

WEEK 49, 2019

THE EPOCH TIMES

CHINA INSIDER

**TikTok Under Fire
for Censoring
US Teen Over Xinjiang Video 2**

Audience members applaud a performance of Shen Yun Performing Arts at Lincoln Center in New York on Jan. 18, 2015.

CHINESE TROLL ARMY ATTACKS

SHEN YUN

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XINJIANG ABUSES

Teen Blocked on TikTok Accuses App of ‘Covering Up’ Truth

ISABEL VAN BRUGEN

The U.S. teenager whose TikTok account was suspended after she posted videos calling out the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) for its oppression of Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities in Xinjiang has accused the Beijing-based company behind the video-sharing app of “covering up” the truth.

In a now-viral three-part video cleverly disguised as a tutorial on how to curl eyelashes, Feroza Aziz, a 17-year-old high school junior in New Jersey, tells her viewers to “spread awareness” of the human rights abuses in China’s troubled northwestern region, where it is estimated at least one million Uyghurs are being held in the region’s network of mass internment camps.

Shortly after, the Muslim American teenager said she had been blocked from TikTok for a month, sharing a screenshot on Twitter of the message she received that it was due to “multiple violations of our [TikTok’s] Community Guidelines.”

While the social network, owned by the Chinese company ByteDance, has since issued a public statement apologizing for suspending Aziz’s TikTok account, it has continued to deny the suspension had anything to do with “China-related content.”

Instead, the app said in a statement that the teenager’s account was suspended for posting a satirical video “that included the image of Osama bin Laden” on a separate, previously deleted account. A spokesman for TikTok later added that the video was removed for 50 minutes due to a “human moderation error.”

Aziz said in a phone interview with The Epoch Times that she believes TikTok’s statement is “suspicious” and “doesn’t add up at all,” because a video she posted last month on a separate account highlighting the humanitarian crisis in Xinjiang was removed from the app as well.

She said that although her account has since been reinstated, she believes this only happened because of the media coverage that ensued after her ban.

I think they gave me my account back because they cracked under pressure and they knew the world was finding out that the truth was finally coming out.

Feroza Aziz

“For them to say that my account was taken down because of a satirical video I created on a previous account, which were both deleted—I was very doubtful,” she said. “I think they gave me my account back because they cracked under pressure, and they knew the world was finding out that the truth was finally coming out,” she said.

Aziz, who describes herself as a human rights activist, also told The Epoch Times she finds it extremely odd that TikTok hasn’t privately apologized to her since she emailed them on Nov. 26.

“They should’ve reached out to me because everything started with me, so I don’t know why they haven’t,” she said. “I don’t know why they’re issuing so many public statements and still haven’t spoken to me.

“I think it is very, very strange.”

CCP officials say the mass detentions among the Uyghur population, the majority of whom practice Islam, are part of measures to crack down on terrorism, religious extremism, and separatism in the country. The CCP has referred to potential “extremist threats” in order to justify its strict surveillance and crackdown on Uyghurs and other ethnic minority groups in the Xinjiang region.

Uyghurs in the region are being detained for reasons such as contacting friends or relatives abroad, traveling to a foreign country, growing beards, and attending religious gatherings, Uyghurs who have family members in the camps told The Epoch Times.

Firsthand accounts described to The Epoch Times have also revealed attempts by authorities to strip Uyghur detainees of their culture and language—as the Party did to the Chinese and Tibetans during the cultural revolution—forcing them to denounce their faith and pledge loyalty to the CCP and its leader. If detainees fail to follow orders, they may be subject to several forms of torture as punishment.

TikTok Faces Backlash

News of Aziz’s account suspension comes as TikTok—which has a global audience of more than 700

million—faces intense scrutiny. The video app previously came under fire after moderation guidelines leaked earlier this year stated that videos containing references to the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989, Tibetan independence, and Falun Gong, among other criteria, must be censored.

While the guidelines made no specific reference to Xinjiang itself, it said videos containing “highly controversial topics, such as separatism, religion sects conflicts, conflicts between ethnic groups, for instance exaggerating the Islamic sects conflicts” must be moderated, the Guardian reported.

Meanwhile, a newly published report from the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), titled “Mapping more of China’s tech giants: AI and surveillance,” found that ByteDance actively “collaborates with public security bureaus across China, including in Xinjiang” to disseminate CCP propaganda on the region.

The tech company also signed a “strategic cooperation agreement” in April with the Ministry of Public Security’s Press and Publicity Bureau, to “promote the ‘influence and credibility’ of police departments nationwide” within the Chinese version of TikTok, named Douyin.

“Under the agreement, all levels and divisions of police units from the Ministry of Public Security to county-level traffic police would have their own Douyin account to disseminate propaganda,” the ASPI report states.

