding fishermen."<sup>198</sup>

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兵渔船 巩固南沙主权” [Foreign Media Say That the 84 Large Maritime Militia Fishing Vessels Will Consolidate Spratly Islands Sovereignty], 参考消息 [Reference News] via QQ News, 2 August 2015, <http://news.qq.com/a/20150802/006925.htm>.

<sup>198</sup> Cited in Andrew Erickson and Conor Kennedy, *Irregular Forces at Sea: Not merely Fishermen—Shedding Light on China's Maritime Militia*, Center for International Maritime Security (CIMSEC), November 2, 2015, <http://cimsec.org/new-cimsec-series-on-irregular-forces-at-sea-not-merely-fishermen-shedding-light-on-chinas-maritime-militia/19624>.

# Becoming a Great “Maritime Power”: A Chinese Dream

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**Approved by:**

**June 2016**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Eric Thompson', written over a horizontal line.

Dr. Eric Thompson, Vice President  
CNA Strategic Studies



## Abstract

In November 2012, then president Hu Jintao declared that China's objective was to become a strong or great maritime power. This report, based on papers written by China experts for this CNA project, explores that decision and the implications it has for the United States. It analyzes Chinese thinking on what a maritime power is, why Beijing wants to become a maritime power, what shortfalls it believes it must address in order to become a maritime power, and when it believes it will become a maritime power (as it defines the term). The report then explores the component pieces of China's maritime power—its navy, coast guard, maritime militia, merchant marine, and shipbuilding and fishing industries. It also addresses some policy options available to the U.S. government to prepare for—and, if deemed necessary, mitigate—the impact that China's becoming a maritime power would have for U.S. interests.

## Executive Summary

In late 2012 the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party announced that becoming a “maritime power” was essential to achieving national goals. This announcement was the culminating point of over a decade of careful Chinese consideration of, and appreciation for, the importance of the maritime domain to China’s continued development, to China’s security, and to China’s vision of its place in the world.

### How does China understand the idea of maritime power?

In the Chinese context, maritime power encompasses more than naval power but appreciates the importance of having a world-class navy. The maritime power equation includes a large and effective coast guard; a world-class merchant marine and fishing fleet; a globally recognized shipbuilding capacity; and an ability to harvest or extract economically important maritime resources, especially fish.

### The centrality of “power” and “control” in China’s characterization of maritime power

Many Chinese conceptualizations of “maritime power” include notions of power and control. China will not become a maritime power until it can deal with the challenges in defense of its maritime sovereignty, rights, and interests, and deal with what it terms the threat of containment from the sea.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Containment from the sea seems to be a broad characterization of how China’s sees Obama administration’s rebalance strategy in practice: strengthened alliances with U.S. Asian maritime partners, increasing the percentage of USN and USAF forces assigned to the Pacific theater, assigning the newest U.S. military equipment to the Pacific, improving relations with nations that have maritime issues with China, enhancing the maritime capabilities of China’s neighbors, growth in multi-lateral maritime exercises among China’s neighbors, and so on. This also includes American open source discussions of a maritime blockade of China in case of conflict.

China's vision of maritime power leads inevitably to the judgment that it requires strong marine defense forces—a “powerful” navy and an “advanced” maritime law enforcement force.

## Why does China want to become a maritime power?

China's strategic circumstances have changed dramatically over the past 20 years. The dramatic growth in China's economic and security interests abroad along with longstanding unresolved sovereignty issues such as unification with Taiwan and gaining complete control of land features in the East and South China Seas held by other countries demands a focus on the maritime domain. Importantly, Xi Jinping has embraced maritime power as an essential element of his “China Dream,” leading to a *Weltanschauung* within the Party and PLA that becoming a “maritime power” is a necessity for China.

## Anxiety regarding the security of China's sea lanes

China's leaders worry about the security of its seaborne trade. The prominence given to sea lane protection and the protection of overseas interests and Chinese citizens in both the 2015 defense white paper and *The Science of Military Strategy* makes clear that sea lane (SLOC) security is a major preoccupation for the PLA.

