The Chinese Militia

CITIZEN-SOLDIERS AND CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

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Located at the interface of civil-military relations, the militia has occupied a delicate and frequently controversial position in the People's Republic of China (PRC). It is ironic that this situation should exist in a society characterized by a high degree of overlap between civil and military leadership. Available evidence suggests that these controversies have arisen because of ambiguities in the role of the militia and that these ambiguities, in turn, have been brought about by the interaction of three factors: first, ideological principles contained in the Marxist-Leninist canon; second, the developmental pattern of the Chinese revolution, and third, elite politics within the PRC. This article will describe these three factors, analyze their interactions, and assess their impact on civil-military relations in the PRC.

Ideology

Early communist theorists considered professional armies to be tools through which the ruling classes sought to keep themselves in power. They believed that socialist societies could best be defended by locally recruited militias. Trained in the martial arts at the same time as they participated in the economic activities of peacetime society, these citizen-soldiers would fight outside enemies with a spirit which could not be matched by that of any professional army. Since they were

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defending their own families and homes, amateurs were believed capable of overcoming even modern armies equipped with more sophisticated equipment.[1] Thus, the existence of a militia was considered a significant part of a socialist state and an important guarantee of its safety not only from outside attack, but from takeover by a professional military from within.

Development of the Chinese Communist Revolution

The idea of reliance on the armed masses had considerable appeal for leaders of the nascent Chinese Communist Party (CCP). In the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century environment that formed these leaders' frame of reference, standing armies had not served China well. Incapable of defending the country from foreign invasion, they were a domestic scourge as well. For several decades after the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911, large parts of China were ruled by warlords. Acting in frequently shifting coalitions, warlords fought one another for territorial gain. Their armies regularly looted and pillaged the areas through which they passed.

The CCP considered the training and organization of militarily skilled and politically aware citizens important not only for external defense, but also for internal revolution. The National Institute of the Peasant Movement, set up in Guangzhou (Canton) in the early 1920s and much celebrated in party mythology, included military training on its curriculum. And Mao Zedong's widely read 1927 *Report of an Investigation into the Peasant Movement in Hunan* advocated the destruction of landlords' power by armed peasant groups. Groups of armed peasants, workers, and students were established by CCP organizers in various parts of China, and during 1927, they launched a series of insurrections. The failure of any of these insurrections to consolidate gains for the revolution convinced many Chinese leaders that victory could not be won without a regularized, professional military. In due consequence, the Chinese Workers' and Peasants' Red Army was founded.

Army and militia were to fight a united People's War against the class enemies. While some differences of opinion must have arisen concerning the division of labor between army and militia, the common dangers of their situation and their belief in a common revolutionary goal served to

mute many of the disagreements. The CCP's very survival was in doubt during this period, and neither army nor militia achieved spectacular gains.

In 1936, the CCP's collusion in a daring and successful attempt to kidnap Chinese president Chiang Kai-shek led to Chiang's Guomindang (GMD) government's granting a degree of legitimacy to the CCP. Ostensibly, the purpose was to encourage the CCP to fight China's Japanese occupiers, and this in turn facilitated the growth of both the party's regular army and its militia organizations. America's declaration of war on Japan after Pearl Harbor left the CCP and GMD freer to fight one another, and the communist militia played a significant part in what became known as the War of Liberation. Militia groups mounted guerilla operations in support of the regular army, provided the army with rear services, and served as a source of recruits.

During this period, the militia was divided into two segments, an elite main force group and the ordinary militia, which was known as the People's Self-Defense Corps. Communist sources credit the militia with an important part in achieving victory in the War of Liberation and an important role in the strategy of People's War.

Chinese Elite Politics and the Role of the Militia

Disagreement over the role and usefulness of the militia has apparently existed since its inception, with the first head of the CCP, Chen Duxiu, accused of disbanding armed groups of peasants and workers (probably on orders from the Soviet Union, which wished to form an alliance with the GMD) and handing their weapons over to "reactionaries."[2] At a later date, Mao Zedong was credited with "correctly solving a series of problems" concerning the building and operations of the militia system.[3]

However, the organization of the militia, like many of the arrangements under which the CCP waged its war for control of China, was often of necessity ad hoc and informal. It was not until the war had been won and the PRC founded that the party confronted the problem of formalizing and institutionalizing the role of the militia. Questions concerning this role have led to frequent disagreements among ranking members of the PRC elite. Typically these disagreements reflect underlying ideological differences with significance far beyond the militia

itself. At the same time, they have led to profound changes in the composition and function of the militia forces. While virtually no facet of militia work has been exempt from these controversies, disagreements have tended to cluster around three principal issues: first, command and control; second, the proper mix of civilian and military functions; and third, the optimum size for the militia.

Command and Control

Command and control issues have focused on the mix of powers that party and military are to exercise, separately or concurrently, over the militia. Subsidiary issues have concerned the degree of central versus local control and the matter of control over weapons.

