



12

Asia and Oceania region:
Chinese Civil War

Key concepts: Consequence and significance

As you read this chapter, consider the following essay questions:

- Discuss the long-term and short-term causes of one 20th-century civil war.
- To what extent did foreign intervention determine the outcome of one 20th-century civil war?
- Examine the role of guerrilla warfare in determining the outcome of one 20th-century war.

Mao Zedong, leader of the Chinese Communist Party and Chairman of the People's Republic of China.

For the first half of the 20th century, China faced political chaos. Following a revolution in 1911, which overthrew the Manchu dynasty, the new Republic failed to take hold and China continued to be exploited by foreign powers, lacking any strong central government. The Chinese Civil War was an attempt by two ideologically opposed forces – the Nationalists and the Communists – to gain central control over China. The struggle between these two forces, which officially started in 1927, was interrupted by the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war in 1937, but started again in 1946 once the war with Japan was over. The Chinese Community Party ultimately won the war in 1949. The results of this war were to have a major effect not just on China itself, but also on the international stage.

Timeline of events - 1911-1928

1911	Double Tenth Revolution and establishment of the Chinese Republic
1912	Dr Sun Yixian becomes Provisional President of the Republic Guomindang (GMD) formed and wins majority in parliament Sun resigns and Yuan Shikai declared Provisional President
1915	Japan's Twenty-One Demands Yuan attempts to become emperor
1916	Yuan dies/warlord era begins
1917	Sun attempts to set up republic in Guangzhou Russian Revolution
1918	Paris Peace settlement
1919	May Fourth Movement
1921	Chinese Communist Party (CCP) formed
1922	First United Front established between GMD and CCP
1925	Sun dies National government set up under leadership of GMD
1926	Jiang Jieshi becomes leader of GMD in March Northern Expedition launched in June Tension increases between Jiang and Communist Central Committee
Jan-Mar	Communist-led strikes in central China threaten Jiang
Apr	Shanghai massacre of Communists
July	Communists expelled from GMD
Dec	Guangzhou massacre
1928 July	Jiang has control of Beijing, declares China now united GMD now turns against the Communists

Long-term causes of the Chinese Civil War

Socio-economic factors

In 1900, China was ruled by the imperial Manchu dynasty. The vast majority of the population were peasants. Their life was hard: they worked the land, and most were extremely poor. It was the peasants who paid the taxes that in turn paid for the great Manchu imperial court. It was also the peasants who faced starvation during floods or droughts, as their subsistence farming techniques often left them with barely enough to feed their families. The population in China grew by 8 per cent in the second half of the 19th century, but the land cultivated only increased by 1 per cent. This imbalance made famines more frequent. Peasants' plots of land were reduced, although at the same time landlords increased rents; some peasants had to pay 80 per cent of their harvest. Peasants would be driven to the cities by poverty, where there was already high unemployment due to improved technology and cheap Western imports.

Map of China in 1900.



Political weakness and the influence of foreign powers

In the century that preceded the Chinese Civil War, the European imperialist powers had humiliated and exploited China and caused the destabilization of China's ruling Manchu regime. Britain had defeated China in the mid 19th century in the Opium Wars, and subsequently the great Chinese Empire was carved up into spheres of influence by the Europeans, Americans, and, at the end of the 19th century, by Japan.

China had been forced to sign unequal treaties that gave the imperialist powers extraordinary controls over Chinese trade, territory, and ultimately sovereignty. Foreigners refused to abide by Chinese laws, and they had their own extra-territorial courts. In addition, missionaries flooded into China in an attempt to spread Christianity. Inflation and corruption weakened the financial position of the Manchus. Widespread corruption among local and provincial government officials also meant that a large portion of tax revenues did not reach the central government.

In 1850, the Taiping Rebellion spread throughout southern China. The rebellion, which lasted until 1864, was part religious movement, and part political reform movement. It was only after the deaths of millions of Chinese that it was put down by regional armies. This involvement of regional armies began the move away from centralized control, which would result in the warlord era in the 1920s.

There had been attempts to resist Western control by sections of the educated elite in China. However, the Self-Strengthening Movement was divided as to how to modernize China, and the Manchus did not coherently support reform. China remained subjugated to the West, and faced the humiliation of defeat in war by Japan in 1895. China lost more territory to Japan when it was part of the settlement in the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905). The extent of popular anti-Western feeling turned into widespread violent rebellion against Westerners in the Boxer Rebellion in 1899. However, without modern weaponry, the anti-foreign revolt was doomed to fail.

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

ATL Research skills

Before the arrival of Europeans, China had been a great power in Asia for thousands of years. Research:

- inventions associated with the Chinese
- the political relationship that China had with its neighbouring countries
- the impact of Confucianism on Chinese society
- the Qing dynasty.



The Self-Strengthening Movement

The Self-Strengthening Movement was a period of reform in China lasting from around 1861 to 1895. It was essentially a response to increasing Western power and influence in China, and was an attempt to resist and redress the concessions that China had been forced to agree to – primarily with Britain. However, the movement was divided on how to 'strengthen' China, and successful reform and development generally failed.

This photo of a group of Chinese Boxers illustrates their poor levels of armament compared with the contemporary European and Japanese military forces.

The overthrow of the Manchu dynasty

By the beginning of the 20th century, China was in a desperate condition, and there was a growing feeling that the ruling Manchu dynasty should be overthrown so that China could be Westernized and democracy introduced. The political weakness of the Manchu dynasty intensified with the death of the emperor and the succession of a 2-year-old boy, Pu Yi, in 1908. The former emperor's brother, Prince Chun, ruled as regent, but was not capable of conducting the essential programme of reform. Indeed, he dismissed the potential troublemaker General Jiang Jieshi and humiliated him, and he increased taxation and frustrated the business classes without any socio-economic progress being made.

Sun Yixian

Sun Yixian was the inspirational leader of the Nationalist GMD. He wanted to modernize China by adopting Western political and economic methods. His anti-Manchu government views had led to his exile to Japan. Sun put together his ideas for the future of China in the form of 'the Three Principles of the People' (see the Interesting Fact box below). However, in his view Chinese democracy would not copy that of the West. For China, the key was not the struggle for personal freedom, but for national freedom.



