Mr Jérôme Hubert René Gapany, Military Academy (MILAC) at ETH Zurich, Switzerland, From "People's War" to "Local Wars": China's Whole-of-Society Approach to Armed Forces Construction and National Defence under Xi Jinping"

Since Xi Jinping's rise to power and his appointment as Chairman of the Central Military Commission in 2012, China's armed forces have undergone sweeping structural and doctrinal reforms. These transformations aim to strengthen combat readiness, consolidate the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) control, and integrate civilian and military sectors under a unified command framework. This paper examines how these developments have reshaped civil-military relations in China, and how the boundary between these two sectors has increasingly blurred under Xi's leadership. Drawing on Chinese doctrinal documents and 16 months of fieldwork along the Taiwan Strait, it focuses on how China's "whole-of-society" approach to armed force construction mobilises local maritime actors and militias as part of its "winning local wars" strategy. Specifically, the "five-in-one" policy (dang-zheng-jun-jing-min), which coordinates the actions of the CCP, local governments, military, police, and population, has been central to enhancing China's coastal defence and anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) capabilities. Adopted by the Central Politburo in 2018, it seeks to establish a cohesive framework that extends from top military leadership in Beijing down to grassroots-level structures. As a result, civilian personnel from a wide range of industrial, social, and economic backgrounds (e.g. fishing communities or sand miners) can be recruited, trained, and mobilised to participate in national defence activities. This study examines in more detail how China's maritime militias and non-military actors are increasingly embedded into military doctrine, particularly in the context of coastal defence and so-called "island operations" (daoyu zuozhan). These contingents, equipped with military-grade weaponry and placed directly under military administration, play an instrumental role in coercive and low-intensity operations over disputed maritime areas in the South and East China Seas. By offering new insight into China's evolving maritime strategy, this article contributes to the academic discussion on the role of hybrid warfare and society in military operations.