

## *Why have the People's Republic of China and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam been able to create and sustain maritime militias?*

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### Biography

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### Abstract

Providing a unique comparison of the maritime militias of the People's Republic of China and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, this study analyses why these two countries were able to create and sustain maritime militias, and their importance to hybrid warfare. By studying the history, organisation, ideology and the economic support provided to these maritime militias, it highlights the similarities between the countries' systems, and how this has allowed for their creation and subsequent maintenance. Based on my findings, I have hypothesised that in order for a country to create and sustain successfully a maritime militia it must have a history of "people's war" and a highly centralised state.

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### Introduction

The South China Sea is one of the most disputed territories in the world. At the forefront of these disputes is the People's Republic of China. Carrying a third of the world's trade, this region should be of concern to all (China Power, 2021). Through its nine-dash line, the eponymous nine dashes on the map of Southeast Asia, which demarcates China's alleged territory, it claims the vast majority of the region beyond the norms of international law. China does this through a combination of strategies, including information warfare, island building and aggressive resource extraction.

"Hybrid warfare" first came into prominence through the Russian invasion of Crimea in 2014. China, however, has arguably been practising it for some time in the South China Sea. At the forefront of China's expansion is the People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia (PAFMM). Made up of fishermen operating on fishing boats and support ships, the PAFMM is used in a variety of missions, including supporting island building, collecting intelligence and clashing with other countries' warships; the PAFMM is never far from the frontline. It has been used so extensively by the PRC that, in 2009, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) decided to

create its own version of the force, in order to compete directly without escalating through the use of traditional assets. Made up predominantly of fishermen, maritime militias are a type of naval force unique to these two communist/Leninist states.

Presently, the only countries to possess operational maritime militias are the PRC and the SRV. In recent years, however, the government of the Philippines have expressed interest and have tried to create their own version passing a law to that effect in 2016 (Government of the Philippines, 2016). As of 2019, they have not had any success in creating a maritime militia. This study, therefore, aims to answer the following question: *why have the People's Republic of China and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam been able to create and sustain maritime militias?* In doing so, it aims to contribute to the academic debate on this increasingly relevant topic. By looking at how the two countries have created their maritime militias and at the factors that have allowed them to be sustained, this research aims at comparing the two cases. Through a comparative case study, it also aims at identifying the key factors conducive to the success of both countries.

Furthermore, the study professes to use this comparison to form a hypothesis on whether it is possible for a non-Leninist state to create an effective maritime militia. This is of importance to both academics and policy-makers. For the former, this is an understudied area but one of rising importance. In particular, the Vietnamese People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia (VPAFMM) is frequently only mentioned in recognition of the fact that the PAFMM is not the only maritime militia in existence, and has received far less scholarly attention than the PAFMM. Moreover, no study has examined why these two countries are the only ones to have been able to create these forces. As such, it will add to the academic literature on the topic. Secondly, as shown by the Government of the Philippines' decision, there is an interest among regional policy-makers to create similar forces. Thus, by studying the existing examples, this study aims to explore whether it would be possible for a democratic country to create and sustain a successful maritime militia of its own. To this effect, this article concludes that it would not be possible. Through a comparative analysis, it was shown that the shared history of the two countries, which have both undergone a communist revolution followed by a Leninist government, coupled by their centralised systems of governance provide a unique set of circumstances for the creation of maritime militias.

### **Previous research on Asian civil-military relations and maritime militias**

As stated, the purpose of this study is to contribute to our understanding of Vietnamese and Chinese maritime militias, whilst contributing to the field of civil-military relations in Asia. It also aims to ascertain whether maritime militias can only be the products of socialist countries, as will be explained further in the methodology. This literature review will, therefore, concentrate on two main aspects: firstly, literature related to civil-military relations (CMR) in Asia and, secondly, literature on maritime militias in both China and Vietnam and the limits of the current research. This is important since it is only in the last decade

that the PAFMM has come under academic scrutiny and the attention of policy-makers. Consequently, there has been an increased number of publications on the topic, although the literature is still young. In contrast, the literature on the VPAFMM is almost non-existent.

### **Civil-military relations**

Civil-military relations as an academic topic can boast a vast literature with a number of key developments. One of the most significant works that pioneered the regional approach under which my research falls, is Morris Janowitz's *Civil-military relations: regional perspectives* (1981). The book's strategy of concentrating on one region in particular allows both for an in-depth analysis and the identification of similarities between nations, which 'reflect underlying uniformities in sociocultural patterns'. Within this work, Harlan W. Jencks' chapter entitled 'China's civil-military relations, 1949–1980' is of particular relevance indicating the link between armed struggle and the future nature of civil-military relations in a country, something that can be seen in the development of both Vietnam and China's maritime militias.

Another of Janowitz's works is also extremely important and has proven pioneering in the field. In *The military in the political development of new nations* (1964), he posits five types of civil-military relations: authoritarian-personal control, authoritarian-mass party, democratic competitive and semi-competitive systems, civil-military coalition and military oligarchy. This has influenced other scholars, such as Paul Chambers and Napisa Waitoolkiat (2017), whose study of the role of militaries in the economies of Southeast Asia uses a modified version of the Janowitzian system to categorise the countries that they study.

There is also extensive research regarding civil-military relations within communist/Leninist countries, most notably Amos Perlmutter and William M. LeoGrande's (1980) work entitled *The Party in uniform: towards a theory of civil-military relations in communist political systems*. This work looks at the influence of the military in communist states through its relations with the state and the party, the so-called "iron triangle", which sets out the stages of development post-revolution.

The majority of the literature regarding civil-military relations in Asia, however, though extensive, is increasingly outdated. The speed of development in China in recent years and Xi Jinping's consolidation of power has meant that much of the pertinent literature now finds itself increasingly irrelevant. Despite this, a lot of the research is still germane; take for instance Andrew Scobell's 'China's evolving civil-military relations: creeping Guojiahua' (2005), which tracks the PLA's development from a party army to a party–state army, and 'Analysing Chinese civil-military relations: a bottom-up approach' by Sofia K. Ledberg (2018), which uses a bottom-up analytical approach to examine the professional autonomy of the Chinese officer corps.

## Maritime militias

The literature on maritime militias is both new and limited. Mainstream writings on the Chinese military mention the militia forces whilst generally failing to reference the maritime element. This is true of David Shambaugh's *Modernizing China's military: progress, problems and prospects* (2002) and Mark Ryan et al.'s *Chinese warfighting: the PLA experience since 1949* (2003). Though the PAFMM has existed since the Chinese Civil War, both books fail to mention it despite the fact that it was recorded as having 750,000 members on 140,000 craft in 1978. This is partly because both of these works were written before the current Chinese expansionism in the South China Sea through the PAFMM. As such, though detailed on regular Chinese forces, these studies fail to mention the PAFMM, indicating the gaps in mainstream literature on the Chinese military. One notable exception, however, is Bruce Swanson's *Eighth voyage of the dragon* (1982). This provides a useful history of the PAFMM in China and its relationship with the state; however, it is now rather outdated due to the militias' shift from coastal control to maritime sovereignty and towards operations in the South and East China Seas.

Andrew Gawthorpe, in his chapter 'Civil-military responses to hybrid threats in East Asia' in Cusumano and Corbe's *A military response to hybrid threats* (2018), explores the history behind hybrid warfare in East Asia, and principally Chinese use of its maritime militia in 1974 and the Vietnamese experience during the Vietnam War. The principal purpose of Gawthorpe's chapter is to highlight effective countermeasures to current Chinese hybrid warfare in East Asia. To do this, he uses historical examples, principally the US experience in Vietnam, to provide learning points for the current climate. Gawthorpe touches upon how the centralised communist/Leninist state of each country allows for the use of hybrid warfare and the integration of civil, military and paramilitary means as a way of furthering this. The focus, however, is predominantly on current Chinese operations and how these can be combatted from a US perspective. The analysis of why China and Vietnam can wield hybrid forces is limited to a brief overview of the civil-military power dynamics in communist/Leninist countries, something that leaves room for further exploration of this complex relationship.