In October 1911, the ruling dynasty was overthrown in a revolution known as the Double Tenth. A republic was created. The revolution began when the government lost control of the military; soldiers in Wuchang revolted and rebellion spread quickly. Most provinces then declared themselves independent of Beijing. The key tensions and issues that led to this revolution would also have a significant effect on the causes of the civil war 15 years later: the impact of imperialism, anti-foreign sentiment, and the weakness of central government.

In November 1911, in an attempt to seize the political initiative, delegates from the 'independent' provinces gathered in Nanjing to declare the creation of a Chinese Republic. Dr Sun Yixian, a political exile, who had been in the USA during the revolution, was invited to be China's first president.

The imperial government attempted to use the former influential general of the Northern Army, Yuan Shikai, to suppress the rebellion, but he double-crossed them by arranging a deal with Sun Yixian. Sun agreed for Yuan Shikai to be president of the new republic in February 1912, in exchange for the end of Manchu rule in China. On 12 February 1912, Emperor Pu Yi abdicated.

The revolution, however, was incomplete. There was no real introduction of democracy, and most former imperial officials kept their positions. The impetus for the revolution was wholly Chinese, but had not been led by the middle classes. It had been the military who ignited the rising and Chinese radicals had joined in later. Michael Lynch argues that the revolution was fundamentally a revolt by the provinces against the centre:

‘The Double Tenth was a triumph of regionalism. It represented a particular phase in the long-running contest between central autocracy and local autonomy, a contest that was to shape much of China’s history during the following forty years.’

Michael Lynch, *China: From Empire to People’s Republic 1900–49*, 2nd ed. (Hodder, 2010), p.22.

Activity 1**Review question**

- How had the following weakened China in the century leading up to the civil war?
 - European imperialism
 - failure of modernization
 - regionalism.

The rule of Yuan Shikai

Yuan ruled China as a military dictator from 1912 until 1915. However, the key issues that had led to the revolution in 1911 remained unresolved. Regionalism continued under Yuan's rule and became the key obstacle to a united China. Sun's party reformed as the Guomindang (GMD) in 1912, and declared itself a parliamentary party.

**The GMD and the Three Principles**

The GMD had been set up by Sun Yixian in 1912. He wanted to create a unified modern and democratic China. He had returned to China after the Double Tenth Revolution in 1911, and established a government in southern China, in Canton. He also saw the need to develop a GMD army. Sun stated that he and his party had three guiding principles:

- Nationalism – to rid China of foreign influence, unite China and to regain its international respect
- Democracy – the people should be educated so that they could ultimately rule themselves democratically
- People's Livelihood – this was essentially 'land reform', the redistribution of land to the peasants, and economic development.

It is argued that Sun agreed to Yuan Shikai's rule in order to avert the possibility of China descending into civil war. The republicans were not powerful enough at this stage to take on the military. It was a lesson that both the GMD and the Chinese Communists would take on board – to win the political battle for China you needed military power.

Sun attempted to undermine Yuan's power by moving him from his power base in Beijing to the south in Nanjing to set up a new government. Yuan refused to leave. At this point the GMD was a regional power only in the southern provinces, and the republicans were not sufficiently organized to mount resistance to Yuan. A 'second revolution' failed and Sun had to flee to Japan in 1913. However, Yuan mastered his own downfall by a series of ill-conceived acts. The 1912 Republican constitution had created regional assemblies, which he abolished in an attempt to centralize power. This act further alienated the provincial powers, especially as tax revenues were centrally controlled. Yuan's final miscalculation was to proclaim himself emperor in 1916. At this point he lost the support of the military and stood down. He died three months later.

Short-term causes of the Chinese Civil War

Political weakness: regionalism – the warlords 1916–1928

A key cause of the civil war in China was the increasing lack of unity in the country by the second decade of the 20th century. Indeed, regionalism or provincialism was to play a significant role not only in causing the war, but also in its course and outcome.

With the abdication and death of Yuan, China lost the only figure that had maintained some degree of unity. China broke up into small states and provinces, each controlled by a **warlord** and his private army. These warlords ran their territories independently, organizing and taxing the people in their domains. They had their own laws and even



Map of China under the warlords. The marked borders are approximations only, and frequently changed.

The warlords

The warlord era can be divided into two periods: the first, pre-1920, was by default rather conservative (they wanted to preserve their own power and feudal rights); the second phase, after 1920, saw the rise of new military commanders who had not been powerful under the Republic and who were more opportunist. Although they are referred to collectively, the warlords were made up of leaders with very different aims and ambitions.

their own currencies. As warlords extended their power and wealth by expanding their territories, it was the peasants who suffered in their continuous wars. None of the warlords was willing to relinquish his armies or power to the central government.

The warlord period increased the sense of humiliation felt by many Chinese and, coupled with their desire to get rid of foreign influence, led to an increase in nationalism during the decade of warlord rule.

China had all but ceased to exist – it was in a state of internal anarchy. If the warlords remained, China would remain divided.

The May Fourth Movement

During this period, two political movements developed in response to both the warlords and foreign influence in China. The May Fourth Movement began in 1919. Students led a mass demonstration in Beijing against the warlords, traditional Chinese culture, and the Japanese. The hostility had been ignited by the Versailles settlement, in which Japan had been given Germany's former concessions in Shandong province. China, it seemed, had joined the Allies in the war only to be humiliated by them.

The significance of the May Fourth Movement was that it was dedicated to change and the rebirth of China as a proud and independent nation. Some intellectuals and students were inspired by revolutionary ideology in order to achieve these goals. The 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, led by Marxists, provided a practical example. The new Bolshevik government aimed to set up a socialist state and had also denounced the imperialists saying that all contested border claims would be dropped. Imperialism was perceived by many as the main cause of China's problems.

Other Chinese were inspired by the GMD Nationalist party, which had grown much stronger during the warlord period. Thus two groups – Communists inspired by the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, and Nationalists under the GMD – developed in China at this time. They were to come together in an alliance in 1922.

