Maritime Militia:
The Unofficial Maritime Agency

Conor Kennedy

DISCLAIMER: The opinions expressed in this briefing are those of the authors alone and do not represent the official views of the U.S. Navy or any other entity of the U.S. Government. Please do not circulate without authors’ explicit written permission.
What is the Maritime Militia?

• A military force raised from civilian mariners and coastal populations to support state objectives at sea
  - Not released from production
  - Organize in military formations
  - Receive military training

• Drawn from port areas with large fishing, shipbuilding, or shipping industries where experienced mariners or craftsmen provide a ready pool of recruits
  - Largely concentrated amongst the fishing fleets

• Tasked with a wide array of missions from peacetime coercion of rivals to wartime support of navies
Limited Scope of Examination

- Grassroots militia forces require language-capable examination
  - Difficult for any single researcher to fully examine across linguistic boundaries

- Significant Maritime Militia activity occurring in South China Sea
  - Persistent territorial disputes
  - Steady overall expansion of paramilitary forces
Major Sources of Maritime Militia

• Maritime Militia used to advance territorial claims in South China Sea
  - Defending maritime claims and occupied features
  - Aggression against perceived incursions by foreign vessels

China

Vietnam

• Both have rich traditions of People’s War and using militia to defend territory
  - The militia are official components of their armed forces
  - Similarly organized
  - Similarly tasked
High Level Support for Maritime Militia

April 2013: Chinese President Xi Jinping visits Tanmen Maritime Militia company on the first anniversary of the Scarborough Shoal Incident. Hainan’s Maritime Militia would later mobilize to defend the HYSY 981 oil rig.

July 2014: Vietnam’s President Truong Tan Sang visits Danang fishermen, presenting gifts to the owner of fishing vessel DNa 90152, which was rammed and sunk by Chinese Hainanese Maritime Militia near the HYSY 981 oil rig.
China’s Maritime Militia

• Great mobilization potential – world’s largest fishing fleet – approx. 187,211 marine fishing vessels by end of 2015

• New emphasis on Maritime Militia in nationwide reserves building, as contained within the 13th Five Year Plan
  -Local growth in Maritime Militia forces evident

*National Defense News, Jan 2016: Graphic depicting recent growth in Beihai City’s Maritime Militia in quantity and specialization*
Integrating Three Sea Forces

Sovremenny-class Destroyer
*Hangzhou (136)*

Banner reads “Ningbo City Xiangshan County Militia Near-Seas Reconnaissance Detachment”

“*A component of China’s ocean defense armed forces, [that enjoy] low sensitivity and great leeway in maritime rights protection actions*”

-Zhoushan Garrison Commander Zeng Pengxiang

Fisheries Law Enforcement
Maritime Rights Protection in the South China Sea

Sanya based Maritime Militia harassed the USNS *Impeccable* in 2009

Gulf of Tonkin

Hainan Province

Tanmen Maritime Militia Company present during April 2012 Scarborough Shoal Incident

Sanya

Tanmen

Maritime Militia mobilized to defend CNOOC HYSY-981 oil rig in May 2014

South China Sea

Sansha


Paracel Islands

South Sea Fleet HQ in Zhanjiang

Gulf of Tonkin

Sanya

South China Sea

Sansha
Sansha City Maritime Militia

Liberation Army Daily, 30 July 2015: Militia Outpost and People’s Armed Forces Department (PAFD) on Tree Island – Military institutions established to manage and support militia operations.

Macao Daily, 28 July 2016: Drummond Island also set up a PAFD and militia outpost.


Sansha Garrison established its first Maritime Militia company on July 2013.
State Run Militia Fishing Fleet

Sansha City Fisheries Development Co. Ltd. was established in February 2015.

Hainan Government Document #532238, 2015: “84 militia steel-hulled fishing vessels” to be delivered to the Sansha City state-owned fishing company.

CDR Cai Xihong wrote in 2015 that Sansha City Fishery Development Co. Ltd. is a Maritime Militia organization.

Hainan Government Website, 18 June 2016: Fleet of vessels designated “Qiong Sansha Yu” moored at Yazhou Central Fishing Port.

Veteran’s preferences & salaried positions. Job recruitment table for Sansha City Fisheries Development Co. Ltd. gives hiring priority to PLA veterans for all positions aboard the vessels.
Training Underway


(Left) *National Defense*, No. 6, 2015: This exercise featured Sansha Maritime Militia loading 32-kg crates labeled “light weapons.”
21 September 2016: Guangdong Province, Zhanjiang City, Xiashan District Maritime Militia train with PLA Navy South Sea Fleet for vessel repair and logistic support.