One author who has produced a plethora of work on the PAFMM is Andrew Erickson. Perhaps the most notable of these is the aptly titled *China's maritime militia* written with Conor M. Kennedy (2019). This work goes into detail about the PAFMM, compiling numerous sources such as PRC documents and interviews to provide a detailed analysis of the PAFMM. Much of Erickson's work, however, is not formally academic; rather, it is a collection of articles, reports and studies conducted on the PAFMM through his role at the US Naval War College's China Maritime Studies Institute. Another important piece of work is his 2017 report, again written with Conor M. Kennedy, titled *China's third sea force – The People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia: tethered to the PLA*. This highlights the close connection between the PAFMM and the PLA. Erickson has also recently written a book with Ryan D. Martinson,

titled *China's maritime gray zone operations* (2019), providing deep insights into the use of the PAFMM in the South China Sea, as well as how it interlinks with the PLA Navy (PLAN) and the Chinese Coastguard. Still, it fails to look at the make-up of the PAFMM itself. Some of the most important research conducted by Erickson involves the Tanmen, Hainan and Sansha maritime militias. Using Chinese documents, interviews and other sources Erickson explores the history, role and leadership of these individual militia units. Moreover, it helps to put an identifier on what are otherwise considered faceless fishing boats, constituting perhaps the most in-depth exploration of individual PAFMM units (down to the company level) and is, therefore, an invaluable source.

Another important published text in relation to the PAFMM is Toshi Yoshihara's article entitled 'The 1974 Paracels sea battle: a campaign appraisal' (2016), which explores the Chinese use of militia forces in its occupation of the Paracel Islands in 1974. It provides an important exploration of the historical role of the PAFMM, as well as the Vietnamese experience of dealing with the PAFMM and how this has influenced its strategy in relation to Chinese expansionism.

A major gap in current research exists in relation to the VPAFMM, as unlike China, Vietnam is not considered a major power. China has attracted research interest from the US since it is increasingly seen as a strategic competitor. This is easily recognisable in the research conducted by Erickson, who as Professor of Strategy in the US Naval War College also informs his own government's strategy directly through the education of officers and government officials at all levels. In contrast, Vietnam's Maritime Militia has received little attention academically, not excluding articles written about Vietnamese strategy in combatting China. Whilst China regards the VPAFMM as something to be concerned with, this does not seem to have filtered through to academic research, save for in the Chinese Press. An example is the writings of Zhang Tao in 2019, who scarcely mentions the Vietnamese Maritime Militia and its expansion. Unfortunately, since 2019, this and a number of other PRC primary sources are no longer freely available. Impermanence is one of the hazards of using primary documents directly sourced from the PRC's own government outlets. Carlyle A. Thayer's article, titled 'Vietnam's strategy of "cooperating and struggling" with China over maritime disputes in the South China Sea' (2016), provides an insight into the continuing maritime tensions between the two nations and thoroughly explores Vietnamese moves towards the modernisation of its navy. It fails, however, to mention the VPAFMM and its role in Vietnamese strategy towards China.

## Theory and methodology

In order to assess the reasons why the PRC and SRV have been able to create and maintain maritime militias, I will use a comparative case study analysis. Case studies are one of the oldest forms of qualitative research with much of what is known about the empirical world coming from case study research. More importantly, they provide a means of identifying

common themes to allow an effective comparison of the two countries and the analysis of their respective maritime militias.

### **Epistemological assumptions**

A shift away from the empirical research of the 1950s and 1960s epitomised by Janowitz and Finer (Blondell, 1999) towards a post-positivist and constructivist approach in civil-military relations research, typified by Norgaard (1994) and Jachtenfuchs (1995), has been observed in recent decades. Their focus on questioning the assumptions underpinning CMR was a very important development. As with the research before them, however, there was a certain focus on questioning civil-military relations among Western democratic states and in doing so they generally ignored CMR in Asia.

Within the study of civil-military relations in Asia, however, this empirical approach has survived. Until the 1970s, no work existed which compared civil-military relations in South East Asia and it was not until Johnson's seminal work in 1972, which included three Asian case studies, that comparisons were drawn across the region. Since then, other works have focussed on the issue of civil-military relations in Asia, such as Croissant's (2018) comparative overview of 24 Asian societies. There have also been several works concentrating on China alone due to its size and role as the region's dominant power (e.g. Finkelstein and Gunness, 2007; You, 2016). The use of comparative case studies in these works demonstrates the breadth of insights that can be drawn by comparing different countries in the region.

These studies are predominantly based on the empirical tradition also known as positivism. This approach underpinned not only civil-military relations research but also research in International Relations and Security more generally. In this study, the aim is to look at two relatively understudied bodies within the Vietnamese and Chinese maritime militias. The objective is to identify the key factors in the creation and continued maintenance of each force, and what this can tell us about the unique nature of maritime militias and the two countries that possess them. Therefore, an empirical approach is the most sensible, as despite the relative age of the PAFMM it has only become relevant in the last decade or so alongside the creation of the VPAFMM. Consequently, my approach is an inductive one aiming to formulate a theory based on the findings rather than testing any particular theory through the study.

### **Case study justifications**

The reason why the PRC and the SRV have been selected for this case study is simple. They are the only two countries to possess maritime militias. As such, it is important to define what a maritime militia is and what differentiates it from both traditional navies and other forces. It is important, however, to justify further this area of research. The South China Sea is one of the most contested areas on Earth with numerous countries making claims to all or some of the territory. Claiming all territory within the so-called nine-dash line (Gao

and Jia, 2013), the PRC has begun an extensive island-building operation in contested areas, such as the Spratly Islands and Scarborough Shoal. At the forefront of this mission is the PAFMM. Their exploits have been reported more often in recent years, as they engage in a variety of missions including intelligence collection, the transport of building materials and, increasingly, presence missions around contested islands and shoals. The militia has also been used in confrontations with other countries operating in the region.

One confrontation that brought the PAFMM into the forefront of international attention was when a PAFMM vessel nearly collided with the USS Lassen, whilst using a grappling hook to try and grab a towed array sonar (Odom, 2010). Other notable instances include actions around the Scarborough Shoal, where the Tanmen maritime militia clashed with the Filipino coast guard and naval vessels, even shooting back at these when caught poaching. The PAFMM has been present at every major clash in the region in recent years including the clash over the HYSY-981 oil rig, where it came at loggerheads with Vietnamese fishing vessels sinking a number of them (Erickson and Kennedy, 2016). In all of these instances, the PAFMM was used as a means of creating plausible deniability and an air of doubt. Much like Russian President Vladimir Putin's deployment of his 'little green men' in Crimea as a means of sowing doubt, the PAFMM has been deployed in similar circumstances to make other nations more hesitant in their responses, as they are unsure if they are operating against fishing vessels or maritime militia members.

The operation of the PAFMM in maritime and legal grey zones has led to it being labelled as the "Grey" force, setting it apart from the "Blue" traditional deep-water navy and the "White" Coast Guard (Erickson and Kennedy, 2019). Through these actions, it is placed at the forefront of hybrid warfare, defined as threats which make use of 'a wide range of overt and covert, paramilitary and civilian measures [...] employed in a highly integrated design' to achieve outcomes (NATO, 2014). It is also marked by actions that are made with calculated ambiguity, something that is especially the case with Chinese operations in the South China Sea (Gawthorpe, 2018). Given the rising importance of hybrid warfare and the deployment of maritime militias in this region, it is important to study them further.

Despite their rise to prominence, no official definition of a maritime militia exists; however, in 2012, the Zhoushan garrison commander and the garrison's mobilisation office defined '[t]he maritime militia [as] an irreplaceable mass armed organisation not released from production and a component of China's ocean forces [that enjoys] low sensitivity and great leeway in maritime rights protection actions' (Erickson and Kennedy, 2019, p. 1).