Communists and Nationalists

By the time Sun died in 1925, the GMD had made little progress towards fulfilling the 'Three Principles'. The party had been limited by lack of influence beyond the south, and the fact it had to rely on alliances with warlords due to the weakness of its military power.

After the death of Sun, General Jiang Jieshi, a committed Nationalist and enthusiastic GMD member, took over leadership of the GMD. He had received military training before World War One in Japan, and then in the new Communist state of the USSR. The Soviet leadership of the USSR had begun to invest in the GMD, providing aid and assistance to the party. The Soviets believed they could foster good relations with a Nationalist China. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was officially set up in 1921; initially, its membership was mainly intellectuals, and it had no real military strength. It was due to this weakness, and some shared aims, that the CCP agreed to work with the GMD. It was also consistently encouraged to cooperate with the Nationalists by the new Soviet state, the USSR.

Attempt to unify China: the First United Front

Both the GMD and the CCP wanted a unified China. They agreed that the first step to this was to get rid of the warlords, and in 1922 they formed the First United Front. Both parties also agreed that China needed to be free of the foreign imperialist

Jiang Jieshi, leader of the Nationalist forces.



powers. The Third Principle of Sun Yixian, 'the People's Livelihood', was often called 'socialism', which convinced the Comintern that this was a party they could back. In addition, Jiang had studied in Moscow in 1923, and then ran the Whampoa Military Academy, which was set up and funded by the USSR to train GMD officers. Despite his Soviet links, however, Jiang was not a Communist. Indeed, he became increasingly anti-Communist, and began his leadership of the GMD by removing Communists from key positions in the party. He stopped short of breaking off the alliance with the Communists, as he knew that he must first take out his primary obstacle to a unified China – the warlords.

Jiang now determined to act on the first of the Three Principles and attempt to unify China by putting an end to the warlords' power. Together with the Communists, the GMD set out on the 'Northern Expedition' in 1926 to crush the warlords of central and northern China. This operation was a great success; by 1927, the GMD and the Communists had captured Hangzhou, Shanghai, and Nanjing. They took Beijing in 1928. Within 2 years, the United Front of the GMD and the CCP had destroyed the power of the warlords, and the GMD announced that it was the legitimate government of China and the new capital and seat of government would be Nanjing.

Activity 2

ATL Thinking skills

Review questions

1. Briefly explain the significance of the following on the development of China up to 1916:
 - Sun Yixian
 - Yuan Shikai
 - warlords
 - May Fourth Movement.
2. What were the key obstacles to setting up an effective central government in China in 1911?
3. What role did foreign involvement play in creating tension in China?

End of the First United Front: the GMD attacks the CCP

Despite the results of the **Northern Expedition**, China was not now unified. The **United Front** was only a friendship of convenience. What had united the CCP and the GMD – the fight against the warlords – was over, and ideology divided the two parties. The success of the Northern Expedition had been not only due to Nationalist ambitions. It was also because of the Communist promise of land to the peasants; this commitment had given them local peasant support. The Communists also had support from the industrial workers: for example, Zhou Enlai, a Communist member of the GMD, had organized the workers rising in Shanghai.

The popular support for the Communists was a key reason that Jiang decided he could no longer tolerate them in the GMD. There could be no more cooperation. Jiang was sympathetic to landlords and the middle classes, and was far more to the right than Sun had been. Areas under Communist control had seen peasants attack landlords and seize land – this could not be tolerated. It seemed to Jiang that the CCP needed to be crushed before China could truly be unified under the GMD.

Jiang now expelled all Communists from the GMD, and his attacks on them reached a peak in Shanghai in the 'White Terror' of April 1927. A powerful 'workers' army' under Zhou Enlai had proved very effective during the Northern Expedition and Jiang turned on them, using informants from the underworld of triads and gangsters – 5,000 Communists were shot. The GMD carried out similar attacks in other cities, in what became known as the 'purification movement': 'purification' meant the massacre of

thousands of Communists, trade unionists, and peasant leaders. About a quarter of a million people were killed. Despite attempts to resist (Mao's Autumn Harvest Rising failed), the CCP was very nearly crushed by the end of 1927.

Ignoring the orders of the Comintern to retain the United Front, the CCP decided that its only hope of survival was for its members to flee into the mountains of Jiangxi. The GMD pursued them, determined to destroy the Communists. The civil war had begun.

Map showing the GMD's Northern Expedition, 1926–1928.



Activity 3

ATL Thinking skills

Source analysis

As his troops approached Shanghai, Chiang (Jiang) was becoming increasingly skeptical of the aims of his communist allies. Already in Guangzhou there had been bad blood between them. Chiang believed that the Communists were preparing to have him killed. But it was the sudden success of the march north that drove the alliance apart. The CCP and the Soviets saw Chiang as a potential military dictator, a Napoleon. Chiang on his side, was becoming increasingly worried that after the liberation of China from Western influence, the CCP and the left wing of the Guomindang would put the country under Soviet control. In his diary, Chiang was increasingly critical of his Soviet advisers: 'I treat them with sincerity, but they reciprocate with deceit.' The Communists were criticizing Chiang in public and preparing to take control of Shanghai from within before his troops arrived. The clock was ticking for a confrontation.

Odd Arne Westad, Restless Empire (Bodley Head, 2012), pp.163–164.

- According to Westad, why was a confrontation between the CCP and GMD likely to take place after the Northern Expedition?

Activity 4



Thinking and self-management skills

Review questions

1. Why did support for Communism grow in China?
2. Why did Jiang turn against the Communists?
3. In groups, create a diagram (mind map or flow diagram) on a large sheet of paper to show the causes of the first period of civil war in China. Decide what themes you want to develop, how you are going to show long-term and short-term causes, and how you are going to show any links between the causes. Each group should then present and explain its diagram to the rest of the class.