Theoretically, the issue of party versus army control of the militia should not arise. The party's authority is supreme, as enshrined in Mao Zedong's phrase, "The party must always control the gun; the gun must never control the party." In reality, the party's supremacy is less clear-cut. While the party sets general guidelines for militia work and reviews the militia's nonmilitary functions, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) must train the militia, supervise and control its equipment and inventories, and inspect the militia's performance. Thus, a dual system of control exists.

This duality is faithfully reflected in the militia chain of command. The Mobilization Department of the PLA oversees militia work. The commander of a military district—generally coterminous with a province in area—directs militia operations, while the provincial party secretary serves as political commissar of the district and assists in militia work. The same is true at the military subdistrict level.

At the county level and below, militia work is supervised by People's Armed Forces Departments (PAFDs), whose commanders are usually PLA officers appointed by the military district. The PAFDs also have party representation as well as that of local civilian authorities. However, the PAFD is an element in the military chain of command; party directives are transmitted to the PAFD through the party's Political Officers Department at any given level in the administrative hierarchy. The PAFDs serve as local command, administrative, and supply organs for the militia; they are also responsible for militia conscription and veterans' affairs.

In this dual system, either party or army may seek to enlarge its sphere of influence at the expense of the other. So also may the local

area. PAFDs have frequently become quite independent of any higher authority: While dutifully repeating party and PLA directives, they tend to interpret these directives in light of perceived local needs. Often, senior military officials have had to be dispatched to PAFDs to bring their behavior into line with the standards laid down at higher levels.

Although this command and control system generally describes militia organization since the founding of the PRC, several interesting variations have occurred in response to differences within the elite group over the proper role of the militia. For example, in 1958, with China embarking on a massive, radical socioeconomic experiment known as the Great Leap Forward, control over the militia was transferred from the PLA to the CCP. The PAFDs, their functions gone, disappeared from mention and seem to have been abolished. Mass media criticized the then-minister of defense Peng Dehuai for his handling of militia work. It appeared that this shift from army to party control was part of radicals' efforts to undercut the power of moderate, professionally oriented military officers and enlist the militia in its socioeconomic program.

There is no evidence that the military was opposed to devolution of its responsibilities to the militia. On the contrary, professionally oriented elements within the PLA tended to regard militia work as burdensome and a waste of time. While relieved to be rid of this burden, these professionally oriented elements are also known to have opposed many of the Great Leap Forward's programs, and doubtless also disapproved of the use of the militia and PLA in support of these programs.

The Great Leap Forward proved an abject failure, resulting in several years of economic crisis and social chaos. Central control over the militia by either party or army virtually disappeared. Food shortages were severe and widespread, the first priority of most of China's citizens was survival. At this point, local and personal interests became dominant; some militia organizations disbanded so that their members could tend to farming. Other militia groups stayed together and, using militia weapons, attacked government warehouses or the fields of neighboring areas in search of food.

A reassertion of central control over the militia was clearly called for. Eventually, after several years and considerable effort, this was accomplished—only to reopen the question of party versus army control.

In December 1959, a three-year program for improving the organization of the military was announced, with the consolidation of militia work as one of its aims. A few months later, in April 1960, a national conference on militia work was convened. Here Lin Biao, who had replaced Peng Dehuai as defense minister, launched a movement to

rectify the militia. In January 1961, the party's Military Commission issued a directive calling for, among other items, strict central control over the utilization of the militia, thorough accounting for militia supplies and weapons, and consolidation of militia organization. That such a directive should be needed seems to indicate that previous efforts to assert central control had had limited success. In 1962, control of the militia was removed from the party and returned to the army.[4]

However, during the following year, public security forces began to assist in militia training, and the amount of time the militia devoted to political work increased. Both these changes indicate efforts to bring the militia more under party control. These efforts continued until the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, after which it became difficult to tell who controlled the militia.

The official media reported militia groups supporting Mao Zedong and pro-Cultural Revolution elements that were loyal to him. However, other evidence indicates that militia units frequently acted in support of local causes which might or might not reflect the ideas of radical party ideologues in Beijing. Many years later, Beijing Radio praised the militia of a certain county in Shaanxi province because it had *not* entered the area's towns during the Cultural Revolution to cause trouble[5]—the implication being that the opposite phenomenon had been prevalent at that time.