Further to this, both countries are under what Janowitz (1964) labels as authoritarian-mass party control. As mentioned in the literature review, Janowitz posits five types of civil-military relations. Both the PRC and SRV fall under the category of an authoritarian-mass party in the above system, which is typified by a highly vertical single party system exercising complete

control over the military. Their power resides in the politburo or directorate. Civilian control is strong; however, there is little to no pluralism and, as such, is representative of communist/Leninist countries like the PRC and SRV. Both countries are also typified by the fact that the military is allowed to engage in its own economic and commercial projects to supplement their government financing (Chambers and Waitookiat, 2017). This raises the question as to what extent this system is important for the creation and maintenance of a maritime militia.

This study seeks not only to explore what factors helped to create and maintain the maritime militias in question but also whether maritime militias are only possible in countries of the same system, namely communist/Leninist countries with a high level of civilian control over the military and with violent revolutionary origins. With tensions continuing to rise in the South China Sea, and other countries in the region discussing the idea of creating maritime militias, this research aims to test the hypothesis of whether maritime militias can only be created and maintained by authoritarian-mass party socialist countries. Unfortunately, due to the fact that these two countries are the only ones with maritime militias, it is not truly possible to ascertain whether other countries are unable to develop and maintain militias. Whilst the Philippines have expressed an interest in creating their own maritime militia, as of 2019 this project has not progressed and, as such, there are neither sources nor an actual militia available for comparison with the SRV and PRC. This is not to say that it is impossible for them to develop a maritime militia in the future but, presently, it is not possible to include them in the study. What can be examined, however, are the unique factors that have allowed the two case studies to develop maritime militias, and whether these factors are unique to them. In order to accomplish this, the study will compare the two countries in question based on the criteria listed below, which have been identified as key areas for such an assessment.

### **Research methods**

Having considered several different methods to assess why both countries have been able to create and maintain maritime militias, I settled upon a comparative case study. Unlike more traditional case studies, however, my analysis is not focussed on why two countries with similar systems ended up with different outcomes, but rather what are the similarities between them. Case study research has a long and respected tradition, especially regarding Asia. As maritime militias are still understudied within the area of military studies, especially the VPAFMM, we need to approach them from an empirical standpoint, something that a case study design allows for. Furthermore, other methods such as interviews would be impossible. This is not only due to language difficulties but also the reluctance of members of the maritime militias to speak to foreigners. The research conducted by Erickson and others into the PAFMM provides a wealth of open-source documents, white papers and Chinese language news stories offering direct insight into the PAFMM. As such, they are among the main sources of information. This, however, is not the case for the VPAFMM. Therefore, I have endeavoured to locate sources on the VPAFMM online. Using open-source government documents, news articles, press releases and official interviews, I have been able to build a



picture of the VPAFMM, how it was created and how it is maintained.

There are, however, some severe limitations to the data available. First and foremost, there is the problem of language. Whilst technology has allowed for the much easier translation of web pages, in particular, there are still some documents that cannot be translated. Thus, the work of Erickson and Kennedy in bringing these sources to light for the English-speaking world is invaluable. As already mentioned, the general literature around this topic is thin. Though it has grown in recent years, much of the research done by the US government is not available to the public. Conversely, articles written for public consumption within the PRC are difficult to access beyond the language barrier. Many articles that contradict statements made about the PAFMM to a global audience have since been deleted as a means of reinforcing the official line. As such, finding Chinese language sources that have already been discovered can be as difficult as finding new sources. In terms of data on Vietnam, nowhere near the same amount of research into their maritime militias has been conducted as into the PAFMM. Therefore, we must rely to a large extent on official documents, such as white papers and government laws.

In analysing the various sources, it was these factors which repeatedly appeared throughout.

### **Areas of comparison**

During the analysis of the various sources, three key factors emerged as central themes for both countries: their history, their political system and organisation, and their control of the economy. Coincidentally, whilst these factors are somewhat unique to each nation they share many commonalities, providing a solid basis for comparison and contrast. Other potential areas applied to one country rather than the other, such as individual leaders, but also seemed to have less bearing on the maritime militias themselves and were, therefore, disregarded for the purposes of this study.

**History** – The PAFMM came about due to its struggle against the fleet of nationalist China. Since then, it has continued to play an important role in Chinese defence matters, such as the 1974 Paracel Islands campaign. Vietnam’s maritime militia is, by comparison, very new; however, as a nation, Vietnam has a long tradition of “people’s war”, most notably the National Liberation Army during the Vietnam War. As such, this section will analyse the extent to which a nation’s historical experiences can affect its ability to create and maintain an effective maritime militia, and whether or not this is the predominant factor.

**Political system and organisation** – Both China and Vietnam are socialist countries with a high degree of control over civilian and military life. As such, this section will analyse the civil-military relationship as well as the overall political control in these countries. Furthermore, it will look at the state’s relationship with its citizens and how this ties in with recruitment for and maintenance of the maritime militia, through analysing the extent to

which participation is compulsory.

**Control of the economy** – Both China and Vietnam have supported the relationship between maritime militias and the fishing economy. Government support towards building large ocean-going steel-hulled vessels and higher salaries than would otherwise be provided to fishermen have both been used to incentivise fishermen to place their livelihoods at risk. This is particularly the case for Vietnam, where fishing vessels sent into conflict with China have been sunk, ostensibly leading to the loss of these fishermen’s livelihood. This study will analyse state documents, news reports and interviews to ascertain not only the extent of financial support but what role it plays in the maintenance of the respective maritime militias.

### **Analysing the data**

As an empirical study on an understudied aspect of international relations and security policy in Asia, the data is not only important for the conclusions that can be drawn but also for understanding both organisations better. Such analysis, however, is very Janowitzian, aiming to draw conclusions from the data in an empirical manner.

Therefore, the purpose of the analysis is to draw conclusions directly from the empirical findings isolating the major factors by identifying commonalities in both states and their respective prominence in reports, secondary literature and laws. Through this, I aim to analyse the respective importance of each factor, isolate the key reasons why both countries have been able to create and maintain these increasingly specialised militia units and whether or not that would be possible for a country that does not have an authoritarian-mass party government. I will also make use of process-tracing to track which causal mechanisms have led to the creation of these maritime militias.

## **The People’s Republic of China**

### **History**

In 2018, the Chinese defence minister General Chang Wanquan implored the nation to prepare for a ‘people’s war at sea’ (Holmes, 2019). In this statement, Chang builds upon a concept of warfare that has been key to the Chinese approach to warfighting since before the foundation of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) itself. “People’s war” as a concept arose out of the Chinese Communist Parties’ (CCP) battles with the Japanese Empire and the Kuomintang (KMT). The concept of “people’s war” was developed by Mao Zedong in response to the inferiority of his forces in arms, equipment and training. As such, it became necessary to wage a protracted war of attrition until the two sides reached a degree of technological parity (Godwin, 2003). Mao Zedong (1972), however, also recognised that such a war required the support of the people, stating in 1938 that:

The mobilisation of the common people throughout the country will

create a vast sea in which to drown the enemy, create conditions that will make up for our inferiority in arms and other things, and create the prerequisites for overcoming every difficulty in war (p. 228)

This theory of “people’s war” subsequently developed into a naval format as the CCP reached the coastline. Whilst some critics argued that the sea, due to its lack of cover and people, made it ill-suited for the concept of “people’s war”, Mao Zedong disagreed pointing out that the ocean was populated by fishermen:

The Navy has its own characteristics, but we cannot emphasise the navy’s specialness. We must carry forward the army’s good traditions. We cannot toss them aside. The Navy must also rely on the people; it must rely on fishermen. It must plant roots among the fishermen.