The course of the war

Timeline of events - 1930-1950

1930-1931	Jiang's First Encirclement campaign attacks Jiangxi Soviet, defeated by CCP
1931	Japanese attack Manchuria 28 Bolsheviks take over Central Committee of CCP Jiang launches Second and Third Encirclement Campaigns against Jiangxi Soviet; both are defeated
1932	Japanese attack Shanghai Jiangxi Soviet declares war on Japan Fourth Encirclement Campaign begins
1933	Truce with Japan Fifth Encirclement Campaign
1934	Long March begins
1935	Survivors of Long March reach Shaanxi Soviet base
1937 Apr	Second United Front is formed
July	Japanese invade China
Nov	Jiang Jieshi moves government to Chongqing
Dec	Rape of Nanjing
1940 Aug	Hundred Regiments assault on Japanese by Red Army
1944 Oct	US commander General Joseph Stilwell leaves China at Jiang Jieshi's request
1945 Aug-Oct	US Ambassador Hurley leads talks between GMD and CCP Japan formally surrenders in China theatre
Oct	Agreement announced, but both sides send forces to Manchuria
Dec	US General George C. Marshall arrives to lead negotiations
1946 Jan	Truce between CCP and GMD
Mar	USSR begins to withdraw from Manchuria Fighting breaks out in Manchuria between GMD and CCP
1947 Jan	Marshall leaves China
Mar	Jiang Jieshi takes Yan'an
Oct	Mao announces land reforms
1948 Apr	US Congress passes China Aid Act – aid sent to GMD again
Nov	Battle of Huai-Hai begins

Timeline of events – 1930–1950

1949	Jan	GMD lose Battle of Huai-Hai
	Apr	CCP captures Nanjing
	May	CCP takes Shanghai
	Oct	Mao announces the establishment of the People's Republic of China in Beijing
	Dec	Jiang flees to Taiwan

Activity 5**ATL Self-management skills**

1. Look back at chapter 1 and the section on guerrilla tactics. The Chinese Civil War is a good example of guerrilla tactics working successfully against a stronger force. As you read through the rest of this chapter, note the rules for guerrilla fighting that were established by Mao, and how and why they were so successful.

Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-Tung)

Born in 1893 to a wealthy peasant family in Hunan province, in south-east China, Mao left work on the land initially to be a teacher. In 1918, he moved to Beijing and worked as a librarian at the university there. The university was a centre for many contrasting ideologies and revolutionary ideas, including Marxism. Indeed, Mao by this stage had been interested in anarchism too. Mao then moved back to Hunan and began to develop and practise his political ideas, demonstrating his skill as a trade union leader and peasant organizer. He was responsible for the shift in CCP policy from attempting to win industrial workers' support in the cities to concentrating on radicalizing the peasantry. This shift was also a realistic response to the CCP's failures to take the towns, where GMD support was strong. In 1931, Mao became the elected chairman of the Central Executive Committee of the CCP. From this time, and in this position, he began to consolidate his control over the party.

Jiangxi Soviet

The term 'Soviet' was taken from Russia. During the revolution in 1917, Russian workers and soldiers had set up soviets or councils in which discussion and debate took place.

The Jiangxi Soviet

The CCP were forced to retreat into Jiangxi province in order to survive the GMD onslaught. This territory became known as the 'Jiangxi Soviet'. Mao's writings suggest that the White Terror had only confirmed what he had already thought about the United Front: that this cooperation with the GMD would destroy the CCP. He also believed that the GMD and the Comintern had the wrong strategy for China, as they focused their revolution on urban areas. Mao's revolution would be based on the peasants. Essentially, this was a more realistic strategy, as the vast majority of Chinese were not urban workers but rural peasants. From a population in China of around 500 million, only 12 per cent were in urban areas, whereas 88 per cent lived in rural regions. From a total workforce of approximately 259 million, 205 million were agricultural workers and a mere 54 million were non-agricultural or industrial workers. Mao arrived at Jiangxi and organized the Jiangxi Soviet around his idea of the central revolutionary role of the peasant – 'The peasants are the sea; we are the fish. The sea is our habitat', he stated. His ideological shift away from orthodox Marxism, which placed the proletariat at the centre of the revolution, put him at odds with more orthodox members of the CCP. But his success in recruiting and organizing the peasants in the Jiangxi Soviet began to win him the argument.

Research Marx's theory of revolution. Explain how Mao's ideas were different from Marx's belief (and thus the Soviet model) of how revolution should take place.

Division within the CCP

Both the CCP and the GMD suffered from 'internal factionalism' during this period of the civil war. Mao's views on the revolution and how the civil war should be fought could be summarized, by 1930, in the following key points:

- The revolution will be carried out by the peasant masses, thus the peasants will be mobilized and politicized by the Red Army.
- The army's tactics will be guerrilla warfare.
- Land reform will be carried out in their areas of control.

Yet his views were not shared by the Soviet Union and the Comintern. The USSR saw the Great Depression as the beginning of the end of Capitalism, and believed that the world was on the brink of international revolution. In February 1930, Comintern official Li Lisan issued an instruction to all CCP members to attack cities in Jiangxi and Hunan. This order was known as the 'Li Lisan Line'. All the attacks failed, and the Communist army was forced into retreat. (The Comintern then blamed Li Lisan by saying he had misunderstood its orders.) The CCP in the cities was shattered, and it appeared that the party could only hold its influence in rural areas. Li Lisan was dismissed from his leadership of the CCP in January 1931.

The GMD attempts to exterminate the CCP

From 1928 to 1934, Jiang had the chance to carry out Sun's Three Principles. His government was ineffective, however, and Jiang made no progress towards democracy or land reform. His support came from landlords and the rich, and so initiatives were limited to the building of some roads and the construction of more schools. Jiang also had to face the threat of the Japanese, who took control of Manchuria in 1931.

Jiang's main goal remained the elimination of the Communists, and during this time he carried out the 'Five Encirclement Campaigns' in an attempt to destroy the Jiangxi Soviet and the CCP. The GMD strategy was to encircle the Reds and cut them off from supplies and resources. The Communists focused their strategy on survival, and based themselves in the mountains between Hunan and Jiangxi provinces. Here they built up their military force – the Red Army. Mao explained his strategy in a letter to Li Lisan in 1929: 'The enemy advances, we retreat; the enemy halts, we harass; the enemy tires, we attack; the enemy retreats, we pursue.'