However loyal militia members may have wished to be, lines of authority were highly confused during the Cultural Revolution, and it was difficult to judge to whom one's loyalty was due. Militia groups took part in factional fighting, sometimes on their own initiative, sometimes on party orders, and sometimes in response to military directions. Militia weapons were extensively used in support of factional fighting and became accessible to nonmilitia members as well. In light of allegations that would be made many years later about this period, it is interesting to note that several recorded examples of militia misbehavior occurred in or near Shanghai.[6]

One effort to rein in this chaos involved putting the militia under army control again. During a rather brief period in 1967 known as the "February adverse current" or the "evil wind of March," the army attempted to use the militia to shore up the country's faltering economy. However, the "adverse current" was reversed during the early spring, with militia groups reportedly hijacking trains and looting PLA arsenals for weapons. Several attempts were made to confiscate militia weapons, but with no discernible results. In some parts of the country, it was simply not feasible to try: Where the Cultural Revolution decimated

public security functions, militia units sometimes took over these functions. Here, possession of weapons often enhanced the militia's effectiveness.

During the show trial of radicals held in late 1980, the prosecution charged that the radical group known as the Gang of Four had begun in 1967 to organize the militia as its own armed force. The Gang allegedly tried to use the militia to implement radical policies, since it felt that the army opposed these policies.[7] However, whatever the intent of radical leaders during this period, the militia did not assume a clear-cut role in the Cultural Revolution.

Eventually the army was used to restore order, and it emerged from the Cultural Revolution in a strong position not only with regard to the militia, but also in terms of its place in society as a whole. As a result, the army had become deeply involved in maintaining social order, eclipsing any role the militia may have played in public security functions during the latter part of the Cultural Revolution. The militia, in fact, was scarcely mentioned in 1968 and received attention in official media only after border clashes with the Soviet Union in 1969 heightened Chinese fears of attack by the USSR. Not surprisingly, these newly important militia units were very much under army control.

This remained the case until the autumn of 1973, when yet another shift to party control occurred. Joint editorials in the *People's Daily* and *Liberation Army Daily*—the official party and army publications, respectively—called for local party committees forcefully to reassert direct control over the militia.[8] As before, there is no record of army resistance to this reassertion of party control. PAFDs were abolished and their functions were assumed by party organs. Militia headquarters were created in major cities, and there were plans to create a militia command at national level as well.

The precise degree of control exercised by the party over these militia headquarters is unknown. While the radical elements in the Chinese leadership who advocated this reassertion of party control insist that the militia headquarters were under party control, their moderate opposition sees the militia headquarters as tools of radicals rather than of the party and views the headquarters as subversive rather than constructive in aim. Both sides agree, however, that the radicals aimed at ending the army's control over the militia. The carefully contrived evidence presented at the 1980 show trial that China's moderates held to convict leading radicals quoted one defendant as having said, in March 1974, "The army must not be allowed to lead the militia, whose command should be in the hands of the municipal party committee."[9] Two years

later, he allegedly added, "I'm certainly going to keep firm control over [the militia]. You must run it well for me. . . . The army isn't so reliable."[10]

In the view of radicals, the strong position the military had held in the PRC power structure since the Cultural Revolution was being used to buttress moderate, ideologically unacceptable economic and social policies. Thus, radicals saw their mission as returning power in China to the party, to which it clearly and rightfully belonged, and hoped to use a militia that had been strengthened and removed from military domination as a tool to this effect.

The mid-1970s saw considerable tension between the army, supported by moderate Vice-Premier Deng Xiaoping, and the militia, championed by the radical Gang of Four. For example, in August 1975, the New York *Times* reported that Deng had ordered the PLA in the coastal city of Hangzhou to put down a militia disturbance there. After considerable difficulty, the army succeeded in disarming and disbanding the militia.[11]

By contrast, Deng's purge in the wake of violent demonstrations in Beijing's Tiananmen Square in April 1976 led to a much greater role for the militia. The militia was in fact touted as the savior of the Tiananmen riots, while Deng's steadfast opposition to the creation of militia headquarters was listed among his many traitorous acts. Following Deng's removal from office, Taiwanese sources reported that radical-led militia units were replacing PLA personnel on garrison duty in Beijing.[12] At the same time, Soviet sources charged that radical leaders were using the militia in opposition to the regular army.[13] While one must be wary of both Taiwanese and Soviet interpretations of the PRC, these particular reports are corroborated by statements made by official Chinese sources during the 1980 trial of radical leaders.

The issue of who was to control the militia was joined again after Mao's death in September 1976, and the radicals were clearly the losers. Their leaders were taken into custody during the weeks following Mao's death, and the militia was temporarily disbanded. Several months later, a very different organization began to emerge, with militia headquarters abolished and PAFDs revived. At the same time, Deng Xiaoping returned to a position of power.

In 1978 a national-level militia conference convened in Beijing. New militia regulations that reestablished the dual system of control by party and army were issued. Local party committees and military regions were admonished to pay attention to militia work and to exercise unified leadership over it.[14]

This remains the situation at present writing. However, both the militia conference and several subsequent pronouncements left little doubt that neither party nor army is especially enthusiastic to shoulder the burdens of militia work. As phrased by Politburo member Nie Rongzhen:

> All local party committees must attach importance to militia work, place it among the most important items on their agendas, and effectively strengthen leadership. . . . Some [PLA] comrades . . . feel that to do militia work means they are inferior to others and that it means a lack of faith in them by their organizations.[15]

Repeated admonitions that party and military organs must pay strict attention to militia work seem to indicate that, despite central government pronouncements and formal organizational charts, the system of dual control does not accurately describe reality in a significant number of cases. With both army and party seemingly indifferent, an important portion of militia command and control may devolve on the local area, as has happened many times in the past. As we shall see below, there is in fact evidence that this may be occurring.