This theory of “people’s war” at sea was the means by which the CCP aimed at defeating the technologically superior KMT. One important instance in which fishing boats were used was the battle for Hainan Island in 1950 (now a major maritime militia base), when the PLA refitted sailboats with weapons and used numerical superiority and greater manoeuvrability to defeat the larger, slower KMT vessels. This, in turn, led to the development of the idea of a “people’s war at sea” and the “thousand-ship march”, which relied on the use of a numerically superior force to overwhelm a technologically superior one. Perhaps the epitome of this form of warfare at sea was the 1974 dispute over the Paracel Islands. This clash between the PRC and South Vietnamese forces saw the deployment of maritime militias as an independent force using fishing trawlers to infiltrate the island (Yoshihara, 2016). Rather than the previous use of fishing vessels due to necessity and technological inferiority, what we see is the combined use of maritime militia and PLAN forces to achieve both strategic and operational objectives through tactics reminiscent of what can be seen in the South and East China Seas today.

Another important aspect of militias is their enduring presence in the Chinese military structure. The origin of militias in Chinese forces can be traced back to Mao Zedong and their use against the KMT. The militias formed one of the three strands needed to support his strategy, alongside regional forces and the PLA (Godwin, 2003). As such, an armed militia is at the heart of Chinese military history and theory. The maritime militia itself, however, did not come about until after the formation of the PRC. Rather, the militia was a solution to two problems facing the PRC: first, the ever-present threat of nationalist forces along the coastline and, second, the need to control the previously itinerant fishing communities that had caused trouble for previous regimes. An initial maritime militia was created, focusing on coastal defence and mainly made up of land dwellers (Rielage and Strange, 2019).

Simultaneously, the PRC moved to create new bonds tying the marine economy to the new state. This revolved initially around modernising the fleet and increasing the catch but, due

to an exodus of ships to Hong Kong, the first five-year plan (1952–1957) redoubled the efforts of political organisation in regard to the fishing fleet. As part of this, vessels were required to register in a collective and received political education. Strict organisational control was enforced by a requirement that on every crew there had to be a party or Communist Youth League representative to enforce planned routes. Furthermore, multiple family members of the fishermen were required to set up residence ashore to ensure their loyalty (Rielage and Strange, 2019; Erickson and Kennedy, 2019). As communist control of the fishing population increased, so did efforts to integrate them into national defence planning. For instance, a PRC fishing licence acquired by US naval intelligence in 1951 included the requirement to assist in preventing ‘raids and infiltration’ (Swanson, 1982). PRC fishermen began to play an accented role in supporting the PLAN, such as the 1965 capture of a Taiwanese spy plane crew or more assertive ‘maritime rights protection’ (Rielage and Strange, 2019).

### **What does this mean in terms of the modern-day maritime militia?**

What we can extrapolate from the above is that today’s maritime militia is influenced not only from a strong tradition but also from a supporting theoretical framework. When analysed, the concept of “people’s war”, though challenged to an extent by technological advancements particularly within the PLA, is nevertheless a strong one. Maritime militia units are proud of the role they have played in the past, and this sense of continuity in a proud military tradition cannot be set aside and ignored. Rather, in examining why China has successfully set up a maritime militia that is able to conduct operations in close concert with its Navy, it is possible to infer that China’s history and its unique circumstances are responsible for creating an environment conducive to the presence of an effective militia. By building on this tradition and developing the maritime militias further via improved technology, training and even specially built ships, the PRC has been able to take advantage of its own history. It is also clear, however, that whilst China has a maritime militia predominantly due to its unique history, its maintenance is due to the factors listed below.

### **Organisation**

Organisation lies at the heart of how the PAFMM is maintained and is closely linked to the ideology of the PRC. It not only provides the leadership through which it is deployed but also the party oversight to make sure that the militia remains loyal to the party above all.

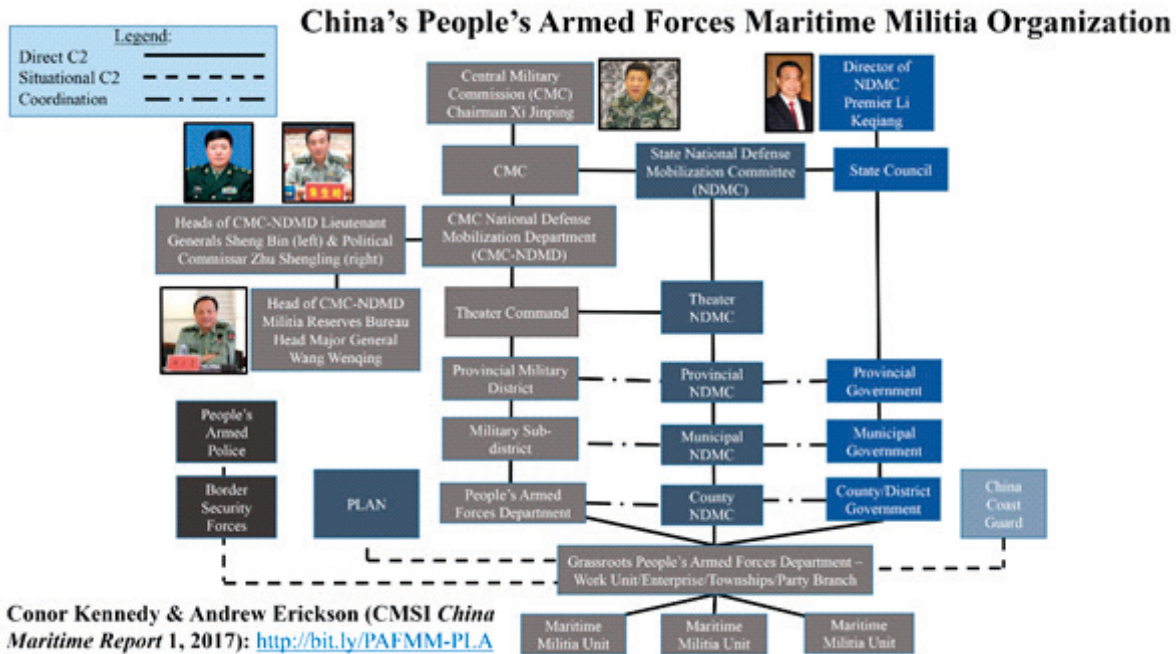


Figure 1

In terms of the structure of the PAFMM, Erickson has created a diagram (see *Figure 1*), which provides a detailed overview of the command and control of the PAFMM. As with all of his work, this is based on open-source documents that he has located and translated, providing key insights into the PAFMM's make-up. As seen, the lowest level is the individual maritime militia unit. These can be more professional units filled with PLAN veterans but, for the most part, they are based around existing fishing communities. The largest communities form battalion-sized units with the majority of localities creating company-sized units, which are further divided into platoons with an individual ship being considered a squad (Erickson and Kennedy, 2015). At the highest level, management of the militia begins at the CMC National Defence Mobilisation Department, which sets out the regulations for the militia as a whole. According to Erickson, however, real command of the militia begins at the Provincial Military District level and trickles below, with individual departments overseeing the thousands of county and grassroots People's Armed Forces Departments (Erickson and Kennedy, 2015).

What is most significant is the dual leadership system of the command in which responsibility is shared between the military and their government/party counterparts. This is set out in the Militia Regulations (1991):

The local people's governments at all levels must strengthen their leadership over the work of the militia, coordinate the work of the militia, and organise and supervise the task of the militia. The relevant departments of local people's governments at various levels shall assist the military organs in carrying out the work of the militia and solve relevant problems. (Article 7)

This results in the militia being overseen simultaneously by the local military commander and the government leader. Dual leadership is further reinforced by the fact that the local government is also responsible for the funding of the militia. Since command falls on two different structures, the National Defence Mobilisation Committee (NDMC) plays a crucial role in binding the military and political leaders into one decision-making body. The NDMC brings together these leaders to organise, coordinate and direct nationwide defence mobilisation. Whilst operational command of the militia falls to the Provincial Military District, or the PLAN depending on the operation, the civilian command elements provide the political oversight, making sure that the militia remains loyal to the party. This structure allows decisions to be made quickly in relation to the maritime militia, as both the military and the government/party are working towards a common goal through the relevant NDMC.

