

Top legislature passes armed police law

BEIJING: China's top legislature Thursday passed the country's first law on the armed police, giving the force new duties and statutory authority to respond to security emergencies.

The Law on the People's Armed Police Force (PAPF) of the People's Republic of China mandates the mobilization of the 660,000-strong PAPF to deal with riots, disruptions, serious violent crimes, terrorist attacks and other emergencies.

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Armed PAPF officers will patrol China's municipalities, provincial and regional capitals during periods of unrest, and take responsibility for the security of major transport lines and important public facilities.

Without defining the times when such activities would be authorized, the law says the PAPF will also have a duty to assist other law enforcement forces in arrest, pursuit and escort operations.

The law was passed by legislators after its second reading at the 10th session of the Standing Committee of the 11th National People's Congress (NPC), and endorsed by President Hu Jintao on Thursday to make it effective.

Under the 38-article law, PAPF troops can establish security checkpoints to examine all personnel and vehicles entering and departing an area under their authority. PAPF personnel can interrogate suspicious persons and check their identification documents, belongings and vehicles.

They are also authorized to "take necessary measures" to dispel large assemblies of people that compromise social order and the security of facilities the PAPF protects.

However, the law prohibits PAPF troops from restricting individual freedom by detention or body searches as well as raiding individual residences without a legal warrant.

PAPF troops on duty or operations should wear their olive green uniforms and bear their credentials, the law says.

Although governments above county-level can request the engagement of the PAPF in security operations, the law strictly limits the authority to mobilize and deploy the PAPF to the State Council, the Cabinet, and the Central Military Commission (CMC).

The PAPF – drawn from China's police force -- was founded in 1982 as an internal security force to provide services ranging from protecting important political figures to urban firefighting.

Under the dual command of the CMC and the State Council, the armed police played a major role in quelling riots in Lhasa on March 14 last year and in Urumqi on July 5.