Civilian versus Military Functions

In theory, the militia member is both civilian and soldier—a productive member of society in peacetime and a valiant warrior in time of hostilities. This is epitomized in party slogans describing militia members as striding forward "with a rifle on one shoulder and a shovel on the other." In reality, the functions of the militia are much more complex.

To extend the party's metaphor, it is difficult to aim one's rifle accurately with a shovel on one shoulder, and hard to do farmwork while carrying a gun. To be ready for war implies a fairly rigorous and systematic peacetime training program. But to participate in such training means time must be taken away from production work. How the militia member shall be compensated for the time spent on training, and whether this training increases the state's security to a degree at least equal in value to the goods and services the trainees would have produced had they remained at their jobs, have been recurrent questions during the past thirty-odd years.

Militia members have traditionally been expected to perform a variety of both military and nonmilitary tasks. In time of hostilities, they

are expected to provide mass support for the army and to mount mobile, guerilla-type operations. Both tasks are integral parts of Mao Zedong's concept of People's War, and indeed it is in official descriptions of People's War that the militia's place in party mythology has been enshrined. The militia is considered a bridge between the people and the army. As such, its members are to provide reserves for regular troops and to serve these troops in an auxiliary capacity. In the latter role, they may transport supplies to troops, serve as guides in their local areas, give medical treatment to the wounded, and guard prisoners. In areas further removed from battle lines, militia members are to secure lines of communication against sabotage and enemy attack, organize the civilian population against air attack, and assist in such recuperation and evacuation efforts as may be needed after such attacks.

During peacetime, militia members are expected to play leading roles in increasing production and to perform public security duties. Militia members are frequently called upon to serve as a shock force in a drive to increase production and to render aid in time of emergencies, such as earthquakes or floods. Their public security duties require them to coordinate with PLA and regular public security departments; to perform guard duty at border areas, warehouses, and factories; and to report suspicious persons, prevent sabotage, suppress rebellion, and the like. Militia have a political-ideological role as well: They are to promulgate and conform to whatever may be the current party line. At the same time, militia members are expected to carry out normal work activities.

Clearly, it is impossible to play this wide variety of roles with any degree of skill, and the militia has been criticized frequently for its deficiencies. Lin Biao, who was Mao Zedong's designated heir from the Cultural Revolution period until his death in 1971, allegedly felt that the militia was "a heap of loose flesh," and the Gang of Four is said to have described its composition as "officers sitting on a wall and soldiers trained in a chest of drawers."[16] Many efforts have been made to remedy these deficiencies; all have involved making choices concerning which roles of the militia to emphasize and, by implication, which to downgrade in importance. Any particular choice of roles is apt to be criticized by the enemies of those leaders responsible for making the choices.

Given the CCP's victory over Chiang Kai-shek in 1949, it is hardly surprising that the militia's domestic tasks are emphasized over their military duties. Militia members helped to implement the sweeping reforms the CCP introduced into most areas of the Chinese socioeconomic system. Some also served as "volunteers" in the Korean War and

helped to suppress internal resistance from those who continued to oppose a communist government.

Regulations passed in 1957 changed the militia's role from basically domestic to predominantly military. In effect, the militia became the reserve force for the PLA, being assigned both those young people who were eligible for the PLA but not selected for service and those who had served their tour of duty with the PLA. The change from civilian to military emphasis reflects the increased concern with military professionalism generally associated with then-Defense Minister Peng Dehuai.

The militia's role as reserve force for the PLA was short-lived. In 1958, when radical leaders introduced their Great Leap Forward program, the role of the militia shifted again. Radicals considered mass mobilization the crucial element in tackling most of China's problems, whether domestic or foreign, and the militia was expected to play an important part in both. Domestically, the "everyone a soldier" campaign emphasized the militia's role in increasing production. In foreign policy, radical leaders assessed that the world balance was shifting toward socialist countries and adopted a much more militant stance toward "decadent" capitalist states. Considering military professionalism tainted by association with bourgeois capitalism, radicals touted the superiorities of People's War as fought by armed civilians. These developments again enhanced the role of the militia, albeit not in a way that emphasized training or war-preparedness.

The collapse of the Great Leap Forward and the reassignment of the militia to army control did not, as might have been expected, lead to an emphasis on military training for the militia. Military training *was* given to the militia; official media reported marksmanship competitions and demonstrations of martial skills. But the main focus of militia work was on activities designed to increase production.