## When will China become a maritime power?

Remarks made by senior leaders since 2012 make it clear that the long-term goal is for China to be a leader across all aspects of maritime power; having some of these capabilities means that China has some maritime power but that it is “incomplete.” The research for this paper strongly suggests that China will achieve the goal of being the leading maritime power *in all areas except its navy*, by 2030.

## Is becoming a “maritime power” a credible national objective?

China is not embarking on a maritime power quest with the equivalent of a blank sheet of paper. In a few years it will have the world's second most capable navy. China is already a world leader in shipbuilding, and it has the world's largest fishing industry. Its merchant marine ranks either first or second in terms of total number of ships owned by citizens. It already has the world's largest number of coast guard vessels.

## The United States inhibits accomplishing the maritime power objective

A significant finding is that from a Chinese perspective U.S. military presence in the Western Pacific impedes Chinese maritime power ambitions. Today China judges that the United States is the only country able to prevent China from achieving its maritime power ambition. To Beijing, the U.S. rebalance strategy exacerbates this problem. For China to satisfy the maritime power objective, it must be able to defend all of China's maritime rights and interests in its near seas in spite of U.S. military presence and alliance commitments. In short, it must be able to *successfully* execute what the latest defense white paper terms "offshore waters defense" (known in the U.S. as A2/AD) for China to be considered a maritime power.

## The maritime power vision is global

A wide variety of authoritative sources indicate that maritime power will also have an important global component. The latest Chinese defense white paper indicates that PLA Navy strategy is transitioning from a single-minded focus on "offshore waters defense," to broader global strategic missions that place significant importance on "distant-water defense."

## Assessing the elements that constitute China's maritime power

### The PLA Navy (PLAN)

When one counts the number and variety of warships that the PLAN is likely to have in commission by around 2020, China will have both the largest navy in the world (by combatant, underway replenishment and submarine ship count) and the second most capable "far seas" navy in the world.

"Far seas" capable warships/CLF/submarines forecast to be in PLAN's inventory around 2020 (discussed in chapter 3) total between 95 and 104 combatants.<sup>2</sup> If one adds this number to the 175-odd warships/submarines commissioned since 2000

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<sup>2</sup> CLF stands for "combat logistics force" (underway replenishment ships).

that are largely limited to near seas operations<sup>3</sup> and likely will still be in active service through 2020, the total PLAN warship/CLF/submarine strength circa 2020 is in the range of 265-273, all of which are homeported in China.<sup>4</sup>

## How large will the PLAN become?

We don't know how large the PLAN will become. This is the biggest uncertainty when considering China's maritime power goal, because China has not revealed that number.

## The China Coast Guard (CCG)

The China Coast Guard already has the world's largest maritime law enforcement fleet. As of this writing, the Office of Naval Intelligence counts 95 large (out of a total 205) hulls in China's coast guard.<sup>5</sup> Chinese commentators believe that China cannot be considered a maritime power until it operates a "truly advanced" maritime law enforcement force. The key will be the successful integration of the discrete bureaucratic entities that have been combined to form the coast guard, and much work remains to be done on this score.

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<sup>3</sup> This number, 175, is the sum of: 9 older DDGs, 11 older FFGs, 25 older conventional submarines, 60 *Houbei* fast attack craft, 29 LSTs, and 41 of the new type 056 corvettes. "Older" here refers to those craft commissioned since 2000 but no longer in production because they have been succeeded by newer, more capable classes.

<sup>4</sup> The U.S. Navy is projected to have a force structure of around 260 similar classes of ships in 2020. If current plans are carried through, some 60 percent of the total USN, or around 156 warships and submarines, will be assigned to the U.S. Pacific Fleet by 2020. So, while the U.S. number includes many more high-end ships, the total number of combatants the PLAN would have at its disposal for a defensive campaign in East Asia is significant.