Education is the responsibility of each ship captain, who is also the militia commander. This is due to the fact that, although the crews of fishing vessels may change, the captain of a vessel usually remains the same from season to season. As such, they are trained as the backbone of the militia cadre and are responsible for the education of the crew. This system allows for greater cohesion and the ability to organise training more efficiently, ensuring ‘the smooth flow of military orders’ (MOD of the PRC, 2014 – source no longer accessible). Captains are responsible for ensuring that the men are educated whilst at sea by delivering both ideological and practical education, i.e. how to operate effectively as a member of the militia.

Focus on ideology is stressed in the Militia Work Regulations (1990) that emphasise that the members of the militia must be of ‘good political ideology’ over any other quality, such as military knowledge or good health. This education is reinforced through the structure of the militia, as party branches are also formed within battalion and company ranks to ensure party control at all levels. Furthermore, it is the responsibility of the squad commanders, who are in most cases the fishing boat captains, to make sure that their crew continues to be of ‘good ideology’. The extent of this emphasis is exemplified in the implementation of long-distance learning and the creation of a ‘maritime mobile classroom’ (MOD of the PRC, 2014). The lessons are designed by the Ministries of Human Resources and the Armed Forces, and learning is supervised by the Maritime Control and Command Centre. Members are tested upon return to port on the content of the videos they have watched, as well as having their assignments marked. This shows the importance placed on ideology by the Chinese government. As mentioned previously, ideology plays a large part in the success of the maritime militia. It was the predominant reason it was created, and the reason why the militia exists and is able to continue to pursue “people’s war” in the twenty-first century.

The role of organisation in maintaining the militia is clearly extensive. It is also clear that its structure is unique to a communist/Leninist state. The system of dual leadership is one that originated in “people’s war”, where military commanders were simultaneously party leaders.

What we can extrapolate is that the current system allows for the continuation of this political command, whereby the militia units are not solely accountable to the military hierarchy. At all levels, the military and party/government work together, ensuring party command of the militia, as well as the ideological purity of its members. This guarantees that the militia feels that they are serving something greater than themselves and that it is their duty to serve the party and their country. This analysis points to a uniquely communist/Leninist system designed to ensure party control of assets and imbue its members with ideological fervour. It is this ideological education, alongside the financial incentives, that plays a key role in convincing members to join and stay in the militia.

### **Economic support**

China is able to utilise economic incentives to individual fishermen, as well as ship owners and captains, to incentivise them to join the PAFMM. Furthermore, they may also use the ability to fine or even withdraw fishing licences from those who refuse to fulfil their obligations to the militia. This is one of the major differences between a communist/Leninist state and a free market economy, as the former can dictate what methods of production their citizens engage in, using the power of the state. The Chinese system allows for large parts of the country's fishing fleet to be deployed in a way which is unproductive economically. For instance, reports indicate hundreds of Chinese fishing boats and support ships staying off Thitu Island. They do not fish but rather spend their days at anchor around the island (Mangosing, 2019). The economic support these fishermen and the owners of the fishing boats receive must be competitive enough for them not to fish and, instead, use their vessels as a means of exerting pressure on the Filipino forces in the area through their sheer number.

For instance, in 2006, the Ningbo Military division of Zhejiang Province found that of the 140 listed militia boats in the region, 40 had been sold off by their respective owners (Deng, Zhao and Chen, 2006). In response to this, the government initiated a number of actions including that the pre-made fishing boats must be resold to the Ministry of Human Resources. Further to this, the military division warned against the further sale of fishing boats by their owners. These represent a number of economic actions that would not be possible in a free state. The local government can purchase these vessels, which it can then operate, while also threatening any other owners against selling their vessels, an action that would be completely unacceptable and unenforceable in a non-communist/Leninist nation. In this regard, it is the power that the state has over the economy and its ability to punish those who do not join the militia that are most powerful.

Further to this, the state also uses financial incentives and punishments to convince fishermen to fulfil their PAFMM duties. This mainly comes in the form of financial compensation, the level of which can vary regionally. Financial incentives are a powerful motivator not only for existing fishermen to continue to trade as such but also for them to remain in the PAFMM. With fish stocks being depleted in the region and increased competition from other Asian

states, the money earned from PAFMM duties has become more valuable as a reliable source of income. For instance, a survey conducted by the Sansha Garrison Political Department in 2015 found that 42% of Sansha's maritime militia attached greater importance to 'material benefits' than 'glory' in their service (Kennedy and Erickson, 2019).

These incentives help to persuade fishermen, especially in poorer regions, to join the PAFMM in order to subsidise their revenues. They are able to claim a variety of allowances. For instance, Article 27 of The Regulations on the Mobilisation and Requisition of Maritime Civil Vessels in Guangdong Province (2002), provides compensation in the event of participating in training, preparing for combat readiness, handling emergencies and emergency support, as well as for assisting in technological transformation projects and any other matters for which militiamen may be mobilised. Article 28 further stipulates that they can claim for fuel costs, lost income and basic living expenses. The fuel subsidies are quite extensive, representing a large outlay for regional governments. For instance, the city of Taishan in Guangdong province has paid fuel subsidies worth 194 million yuan in 2013 to some 2,650 vessels, paying out on average of 3,850.30 yuan per ton (Erickson and Kennedy, 2019). This is a significant amount of money and indicates that the government provides meaningful economic support to its fishing fleet for its service as maritime militia.

Whilst this is not an activity limited to communist countries, it is used alongside other measures so that the Chinese fishing fleet and the PAFMM continue to be present in the disputed areas of the South China Sea. The Chinese Government are also able to use their overall control to influence the cheap building of vessels not only for the PAFMM but also for the PLAN and CCG, with China's massive commercial shipbuilding industry subsidising the overhead costs of ship production for all three (Erickson, 2018).

Economic incentives, however, have been shown not to be enough for a number of reasons. First, the compensation of 10,000 RMB per day is half of the 20,000 RMB a day the vessels would be expected to make during peak fishing season (Jin, 2016). Thus, depending on the area the vessel comes from, economic incentives can be seen as insufficient compared to the money made on the open market, and has resulted in incidents such as that taking place in Zhejiang province in 2006 (Deng, Zhao and Chen, 2006). In these cases, the Chinese government relies on its control of other aspects of government, such as the courts, to enforce the obligation of militia service in the PAFMM by drawing on relevant laws (Jin, 2016).

For instance, in 2015, executives of the Sanya Fugang Fisheries Company, home to the maritime militia unit that harassed the USNS Impeccable in 2009, were indicted on numerous counts of bribery. The Haikou Intermediate People's Court, however, granted them leniency citing the extensive service of the maritime militia company in protecting China's rights and interests (Kennedy and Erickson, 2017). This incentive would not be available in a non-communist country. It is clear that government support, both economically and through other



means, is one of the reasons why China has been able to maintain its maritime militia and, more importantly, deploy it in the South China Sea.

## The Socialist Republic of Vietnam

### History

Unlike China, Vietnam does not have a long maritime militia tradition with its own being created in 2009 as part of Law No. 43/2009/QH12. This set out the laws and regulations around a maritime militia, as well as its purpose. Vietnam, however, does have a tradition of militias and civilians fighting. In fact, as with the PRC, one of the key tenets of its military strategy is that of “people’s war”. Vietnam’s military traditions also originate in its own revolutionary experiences. Vietnam, rather than fighting a nationalist government, found itself in combat with foreign imperialist forces in the form of the Japanese, the French and the Americans. This shaped its military theory creating a doctrine of “people’s war”. Much of the communist theory of “people’s war”, however, was drawn from the experience of the CCP. Starting in the 1920s, Vietnamese communist leaders gathered direct knowledge of Chinese communist theories and practices of organising “people’s war” (Harrison, 1989). This included Ho Chi Minh himself who went to Mao Zedong’s Northern Chinese base in 1938. Other notable Vietnamese party members serving alongside the Chinese included Ly Buin and Nguyen Son, both of whom participated in the long march, and Nguyen Chi Thanh who served in Mao Zedong’s army into the 1940s. Thus, there is a distinctly Chinese influence on the Vietnamese theory of “people’s war”. This, however, was increasingly influenced by their own experiences, as much as those of the Soviet Union and the PRC.