Li Lisan was replaced by a group of Moscow graduates known as the '28 Bolsheviks' and the influence of the Comintern remained strong enough to remove Mao as chief commissar of the Red Army. Mao did not like these 'inexperienced men'.

The first three campaigns were launched between December 1930 and September 1931. The Red Army under Mao and Zhou Enlai faced increasingly strong GMD forces, first 100,000, then 200,000, and finally 300,000 men – and they defeated all three. Using Mao's strategy of revolutionary war, they allowed the GMD to enter their territory and begin to round up Communists, and then they attacked the fragmented units. Their knowledge of the terrain and their use of the support of the local peasants meant that they could choose the place and timing of their engagements.

Mao was not involved in the Fourth Encirclement Campaign. Zhu De was commander-in-chief of the Red Army, and he used the same tactics as before with the same results – the GMD was forced back again in March 1933.

Mao and the 28 Bolsheviks

During the military campaigns of the early 1930s Mao's position was being eroded and marginalized by the 28 Bolsheviks. The *coup de grâce* came in July 1934, when by order of the Comintern Mao was put on probation and barred from meetings. From July until the beginning of the Long March in October, when he was released, he was under house arrest.

Activity 6

Source analysis**Source A**

 We split up into small, swift combat units which got in their rear and on their flanks and attacked, cutting them into segments. There's nothing secret about such tactics ... [The GMD] failed because such guerrilla warfare requires not only a thorough knowledge of the terrain of the battle area but also the support of the common people.

Zhu De, Red Army leader.

Source B

 The eight rules of the Red Army:

- Return and roll up the straw matting on which you sleep.
- Be courteous and polite to the people and help them when you can.
- Return all borrowed articles. Replace all damaged articles.
- Be honest in all transactions with the peasants. Pay for all articles purchased.
- Replace all doors when you leave a house.
- Be sanitary, and, especially, establish latrines a safe distance from people's houses.

The Eight Rules of the Red Army (1928), quoted by the American journalist Edgar Snow.

Source C

 The GMD troops burned down all the houses in the surrounding area, seized all the food there and blockaded us ... We were sick and half-starved. The peasants were no better off, and we would not touch what little they had. But the peasants encouraged us. They dug up from the ground the grain they had hidden from the GMD troops and gave it to us ... they wanted us to win. Tactics are important, but we could not exist if the majority of our people did not support us. We are nothing but the fist of the people beating their oppressors.

Statement by CCP general Peng Dehuai, in 1936.

1. According to Source A, how was guerrilla warfare waged?
2. According to Sources B and C, why would the CCP have the support of the peasants?
3. Why was peasant support so crucial to the CCP?
4. Using these sources and your own knowledge, explain why Mao's guerrilla tactics were successful in this first phase of the Chinese Civil War. (See also chapter 1 for more discussion of guerrilla tactics.)

The Long March

Seven months later, in October, Jiang attempted his fifth and final campaign against the 'bandits'. On this occasion he had taken the advice of a German general: to adopt a gradual approach. This time a force of 800,000 men was sent in, with air cover and artillery. The Red Army could not take advantage of its previous strengths of higher mobility and local support. Outnumbered and surrounded by GMD forces, it fought and lost a final battle at Ruijin in 1934.

Military Strategy 1930-1934		
1930-1931	1932-1933	1934
Mao in charge	Zhu De in charge of Red Army	The 28 Bolsheviks in charge of Red Army
Guerrilla warfare	Guerrilla warfare	'Stand and fight'
GMD Encirclement Campaigns 1-3	GMD Encirclement Campaign 4	GMD Encirclement Campaign 5 (began 1933)
GMD campaigns 1-3 fail	GMD campaign 4 fails	GMD campaign 5 succeeds - German military advice. Red Army breaks out / Long March

The CCP faced annihilation. Mao decided that the only chance the CCP had was to break through the GMD's lines and set up another base. They succeeded in doing this on 19 October and then embarked on what became known as the 'Long March'. The Long March took the CCP on a seemingly impossible 9,600-kilometre trek to Shaanxi across some of the most inhospitable territory in China. It took 368 days and it led to the death of more than 90 per cent of the 90,000 Communists that broke through their encirclement at Jiangxi.

Activity 7



Social and communication skills

The impact of the Long March

- What was the Long March and why was it significant to the outcome of the Chinese Civil War?
- In small groups, research the course and key turning points of the Long March, using the information that follows as a starting point. Your group will be writing the script of a short play or documentary based on your research. It should include the key events listed below, any extra information from your own research, areas of controversy, and an explanation of why the Long March remains important in Chinese history. You could also include historical characters and quotations from contemporaries.



Map showing the route of the Long March.

Key events of the Long March

Crossing the Xiang River

The Xiang River was strongly defended by the GMD, and Jiang was determined not to let the CCP escape. Mao criticized the strategy the CCP used at the river, where around 50,000 died. The CCP had not used his tactics of outmanoeuvring and deceiving the GMD; they had also been loaded down with furniture and other unnecessary equipment. The 28 Bolsheviks, now in charge of the army, had simply led the CCP in a line into the river, where they were 'sitting ducks' for Jiang's forces.

Zunyi Conference

In January 1935 the CCP, this time using guerrilla tactics, managed to capture the town of Zunyi. The 28 Bolsheviks had been discredited due to their disasters at Jiangxi and the Xiang River. At a party conference held here to determine future CCP policy, Mao established a much stronger hold over the party.

Upper Yangtze River Crossing

At Zunyi, Mao ordered that his forces 'march north to fight the Japanese', and now led the Red Army towards Sichuan to meet up with the 40,000-strong Communist army under the leadership of Zhang Guotao. Jiang pursued Mao across the far-western provinces of Yunnan and Tibet. The GMD destroyed all the boats at the Yangtze River crossing in an attempt to rout Mao's forces. Mao deceived the Nationalists that his army was constructing a bridge to cross, but sent units to a town 136 kilometres further along. Thus, while the bridge was being built, the CCP crossed the river in another place. Mao's forces got across before the GMD realized what was going on.