<sup>5</sup> Office of Naval Intelligence, *The PLA Navy: New Capabilities and Missions for the 21st Century*, Washington, DC, p. 18, <http://www.oni.navy.mil/Intelligence-Community/China>, and U.S. Department of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2015*, p. 44, [http://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2015\\_China\\_Military\\_Power\\_Report.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2015_China_Military_Power_Report.pdf). For comparison, the Japanese coast guard operates 54 cutters displacing more than 1,000 tons. See the Japan Coast Guard pamphlet available here: <http://www.kaiho.mlit.go.jp/e/pamphlet.pdf>. The USCG currently operates 38 cutters displacing more than 1,000 tons. See the USCG website: <http://www.uscg.mil/datasheet/>.

## The maritime militia—the third coercive element of China’s maritime power

One of the most important findings of this project is the heretofore underappreciated role that China’s maritime militia plays, especially in the South China Sea. Often, it is China’s first line of defense in the maritime arena. It has allowed China to harass foreign fishermen and defy other coast guards without obviously implicating the Chinese state.

## Shipbuilding and China as a maritime power

China became the world leader in merchant shipbuilding in 2010. For the last several years, global demand has shrunk significantly, and China now faces the reality that it must shed builders and exploit economies of scale by consolidating and creating mega-yards. In short, for China “... to move from a shipbuilding country to shipbuilding power,” it has to focus on quality above quantity.

## China’s merchant marine

China’s current merchant fleet is already world class. Beijing’s goal is to be self-sufficient in sea trade. During the past 10 years, the China-owned merchant fleet has more than tripled in size. In response to the Party’s decision for China to become a maritime power, the Ministry of Transport published plans for an even more competitive, efficient, safe, and environmentally friendly Chinese shipping system by 2020.

## China’s merchant marine is an important adjunct to the PLA

China’s merchant marine is also becoming more integrated into routine PLA operations, compensating for shortcomings in the PLA’s organic, long-distance sealift capacity. This is likely to increase as more civilian ships are built to national defense specifications and enter into the merchant fleet.

## Fishing is an element of China’s maritime power

China is by far the world’s biggest producer of fishery products (live fishing and aquaculture). It has the largest fishing fleet in the world, with close to 700,000 motorized fishing vessels, some 200,000 of which are marine (sea-going) with another 2,460 classified as distant-water (i.e., global, well beyond China’s seas) in

2014.<sup>6</sup> The fishing industry is now viewed in strategic terms; it has a major role in safeguarding national food security and expanding China's marine economy.

## Beijing's views on its maritime power: What are the shortfalls?

When one considers all the aspects of maritime power—navy, coast guard, militia, merchant marine, port infrastructure,<sup>7</sup> shipbuilding, fishing—it is difficult to escape the conclusion that China already is a maritime power, at least in sheer capacity. No other country in the world can match China's maritime capabilities across the board.

### So what is the problem?

Why do China's leaders characterize becoming a maritime power as a future goal, as opposed to asserting that China is a maritime power? Chinese experts think that China has to improve in several areas:

- The China Coast Guard needs to complete the integration of the four separate maritime law enforcement entities into a functionally coherent and professional Chinese coast guard.
- Increased demand for more protein in the Chinese diet means that the fishing industry—in particular, the distant-water fishing (DWF) component—must expand and play a growing role in assuring China's "food security."
- Chinese projections suggest that by 2030 China will surpass Greece and Japan to have the world's largest merchant fleet by DWT<sup>8</sup> and that its "international

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<sup>6</sup> "Transform Development Mode, Become a Strong Distant-water Fishing Nation," *China Fishery Daily*, 6 April 2015. Online version is available at [http://szb.farmer.com.cn/yyb/images/2015-04/06/01/406yy11\\_Print.pdf](http://szb.farmer.com.cn/yyb/images/2015-04/06/01/406yy11_Print.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> China has 6 of world's top 10 ports in terms of total metric tons of cargo (Shanghai, Guangzhou, Qingdao, Tianjin, Ningbo, and Dalian) and of 7 of the world's top 10 ports in terms of container trade, or TEUs (Shanghai, Shenzhen, Hong Kong, Ningbo, Qingdao, Guangzhou, and Tianjin). No other country has more than one. China also has 6 of 10 of the world's most efficient ports (Tianjin, Qingdao, Ningbo, Yantian, Xiamen, and Nansha). UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), *Review of Maritime Transport 2015*, [http://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/rmt2015\\_en.pdf](http://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/rmt2015_en.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> Deadweight tonnage (DWT) is a measure of how much weight a ship is carrying or can safely carry. It is the sum of the weights of cargo, fuel, fresh water, ballast water, provisions, passengers, and crew.