In part this focus reflected the exigencies of China's situation at the time. The Great Leap Forward had devastated the PRC's economy, and it was absolutely necessary to revive the production system that serviced the daily needs of the country's population. However, this reduced military role for China's militia also reflects the army leadership's feeling that time spent training the militia was time lost from other activities that were more beneficial to the national defense. Advocates of military professionalism again predominated in leadership positions, and they tended to consider the militia of marginal value.

The Socialist Education Movement of the mid-1960s led to a downgrading of production-related activities in favor of emphasizing the ideological role of the militia. Radical elements were gaining power;

they tended to consider the internal political role of the militia of foremost importance. Ideological education occupied a much larger part of militia members' time than previously, and more attention was given to the public security duties of the militia. The underlying premise was that, when ideologically purified, the militia would be equipped to perform internal surveillance functions.

Radicals were opposed to militia contests and demonstrations of skill, believing them to be manifestations of the "bourgeois military line." The competitions ceased, although, paradoxically, official propaganda gave increased attention to the role of the militia in time of war. This apparent contradiction has a ready explanation: Although militia *competitions* were ideologically unacceptable to radicals because they represented bourgeois military professionalism, radicals were firm believers in the principles of People's War, in which the militia plays an important part.

Radicals' pronouncements on the military value of the militia were not meant exclusively as assertions of ideological principle aimed at a domestic audience. The concept of the unassailability of a China defended by scores of millions of stalwart militia members was also useful internationally during the 1960s. Should the American imperialists desire to extend their aggression from Vietnam to the PRC, they were forewarned that the valiant Chinese militia awaited them.

The greater the defense role given to an armed citizenry, the less the prestige of the regular army—in particular, the less the prestige of a professionally oriented, highly specialized army equipped with modern weapons. That we know of no instance of the PLA protesting this diminution of its role may simply mean that its protests were delivered privately. However, the PLA was itself highly politicized during this period. The military rank system was abolished in 1965 and emphasis was placed on the PLA's role in civilian society, its duties toward the masses, and the folly of relying on advanced technology rather than ideological purity to win wars. Many professionally oriented officers were purged or demoted. Thus the PLA's seeming indifference to its diminished role vis-à-vis the militia may also reflect changes in its structure, which brought to power less professionally oriented people—people who were more in sympathy with the concept of citizen soldiery.

The Cultural Revolution, which followed close on the heels of the Socialist Education Movement, intensified the changes brought by the latter. Save for a brief period in 1967 when the army was put in command of the militia and attempted to use it to repair damages to the country's faltering economy, the militia was utilized in ideological education and public security duties; the value of People's War and the

importance of the militia's role therein were stressed. It was apparently also at this time that radicals came to reorganize Chinese society in line with revolutionary principles and that they first devised their plan to make the militia a counterforce to the PLA. Given the strong position the PLA attained as a result of the Cultural Revolution, plus Mao's dictum that the party must always control the military, this use of a radicalized militia to combat a moderate PLA may be seen as entirely justifiable.

Radicals' plans to use the militia in this way were temporarily halted by relatively serious border skirmishes with the Soviet Union during much of 1969. The resulting fear of war led to close PLA supervision of the militia and an intensification of training activities. However, as the threat of war receded, PLA control diminished. In 1973 radicals began to popularize a new form of militia that incorporated the functions heretofore performed by public security and fire departments. This new "three in one" militia, said to be based on a prototype model in Shanghai, was to guard against both internal and external enemies. Two years later, a change in the Chinese constitution elevated the militia to parity with the PLA and reaffirmed the authority of the party over both ("The Chinese PLA and the militia are the workers' and peasants' own armed forces led by the Communist Party of China").[17]

While its creators touted the new militia's role in protecting China against both internal and external enemies, it was the former function, and not the new militia's usurpation of PLA prerogatives, that became more controversial. Militia members were used as guardians of the standards of ideological purity introduced by the Cultural Revolution. They reportedly sought out "counterrevolutionaries," "deviationists" from the party line, and "revisionists" of Marxist-Leninist doctrine. In keeping with radicals' conviction that legal procedures were a bourgeois device that hindered justice, suspects were typically apprehended without warrants, detained without indictments, and convicted on the basis of forced confessions.[18] The militia was also used in support of power struggles at the highest level: It suppressed the Tiananmen demonstrations of April 1976 that led to Deng Xiaoping's dismissal from office.