The Luding Bridge

Just two weeks later, with Mao forcing the pace, covering 134 kilometres in just 24 hours, the Red Army came to the Dadu River. Local people had built a bridge, using their own resources to pay for it, from 13 heavy iron chains covered by wooden planks. The river was very fast moving, but here was the only way to cross. The GMD could, and should, have blown up the bridge, but this action would have led to local outcry. Instead Jiang's forces removed the planks that covered the chains. What took place next is disputed. According to the CCP, 22 volunteers crossed the bridge, clinging on to the chains and lobbing hand grenades at the machine-gun posts that fired on them. Only five of the attackers survived, but they managed to take out the machine-gun posts, while those behind them laid new boards so that the Red Army could then rush across. In the ensuing battle, the GMD attempted to set fire to the bridge, but it was too late.

However, Jung Chang and Jon Halliday write that:

This [the crossing of the bridge] is complete invention. There was no battle at the Dadu Bridge. Most probably, the legend was constructed because of the site itself: the chain bridge over the roiling river looked a good place for heroic deeds. There were no Nationalist troops at the bridge when the Reds arrived on 29 May ... the strongest evidence debunking the myth of 'heroic' fighting is that there were no battle casualties. The Red Army crossed the bridge without incurring a single death. The vanguard consisted of twenty-two men, who, according to the myth stormed the bridge in a suicide attack. But at a celebration immediately afterwards, on 2 June, all twenty-two were not only alive and well, they each received a Lenin suit, a fountain pen, a bowl and a pair of chopsticks.

Jung Chang and John Halliday, *Mao: The Unknown Story* (Jonathan Cape, 2005), pp.159–160.

Disputes between Zhang Guotao, Zhu De, and Mao

Mao had 10,000 left in his army, and this force finally met up with 45,000 men under the command of Zhang in Sichuan. The two leaders disagreed on what the Red Army's next move should be. Mao wanted to go north to the Shaanxi Soviet, where they could fight the Japanese. Zhang wanted to stay in western Sichuan, or go further west to have closer access to the USSR. They could not agree and ended up going separate ways. Zhu De decided to go with Zhang, and the two generals took the majority of forces with them. The GMD attacked them, split their forces, and Zhu fled to join Mao. Zhang's forces were virtually destroyed.

Songpan Marshes

To get to Shaanxi, Mao had to cross the unmapped and deadly Songpan Marshes, where men sank into the mud and drowned, faced attack from local tribes, and ate poisonous plants in an attempt to fend off starvation. Of the 10,000 that entered the marshes, only 7,000 made it across the 400-kilometre region.

Shaanxi

After marching 9,600 kilometres, and fighting 15 major battles and many smaller skirmishes, Mao's army arrived at the Shaanxi Soviet in October 1935. Here they set up a Communist base centred on the town of Yan'an.

Activity 8

ATL Thinking skills

Source analysis

Source A

Has there ever been in history a long march like ours? No, never. The Long March is also a manifesto. It proclaims to the world that the Red Army is an army of heroes and that the imperialists and their jackals, Jiang Jieshi and his like, are perfect nonentities. It announces the bankruptcy of the encirclement pursuit, obstruction and interception attempted by the imperialists and Jiang Jieshi. The Long March is also an agitation corps. It declares to the approximately two hundred million people of eleven provinces that only the road of the Red Army leads to their liberation. Without the Long March, how could the broad masses have known so quickly that there are such great ideas in the world as are upheld by the Red Army? The Long March is also a seeding machine. It has sown many seeds in eleven provinces, which will sprout, grow leaves, blossom into flowers, bear fruit and yield a crop in future. To sum up, the Long March ended with our victory and the enemy's defeat.

Mao reminiscing on the Long March.

Source B

When Mao finally arrived back at the Red area in north Shaanxi that was to be his base, his army was down to well below 4,000. In the last – and easiest – month of the journey, he actually lost more than half of his remaining men, between deserters, stragglers and deaths both from illness and at the hands of his own security men ... And the troops were in the worst possible shape. One officer recalled:



The Long March became a much mythologized episode in Chinese Communist history. Here an idealized poster celebrates the march and its participants.

'We were famished and exhausted. Our clothes in particular were in shreds. We had no shoes or socks, and many people wrapped their feet with strips of blanket ... Wuqi [where they arrived] was already a very poor place but even the ... local comrades kept questioning me: how come you got into such a sorry state?'

Jung Chang and John Halliday, *Mao: The Unknown Story* (Jonathan Cape, 2005), p.172.

1. According to Mao, what was the significance of the Long March?
2. Discuss the differences between the traditional interpretation of the events at Dadu Bridge and the accounts of the Long March given by Chang and Halliday. Why might these accounts differ? You should consider the origin and purpose of each source.

Mao and revolutionary warfare

Mao's war against the GMD can be classed as a revolutionary war, as he was trying not only to defeat the GMD but also to impose a revolutionary ideology on the Chinese people.

The choice the Chinese people had was between **Maoism**, with its total restructuring of society, economy and government, and the Nationalists' policy, which basically involved maintaining the status quo. Mao believed that the peasants were central to revolutionary war, and so his priority had to be to persuade them to support the Communist cause.

Mao's revolutionary warfare consisted of several stages:

Setting up base areas

Mao planned to set up 'base areas' in which he would organize the peasants and educate them in Communist ideology. They would then, it was hoped, accept new taxes and justice systems applied by the CCP, which would be better than those they had previously endured. These base areas would be remote and thus difficult for the GMD to interfere with during this 'education process'. A constituent of the 'Eight rules of the Eighth Route Army' was to treat everyone with respect, and this very powerful idea helped to gain the support and trust of the peasants.

The organization phase

Once a base camp was set up, CCP leaders would be sent out to other villages to repeat the process. Mao called this the 'organization phase'. The aim was slowly to take over the countryside, thereby isolating the cities to allow the CCP ultimately to take political control of China.

