

# Regional military separatism after Deng?

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Military separatism has plagued China since ancient times. It means that, in places where Chinese people traditionally lived in clusters, central authority lapsed, weakened, or collapsed and, as a consequence, an ideological and/or moral crisis developed which, in turn, permitted the rise of some ambitious or power-thirsty military men or civilians to dominate not only military, but political, economic, and administrative affairs as well, within a region or area, however large or small.

Military separatism comes in various forms, such as that characterized by a military governor (*zhoumu*), a frontier-troops commander (*jiedushi*), a warlord (*junfa*), or mountain warlord (*shantouzhuyizhe*). For the sake of distinguishing our term from its predecessors, regional military separatism (RMS) will be used to denote such possible phenomena after the death of Deng Xiaoping.

Recently, scholars and experts like Clare Hollingworth, Harrison E. Salisbury, and Endo Shotoku perceived that RMS may develop in the post-Dengist China. Their perceptions appear correct in view of the following major factors.

First, since 1949, the People's Republic of China (P.R.C.) government has been instilling in the minds of its people the concept of "region." There are military, administrative, economic, and political types of regions. Although many principles were observed in their respective demarcation, some people's basic interests were affected, resulting in a constant power struggle.

Second, a collective leadership is most likely to emerge after Deng. This means that he who controls the Central Military Commission of the Chinese Communist Party may still have to seek support from other power centers in order to carry out a plan.

Third, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has been manufacturing consumer durable goods since 1979. At a time when 60% of the P.R.C.'s national enterprises are near bankruptcy, 20% are barely surviving, and only 10% in good shape, the PLA may take over some of the problem enter-

prises. This means that the PLA will be increasingly dominating local economic affairs as years go by.

Fourth, P.R.C. officials are beginning to study the merits of federalism. This fact alone tends to encourage some PLA commanders and political commissars at any level to seize on opportunities to practice RMS, because federalism means decentralized power.

Fifth, Chinese people are well known for their parochial mentality, and even the Chinese Communists are unable to solve this problem. Needless to say, just the thought of that encourages or tends to encourage the practice of RMS by some people.

Sixth, the P.R.C. admits that roads leading to the frontier area are not sufficient to conduct a future war. This suggests that RMS could be practiced in those areas lacking adequate transportation systems.

Seventh, natural disasters plague many parts of mainland China. If the P.R.C. government failed to take care of the victims, some people in those disaster areas might practice RMS.

Eighth, foreign pressure is also a factor. There are many people who want China to be divided. For example, Nakajima Mineo of the Tokyo Foreign Languages University, in December 1991, proposed the formation of the Chinese Federation of Republics after the collapse of communism, which would include the Hong Kong Republic, the Guangdong Republic, the Taiwan Republic, and at least five others.

## Some areas can be ruled out

However, the practice of RMS can be ruled out in many places, such as the capital of the P.R.C., military camps, industrial areas, etc. Broadly speaking, it is not possible for RMS to emerge, develop, and grow in areas along the coastal as well as the frontier areas. If making money is what the coastal people are after, then it would be utterly unwise for them to practice something that would invite a military response from the Central Military Commission.

The frontier area is also unlikely to practice RMS. The PLA troops are there to coopt the ethnic minorities not to help them work for their cause of independence. In other words, a symbiotic relationship between the PLA troops and the minorities is not possible. Nonetheless, small-scale RMS could be practiced in the interior or inland China (*neiludiqu*), if the P.R.C. government repeatedly failed to take care of their needs and demands, such as has happened after natural disasters. To be sure, the *neiludiqu* has yet to benefit from Deng's open-door policy.

However, even if RMS is possible, it would still be deflected, checked, or offset by other factors, such as efforts by the P.R.C.'s Ministry of Public Security to resist "peaceful evolution," or the fear of chaos (*luan*) by the majority of Chinese people, who have had their fill after decades of turmoil in mainland China, because military separatism usually means civil war.