“The agreement also reportedly says ByteDance would increase its offline cooperation with the police department, however, it is unclear what this offline cooperation is. “Beijing has demonstrated a propensity for controlling and shaping overseas Chinese-language media,” Fergus Ryan, Danielle Cave, and Vicky Xiuzhong Xu wrote in the report.

“The meteoric growth of TikTok now puts the CCP in a position where it can attempt to do the same on a largely non-Chinese-speaking platform—with the help of an advanced AI-powered algorithm.”



Freshmen march during military training at Guangzhou University in China’s Guangdong Province, on Sept. 20, 2005.

Report Highlights Risks of Research Partnerships With Chinese Universities

FRANK FANG

A recent Australian report is warning governments, companies, and schools that their research cooperation with Chinese universities might contribute to the Chinese regime’s military development and human rights abuses. The report, titled “The China Defence Universities Tracker: Exploring the Military and Security Links of China’s Universities,” was published by Canberra-based think tank Australian Strategic Policy Institute on Nov. 25.

“When analyzing cases of espionage and illegal export involving Chinese universities, it becomes clear that institutions with strong military and security links are disproportionately implicated in theft and espionage,” the report said.

The report reviewed about 160 Chinese universities, companies, and research institutes, based on information available online, including Chinese agencies’ websites.

It placed 92 Chinese institutions in a “very high risk” category, meaning that they could be “leveraged for military or security purposes.”

Among those 92 institutions, 52 belong to China’s People’s Liberation Army (PLA), such as Rocket Force Command College, Navy Logistics Academy, and Army Medical University. Additionally, 20 civilian univer-

The establishment of defense laboratories fosters close relationships between researchers and the military that can be used to facilitate and incentivize espionage.

Australian Strategic Policy Institute report

A pilotless helicopter displayed by Beihang University at an exhibition of military and civilian technological achievements in Qingdao, in Shandong Province, China, on Oct. 10, 2018.

sities were also tagged as “very high risk” institutions.

In addition, 23 civilian universities were placed in the next category of “high risk,” while 44 other civilian universities were flagged as “medium” or “low risk.”

Details of these Chinese universities and research institutes, including their risk assessment and research areas, have been compiled in an online database called “China Defence Universities Tracker.”

The report identified at least 15 civilian universities that have been linked to espionage, implicated in export controls violations, or have been identified by the U.S. government as aliases for China’s nuclear weapons programs.

Moreover, four of the “Seven Sons of National Defense”—a group of leading universities with deep links to China’s military and defense industry such as Beihang University, Harbin Institute of Technology, and Nanjing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics (NUAA)—have been implicated in espionage or export controls violations, according to the report.

One recent U.S. court case has involved NUAA. In October 2018, the U.S. Department of Justice charged a Chinese spy named Xu Yanjun, who was working for China’s top intelligence agency the Ministry of State Security (MSS), for conspiring to steal

information on GE Aviation’s fan blade design for jet engines.

Xu and his conspirators arranged for a GE aviation engineer to give a presentation at NUAA, with Xu paying for all of the engineer’s travel expenses to China, the indictment said. After the presentation, Xu continued to extract critical information from the GE employee. According to BBC, NUAA confirmed that Xu was also a part-time postgraduate student at its school.

“The MSS also leverages civilian universities for training, research, technical advice, and possibly direct participation in cyber espionage,” the report said.

For instance, Su Yuting, a professor at the School of Electrical and Information Engineering at Tianjin University, was a recipient of a technology progress award issued by the MSS, according to a report by the university. Su’s area of research includes multimedia information processing and security, and Internet of Things (IoT) technology.

The think-tank noted that with the expansion of collaboration between universities around the world and Chinese partners, “it’s clear that many institutions have not effectively managed risks to human rights, security, and research integrity.”

For example, between 2007 and 2017, the PLA dispatched more than 2,500 of its scientists to train and work in universities overseas.

“Some of those scientists used civilian cover or other forms of deception to travel abroad,” the report said.

“All of them were sent out to gain skills and knowledge of value to the Chinese military; all of them are believed to be Party members who return to China when instructed.”

Military-Civil Fusion

Beijing has long adopted a state strategy of leveraging private industry and universities to advance its military, the report said. Currently, the Chinese Communist Party’s Central Commission for the Development of Military-Civil Fusion oversees this fusion effort.

In August 2018, China’s Ministry of Education, Ministry of Finance, and the National Development and Reform Commission jointly issued a policy document, urging universities to integrate into the “military-civil fusion system” and “advance the two-

way transfer and transformation of military and civilian technological achievements.”