Defending the bases

The next stage was to defend the base areas, which would not remain free from GMD attack, especially once GMD taxes were going to the CCP. Mao organized the peasants to use hit-and-run tactics, their advantage being knowledge of terrain and support of the local population. If the GMD attempted to hunt down the CCP units, they would be drawn into hostile areas, which would enable the guerrillas to attack them again and/or disappear into the local community. In this way, the 'enemy' would become demoralized and worn down. Any attempt by the GMD to wipe out the CCP presence with massive attacks and looting of villages would only increase hostility to the Nationalists and improve the position of the Communists.

The guerrilla phase

The communists could always survive by retreating, as they had in the Long March. Other bases could be set up as they retreated – these would then create more guerrilla fighters. This was the 'guerrilla phase' of the war.

Protracted war

Mao understood that his strategy would lead to a long war; indeed, the idea of a 'protracted war' was central to his thinking. However, as the numbers of guerrillas grew, and in turn the number of attacks on the enemy increased, the balance would finally tilt in favour of the guerrillas.

Seizing power

At this stage, the revolutionary war would go into the 'open or mobile phase', where guerrilla units joined together to form a conventional army. The CCP was in this last stage of guerrilla warfare when the second phase of the civil war broke out in 1946. Once in power, a period of consolidation would be needed to rid China of the remnants of the 'old regime'.

End of the first stage of the Chinese Civil War – the Second United Front, 1937

The Long March was essential for ensuring the survival of the CCP and also for making Mao the unchallenged leader. Jiang Jieshi was still determined to defeat the Communists, but he also had to deal with the threat from Japan. China had been invaded in 1931 when the Japanese took over Manchuria. Jiang initially did little about this apart from appealing to the League of Nations, as he still regarded the Communists as the more dangerous threat. He said that the Japanese 'were a disease of the skin while the Communists were a disease of the heart'.

Jiang unsuccessfully attempted to resist the Japanese attacks on Shanghai in 1932, and in May agreed to a truce. The Japanese advanced to the Great Wall in January 1933, however, and their growing control in China led to a great increase in anti-Japanese sentiment.

Mao called for another 'United Front' to fight the Japanese, and this was supported by all who had suffered under Japanese occupation, including the northern warlords Zhang Xueliang and Yan Xishan. Yet in the end it was the Comintern and not Mao that pushed the alliance between the CCP and the GMD. Stalin was worried about Japanese expansion in and from Manchuria. By 1936 he saw Jiang Jieshi as the only leader in China who could effectively fight them. The Second United Front was sealed when Jiang Jieshi was kidnapped in Xi'an by the warlord Zhang (he had been there planning his next assault on the CCP). This shocked both the Chinese and the Soviets, and although some of the kidnappers wanted to shoot Jiang, he was released on Comintern orders after 13 days.

Activity 9

ATL Thinking skills

The kidnapping of Jiang

From all segments of society came requests for [Zhang] to release Chiang (Jiang). Most people did not believe that China could organize against Japan except under the Generalissimo's leadership. Even Stalin and the Soviets chimed in, since they believed that all alternative leaders to Chiang would be less likely to wage successful war against Japan. Zhou Enlai, Mao's second in command in the CCP, went to Xi'an to secure Jing's release. While Mao must have been fuming at seeing his archenemy get away, he knew that Stalin was keeping an eye on his every action, and that there was no other way out. He may even, in his heart of hearts, have agreed with the majority of his countrymen: With Chiang there might be little hope of ever defeating the Japanese, but without him there was not hope at all.

Odd Arne Westad, *Restless Empire* (Bodley Head, 2012), p.255.

- According to Westad, why was Jiang released after being kidnapped?

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

Research skills ATL

Research the attack on China by Japan. Why was Manchuria so appealing to Japan? What was the Mukden incident and its consequences for China, Japan, and for international relations at the time?



Japanese expansion in China, 1937–1944.

In April 1937 the Second United Front was formed. The civil war was suspended, and there was instead a 'National War of Resistance'. The GMD would benefit from support from the USSR, and potentially aid from the USA. The CCP benefited from the legitimacy the alliance gave them – they could no longer be dismissed as 'bandits'. The Communists also hoped that the war against Japan would exhaust the GMD.

The start of the war proper between Japan and China was triggered by an incident at the Marco Polo Bridge. There is no evidence that the clash between Japanese and Chinese troops that took place here was engineered by the Japanese. However, the fighting quickly spread, and by the end of July the Japanese had captured Beijing. In August, in the battle for Shanghai, Jiang Jieshi's forces were forced to retreat after losing around 300,000 troops. The capital, Nanjing, was relocated 1,200 kilometres to the west, to Chongqing, for the remainder of the war. Nanjing was left to face the onslaught of the Japanese. The atrocities that were then perpetrated there became known as the 'Rape of Nanjing' (see page 155).

Why was the CCP able to survive the first stage of the Chinese Civil War?

The final victory of the CCP after 1945 could never have occurred had it not been for their successes between 1928 and 1936. Why were they successful in this period?

CCP successes

- The Long March ensured CCP survival and offered a defensible base in Yan'an. It was also a propaganda victory for the CCP, who were able to use the journey to proclaim their policies to many thousands of people. They also won patriotic support for their claim to be going north to fight the Japanese.
- The march also confirmed Mao as the leader of the CCP, gave the CCP a good deal of fighting experience, and welded the survivors into a very tight, dedicated group of fanatical revolutionaries.
- Mao's offer to create a joint front with the GMD against the Japanese again won the CCP popularity, allowing them to pose as the true nationalists.

GMD errors

In contrast to the CCP, the GMD forces made several errors. Their decision to deal with the CCP before the Japanese lost them patriotic support. In addition, the poor treatment of peasants by the GMD forces further degraded their popularity. They had also failed to implement Sun's Three Principles (see page 256).

The Sino-Japanese War

The events of the war against Japan were key to explaining both the reasons for the outbreak of the second phase of the civil war and also the ultimate victory of the CCP.

