The term applied to the inhabitants of a territory which has not been occupied, who on the approach of the enemy spontaneously take up arms to resist the invading troops without having had time to organize themselves into regular armed forces. They must be regarded as combatants [1] if they carry arms openly and respect the laws and customs of armed conflict.

If captured they have a right to be treated as prisoners of war [2]. The levée en masse should not be confused with resistance movements.
German Invasion of Crete

CASES

International Law Commission, Articles on State Responsibility (Part A., Art. 9 and Commentary) [7]

Israel, Military Prosecutor v. Kassem and Others [8]

Georgia/Russia, Human Rights Watch’s Report on the Conflict in South Ossetia (Para. 95) [9]

Source URL: https://casebook.icrc.org/glossary/levee-en-masse

Links

[1] https://casebook.icrc.org/glossary/combatants