“At least 68 universities are officially described as parts of the defense system or are supervised by China’s defense industry agency, the State Administration of Science, Technology and Industry for National Defense (SASTIND),” the report stated.

SASTIND, a subordinate agency of China’s Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT), is overseen by China’s State Council, a cabinet-like agency. The “Seven Sons” are supervised by the MIIT.

There are also more than 160 defense-focused laboratories in civilian universities. “Many of these defense labs obscure their defense links in official translations of their names,” the report said.

For instance, some national defense science and technology laboratories are simply called “national key laboratories.”

“The establishment of defense laboratories fosters close relationships between researchers and the military that can be used to facilitate and incentivize espionage,” the report said.

In May 2013, U.S. intelligence agencies found that a computer science laboratory at Wuhan University carried out cyberattacks on the West, including the United States, on behalf of the PLA, according to a report by The Washington Free Beacon. The program was run by the Ministry of Education.

The Australian report also warned that partnerships with Chinese universities and companies could inadvertently contribute to human rights violations.

For instance, state-owned China Electronics Technology Group Corporation has established joint laboratories in Europe and Australia since 2014. Its subsidiary, Hikvision, a video surveillance company, has been linked to human rights abuses in the region of Xinjiang, where the regime has deployed a dense surveillance network to monitor and control more than 10 million Uyghur Muslims.

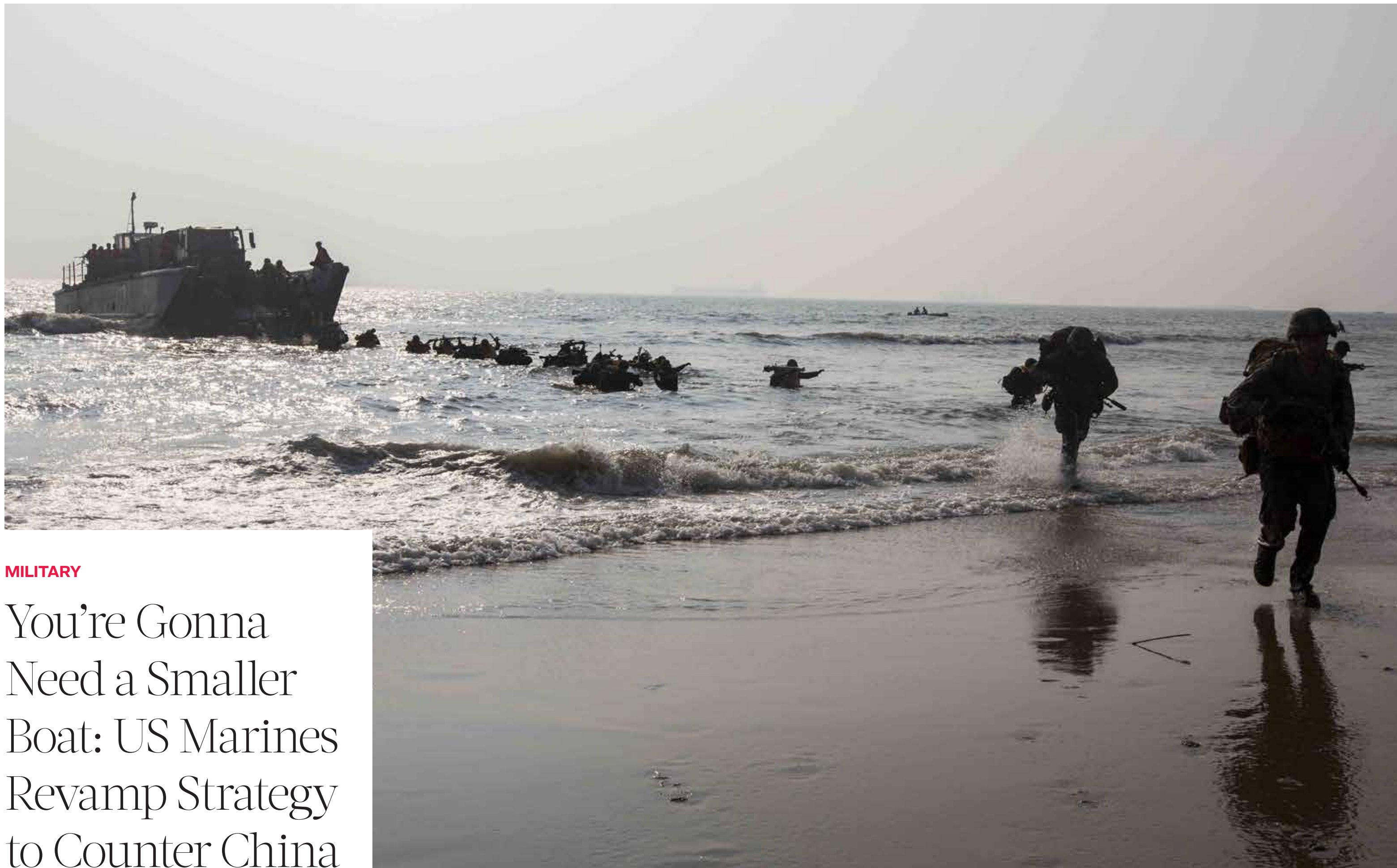
To guard against such human rights and security risks, the report recommended that universities collaborate with Chinese counterparts set up independent research integrity offices and introduce annual reviews of research integrity.