shipping capacity” will double, to account for 15 percent of the world’s shipping volume. China’s goal is that 85 percent of crude oil should be carried by Chinese-controlled ships. China will become the largest tanker owner by owner nationality around 2017-18.

- China’s shipbuilding sector is facing a serious period of contraction; thus, the biggest shortcoming is trying to preserve as much capacity as possible: among other things, thousands of jobs are at stake. Chinese builders are also working to ensure the future health of the industry by building economically competitive complex ships and thereby moving up the value chain.
- China’s most serious impediment to becoming a maritime power is its navy. It wants its navy to be able to control its near seas, deal with the threat of containment, defend its worldwide sea lanes, and look after global interests and millions of Chinese citizens abroad. Chinese assessments quite logically conclude that until its navy can accomplish these missions China will not be considered a maritime power.

## **When will China become the leading maritime power?**

From the perspective of spring 2016, none of these shortcomings appear insurmountable. Past performance suggests that China is likely to achieve all of its maritime power objectives, except perhaps one, sometime between 2020 and 2030.

Shortcomings in the coast guard, maritime militia, and fishing industry are likely to be rectified by around 2025. Chinese experts estimate that the merchant marine objectives will be accomplished by around 2030. China seems determined to move up the value/ship complexity scale in shipbuilding. This is will depend on the success of China’s attempts to create mega-yards to capitalize on economy of scale.

China is forecast to have a larger navy than the United States in five years or so if one simply counts numbers of principal combatants and submarines—virtually all of which will be available in East Asia, facing only a portion of the USN in these waters on a day-to-day basis. China will have a growing quantitative advantage in the Western Pacific while gradually closing the qualitative gap.

Since it is up to China’s leaders to judge when its navy is strong enough for China to be a maritime power, it is difficult to forecast a date. Their criteria for deciding when its navy meets their standards for being a maritime power are likely to revolve around several publicly stated objectives:



- *The first objective is to control waters where China’s “maritime rights and interests” are involved.* This likely means the ability to achieve “sea and air control” over the maritime approaches to China—i.e., to protect mainland China when U.S. aircraft or cruise missile shooters are close enough to attack it, probably somewhere around the second island chain.<sup>9</sup> “Near-waters defense,” known as A2/AD in the United States, is intended to defeat such an attack. A very important uncertainty is when, if ever, China’s leaders will come to believe that its navy can provide such a defense, *because the United States is actively working to ensure that it cannot.*
- *The second objective is being able to enforce its maritime rights and interests.* If one considers this to be primarily a peacetime problem set, the combination of China’s coast guard and maritime militia, backstopped by over the horizon PLAN warships, is increasingly capable of enforcing Chinese rules and regulations in its territorial seas and claimed EEZ (or within the so called nine-dash line) in the South China Sea.
- *The third objective revolves around the ability to deter or defeat attempts at maritime containment.* Maritime containment is not well defined, but is often used to characterize how China perceives the Obama administration’s rebalance strategy. Collectively, the US policy of strengthened alliances with Asian maritime partners, increasing the percentage of USN and USAF forces assigned to the Pacific theater, assigning the newest US military equipment to the Pacific, improving relations with nations that have maritime issues with China, enhancing the maritime capabilities of China’s neighbors, growth in multi-lateral maritime exercises among China’s neighbors, and so on, suggests a containment strategy. But it also appears to include a belief that the United States would attempt to blockade China in case of conflict.
  - If “maritime containment” is intended to mean a blockade, a war-time activity, the combination of the capabilities required to “control “ its

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<sup>9</sup> The goal of “control” is found in the 2004 PRC defense white paper, from the Information Office of the State Council of the PRC, December 2004, Beijing, <http://english.people.com.cn/whitepaper/defense2004>. Western naval strategists/theorists normally define “sea or air control” as being able to use the sea or air at will for as long as one pleases, to accomplish any assigned military objective, while at the same time denying use to the enemy.

maritime approaches, addressed above, plus the capabilities associated with the “open seas protection” mission addressed in chapter 3, pertain.