The main Vietnamese thinker here was General Vo Nguyen Giáp. His writings are based on the Chinese experience combined with Vietnam’s own, and these do differ to an extent. For instance, there is a greater focus on guerrilla warfare than in Mao Zedong’s writings. This is predominantly due to the extreme imbalance in terms of arms and technology available, even more so than in China, leading them to adopt:

The strategy and tactics of a people’s war in an economically backward, colonial country, standing up against a powerfully equipped and well-trained army of aggression. Is the enemy strong? One avoids him. Is he weak? One attacks him. To his modern armament one opposes a boundless heroism to vanquish either by harassing or by combining military operations with political and economic action [and] initiative, flexibility, rapidity, surprise, suddenness in attack and retreat (1970, p. 103)

In this strategy and accompanying tactics, greater focus is placed on the use of irregular warfare. Whilst Mao Zedong’s idea of “people’s warfare” concentrated on the idea of drawing

the enemy deeper into friendly territory so as to be able to fight on favourable ground far from the enemy's supply points, Vo Nguyen Giáp focused more on guerrilla warfare. Furthermore, parallel to the study of Chinese sources, there was also an increased focus on the country's own history of popular resistance. Giáp points out that Vietnam's history provides a perfect example for the understanding of the principle of the 'armament of the revolutionary masses and the building of the revolutionary army' (Harrison, 1989).

Vo Nguyen Giáp (1975) also mentions militias, stating that '[t]he invincible strength of the people's armed forces proceeded from the direction of the party [which] armed the entire people [and organised] three categories of regular [and] regional troops and popular militias' (p. 27). Whilst Vietnam may not have had a maritime militia until 2009, it does have a strong tradition of service very similar to China. The tradition and organisation already in place are an important part of why Vietnam was able to create successfully a maritime militia. Throughout recent Vietnamese history, the militia and self-defence forces have been at the forefront of responses not only to civil but also military threats.

For instance, in the 1979 Sino-Vietnamese War, Vietnamese militias played a crucial role in engaging the Chinese regular forces and inflicting significant casualties. Using rudimentary, improvised weapons, they resisted against French, American and Chinese forces. They have also successfully used more advanced weaponry, notably in the form of anti-air detachments during the Vietnam War, whose tally accounted for ten percent of US pilots shot down over North Vietnam (*GlobalSecurity.org*, no date). Fighting under the mottos, "one hand on the plow, the other on the gun" and "one hand on the hammer, one hand on the gun", the militia highlighted the close relationship between production and fighting. Lieutenant General Do Ba Ty (2015), the Chief of the General Staff and the VPA Deputy Minister of National Defence, states how after these wars the Militia and Self-Defence Force:

continued to bring into play its role in the new condition, being an important part of the Vietnam's three types of Armed Forces, the core in carrying out military and defence tasks, maintaining political security, localities' social order and safety, making contribution, in cooperation the whole military and people, to thwarting the hostile forces' strategy of "Peaceful Evolution", firmly safeguarding national independence and sovereignty, and socialist regime. Also, the Militia and Self-Defence Force promoted its motive role in production, natural disasters and diseases prevention and alleviation, search and rescue, actively contributing to economic and social development, the country's industrialization and modernization.

Importantly, Do Ba Ty also argues that the heightened circumstances faced by Vietnam in the present require the 'bringing into play the Militia and Self-Defence Force's glorious traditions

and valuable experiences of the past years'. Vietnam, thus, recognises the importance of its tradition of militia service and its past success for the realisation of its current iteration. Whilst Vietnam may not have had a maritime militia in the past, the tradition of militia service is one that runs through the country, to the extent that the image used by Do Ba Ty in his celebration of the 80 years of the Militia and Self-Defence Force is that of the decade-old maritime militia.

### **Organisation**

The organisation of the VPAFMM is similar to that of the PAFMM. Both are subject to a dual leadership system with joint control by the military and the government/party. This is most noticeable at the highest level, where the National Defence and Security Council is headed by the president of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, who is also commander-in-chief of the armed forces. As with the PRC, the military is directly subordinate to the Party, in this case the Central Military Party Committee (CPMC). This provides party control of the military at all levels (Thayer, 2016). The VPAFMM is answerable to the Militia Self-Defence Bureau, which is under the General Staff Department of the VPA. Vietnam is divided into nine military regions, each of which is responsible for the militia operating in its region. These areas are further subdivided into military districts and commune-level command units (*GlobalSecurity.org*, no date). The commune-level is the equivalent of the county level command in the PRC and, as such, has perhaps the biggest impact on the VPAFMM. At the lowest level one finds the militia itself; much like the PAFMM, this is divided into various ranks with the lowest being a group, followed by a squad and then a platoon. A company is called a flotilla and a battalion a fleet, though this information has been gleaned from a single website, which is one of the few with details on the VPAFMM (*GlobalSecurity.org*, no date).

Unfortunately, sources on the structure of the VPAFMM are limited. Beyond Thayer, the main Western author on the Vietnamese military, very little research has been conducted on the VPAFMM. The majority of information is gleaned from websites and articles written by the Vietnamese military and published through the *National Defence Journal*. From an academic standpoint this is far from ideal; however, due to the nature of the VPAFMM, this is to be expected. Compared to the PRC, Vietnam is a minor regional power on the world stage. Unlike the PRC, it is not regarded as a direct competitor to the United States and, as such, its militia has not been afforded the attention of PAFMM. Despite this, through the reading of Vietnamese Defence white papers, articles from the *National Defence Journal* and the work of Thayer, it is possible to begin piecing together a picture of the VPAFMM from predominantly primary sources.

It is clear that all levels have a direct impact on the militia and that is why the Vietnamese have been able to create a maritime militia successfully in such a short period of time. The role of the party and its desire to implement the laws passed is also clear. For instance, Military Region 9's Party Committee and Command endeavoured to comply with the 2009

law on the militia to the extent that, by 2020, the local militia and self-defence forces would make up 1.4% of the region's population. Furthermore, in order to make sure that the said units are ideologically loyal, it also committed to establishing military party cells in all wards, communes and towns across the district (Nguyen, 2018). The organisation of the regions is important in allowing this shift towards a maritime militia. The dual system allows for the close cooperation of the military and the party, with the latter having control over all aspects of government. This allows for decisions to be implemented quickly when required, as demonstrated by the increase in support for the maritime militias. It also allows for the effective recruitment of candidates for the militia. For instance, it is the responsibility of the chairpersons of the commune-level People's committees to organise the first-time registration of eligible members for the militia, who then work closely with the commune-level military command to select appropriate candidates. As with the PAFMM, funding is also designated to the local level and it is the responsibility of each commune and each region to report and organise the budget for military activities in their district. There is no equivalent, however, to the PRC's National Defence Mobilisation Committees, requiring the military and party to work together directly.

As with the PAFMM, the overall organisation of the VPAFMM is used to maintain and increase ideological awareness. For instance, in Military Region 9, the Party Committee and Command are committed to ensuring military party cells are established in all wards, communes and towns across the region in order to maintain ideological purity. What does this contribute, however, towards the creation and maintenance of an effective maritime militia? At the lowest level, it is the role of the party to encourage the idea of 'whole-people national defence', as set out in the 2009 law, which established the maritime militia. Indeed, the 2018 defence law stipulates that:

1. Protecting the Fatherland is a sacred duty and noble right of citizens.
2. Citizens have a duty of loyalty to the Fatherland; [they] must perform military service [and are] obliged to join the militia and self-defense and build a national defense; abide by measures of the State and competent persons in performing defense tasks according to the provisions of this Law and other relevant law provisions.