U.S. teen Feroza Aziz informs viewers about the Chinese Communist Party’s detention of at least 1 million Uyghurs in the Xinjiang region of China, in TikTok videos that were later deleted by the company.



STR/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



U.S. MARINE CORPS PHOTO BY LANCE CPL. CHRISTIAN AYERS

MILITARY

You're Gonna Need a Smaller Boat: US Marines Revamp Strategy to Counter China

SIMON VEAZEY

After nearly two decades of accumulating dust on the streets of Fallujah and Camp Bastion, the U.S. Marine Corps is once again preparing to get its boots wet.

Following the publication of the Trump administration's 2018 National Defense strategy, the U.S. military has been revamping its strategies to counter Russia and China, in an era of what analysts call renewed "great power competition."

In the Pacific, China's layers of long-range precision missiles designed to hold the U.S. Navy and its jets at arm's length have left strategists with a headache.

The concerns aren't simply about all-out warfare, but that this so-called "anti-access bubble" hampers the support of regional allies—and potentially threatens to push the United States out of now-vulnerable permanent positions such as deep-water ports.

The Marines have now come up with a plan to turn the tables on the Chinese military.

They are going to need a smaller boat.

Marine Corps Commandant Gen. David Berger published a major shift in strategy in July, which would see the Marines return to their roots as an expeditionary force that supports the Navy, with an almost exclusive focus on countering China in the Pacific.

"The current force is not organized, trained, or equipped to support the Naval force—operating in contested maritime spaces, facilitating sea control, or executing distributed maritime operations," Berger wrote. "There is no piece of equipment or major defense acquisition program that defines us."

Berger's plan has yet to run the gauntlet of Congress, and needs the green light from the Navy in the form of a sweeping Navy force-structure assessment (FSA), expected sometime in the next month.

"The biggest thing that came out of the new strategy is the shift of the Marine Corps away from focusing on amphibious assaults, where they will storm a beach like in World War II, toward much smaller operations," said Bryan Clark, senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments. Clark, a former special assistant to the Chief of Naval Operations, told The Epoch Times that those new operations would be "more like small raids, setting up advanced bases in remote locations."

Having smaller ships (preferably with stealth capability) is vital not only militarily—it's also about being able to slip into position either unnoticed or with a politically palatable cover story.

Using higher numbers of smaller ships, the Marines would set up artillery, batteries, and surveillance on numerous remote atolls and island chains, slipping inside the anti-aircraft bubble on smaller ships, without the provocation or risk associated with a carrier or large amphibious ship.

"That shift [in strategy] has a lot of implications for the kinds of equipment and systems the Marines need, which has created a lot of disruption in the industry that supports the Marine Corps and also with the Navy that builds the ships and mans the ships the Marines use," Clark said.

Great power competition has pushed the 186,000-strong Marine Corps to narrow its strategy focus almost exclusively on China, Clark says, while NATO and the U.S. army tackle the other strategic challenges posed by Russia in Europe.

In many ways, that marks a return to the traditional role of the Marines as an amphibious Navy-

supporting expeditionary force—albeit minus the large-scale beach assaults launched from massive amphibious ships.

Distributed Lethality

The Marine Corps' strategy aligns with new Navy tactics called distributed operations, designed to counter the fact that the queens in the game of maritime chess—the large U.S. ships and carriers—are held at bay by relatively expendable firepower.

Distributed operations mean moving away from reliance on a few large ships, instead, distributing the firepower and forces (lethality), as well as surveillance, across many more platforms, including unmanned ships, with no single point of failure.

"Visions of a massed naval armada nine nautical miles off-shore in the South China Sea preparing to launch the landing force in swarms of ACVs, LCUs, and LCACs [amphibious landing vehicles] are impractical and unreasonable," Berger wrote in his strategy document. "We must accept the realities created by the proliferation of precision long-range fires, mines, and other smart-weapons, and seek innovative ways to overcome those threat capabilities."

Among the other solutions, Berger also proposed experimenting with "lethal long-range unmanned systems capable of traveling 200 nautical miles."