- But if deterring maritime containment implies a peacetime activity involving the combination of Chinese conventional and nuclear capabilities and the perception that China’s leaders have the will to act, this deterrent is already in place—and will be enhanced by its newly operational SSBN force.
- Deterring maritime containment may also address the broader political-military objective of making certain that the United States and other leading maritime powers of Asia do not establish a formal defense treaty relationship where all parties are pledged to come to the aid of one another. (This seems highly unlikely because of China’s economic power, geographic propinquity, and strategic nuclear arsenal, and because it has the largest navy in Asia.)

## Implications and policy options for the United States

### Implications

Whether it is the navy, the merchant marine, or China’s distant-water fishing fleet, the Chinese flag is going to be ubiquitous on the high seas around the world. There may be far more opportunities for USN-PLAN cooperation because the PLAN ships are far removed from Chinese home waters, where sovereignty and maritime claim disputes create a different “maritime ambiance.”

Collectively, a number of factors—the goals for more Chinese-controlled tankers and other merchant ships, the new focus on “open seas protection” (aka, far seas, what the U.S. would term “blue water”) naval capabilities, the bases in the Spratlys, Djibouti, and perhaps Gwadar, Pakistan, and the ambitious infrastructure plans associated with the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Maritime Silk Road—suggest that China is doing its best to immunize itself against attempts to interrupt its seaborne trade by either peacetime sanctions or wartime blockades.

One implication for Washington of China’s growing “open seas protection” capable ships is that U.S. authorities can no longer assume unencumbered freedom to posture U.S. naval forces off Middle East and East African hotspots if Chinese interests are involved and differ from Washington’s. Both governments could elect to dispatch naval forces to the waters offshore of the country in question.

Once the reality of a large Chinese navy that routinely operates worldwide sinks into world consciousness, the image of a PLAN “global” navy will over time attenuate perceptions of American power, especially in maritime regions where only the USN or its friends have operated freely since the end of the Cold War.

More significantly, the image of a modern global navy combined with China’s leading position in all other aspects of maritime power will make it easy for Beijing to eventually claim it has become the “world’s leading maritime power,” and argue its views regarding the rules, regulations, and laws that govern the maritime domain must be accommodated.

## Policy options

Becoming a maritime power falls into the category of China doing what China thinks it should do, and there is little that Washington could (or should) do to deflect China from its goal. The maritime power objective is inextricably linked to Chinese sovereignty concerns, real and perceived; its maritime rights and interests broadly and elastically defined; its economic development, jobs, and improved technical expertise; the centrality of fish to its food security goals; and its perception of the attributes that a global power should possess. Furthermore, it is important because the president and general secretary of the CCP has said so.

There is one aspect of Chinese maritime power that U.S. government officials should press their Chinese counterparts to address: just how large will the PLA Navy become? The lack of Chinese transparency on this fundamental fact is understandable only if Beijing worries that the number is large enough to be frightening.

Washington does have considerable leverage on the navy portion of China’s goal because of the direct relationship between the maritime power objective and its impact on America’s ability to access the Western Pacific if alliance partners or Taiwan face an attack by China. U.S. security policy should continue to focus on and resource appropriately the capabilities necessary to achieve access, or what is now known as Joint Concept for Access and Maneuver in the Global Commons (JAM-GC).<sup>10</sup>

## Conclusion

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<sup>10</sup> Sam LaGrone, “Pentagon Drops Air Sea Battle Name, Concept Lives On,” *USNI News*, January 20, 2015, <https://news.usni.org/2015/01/20/pentagon-drops-air-sea-battle-name-concept-lives>.