This law is important in reiterating the duty of all citizens to participate in national defence-building in the long tradition of "people's war". Alongside this, the law reiterates that it is the duty of all serving in the armed forces to be 'absolutely loyal to the Fatherland, The People, the Party, and the State'. This applies to the militia alongside the army and, as in the PAFMM, it is ensured by the education of the militiamen. Whilst we do not have any detailed information on any type of long-distance learning taking place, such as that utilised by the PAFMM, this is likely because the VPAFMM are mainly based close to their own shores. Furthermore, in order to ensure that the militiamen and their vessels adhere to the above and

are ideologically loyal to the party, they rely on a core of party members, union members and demobilised soldiers. These form a ‘reliable political force of grassroots committees and administrations in maintaining security, social order, and safety in the sea border areas and participating in the struggle to protect the sovereignty of the sea and island homeland’ (Nguyen, 2018).

What can be extrapolated from this, is that the whole state apparatus focus on the fact that it is the duty of everyone to serve the state. This makes it significantly easier to recruit members to the militia due to the expectation that all citizens must participate in national defence. Thus, combining this with the greater organisation and economic support enabled by the system of government, the maritime militia was created fairly easily due to the desire of the population to serve.

### **Economic support**

One of the most significant events in the history of the, then five-year-old, VPAFMM was the clash with the PRC over the Haiyang Shiyou 981 (HYSY 981) oil rig in 2014. As the Vietnamese fishing boats were significantly smaller than their PRC counterparts, they were rammed and sometimes sunk (Green, Hicks, Cooper, Schaus and Douglas, 2017). Subsequently, Vietnam began a process of upgrading its fishing fleet, passing Decree No. 67/2014/ND-CP on 7 July 2014. This law is important for a number of reasons, firstly because it indicates the Vietnamese government’s desire to upgrade the size and power of its fishing fleet. Secondly, it provides an insight into the government’s relationship with the economy, the commercial and state banks, and how it may use its economic control to further its strategic goals. It also reveals the economic incentives provided to Vietnamese fishermen who, although not strictly part of the militia, are obliged to participate when required. Most importantly, it is the only publicly available document from which we can assess the funding of the VPAFMM. Therefore, it provides a unique insight into the state’s relationship with both the maritime militia and the wider economy, attracting attention to the importance of high levels of centralised command, such as those present in a communist/Leninist state, for the success of similar endeavours.

The principal observation here is the sheer disparity in economic power between the two countries. Whilst China is able to use its organisational power and the world’s largest shipbuilding industry to produce vessels, Vietnam is solely reliant on loans and incentives (Erickson, 2019). The comparison, however, allows us to infer the role of high-level party control and organisation as common to both.

Article one of Decree No. 67/2014/ND-CP states that it was written with the purpose of prescribing ‘investment, credit and insurance policies; tax incentives and a number of other policies for fisheries development’. Article two then goes on to state that the decree applies to Vietnamese organisations and individuals conducting fishing activities, and those wishing

to build new ships or upgrade existing ones, as well as implementing investment projects on fishing-related infrastructure. Significantly, it indicates the nationalist aims of the policy in helping to improve the Vietnamese fishing fleet, with loans specifically unavailable to any foreign corporations that may be operating in Vietnam. Article three of the decree deals mainly with the investment policy in regard to ports, buoys and other features, the funding of which comes from the budget of the central government. Article four provides us with an insight into both the government's plans for the maritime militia and how it uses its control of the economy to do so. For instance, the decree states that in the case of an owner wishing to build a steel-hulled ship:

Shipowners may borrow loans from commercial banks not exceeding 95% of the total investment in the shipbuilding, with the interest rate of 7%/year, of which shipowners shall pay 1%/year and the state budget shall subsidise 6%/year.

Comparatively, in the case of wooden ships:

Shipowners may borrow loans from commercial banks not exceeding 70% of the total investment in the shipbuilding, with the interest rate of 7%/year, of which shipowners shall pay 3%/year and the state budget shall subsidise 4%/year.

This shows that the government is willing to pay more interest on steel-hulled ships and also allows for larger loans, in this case, up to 95% of the cost of the ship. In doing so, it is clear that the Vietnamese government is encouraging the production of steel-hulled ships in the hope that they will become part of the VPAFMM and will be used in support of its operations in the region. This is even clearer in the following case:

building new steel or new-material ships with a total main engine capacity of 800 HP or over: shipowners may borrow loans from commercial banks not exceeding 95% of the total investment in the shipbuilding, with the interest rate of 7%/year, of which shipowners shall pay 1%/year and the state budget shall subsidise 6%/year.

The most favourable loan is offered to the most powerful steel-hulled ships and is indicative of how Vietnam uses its economic control to reinforce the VPAFMM. This offer has been taken up nationwide, with the Thuan Nam district having used the loans to build ten ships to the above specifications (Nguyen, 2018). Moreover, in 2016, 35 shipowners in Quang Ngai and 28 in Khanh Hoa received government loans, while a further 35 in Binh Dinh signed contracts to build new ships (Zhang, 2016). Economic control is showcased in how the state can dictate to banks who they are to give loans to and also the interest rate to be paid. For

each class of loan, the government has decreed the interest rate by law. This, however, is not to the detriment of the banks as the government pays the majority of the interest on the boats. Theoretically, this allows the fishermen to pay off the loan more quickly, thus adding the boat to the nation's fishing fleet permanently. Further support is provided for insurance fees under Article five, including 100% support for the premiums of all crew members aboard and payment of 90% of the premium for ships with engine capacity of 400 HP or over.

Furthermore, under Article six, the Vietnamese government exempts fishermen from paying royalties on natural marine resources that they fish, as well as registration fees among other tax benefits. Perhaps the most interesting is Article seven, in which the state pledges to cover 100% of the costs of training crew members, and to subsidise vessels over 400 HP for up to ten voyages a year. This is significant due to the drop in fish stocks in the South China Sea, with total stocks depleted by 70–95 percent since the 1950s and catch rates having declined by 66–75 percent over the last 20 years (Poling, 2019).

As seen above, the law stipulates the rate of interest banks would charge on certain loans. Furthermore, it also sets out a number of conditions according to which the bank would have to apply to the government to reclaim its loan were the boats to be sunk or damaged beyond repair. Government stipulations on interest and loan amounts, and the fact that the banks must provide these loans irrespective of credit on terms set by the government shows the Vietnamese government's power over commercial institutions. Whilst the maritime militia does not benefit from the state-controlled commercial operations that are a significant part of the Vietnamese economy, the government's influence on the economy as a whole and its relative control compared to that of, for instance, the Filipino government over banks are important factors. Most notably, they enable the Vietnamese government to provide support through nominally private institutions benefitting the state, whilst limiting its outright expenditure predominantly related to interest payments.

Furthermore, the decree sets out the criteria of eligibility for upgrades and support. In terms of the VPAFMM, the most significant aspect is that 'offshore fishing logistics ships are members of fishing teams, cooperatives or enterprises' (Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2014). Moreover, these vessels must have their activities certified by 'the army unit stationed on an island near the fishing ground or certification of the position of operation of the fishing service ship via the global positioning system (GPS) by a functional agency'. This provides a way for the government not only to track its investment but also to organise the ships into maritime militias. Although the decree does not explicitly state that this is its purpose, its temporal proximity to the Haiyang Shiyu incident and the focus on tougher, more powerful ships makes this a plausible assertion.

## Analysis

A comparison of the maritime militias of China and Vietnam reveals numerous similarities. Most importantly, both have a history of “people’s war” and this doctrine continues to guide their present-day military doctrine. “People’s war” includes two core concepts. These are the focus on irregular warfare and the involvement of the whole of society in the fight. They form the guiding principles that underpin the formation of maritime militias in both countries. It is the responsibility of all citizens to fight for the state and the party, an idea that lies at the core of the 2018 Vietnamese Defence law.