But the mainstay of Marine-distributed operations would be Expeditionary Advanced Based (EABO)—the creation of positions on numerous atolls and islands, potentially owned by allies, that Clark referred to.

Similar strategies have been proposed for British marines as a solution to the long-range missile puzzles.

Shell Game

Sidharth Kaushal, a research fellow on sea power at defense think tank Royal United Services Institute, last week co-authored a paper

U.S. Marines currently under 4th Marine Regiment, 3rd Marine Division, and members of the Indian military run to shore on Kakinada Beach, India, on Nov. 19, 2019.

on the subject.

"It's very difficult to find and suppress missile batteries on an island," Kaushal told The Epoch Times.

"EABO envisions creating a litany of advanced anti-ship positions, anti-air defense positions, and potentially forward air refueling positions. This would now give the adversary a headache because they now have to waste expensive precision-guided munitions on multiple atolls, many of which are empty, most of which will be hardened to a certain degree," he said.

"This would give the U.S. Navy—which would be operating behind these sorts of atoll positions—more freedom for maneuver[s] as well as a certain degree of air cover."

That protection of the Naval force marks another key change in Marine Corps strategy, he said—a focus on assisting the fleet.

The Marine Corps could also bring anti-ship missiles to those positions—something it hasn't done in the past.

For the Chinese, it's worthwhile to throw precision-guided missiles worth millions at a \$14 billion ship that can be sunk with one hit, taking down billions of dollars worth of aircraft at the same time.

But even if it can be identified, an island or atoll can't be sunk, stacking the costs in favor of the Marines. Furthermore, the Marines would be constantly moving positions from one island to another.

"It's like a shell-game in a way," said Kaushal. "One shell is full, many are empty. If you are constantly moving, you force the opponent to expend munitions."

But the island position strategy isn't mostly about all-out warfare. Instead, it turns the tables on adversaries that have relied on their anti-ship and anti-aircraft missile prowess to hassle their way toward their geopolitical goals without sparking all-out conflict.

"This approach of putting U.S. weapons on allied soil—it's using the Chinese playbook against them," Clark notes. "Because you

We must accept the realities created by the proliferation of precision long-range fires, mines, and other smart-weapons, and seek innovative ways to overcome those threat capabilities.

Marine Corps Commandant Gen. David Berger

conflict that doesn't tip into or trigger open war.

To engage "below the conflict," a ship or force needs to already be in the neighborhood, and it needs a cover story, such as being on exercises, or stealth capability.

"It's really the local forces that are available on-site, rather than the aggregate capabilities of both nations which matter," says Kaushal. "It's how much you can muster in a relatively short time span."

That means there's going to be a growing, but low-key, low-visibility military presence in the Pacific to keep all those elements ready," he says.

"There is going to be a growing emphasis on a forward-deployed layer of contact forces that can operate with a low signature and with a degree of stealth within the anti-aircraft bubble."

"You see this very much in what America calls dynamic deployment."

"If you can generate a relatively scalable force, and place it on a few islands after some provocation, that might be a way of sending a diplomatic and coercive counter-message without escalating to a level that for example, politicians might not be comfortable with."

"In a limited skirmish between the PLA (Chinese) navy and let's say allied forces, deploying something like a carrier task group might be too political."

To a degree, this is a return to the low-conflict, high-stakes skirmishes and maneuvers of the Cold War, Kaushal says.

"This form of conflict is likely to become ever more frequent because states can't afford to clash openly in a world of mutually assured destruction and economic interdependence."

While the cover stories of maneuvers, humanitarian missions, etc., allow forces to be in the right place at the right time and are transparent to both adversaries, as long as both sides have too much to lose from all-out conflict, neither will unmask that mutual fiction, Kaushal says.

"It's a question of whether leaders in both countries are willing to tie themselves to a collision course by openly acknowledging what's happening."

Clark too says that the EABO concept is about operating below the threshold.

Smaller Boats

But the Marine Corps' plan has a number of hurdles to pass, Clark says.

"If you really accept the argument that this will be the form of Marine operations, at least for the foreseeable future, then a lot of the force structure shifts that the Navy's been buying to support the Marines are not as useful."

Instead of the current 33 large amphibious ships, for example, they might need 50 or 60 "much

smaller ships," Clark says.

"That's a pretty significant disruption to the Navy's shipbuilding and to the shipbuilding industry."

"The other thing is that the Marine Corps internally is going to have to pay for all these new precision weapons, electronic warfare systems, command and control systems that they want to put ashore on these advanced bases."

But Clark says that there's a lot of interest on both the part of the Navy and Marine Corps in bringing Berger's plan to life and that he expects the upcoming FSA to evolve the Navy fleet in that direction.

