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China Can't Fight a Virus Let Alone a War

The COVID lockdowns in Shanghai seem like an impressive display of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) power. But authorities are doubling down on the bad policy, which shows how they will have supply and morale problems during any potential war.

The regime is trying to fight COVID-19 with draconian lockdowns. They have shut down key sectors like the technology hub of Shenzhen and the financial hub of Shanghai. That city has always been more open to the West due to its extensive presence of foreign diplomats. During World War II, Shanghai witnessed prolonged conflict between China and Japan.

But now, the West is witnessing the CCP lose its war against the coronavirus. The regime's failures in the fight against the pandemic suggest that it can't fight an actual war.

Dictators

The first problem is the CCP decided to double down on the bad policy. Most Americans fret over the superior power of a dictatorship. While democracies seem hopelessly fractured and forever fighting, a dictatorship can make decisive decisions and sustain them longer, even when they don't work.

This downside is seen clearly in Beijing's policies. Most of the world has abandoned lockdowns because they haven't stopped the spread of the virus. Death statistics of areas with no lockdown policies compared to locked-down areas show no difference. But there were also many opioid overdoses, suicides, mental illness, and domestic violence due to lockdowns.

In democracies, the people make their voices heard at every election. As a result, politicians—worried about keeping their jobs due to public discontent at overreaching government control—finally stopped their bad policies.

But in a communist dictatorship, the subordinates must worry about their jobs if they dare tell their leaders the truth. During the early days of COVID, brave whistle-blowers were suppressed for telling uncomfortable truths about the coronavirus. And this caused the situation to become much worse than it could have been.

It also meant that Beijing's handling of the pandemic sent a message to junior officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) that honest opinions are not welcome if they could damage the CCP's image. Even in peacetime, the Chinese people have died because of it.

The inability to listen to front-line individuals with direct knowledge of problems and the fondness for top-down, centralized planning that ignores criticism could hurt China in a potential conflict. Warfare is incredibly chaotic, and intelligence from the front lines is paramount.

Soldiers from dictatorships are often more scared of making mistakes and getting punished than telling the truth to leaders. Additionally, a dictatorship might buy the fanciest weapons system, but the soldier who is afraid of making mistakes in a chaotic environment will be unable to fight a war.

Supply Chain

The lockdowns in Shanghai have thrown the entire population into disarray. It was a government plan, and you would think the top authorities would have anticipated and prepared for the implications of their policies, such as shifting large amounts of food to its civilian population.

But none of that has happened. The citizens are trapped indoors, and the regime has provided inconsistent amounts of poor-quality food. Infected children are being separated from their parents, and citizens are begging the authorities to let them search for food. Western observers, not censored by the regime, reported Chinese people are forced to scream for help and supplies from their balconies.

The war time application should remind readers that a conflict is more than weapons system and units being moved around like chess pieces. During war time, moving food, fuel, and soldiers requires effort. And the CCP can't even send food to a major city during a time of peace. The people, government, and military aren't being bombed. They don't face the chaos of war.

And yet even though CCP officials presumably knew their plan in advance, they failed to properly prepare for it. Like the Russian juggernaut often stalled due to lack of fuel, it is tough to imagine China performing better in a war.

Citizens

Moreover, the oppressive lockdowns can't help the CCP officials endear themselves to their own citizens. The people of Shanghai live under a brutal dictatorship. They're often censored on social media, but Western analysts already tell us about their discontent.

Moreover, Classical Chinese writing as far back as the Warring States period discussed the limitations of dictatorship. An authoritarian government can command bodies. They can lock people indoors, lock up tennis star Peng Shuai over a social media post, and oppress the Uyghurs. But they can't win the hearts and minds of their people.

This means that the CCP is weaker than perceived by many Western analysts. Fewer people will volunteer for the military. If forcibly conscripted, they won't fight hard. Civilians, even in a dictatorship, will protest against the government.

The people of Shanghai are forced to fight for food during a pandemic, they won't be more motivated to storm fortified beaches under fire. They are more likely to reject the CCP. And any potential warfare will only reveal the people's mistrust in the Party.

Just like the revolts throughout Chinese history and the fall of the Soviet Union, the CCP will seem powerful until it isn't, and suddenly collapses. As Mao Zedong himself said when he was the revolutionary against a powerful government, "A single spark can start a prairie fire."

Conclusion

The lockdown of Shanghai is horrible for the people stuck there. They are the victims of an outdated policy that doesn't work, and a regime that doesn't respond to the will of its people. But it shows how the CCP will be unable to supply its armies in war, and more importantly, it squanders the trust and allegiance of the people.

Sir Larry M. Swart