The only thing likely to cause China to reconsider its objective of becoming the leading maritime power is an economic dislocation serious enough to raise questions associated with “how much is enough?” This could cause a major reprioritization of resources away from several maritime endeavors such as the navy, merchant marine, and shipbuilding.

Thus, beyond grasping the magnitude and appreciating the audacity of China’s ambition to turn a country with a historic continental strategic tradition into the world’s leading maritime power, the most practical course for the United States is to ensure that in the eyes of the world it does not lose the competition over access to East Asia because without assured access the security aspects of America’s traditional strategy in East Asia cannot be executed.

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# Introduction

Michael McDevitt

In November 2012, then president Hu Jintao’s work report to the Chinese Communist Party’s 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress was a defining moment in China’s maritime history. Hu declared that China’s objective is to be a *haiyang qiangguo*—that is, a strong or great maritime power. China “should enhance our capacity for exploiting marine resources, develop the marine economy, protect the marine ecological environment, resolutely safeguard China’s maritime rights and interests, and *build China into a strong maritime power*” (emphasis added).<sup>1</sup>

Hu’s report also called for building a military (the PLA) that would be “commensurate with China’s international standing.” These two objectives were repeated in the 2012 PRC defense white paper, which was not released until April 2013, after Xi Jinping had assumed Party and national leadership.<sup>2</sup>

According to the white paper:

China is a major maritime as well as land country. The seas and oceans provide immense space and abundant resources for China’s sustainable development, and thus are of vital importance to the people’s wellbeing and China’s future. It is an essential national development strategy to exploit, utilize and protect the seas and oceans, and build China into *a maritime power*. It is an important

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<sup>1</sup> Full text of Hu Jintao’s Report at the 18th Party Congress,” Xinhua, 17 November 2012, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/special/18cpcnc/2012-11/17/c\\_131981259.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/special/18cpcnc/2012-11/17/c_131981259.htm).

<sup>2</sup> Beyond the issues of building China into a maritime power, the 2012 white paper is also important because it foreshadows the 2015 white paper by defining specific “far seas” operations for the PLA Navy: humanitarian missions, escort operations, evacuation of Chinese citizens abroad in periods of crisis or natural disaster, and joint exercises with foreign partners. Finally, the white paper provides justification for the PLA’s deployments for “diversified missions” that support China’s international standing and its security and developmental interests. See Daniel Harnett, *China’s 2012 Defense White Paper: Panel Discussion Report*, CNA China Studies, CCP-2013-U-005876 Final, September 2013, [http://www.cna.org/sites/default/files/research/ChinaStudies\\_WhitePaper.pdf](http://www.cna.org/sites/default/files/research/ChinaStudies_WhitePaper.pdf).

duty for the PLA to resolutely safeguard China's maritime rights and interests. (Emphasis added.)<sup>3</sup>

The goal of becoming a maritime power raises a number of questions related to what this aspirational goal actually means, and what the implications are for the United States as China pursues this goal. This report will explore this issue, starting with an assessment of what China's leaders mean by "maritime power."

## What is a maritime power?

As Professor Geoffrey Till has written in his well-regarded work *Sea Power*, "maritime power" and "sea power" are often vaguely defined.<sup>4</sup> Ever since Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan introduced the term "sea power" into the global security lexicon,<sup>5</sup> the precise definitions of "sea power" and of "maritime power" have been unclear, which often results in their being used interchangeably.

Today, "maritime power" is more commonly used in current Western discourse as an inherently broad concept, embracing all uses of the sea, both civil and military. In its widest sense, it can be defined as "military, political, and economic power or influence exerted through an ability to use the sea." The maritime power of a state reflects sea-based military capabilities, such as ships and submarines, as well as a range of military land-based assets and space-based systems that may or may not be operated by the navy. It also includes civilian capabilities such as a coast guard, port infrastructure, merchant shipping, fishing, and shipbuilding.<sup>6</sup>

A good example of this broad definition of maritime power was delivered during a 2003 U.S. Naval War College conference dedicated to the topic of "maritime power,"

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<sup>3</sup>See State Council Information Office, *The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces*, Beijing, April 2013. The official English translation is available at: [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-04/16/c\\_132312681.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-04/16/c_132312681.htm). Hereafter, this will be referred to as China's 2012 defense white paper. Also see Liu Cigui, "Striving to Realize the Historical Leap From Being a Great Maritime Country to Being a Great Maritime Power," *Jingji Ribao Online*, November 2012.