"The question will then be whether the Navy and Marine Corps can make a case to Congress, and to the administration even."

"Then, they will have to convince the industry that there is a plan that will keep the industry solvent during this shift."

The changes will come slowly, he says, because shipbuilding is a very capital intensive activity.

"With the Army, you can make much more rapid changes. We saw with the Army during the Iraq war, they were able to create a counter-insurgency focused army within about three or four years."

Appealing to the Marine Spirit

The largest of the amphibious ships won't be axed, but instead, turned into mini-aircraft carriers for the new F-35B stealth fighter with its vertical takeoff and landing capability.

"They will want to keep the 11 of those that they plan on having," says Clark, "and let them mostly do the job of carrying F-35s."

"Most of the adjustments that we will see in the amphibious force structure will be in the smaller the LPDs. The Navy just bought a new tranche of those, they just bought 13, and they are getting ready to buy the next tranche."

Gen. Berger has suggested that the force could be cut to pay for the changes—a move that Clark says is unlikely to go down well with Congress or with the retired Marines who hold some sway over decision-makers.

But despite the upheaval, the commandant's plans could appeal to the core identity of the Marine Corps, and its fierce pride as a separate force in its own right, Clark says. "The [strategy] appeals in a way to the old guard because it creates a very different mission for the Marine Corps than the Army."

Kaushal agrees, saying that the seizing of offshore positions, EABO, and providing support for the Naval fleet all "reflects the classic emphasis of the Marine Corps."

"What the Marine Corps was doing in the 2000s, helping with very distinctly land battles in the Middle East, Fallujah, and so on, was the real divergence from its culture."

Assault Craft Unit 5 (L) during the 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit's amphibious offload to Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton in California.

U.S. MARINE CORPS PHOTO BY SGT. ADAM DUBLINSKE



The biggest thing that came out of the new strategy is the shift of the Marine Corps away from focusing on amphibious assaults, where they will storm a beach like in World War II, toward much smaller operations.

Bryan Clark, senior fellow, the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments

CHINESE INFLUENCE

Chinese Internet Trolls Attack Shen Yun in Bid to Influence Public Opinion

CATHY HE & NICOLE HAO

The Chinese communist regime has deployed its massive army of internet trolls to smear Shen Yun Performing Arts in an effort to sway public opinion against it, according to the company.

These anonymous people are working to stack Google search results with negative reviews of Shen Yun, Leeshai Lemish, an emcee with the company, said in a recent interview with The Epoch Times.

Shen Yun is a New York-based classical Chinese dance company that has toured the world since 2006, with a stated mission to showcase 5,000 years of Chinese civilization through the arts.

While the company consistently performs in sold-out venues across the globe, it's drawn the ire of the Chinese regime over presenting scenes depicting the continuing persecution of the spiritual group Falun Gong.

Falun Gong, also known as Falun Dafa, is a meditative practice that includes a set of moral teachings based on the principles of truthfulness, compassion, and tolerance. The practice was banned in China after the Chinese regime deemed it a threat due to its immense popularity; official estimates at the time put the number of practitioners at 70 million to 100 million.

Adherents of the practice in China have since been arbitrarily detained and subjected to forced labor, brainwashing, torture, and forced organ harvesting. More than 4,300 practitioners are confirmed to have been killed in the persecution, though the true number is thought to be much higher.

Outside of China, the regime has sought to demonize and silence efforts made to expose the persecution, including influenc-

ing overseas Chinese media and infiltrating overseas Chinese community groups.

Chinese Internet Trolls

Being in the regime's crosshairs, Shen Yun has faced a barrage of attempts to shut down or interfere with performances since the company started touring 13 years ago.

In addition to numerous cases of Chinese consulates or embassies pressuring theaters or governments to cancel performances, the company's tour buses have been sabotaged, performers' family members in China have been harassed and threatened by local police, and its ticketing website has come under attack, especially in the lead-up to prominent performances in cities like New York, Lemish said.

There's a very strategic and concerted effort to defame us in any possible way, especially in the media and online.

Leeshai Lemish, emcee, Shen Yun

Increasingly, the regime's efforts have shifted online. "There's a very strategic and concerted effort to defame us in any possible way, especially in the media and online," Lemish said.

He said the internet agitators seek to generate negative publicity about Shen Yun that ranks higher on internet searches than favorable reviews of the group's performances.

"No matter how many thousands of positive reviews. ... But still, at the very top of the Google ranking are these negative articles," Lemish told The Epoch Times' affiliate NTD, noting that the three reviews that appear on the first page of re-

sults from a Google search of "Shen Yun" are negative.

Given that most people don't navigate past the first page of Google search results, the trolls are "really working really hard to get that space to be just as negative as possible," he added.