Radicals also planned to use the militia to ensure that their views would prevail after the death of aging, ill Mao Zedong. Factories in Shanghai were reportedly ordered to manufacture large quantities of rifles for militia use and heavy-duty weapons such as rockets, howitzers, and tanks, which are not normally issued to militia units, began to be stockpiled. While the militia uprising was to take place in a number of

urban areas, only in Shanghai did it assume major proportions. The PLA, presumably acting on the orders of antiradical leaders, put down the uprising and concomitantly broke the power of radical leaders.[19]

A new state constitution promulgated in March 1978 removed the militia from its position of parity with the PLA, and other regulations divested the militia of its formal connection with public security and fire-fighting departments. The present leadership's view of the militia's proper functions focuses on its role in increasing production and organizing relief work in time of emergency. In addition, part of the militia is to have a role in wartime. While the main energies of the militia are to be consumed by the Four Modernizations programs designed to bring China into the ranks of industrialized countries by the year 2000, the militia's role in People's War has been reaffirmed. Terming the concepts of People's War and the militia's place therein "a revolutionary heirloom which we must pass on from generation to generation," a vice-chair of the party's Military Commission argued that the role of the militia would be greater rather than less in a war fought under modern conditions.[20] However, subsequent actions made clear that only a small, carefully selected percentage of militia members would be thoroughly trained and given the necessary familiarity with modern weapons to play a significant role in such a war. In effect, this group, known as the armed militia, serves as reserves for the army, while the remainder of the militia will focus on production activities. In order to reduce the burdens of militia work on the work units to which they belong, flexibility is to be the guiding principle of militia training. Local areas are to avoid using the militia at unnecessary functions such as parades; they may fix training to coincide with slack periods in their production activities, and they may choose which kinds of training activities best suit local needs.[21]

While the role of the militia as a guardian of ideological purity is no longer mentioned, the militia retains a peripheral role in public security functions. Given the criticism the militia sustained for its public security role under the Gang of Four, one might suspect that many militia members would be loath to participate in public security duties. Indeed, the official media have stressed a need to reeducate these comrades so that they understand that it is not militia participation in public security itself which is wrong, but rather participation in the erroneous manner advocated by the Gang of Four. Indications are that they have not yet succeeded in convincing militia members of this.

Size

Controversy over the size of the militia has been closely connected with elite assessments of its value to the society as a whole and of its particular worth as a military force, aid to production, and/or mass organization. Generally speaking, the size of the militia has varied in response to perceptions of the imminence of conflict with an external enemy and with assessments of its ability to contribute to internal production and surveillance work. Views on the optimal size of the militia have ranged from a large mass organization of citizen-soldiers, on the one hand, to a small, well-trained elite, usually serving mainly as reserves for the PLA, on the other.

A note of caution on interpreting statistics on militia size is in order. The PRC government has frequently been reluctant to release any meaningful statistics at all, and it is particularly hesitant to do so on matters relevant to national security. Where statistics on the militia have been given, they do not reveal what percentage of the organization is combat-effective and what percentage exists mainly on paper.

Many reports on militia size reflect Western computations derived from sporadically released Chinese figures for the number of militia members in a county or province whose total population is known. However, to calculate the total size of the militia from data based on a few counties or provinces is risky. Other Western estimates are based on immigrant and refugee interview data compiled in Hong Kong. This sample contains a disproportionate number of persons from the areas nearest Hong Kong, causing problems of extrapolation.

However, difficult as it may be to specify the exact size of the militia, we are able to chart the general growth, decline, and resurgences in militia membership and to relate these shifts to elite perceptions of the militia. Before 1949, a large militia was considered important to the prosecution of the war against Chiang Kai-shek, and by the time the PRC was founded, the militia comprised approximately 10% of those Chinese under CCP rule. Militia organization, always informal, apparently disappeared after the CCP's victory. A *People's Daily* article of 25 November 1950 mentioned a three-year plan to bring militia strength to 23,750,000, or about 4% of the total Chinese population, by the end of 1953.

Even this modest figure was apparently never reached, and both the numbers and prestige of militia members remained low. The PLA at this

time had its own reserve system, so that entry to the prestigious regular army could not be facilitated by service in the militia. In 1957, when new regulations made the militia the reserve force for the PLA, both its prestige and its numbers rose quickly. By the end of that year, its membership was estimated at 30 million.

During the following year, China launched its Great Leap Forward, and the militia's prestige and numbers reached unprecedented heights—though not because of its function as reserves for the PLA. In fact, the militia was elevated to virtual parity with the regular army; any suggestions that it would play a lesser role were condemned as examples of a bourgeois military line.

An important goal of the Great Leap Forward was to reduce specialization. In a scheme that aimed at erasing the differences between farmwork and factory work and at making peasants into intellectuals and vice versa, it is not surprising to find the assertion that ordinary citizens could be responsible for the country's defense. Indeed, as has been mentioned above, one of the slogans of the Great Leap Forward was "everyone a soldier." It should not be supposed that militia membership aimed only at enhancing the country's defense. Rather, the drive attempted to induce the broad masses of civilians to apply a militarylike workstyle enthusiastically to all of China's problems, domestic and otherwise.

