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# Fact Sheet: The People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia (PAFMM)

2010年10月, 60年一遇的特大暴雨使潭门镇变成了一片“泽国”, 港内68艘渔船被洪水冲走, 上百名群众被困。危难关头, 该连党支部站了出来, 发动党员骨干、渔民群众迅速形成合力, 组成3支应急分队, 顶着风浪, 冒着大雨,



Maritime militia forces at review in Tanmen, Hainan, 2010 (file image)

BY **ANDREW S. ERICKSON** (<https://www.maritime-executive.com/author/andrew-s-erickson>) 2019-04-30 13:50:57

*To distill five years of research on China's maritime militia into actionable policy recommendations, the author offers the following memorandum, which he proposes to be issued with official U.S. government authority.*

As the [National Security Strategy](https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf) (<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>) of the United States of America 2017 emphasizes, China is engaged in continuous competition with America—neither fully “at peace” nor “at war.” Per this national guidance, we will raise our competitive game to meet that challenge, in part by addressing the potential risks to U.S. interests and values posed by all three Chinese sea forces: the Navy, Coast Guard, and Maritime Militia. In terms of ship numbers, each is the largest of its type in the world.

While virtually unique and publicly obscure, China's Maritime Militia is known clearly (<http://media.defense.gov/2018/Aug/16/2001955282-1-1/1/2018-CHINA-MILITARY-POWER-REPORT.PDF>) to the U.S. government, which monitors it closely. A component of the People's Armed Forces, it operates under a direct military chain of command (<http://www.andrewerickson.com/wp->

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[content/uploads/2017/03/Naval-War-College\\_CMSI\\_China-Maritime-Report\\_No-1\\_People%E2%80%99s-Armed-Forces-Maritime-Militia-Tethered-to-the-PLA\\_Kennedy-Erickson\\_201703.pdf](#)) to conduct state-sponsored activities. The PAFMM is locally supported, but answers to the very top of China's military bureaucracy: Commander-in-Chief Xi Jinping himself.

China employs the PAFMM in gray zone operations, or "[low-intensity maritime rights protection struggles](#) ([http://www.wanfangdata.com.cn/details/detail.do?\\_type=perio&id=gf201701008](http://www.wanfangdata.com.cn/details/detail.do?_type=perio&id=gf201701008))," at a level designed to frustrate effective response by the other parties involved. China has used it to advance its disputed sovereignty claims in international sea incidents throughout the South and East China Seas. This undermines vital American interests in maintaining the regional status quo, including the rules and norms on which peace and prosperity depend.


PAFMM units have participated in manifold maritime incidents in the South and East China Seas. Publicly-documented examples include China's 1974 seizure of the Western Paracel Islands from Vietnam; 1978 swarming into the Senkaku Islands' territorial sea; involvement in the occupation and development of Mischief Reef resulting in a [1995 incident](#) (<http://cimsec.org/frontier-frontline-tanmen-maritime-militias-leading-role-pt-2/25260>) with the Philippines; harassment of various Vietnamese government/survey vessels, including the *Bin Minh* and *Viking*; harassment of [USNS Impeccable \(2009\)](#) (<http://cimsec.org/chinas-daring-vanguard-introducing-sanya-citys-maritime-militia/19753>) and [Howard O. Lorenzen \(2014\)](#) ([http://jsnews.jschina.com.cn/nt/a/201705/t20170516\\_509602.shtml](http://jsnews.jschina.com.cn/nt/a/201705/t20170516_509602.shtml)); participation in the [2012 seizure](#) (<http://cimsec.org/model-maritime-militia-tanmens-leading-role-april-2012-scarborough-shoal-incident/24573>) of Scarborough Reef from the Philippines and [2014 blockade](#) (<http://www.andrewerickson.com/2017/02/china-open-source-example-proposal-to-hainan-government-reveals-maritime-militia-activities/>) of Second Thomas Shoal; [2014 repulsion](#) (<http://cimsec.org/frontier-frontline-tanmen-maritime-militias-leading-role-pt-2/25260>) of Vietnamese vessels from disputed waters surrounding CNOOC's *HYSY-981* oil rig; [large surge](#) (<http://www.andrewerickson.com/2018/08/pentagon-releases-2018-china-military-report-u-s-governments-most-extensive-public-coverage-yet-of-chinas-maritime-militia/>) of ships near the Senkakus in 2016 and layered "cabbage-style" envelopment of the Philippines-claimed Sandy Cay shoal near Thitu Island, where China has sustained a presence of at least two PAFMM vessels since August 2017.

The elite units engaged in these incidents incorporate [marine industry workers](#) ([https://www.cna.org/cna\\_files/pdf/Chinas-Maritime-Militia.pdf](https://www.cna.org/cna_files/pdf/Chinas-Maritime-Militia.pdf)) (e.g., fishermen) directly into China's armed forces. While retaining day jobs, they are organized and trained in the PAFMM and often by China's Navy, and [activated on demand](#) ([https://dnnlgwick.blob.core.windows.net/portals/0/NWCDepartments/China%20Maritime%20Studies%20InsForce\\_The\\_Peoples\\_Armed\\_Forces\\_Maritime\\_Militia\\_Tethered\\_to\\_the\\_PLA\\_FINAL.pdf?sr=b&si=DNNFileManagerPolicy&sig=Jd%2FG7I74zZfSYfemEPihVfZYRIW6jX7%2FhOGp7m5B3nQ%3D](https://dnnlgwick.blob.core.windows.net/portals/0/NWCDepartments/China%20Maritime%20Studies%20InsForce_The_Peoples_Armed_Forces_Maritime_Militia_Tethered_to_the_PLA_FINAL.pdf?sr=b&si=DNNFileManagerPolicy&sig=Jd%2FG7I74zZfSYfemEPihVfZYRIW6jX7%2FhOGp7m5B3nQ%3D)). Since 2015, starting in Sansha City in the Paracels, China has been developing more professionalized, militarized, well-paid [full-time units](#) (<http://cimsec.org/riding-new-wave-professionalization-militarization-sansha-citys-maritime-militia/27689>) including military recruits, crewing [84 purpose-built vessels](#) (<http://www.andrewerickson.com/2016/08/china-open-source-example-big-plans-for-maritime-militia-base-buildup-as-seen-from-a-government-proposal-document/>) with mast-mounted water cannons for spraying and reinforced steel hulls for ramming. Lacking fishing responsibilities, personnel train for peacetime and wartime contingencies, including with light arms, and deploy regularly to disputed South China Sea features even during fishing moratoriums.

There is no plausible deniability: the PAFMM is a [state-organized, -developed, and -controlled force](#) (<https://nationalinterest.org/feature/exposed-pentagon-report-spotlights-china%E2%80%99s-maritime-militia-29282>) operating under a direct military chain of command to conduct Chinese state-sponsored activities. From now on, the United States expects all three Chinese sea forces—including the PAFMM—to abide at all times by the same internationally-recognized standards of law, seamanship, and communications to which U.S. maritime forces adhere; including the International Collision Regulations (COLREGS) and other international regulations governing allowable conduct by ships at sea.

Bottom line: Henceforth, the United States will not tolerate any attempt by the PAFMM to interfere with or compromise the safety, operations, or mission accomplishment of any U.S. government vessel.

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*This editorial appears courtesy of Dr. Erickson and may be found in its original form [here](http://www.andrewerickson.com/2019/04/fact-sheet-chinas-maritime-militia/) (<http://www.andrewerickson.com/2019/04/fact-sheet-chinas-maritime-militia/>).*

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