In addition to a trove of favorable reviews of the performance found in The Epoch Times' special coverage of Shen Yun, the company has also received numerous welcome letters or proclamations by federal, state, and city officials in the United States, and other countries.

Known as the "50-Cent Army," Chinese internet trolls are financed by the regime—allegedly 50 cents (\$0.07) for every post—to spout propaganda or silence dissenting views online, both inside and outside of China.

A 2017 study published in the American Political Science Review said that the Chinese regime has hired as many as 2 million internet trolls, who post an estimated 488 million messages of misinformation or disinformation each year. Lemish said that these people attempt to boost the search result ranking of negative publicity by commenting on those articles, linking to them, and posting on social media.

For instance, articles about Shen Yun on Chinese embassy and consulate websites appear on the first few pages of search results, he said.

"These are not very popular websites. [They] don't do business, don't have news updates," Lemish said. "But those rank really high on Google—that's to me beyond explanation."

The emcee added, "You think, who's actually so motivated, and has the time and the energy, who's not on salary, to actually go and do this on such a large scale?"

Internet trolls have also flooded social media with negative comments about Shen Yun, Lemish



Chinese nationals living in Belgium use a Chinese and a Belgian flag to try to cover an advertisement for Shen Yun Performing Arts at the National Theatre in Brussels on March 31, 2014.

said, including on Yelp, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram.

"This is a very common tactic," he said, adding that many of the comments are in "Chinglish," referring to the broken English used by some native Chinese speakers.

Alexander M. Kehoe, search engine optimization expert and co-founder and operations director at Caveni Digital Solutions, an SEO and digital marketing company, told The Epoch Times that Chinese troll operations on social media are distinctive because the users "have trouble acting like Westerners."

"Chinese trolls on social media are very blatant," Kehoe said. "It's almost like they're toeing exactly the Party line from China. ... No American would actually say something like this."

While Chinese trolls currently trail their Russian counterparts in terms of effectiveness, Kehoe said the "Chinese government is finally catching up with those methods [used by the Russians]."

The curtain call for Shen Yun Performing Arts at the David H. Koch Theater at Lincoln Center in New York on Jan 11, 2015.



LARRY DAI/THE EPOCH TIMES

He said state-backed trolls use social media to push content up and down search engine results. For example, posting negative or controversial comments and disliking or reporting social media posts can push articles down, Kehoe said.

State actors ... have the resources to make either fake [websites] or make so many other websites link to you that it appears that you're authoritative, even if it's artificial as opposed to organic.

Alexander M. Kehoe, search engine optimization expert

"What [the Chinese regime] is doing now is basically pushing things [down] on social media that they don't like outside of the country because they have the resources to do so," he said.

Content can move higher in Google search results if it's linked by many authoritative sources, Kehoe noted, adding that this can be manipulated by state-actors and others wishing to artificially boost a result.

"State actors ... have the resources to make either fake [websites] or make so many other websites link to you that it appears that you're authoritative, even if it's artificial as opposed to organic," he said.

He said the Chinese regime has recently adopted such methods, adding that while the execution isn't as refined as Russian campaigns, "I expect that it'll get better and become harder to spot."

In addition to social media campaigns against the company, Shen Yun's Wikipedia page changes "on a daily basis" to include negative material, Lemish said, another well-known method used by the regime to smear its critics online.

The goal, according to Lemish, is to change the public's perception of Shen Yun.

"It's making us work a lot harder because just the normal way that people discover things these days [is] by Googling them and by hearing about them ... on social media," he said.

"They're really making a strong effort to not allow us to use those channels, and then create negative impressions on people to

make it harder for us to sell tickets."

Influencing Opinions Globally

The tactics used against Shen Yun converge with the regime's growing efforts in recent years to shape perceptions worldwide through online and social media influence operations, Lemish said.

Earlier this year, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube suspended hundreds of accounts linked to a Chinese regime information operation seeking to undermine the protest movement in Hong Kong.

Sonny Lo, a political science professor at the University of Hong Kong, previously told The Epoch Times, the regime has been harnessing Western social media to "win the hearts and minds" of people outside of China.

An October investigation by The Wall Street Journal found that an "army of pro-China troll accounts" attacked Houston Rockets general manager Daryl Morey after he posted an Oct. 4 tweet in support of protesters in Hong Kong.

The Journal analyzed nearly 170,000 tweets directed at Morey in the week following his initial tweet, and found that 22 percent came from accounts with no followers and 50 percent were from accounts with less than 13 followers—a trait tending to indicate state-affiliated operation.

The "troll attack" was intended to "manipulate the conversation about the Hong Kong protests," the Journal said.