<sup>4</sup>Geoffrey Till, *Seapower: A Guide for the Twenty-first Century*, 3rd edition (New York: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>5</sup>Even Mahan, who coined the term "sea power," did not define it, but, in his seminal work, it was clear that he equated sea power with success in major naval battles. See Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History 1660-1783* (London: Methuen, 1965).

<sup>6</sup>The definition is drawn from a first-rate work by Dr. Ian Speller, *Understanding Naval Warfare* (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 6.

when the then commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard said that 21<sup>st</sup>-century maritime power speaks to a nation's needs beyond purely military capabilities. It includes the need to preserve maritime resources, ensure safe transit and passage of cargoes and peoples on its waters, protect its maritime borders from intrusion, uphold its maritime sovereignty, rescue the distressed that ply the oceans in ships, and prevent misuse of the oceans.<sup>7</sup>

In sum, the difference between these two concepts is that “sea power” places more emphasis on the naval dimension, whereas “maritime power” places equal emphasis on the naval and civil elements of a nation's maritime capability. As will be seen, our research indicates that this is what presidents Hu and Xi have meant when they have called for China to become a “maritime power.”

## What are China's “maritime rights and interests”?<sup>8</sup>

A phrase that appears over and over in this report is China's “maritime rights and interests.” Since the phrase first came into use in 1992 with the passage of the PRC “Territorial Sea and Contiguous Zone Law,” Chinese leaders have been talking about the importance of defending China's “maritime rights and interests.”<sup>9</sup> The term is used to link key functional and ideological maritime tasks with domestic legal authorities that in turn guide practical efforts to “build” China's maritime power.

Nearly every public recital in China about maritime power invokes China's maritime rights and interests. As indicated above, former president Hu Jintao officially linked the concepts when he enshrined maritime power as a Chinese Communist Party (CCP) priority at the 18<sup>th</sup> National Party Congress. President Xi Jinping has reiterated and intensified his predecessor's call for building maritime power and, to that end,

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<sup>7</sup>Admiral Thomas Collins, Commandant, U.S. Coast Guard, address before the International Seapower Symposium, October 27, 2003, <http://www.uscg.mil/history//CCG/collins/docs/ADISSNWClunch2003.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup>This explanation is drawn from an excellent paper on this topic by Isaac Kardon, written specifically for this project. A complete copy of the paper is found at [https://www.cna.org/cna\\_files/pdf/China-Maritime-Rights.pdf](https://www.cna.org/cna_files/pdf/China-Maritime-Rights.pdf). Isaac B. Kardon is a Ph.D. candidate in government at Cornell University and a visiting scholar at NYU Law's U.S.-Asia Law Institute in 2015-2016.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Bickford, Fred Vellucci, Jr., and Heidi Holz, *China as a Maritime Challenge: The Strategic Dimension*, CNA Research Memorandum D0023549.A3/1 Rev, October 2010.

has mobilized the state to take active “countermeasures to safeguard our nation’s maritime rights and interests.”<sup>10</sup>

Essentially, China’s promotion of its maritime rights and interests is an important facet of its efforts to economically develop, legally regulate, and effectively control ocean areas under its claimed jurisdiction. Pursuing these goals entails efforts to “perfect” China’s maritime legal, regulatory, and administrative framework, which are then enacted in the form of national legislation, administrative regulation, and departmental rules,<sup>11</sup> that in turn become the source and justification for various maritime legal laws and assertions of sovereignty, jurisdiction, and physical control.