As might have been expected, the "everyone a soldier" movement led to a denigration of professionalism within the PLA, and the recently ousted defense minister was criticized for saying that the militia had lost its function in postrevolutionary society. Large numbers of people were enrolled in the militia. Chinese sources report that an incredible 220 million people, or a third of the total population at that time, had joined. However, most of this membership was nominal; probably no more than 10% to 15% of those members received military training, and not many more were mobilized *as militia* to tackle the economic and social tasks set by the Great Leap Forward.

With the failure of the Leap, many of the actual policies it comprised were revamped or dismantled, although a good deal of the movement's rhetoric was retained. Thus, the value of the militia continued to be affirmed, even as its effectiveness declined. The size of the militia remained large, although most of its membership existed only on paper.

Militia regulations passed in 1961 reflect a differentiation between nominal and effective membership. All able-bodied citizens of good class background, males between the ages of 16 and 45 and females between 16 and 35, might participate, and indeed they had an obligation to do so. However, a distinction was made between this ordinary militia

and a backbone or basic militia, which had more stringent eligibility requirements and to whom better training would be given. A still more elite organization, the armed militia, was to be recruited from the basic militia.[22]

This convenient fiction has allowed China to claim that virtually all able bodied citizens are militia members while requiring time and commitment from only a small percentage and spending relatively little on them. The same membership criteria were reiterated by the 1978 militia regulations, save that the 1961 version's clause stipulating good class background was replaced with one providing that militia membership be on the basis of one's own free will. Provided that not too large a segment of the Chinese population chooses to exercise its free will in this way, these regulations make the size of the militia a function of the age distribution of the Chinese population. Probably, not many will opt out: Since membership in the ordinary militia often involves no training at all, there are few disadvantages to joining.

The militia is currently estimated to comprise well over 25% of the Chinese population, or 270 million people. As of October 1981, there were rumors of a party central committee directive to the militia ordering a reduction in militia size from 270 to 100 million people. However, membership in the basic militia is smaller—perhaps 10%, or 100 million people—and that of the armed militia from 12 to 15 million. The wide swings in membership of the past, for example, from 4% to 33% of the Chinese population during the 1950s, have not been repeated in recent years. However, controversy continues on how many of these militia members will be given active roles in society in their capacity as militia members. The Gang of Four and apparently radical groups in general favor an activist role and high political salience for large numbers of militia members, while more moderate governments tend to favor a low militia profile internally with military training for a relatively small elite within the militia. Only in time of external threat does this radical-moderate split on the size of the effective militia diminish: A common response to border disturbances with the Soviet Union in 1969 and the Sino-Vietnamese confrontation in 1979 was an increase in the training exercises of larger numbers of militia members.

Conclusions

The Chinese militia seems to exist largely because it is expected to rather than because it fills a needed function. Its roles in domestic soci-

ety as spearhead of production, vanguard of ideology, and in public surveillance and guard duty can probably be better performed by organizations specifically directed toward these tasks. Similarly, its military functions might better be filled by the PLA or by a regularly constituted reserve thereof.

The militia's raison d'être rests on its alleged value in the CCP's march to victory in 1949—a value for which there is little hard evidence.[23] Certainly the number of former leaders who have been criticized for their disparaging remarks about the militia and their failure to handle militia work correctly[24] indicates that many Chinese feel that the militia has been of little value since 1949. The multiplicity of roles it has played since the CCP came to power and the vacilation on which roles to emphasize reinforce an image of the militia as an organization without a clear-cut function. Since ideology nowhere specifies the proper mix of roles, there is legitimate ground for disagreement about them, and controversy will probably continue. Questions of command, control, and size have likewise proved intractable. What is perhaps the most fundamental problem—to create a powerful and efficient martial organization without making it too much like a standing army and without demanding more of the time and energy of both individual members and their production units than they are willing to give—has not been solved.

The militia has been the stepchild of both army and party, neither of which is anxious to assume responsibility for the militia unless it feels the other is usurping its prerogative. This has contributed to problems of morale in the militia: Official sources have reported members' complaints that "It doesn't pay to be a militiaman, as you are neither fish nor fowl."[25] Such attitudes inevitably affect the efficient functioning of the organization.

The one known attempt to use the militia as a counterweight to the army and in support of a particular faction in a power struggle resulted in failure. It is conceivable that other such attempts will be made, although this seems improbable in the near future. Present regulations divide control of the militia between party and army. Though this division was designed to make it difficult for either to usurp power, divided authority also weakens army's and party's respective feelings of responsibility for militia work.