Last week, a man claiming to be a Chinese spy, Wang Liqiang, who recently sought asylum in Australia, revealed that he was involved in an online campaign to attack Taiwan's ruling party in the lead-up to the island's elections in 2018, in an effort to support the Beijing-friendly opposition party.

Wang said the campaign had more than 200,000 social media accounts, and many other fan pages to support its effort.

The online attacks directed against Shen Yun reflect a broader concern about the regime's suppression of free speech in the West, Lemish told NTD.

If a person goes online to research what they want to watch, and what they see online "is skewed because of what Beijing, with their trillions upon trillions of dollars, are able to do, then they're really telling us what we can and cannot watch," he said.

"Do we have the freedom to choose what we want to watch?"

CHINESE MILITARY

Chinese Colonel at Hong Kong Army Garrison Got Rank Through Bribery: Insider

NICOLE HAO

A senior officer in the Chinese military garrison stationed in Hong Kong who's been derided as the "Rolex colonel" used bribes to obtain his rank, an insider told the Chinese-language edition of The Epoch Times.

Col. Wang Yanshun, head of logistics in the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Hong Kong garrison, spent a large sum to be promoted to second-in-command to current garrison commander Maj. Gen. Chen Daoxiang, the insider said.

The insider claimed personal familiarity with Wang. The Epoch Times Hong Kong bureau was able to confirm details of their relationship from other sources, as well as the insider's identity, which remains confidential.

'Rolex Colonel'

According to the insider, Wang, a native of China's Shandong Province, joined the PLA in 1987. He served with the Beijing Military Region's Air Force Logistic Department Auto Battalion after graduating from PLA Air Force Logistical University in 1991.

On Aug. 9, Wang and Chen Yading, the garrison's deputy political commissar, led about 400 soldiers from the unit to donate blood at the Red Cross Society of Hong Kong, as reported by HK01, a generally pro-Beijing outlet. It was the first time that Wang made a public appearance in Hong Kong.

On Nov. 16, Wang led about 50 PLA soldiers, members of an elite special forces team, in cleaning up bricks and barricades on a road near Hong Kong Baptist University in Kowloon.

While the soldiers were dressed in olive green t-shirts and orange basketball jerseys, Wang was attired in a sky-blue t-shirt and wore a Rolex Oyster Perpetual Submariner Date Blue watch with a white gold chain. According to Apple Daily, the watch is valued at 259,000 HKD (\$33,085); the price given on Rolex's U.S. website is \$36,850.

That Wang could afford such an expensive accessory drew the attention of many Chinese netizens, who mocked him as "the Rolex colonel," given the modest salaries of PLA officers, even at higher ranks. According to Chinese media, a logistics colonel can expect to earn a monthly salary of 10,000 yuan (about \$1,400).

Pay for Promotion

The insider said Wang had secured his position through bribery, and that it wasn't the first time he had

used money to gain a promotion. For example, the insider said that in 1999, Wang paid a bribe to be promoted to the command of a battalion from deputy commander.

"The leaders of Air Force Logistic Department planned to promote ... a fellow deputy battalion commander to take the position," the insider explained. "Wang bribed the department commander with 80,000 yuan (\$11,380) and took the position. At that time, his salary was less than 2,000 yuan (\$284) per month, and 80,000 yuan was a lot of money."

Talking about Wang's recent actions in Hong Kong, the insider said that Wang wanted to be promoted to deputy commander of the garrison and boost his credentials.

"Of course, he [Wang] would spend a large amount of money to bribe his way into this position," the insider said.

Giving bribes for promotion has become a common practice in the PLA in past decades, reflecting the high level of corruption in state institutions and the Chinese Communist Party.

In 2014, when the now-deceased senior Chinese Gen. Xu Caihou was under investigation, anti-corruption personnel sent to confiscate allegedly ill-gotten riches from his 2,000-acre residence reportedly discovered a basement filled with riches and boxes of cash. Each was marked with the names of the officers who had given Xu the money as bribes.

Of course, he [Wang] would spend a large amount of money to bribe his way into this position.

Insider

On March 5, 2015, Hong Kong's Ming Pao newspaper reported that Lin Xiaochang, founder and chairman of Philippines-based Hengchang International Co. Ltd., told the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference about rank-buying among officers:

"My nephew works for the PLA. He told me that you need to give the leader 200,000 yuan (\$28,440) for the position of a company commander, 300,000 yuan (\$42,660) for battalion commander, and 1 million yuan (\$142,190) for regiment commander," Lin said.

Li Lingpu from the Hong Kong bureau of The Epoch Times contributed to this report.



A Chinese soldier gestures at an entrance to the headquarters of the People's Liberation Army Hong Kong Garrison in the Admiralty district in Hong Kong on Oct. 7, 2019.



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