The ability to protect China’s maritime rights is considered essential to becoming a maritime power. In fall 2013, one official from the State Oceanic Administration (SOA) wrote, “The most important prerequisite for the building of a maritime power is to...*protect the nation’s maritime rights and interests from being violated*. If our nations core maritime interests and the basic maritime rights and interests cannot be effectively protected, there is no way to talk about building a maritime power.”<sup>12</sup> Chinese leaders treat the protection of maritime rights and interests as a *necessary condition* for becoming a maritime power. Chinese officials, experts, media, and semi-informed citizens routinely cite maritime rights and interests as the key component of maritime power.

## How this report was assembled

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<sup>10</sup> “Xi Jinping at the 8th Study Session of the Central Committee Political Bureau emphasized unceasingly making new achievements towards cultivating greater maritime consciousness and strategic management of the seas, and pushing through the construction of maritime power,” *Renmin Ribao* (August 1, 2013), [http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2013-08/01/nw.D110000renmrb\\_20130801\\_2-01.htm](http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2013-08/01/nw.D110000renmrb_20130801_2-01.htm).

<sup>11</sup> These are listed in order of their formal authority. National legislation is below only the constitution in the hierarchy, followed by administrative regulations for implementing legislation formulated by the State Council, and then rules promulgated by departments. Various other legal instruments can be created at local levels within the legal authorities granted at the national level. See Guifang Xue, *China and International Fisheries Law and Policy* (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2005), p. 79, for a helpful chart and primer on the Chinese legal system, especially as it pertains to maritime laws and regulations.

<sup>12</sup> Liu Kefu, “以三重保护力度推进海洋强国建设” [Push Forward the Construction of Maritime Power with Threefold Efforts], *Zhongguo Haiyangbao*, 17 September 2013: 1.

investigation into China's goal of becoming a maritime power. The first and most important aspect of the project was assembling a team of credible experts to look into the various facets of maritime power and commissioning them to produce comprehensive papers on their respective topics. The papers upon which each chapter is drawn from were presented at a conference held at CNA in 2015, and are posted on the CNA website <https://www.cna.org/news/events/China-Maritime-Power-Conference>. This report is based on these papers, each of which has been abridged by the project director in order to keep the final size of the report to a manageable length.

The project director, CNA Senior Fellow Michael McDevitt, contributed report chapters on the PLA Navy's growing far seas capabilities and on China's shipbuilding industry, as well as the findings and recommendations. His CNA colleagues Dr. Thomas Bickford and Mr. Alan Burns made essential contributions on the China's maritime power goal and the PLA Navy. A former CNA colleague, Mr. Dennis Blasko covered China's merchant marine. Mr. Isaac Kardon, who recently joined the talented team at the U.S. Naval War College's China Maritime Institute (CMSI), analyzed the concept of China's maritime rights and interests. Also from CMSI, Mr. Ryan Martinson wrote a needed exploration of the China Coast Guard. Another CMSI contribution was the paper by Dr. Andrew Erickson and Mr. Conor Kennedy on China's maritime militia, a heretofore underappreciated component of Chinese maritime power in its near seas. Finally, China's fishing industry was expertly addressed by Mr. Zhang Hongzhou, an associate research fellow with the China Programme at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

## What this report covers

This report explores the implications that the Chinese leadership's decision to become a "maritime power" will have for the United States. It takes three main steps: (1) it determines how China understands maritime power; (2) it parses the notion of being a "maritime power" into its component pieces and examine each piece in detail, including a judgment of China's standing today relative to other countries as well as its ambitions for the future; and (3) it presents findings and reach judgments on what this ambition means for the United States and its sea-faring allies and friends. What will Chinese maritime power, as China itself defines it, mean for the United States, and what policy options are available to the U.S. government (USG) to prepare for and, if deemed necessary, mitigate the impact on U.S. interests of a China that has become a recognized "maritime power"?

Because China's leadership is not claiming that China is a maritime power today, and has established maritime power as an aspirational goal, an important aspect of the

project will involve establishing what China thinks it requires in order to achieve this goal. In several aspects of maritime power, such as its fishing fleet, merchant marine, and shipbuilding base, our research indicates that China is already world class.