This unit has undergone three periods of development over the years:

Coastal Militia Company → Maritime Militia Company → Far Seas Militia Squadron
“Using Civilians Against Civilians”

Numerous Chinese and Vietnamese Maritime Militia clashed near HYSY 981 oil rig from May to July 2014

National Defense, 2015: Sansha Maritime Militia conduct a nighttime inspection of a vessel whose crew was deemed guilty of “rights infringement and illegal fishing”

“In most cases...our best approach is to use our fishing vessels against their fishing vessels”
-Senior Captain Li Jie (Naval Research Institute) during 2015 TV interview
Vietnam’s Maritime Militia

Fishing fleet comprised of numerous smaller wooden-hulled fishing vessels

Initiatives to strengthen Maritime Militia

Vietnam passed a law on its militia in 2009, providing a legal framework for the building of its militia, providing particular detail on regulations for the building of the “Marine Militia and Self-Defense Forces”
Training Efforts

*People’s Army Newspaper Online, September 2016*: Vietnamese **Maritime Militia** from Haiphong’s marine shipping companies receive live-fire training from naval staff.

*People’s Army Newspaper Online, October 2015*: Vietnamese **Marine Self Defense Forces** receive live-fire training under direction from the General Staff of the Vietnam People’s Army and in coordination with the Navy.
Recognizing Vessel Shortcomings

July 2014: Vietnamese Prime Minister announces a disbursement of VND4.5 trillion ($211.5 million) to help fishermen build larger offshore vessels.

A Vietnamese fishing vessel rammed and sunk during clashed near the HYSY 981 oil rig is towed back to Da Nang.

Government Decree 67/2014/ND-CP: Meant to implement policies for improved fisheries development, including preferential policies for boosting the construction of larger steel-hulled deep-sea fishing vessels.

THE GOVERNMENT

THE SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM
Independence - Freedom - Happiness

No. 67/2014/ND-CP

Hanoi, July 7, 2014

DECREE

On a number of fisheries development policies

Pursuant to the December 22, 2001 Law on Organization of the Government:

Pursuant to the December 16, 2002 Law on the State Budget:

Pursuant to the November 26, 2007 Law on Tax Administration:

Pursuant to the June 16, 2010 Law on Enterprise Income Tax:

Pursuant to the May 26, 2010 Law on Value Added Tax and the 2013 Law Amending and Supplementing a Number of Articles of the Law on Value Added Tax:

Pursuant to the December 9, 2003 Law on Revenue and the 2013 Law Amending and Supplementing a Number of Articles of the Law on Revenue:

Pursuant to the November 26, 2007 Law on the Personal Income Tax:

Pursuant to the June 16, 2010 Law on Enterprise Income Tax and the 2013 Law Amending and Supplementing a Number of Articles of the Law on Enterprise Income Tax:

Pursuant to the December 16, 2002 Law on the State Budget and the 2013 Law Amending and Supplementing a Number of Articles of the Law on the State Budget:

Others Resorting to Maritime Militia

• Philippines: Chief of the Northern Luzon Command announced in June 2016 intention to include the fishing community in the National Task Force’s effort to assert rights over Scarborough Shoal
  -Fishermen reportedly reluctant to undertake this task

• Maritime Militia less effective if not backed up by naval or maritime law enforcement forces

(Left) CNN, July 2015: China Coast Guard personnel confront Filipino fishermen attempting to fish at Scarborough Shoal
Implications of Maritime Militia Presence

- Increased uncertainty in the actions or intent of regional states
Calibrated signals or just local activism?

Liberation Army Daily, 3 August 2016: PRC Defense Chief inspects Maritime Militia units in Ningbo and Wenzhou during his visit to Zhejiang Province. There he called for preparations for “people’s war at sea.”

Days later, Japan lodges protest with the PRC after discovering 230 fishing vessels operating near the Senkaku Islands.
Implications of Maritime Militia Presence

-Maritime Militia growth reflects increased recalcitrance
   Expanding tool sets for reinforcing claims, not for resolving disputes

-Increasing frequency of confrontation risks sparking conflict
   Flooding disputed waters with civilians
   A single fishing vessel can cause a major international incident

-Island construction efforts in the Spratlys will likely support Maritime Militia operations
Militarization and Politicization of Fishing Fleets

• Mix of economic incentive and political glorification distorts regular balancing of profit and risk

• Assertion of party leadership, political education, and military training of fishermen makes an already dangerous profession even more hazardous

• Resulting suspicions harmful to freedom of navigation and safety of fishing industry

Hainan Daily, 7 December 2012: Hainan Provincial Party Secretary Luo Baoming visits Tanmen Township to inform them of the goals set forth by the CPC’s 18th National Congress to develop marine resources, protect maritime sovereignty, and become a maritime power
How to Deal with Maritime Militia

• Pressure states that use Maritime Militia to disclose and identify such forces, and ensure proper distinction in order to protect innocent civilian vessels from mistaken identification as militia
  
  Ex: Liberation Army Daily, 6 January 2014: “Putting on camouflage, they qualify as soldiers; taking off the camouflage, they become law-abiding fishermen”

• Expect Coast Guards and Maritime Militia to adhere to Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea (CUES)
  - No more good cop, bad cop
A Few Thoughts

• Explore paths of Mil-to-Mil communication with provincial military commands that manage Maritime Militia

• Contact Maritime Militia personnel directly
  - Potentially more risk-averse than regular military units
  - Language-capable communication to disincline further aggression or obstruction

• Open source researchers can do more to cast light on these forces
  - Provide necessary evidence for policy makers and the public to openly discuss
For More Information:

Detailed compendium on China’s Maritime Militia can be found at:
http://www.andrewerickson.com/