Whether or not it would be possible to create a force without such a revolutionary background is an interesting conundrum. It is clear that the history of “people’s war” and the tradition it created, reinforced by the apparatus of the state, is crucial for the creation of maritime militias and their continued existence. Thus, it can be said that this is perhaps the main reason why both China and Vietnam have been able to maintain maritime militias, and is a factor that can be directly linked to their system of government and how each eventually came into power.

The concept of “people’s war” is unique to communist/Leninist societies. Guerrilla warfare, however, is not. The tactics associated with the former came about out of necessity and were merged with ideology to create a doctrine which worked for both countries. It is clear that this process played a significant role in the creation of their respective maritime militias. This tradition, combined with the threat of a technologically superior force, meant that these countries, by necessity, resorted to using what was available to them to counter threats. In both cases, however, maritime militias were formed in the heat of war. Would it be possible to create a maritime militia capable of conducting what is known as grey warfare without this tradition of “people’s war”? I think not. For this sort of warfare, a highly centralised system such as that encountered in Leninist societies is necessary in order to bring all aspects of the state together, both civilian and military. Filipino fishermen saw it as the duty of their government to respond to Chinese territorial aggression, not their own, something that was vastly different to the worldview of Vietnamese fishermen in 2014 (Macatuno, 2016).

The Chinese and Vietnamese have addressed this issue in two ways: firstly, through the education of their citizens to believe that it is their duty to serve in defence of country and party. Whether by deploying party members alongside the fishermen to make sure they remain loyal or by threatening punishment upon return if they do not fulfil their duty, the system and its ideology are designed to ensure citizens will serve when required. It is hard to believe a democracy could organise a militia whose members were willing to do the same, or deploy the same effective means of compliance as a communist party. This can be seen clearly in the interviews of Filipino fishermen who insisted that ‘it is not our job’ to defend territorial waters (Macatuno, 2016).



Secondly, it took the apparatus of a strong state to create these forces. In the case of the PAFMM, entire families were taken hostage ashore to ensure the fishermen's loyalty. More recently, subsidies, payments and even preferential legal treatment were deployed in order to entice the continued participation of fishermen in the militia. The state has been shown to have the power to create a system where it is almost impossible to refuse anything, albeit with the threat of punishment and the withdrawal of privileges. This is symptomatic of a Leninist government where the government/party has significant power over all aspects of life. Finally, the ideology which created the doctrine of "people's war" has been fed to the citizens ever since and, combined with the above-described apparatus, has resulted in strong feelings of duty to serve the country among the citizenry.

It is also clear that China and Vietnam entertain different reasons for maintaining the militias. China's use of the PAFMM as a "grey" force to expand its territorial claims in the region elicited varying responses from different countries. To the contrary, Vietnam installed a militia not to rival the PAFMM directly but to be able to compete with it even if on a smaller scale where needed. It has provided it with a means of responding to territorial aggression in kind, through the use of fishing boats rather than warships. It is in the use of a maritime militia for "grey zone" warfare, however, that the two countries have a distinct advantage. The highly centralised government system, as seen in both the PRC and SRV, allows for the effective wielding of the non-military aspects of the state towards a common goal. This is most obvious in the control of the economy and the judiciary in support of the national strategy. The troubles of the Filipinos in setting up their National Task Force for the West Philippine Sea is due, in part, to the fact that their government is not as centralised as in communist/Leninist systems. It is telling that their task force was made up of representatives from 16 different agencies (Government of the Philippines, 2016). One of their mandates was to create an Action Task Force, which to date they have yet to do, demonstrating the difficulties faced by a less centralised state.

It is, therefore, possible to conclude that two elements must be in place in order to create and maintain an effective maritime militia: first, a tradition of all citizens serving in the military or militia, and second a highly centralised state – either one with authoritarian-personal control or one with authoritarian mass control (Janowitz, 1964). In regard to the former, it is clear that both the PRC and SRV share this tradition. This arose from their unique history, which is inextricably linked to their ideology. As can be seen by the reluctance of the Filipino fishermen to sacrifice their own economic prosperity to execute tasks, like defence, which they consider as the duty of the government, it would be almost impossible to create an effective force constituted from civilians who do not have such a tradition.

Regarding the second point, a highly centralised state is important for two reasons. First, it is crucial for the close collaboration between the government and the military, which plays a significant role in the maintenance of the maritime militia. In particular, if the militia is to

be deployed in hybrid warfare, a centralised state is especially important as it can go beyond mere self-defence. Rather, incentives, payments and support have to be handed out in order to enable the fishermen and ship owners to continue to be paid whilst engaging in activities that keep them away from their own means of production. What we see is that an effective maritime militia requires a highly centralised state such as a communist/Leninist one. The Government of the Philippines' failure shows that without this singular driving force and unifier it is decidedly more difficult to bring together all the government apparatuses for a task of this kind.

It, thus, becomes obvious that countries with a communist/Leninist system have a clear advantage in creating maritime militias. My research does not show that it is impossible to create a maritime militia in a non-communist/Leninist state. In order to do so successfully, however, one requires many of the hallmarks of such states, primarily a highly centralised government and a tradition of enforced mass service.

## Conclusion

Vietnam and China created their maritime militias at different points in time and for different reasons. Consequently, it is clear that they have done so due to the system of government in place and how this was brought about. In each case, their experience in fighting numerically and technologically superior forces, led them to utilise the assets they had available. Although the time and circumstances under which these militias were created differ, the reasons why both countries were able to deploy them are similar. Both used the idea of “people’s war”, their highly centralised form of government and, also, successfully mobilised public sentiment, as well as state organisation. In this regard, a tradition of “people’s war” is the key factor why both were able to create a maritime militia, something that can be observed in both states’ military doctrine.

In terms of the maintenance of maritime militias, it is clear that the tradition of “people’s war” and a highly centralised state are the two most crucial factors. Both states share similar systems of government and processes by which the ruling parties came to power. In both states, the centralised nature of the Leninist government and the overarching control of the party have enabled the close collaboration of the military, local governments and businesses in order to sustain the militia through favourable loans, payments and even laws. They have also been able to make use of the militia as a hybrid warfare actor. Combined with their respective traditions of “people’s war”, China and Vietnam were able to create a doctrine and a force that are still of use in the twenty-first century. Were it not for this tradition of universal service, a hallmark of their shared systems, it is doubtful that either would be able to maintain a maritime militia.

With the South China Sea being one of the world’s most disputed areas, the maritime militias of each country will only rise in importance. The significance of the South China Sea to

both states bordering the region and to policy-makers and business leaders globally, hinges on the fact that a third of global trade transits through it. In the coming years, this rather fringe topic will increasingly come to the forefront, including in Europe where it has until recently been largely ignored. This project aimed to shed light on these two important but little understood organisations with the aim of forming a hypothesis about maritime militias that is relevant to the region and other states globally. It has successfully done this by adding a direct comparison of the two countries in the literature. Mentions to the VPAFMM are usually cursory rather than forming an in-depth examination of the organisation itself. As such, this study has successfully added to the literature on the topic by not only giving equal treatment to both PAFMM and VPAFMM, but by using this to form a hypothesis that can be applied to maritime militias in general, whilst also providing some pointers to policy-makers, who may be considering the creation of a maritime militia of their own.

This project was limited by various factors, principally language and the availability of sources. As more sources are translated, this area will become increasingly more accessible to researchers globally, beyond those with the necessary language skills. At this point, it is important to give credit to Professor Andrew S. Erickson and Conor M. Kennedy for the important work they do in bringing the role of maritime militias to the world's attention through their valuable open-source research. Without their efforts, this project would have been impossible.

This research aimed to provide a direct comparison of the maritime militias of China and Vietnam and discuss the reasons behind their creation and effective maintenance. It was shown that it is unlikely that the Philippines will be able to create a successful maritime militia in the manner of Vietnam, let alone China. For the time being, maritime militias will continue to be the sole reserve of China and Vietnam due to their system of government and unique histories.

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