The repetition of official admonitions to military districts and party committees to take militia work more seriously indicates that they are not doing so. Thus, power frequently devolves to the local area, with undesirable effects on social order. For example, in 1979 a dispute between the children of neighboring villages on Hainan Island escalated

into a serious altercation between their elders. The respective village party secretaries authorized the use of militia personnel and weapons against each other and a battle involving nearly 700 persons ensued, with six people killed and extensive property damage.[26]

Recent directives allowing local areas more flexibility in recruitment practices and training schedules of the militia will doubtless reinforce this already extant localism. Interestingly, these problems of localism have a vivid parallel in imperial China, where interlineage feuding and militia organization reinforced one another.[27] In extreme cases, the security of the state might be jeopardized, with federations of village militia organizations rebelling against the central government. These were particularly hard for central government troops to quell, since local ties were strong and it was impossible to distinguish militia belligerents from ordinary peasants. One official writing in 1826 expressed a problem with contemporary relevance, lamenting that "when they congregate and oppose the government, they are rebels; when they disperse and depart, they are civilians once more."[28]

Such situations are unlikely to arise on any large scale in present-day China. Yet during the turmoil of the past few years, the government has several times publicly acknowledged that its enemies in widely different areas maintain links with one another[29] and that militia weapons have contributed to antigovernment violence.[30] Thus, the militia, despite its limitations as an external fighting force and in its domestic duties, has the capacity substantially to disrupt social order.

While apathy rather than aggressive intent best describes the present posture of the militia, the government is well aware of the problems that the militia has posed in the past and is capable of posing in the future. Politburo member Nie Rongzhen's characterization of the militia as a revolutionary heirloom is apt—but it is an heirloom whose continued existence may impose on the society costs that are not worth the positive contributions it may make.

Notes

1. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "Elberfeld Speeches," 8 February 1845, in *Works,* Vol. 2, (Moscow: State Publishing House of Political Literature, 1955), p. 539.

2. Lin Yun-cheng, "The Militia in Chinese People's Revolutionary Wars," *Beijing Review.* 7 (21 August 1964): 21.

3. Ibid., p. 22

4. Yang Lu-hsia, "The Chinese Communist Militia" (Part I), *Issues and Studies* (Taibei), June 1973, p. 56.

5. *Xinhua* (Beijing), 13 August 1980, in Foreign Broadcast Information Service, China, 1980, No. 164, p. L/4 (hereafter FBIS-CHI-80-164).

6. See, for example, Shanghai Radio, 13 January 1967; *Xinhua* (Shanghai), 25 January 1967.

7. *Xinhua* (Beijing), 19 November 1980, in FBIS-CHI-80-226: L/27.

8. FBIS, *Trends in Communist Media*, 24 (3 October 1973): 3.

9. *Xinhua* (Beijing), 19 November 1980, in FBIS-CHI-80-226: L/27.

10. Ibid.

11. C. L. Sulzberger, "The Bear in the China Shop," New York *Times* (10 August 1975): IV-15.

12. Hong Kong, AFP, 2 July 1976, in FBIS-CHI-76-129: K/3-4.

13. Radio Moscow, 19 June 1976, in FBIS-SOV-76-123: C/1.

14. These regulations are translated in *Issues and Studies* (Taibei), February 1980, pp. 75-95. See specifically Article 4 on p. 77.

15. *Xinhua* (Beijing), 8 August 1978, in FBIS-CHI-78-154: E/9.

16. *Xinhua* (Beijing), 8 August 1978, in FBIS-CHI-78-156: E/1.

17. *Beijing Review*, (24 January 1975): 15.

18. *Pravda*, 31 July 1976, in FBIS-SOV-76-151: C/2.

19. *Xinhua*, 13 December 1980, in FBIS-CHI-80-242: L/3.

20. Nie Rongzhen, "The Militia's Role in a Future War," *Beijing Review* 21 (1 September 1978): 16.

21. See, for example, an account of the arrangements made by various areas near Tianjin, as reported in Joint Publications Research Service, 75320, *China Report* 67 (17 March 1980): 45-59.

22. *Issues and Studies*, February 1980, pp. 88-89.

23. There may be a parallel between the Chinese experience and that of the United States. American mythology has tended to eulogize in a manner disproportionate to the facts the role of sturdy farmers and frontiersmen in winning the war against the standing armies of the British. See Marcus Cunliffe, *Soldiers and Civilians: The Martial Spirit in America, 1775-1865* (Boston: Little, Brown 1968), pp. 52-54.

24. Nie Rongzhen, speaking in August 1978, listed Peng Dehuai, Lin Biao, and the Gang of Four. *Xinhua* (Beijing), 7 August 1978, in FBIS-CHI-78-154: E/1. Other sources have added still more names to the list.

25. *Yunnan Ribao* (Yunnan Daily), 3 July 1978, in Joint Publications Research Service, 32-432 (28 February 1979): 7.

26. Haikou Radio, 21 March 1980, in FBIS-CHI-80-59: P/7.

27. Philip A. Kuhn, *Rebellion and Its Enemies in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), pp. 78-79.

28. Ibid., pp. 40-41.

29. Radio Beijing, 25 April 1980, in FBIS-CHI-80-83: L/8.

30. Shenyang Radio, 24 May 1980, in FBIS-CHI-80-103: S/3.

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