The impact of the war on the GMD

The GMD withdrew its capital to Chongqing. As large areas of the GMD's support base were under Japanese occupation, Jiang Jieshi lost much-needed tax revenue. He faced

the problem by printing more money, which led to high levels of inflation, and in turn impacted badly on the middle classes, who were the natural supporters of the GMD. The peasantry were also hardest hit by taxes. Other problems faced the GMD:

- Corruption was rife in the GMD army, and its troops were ill-treated and unmotivated. Conscription further alienated the peasantry.
- Although the USA sent aid to the GMD, Japanese control of the coastal ports and key land routes meant that only limited supplies could come in via the Himalayas.
- The GMD remained riddled with factions throughout the war. With rising discontent against his rule due to corruption, military failures, and inflation, Jiang Jieshi's response was increased repression, which exacerbated hostility towards the government.
- Territorially, the GMD lacked control over many of China's provinces. It really only controlled the territory around its capital in central China and areas of the south.
- The war exhausted the GMD physically and psychologically. They bore the brunt of the Japanese attacks in the early stages of the war, and throughout they continued to meet the Japanese in conventional battles, which resulted in heavy losses. Meanwhile, the CCP was fighting a guerrilla war, incurring only light losses.
- The public lost a lot of respect for the GMD in the later stages of the war, as it appeared to be waiting for the Americans to win the war.

Activity 10

ATL Thinking skills

Source analysis

“ The Communists got their chance because the Nationalists failed so completely ... [The Nationalists'] notorious corruption resulted in hoarding and profiteering while millions of peasants starved ... The Nationalist army was a scandal. It was largely led by incompetent generals who owed their position to cronyism ... Soldiers died more from lack of food or medicine than from battlefield wounds; 10% of the army probably had tuberculosis. The army made enemies rather than friends out of the people. Peasants were conscripted into the ranks by force ... often shackled to one another ... it was so hated that peasants often killed Nationalist soldiers who fell into their hands ... ”

From June Grasso, Jay Corrin, and Michael Kort, *Modernization and Revolution in China: From the Opium Wars to the Olympics* (M.E. Sharpe, 2009), p.113.

1. Using this source, identify the key problems within the GMD army.
2. With reference to its origin, purpose, and content, assess the value and limitations of using this source to find out about the GMD's army?

The impact of the war on the CCP

Mao used the war against the Japanese to carry out his revolutionary warfare. Indeed, Mao said that 'our fixed policy should be 70 per cent expansion, 20 per cent dealing with the GMD and 10 per cent resisting the Japanese'. By March 1945, the Communists had liberated 678 out of 914 country towns and had implemented their policies in them: land reform, setting up village schools and village soviets, reducing taxes, and abolishing debt. The historian James Sheridan writes that the reason they achieved the enthusiastic backing of the peasants was 'by meeting the local, immediate needs of the peasants through reformist and radical social policies and by providing leadership for the defence of peasant communities against the Japanese. In this fashion the communists won peasant confidence and in the process began the transformation – the modernization – of rural China' (*China in Disintegration* (Free Press, 1977), p.264).



The Dixie Mission

The US Army sent an 'Observation Group', known as the Dixie Mission, to establish relations with the CCP in July 1944. The mission lasted until March 1947. Its task was to analyse the CCP politically and militarily in order to establish whether the American war effort would benefit from working with the CCP. John S. Service was responsible for analysing the CCP politically, and Colonel David D. Barrett was the military analyst.

The Dixie Mission's initial feedback was positive; it suggested that Yan'an was more effectively governed than other GMD-held territories, and was in general less corrupt. It also suggested that the CCP could be a useful military ally in China. The Dixie Mission also hosted the failed attempts by the Americans to broker an alliance between the CCP and the GMD. Their analysis of the potential of the CCP to be a sound post-war ally was not taken on board by the US government either. Indeed, those involved with the Dixie Mission were later accused of being Communist sympathizers in the 1950s, and were persecuted during the McCarthy era.

Members of the Dixie Mission in Yan'an.



The Rectification Campaign



The Rectification Campaign/Movement was initiated by the Communists to reinforce their ideology, but quickly became a campaign against intellectuals and anyone who was not in line with Maoist thinking. After approximately 10,000 people had been killed, the campaign led to Mao's position and leadership in the CCP being confirmed.

During the GMD's blockade of Yan'an from 1939, the CCP attempted to be self-sufficient. They held back inflation by taxing people in goods. Officials and soldiers had to contribute to agricultural production under the 'garrison' system. To a certain extent this worked, as the historian Jack Gray suggests, '... by 1945 about 40 per cent of their basic needs were supplied in this way' (*Rebellions and Revolutions: China from the 1880s to the 1980s* (Oxford University Press, 1990), p.277).

To establish unity within the party and to spread Maoist ideology further, a series of Rectification Campaigns were launched between 1941 and 1944. The 'correct ideas' were Mao's, and any deviation would not be tolerated. The primary ideas were the 'mass line', which meant policies were to be taken to the people and ideas taken from the people, Mao's peasant-based Communism, and the military strategy of guerrilla warfare. The Rectification Campaigns were successful in ridding the Communists of their factions, including pro-Russian groups. However, many educated Chinese who arrived at Yan'an believing that they would be helping the revolution also found themselves persecuted as class enemies and spies.

Historians do not agree on the military contribution of the CCP in the war against the Japanese. Some suggest that it was rather more limited than Mao claimed. There is little doubt, however, that there was a general perception within China and internationally that the CCP gave good leadership during the war. This perception led many Chinese to see the Communists as the true nationalists, and support the CCP rather than the GMD.

Mao used his guerrilla assaults on the Japanese as good propaganda to promote the CCP as the real nationalist force defending China. He also emphasized the support that the GMD was receiving from the USA, arguing that Jiang was nothing more than a puppet of the Western imperialists. Such sentiments fed into the long-held anti-foreign and anti-imperialist popular feelings in China.

Activity 11

ATL Thinking skills

Review questions

1. In what ways had the CCP been strengthened by the impact of the Sino-Japanese War?
2. In what ways had the GMD been weakened by the impact of the war?
3. 'It is absurd to speak of an historical event as "inevitable", but the Communist–Guomindang civil war almost demands that adjective. It is difficult in retrospect to see how it could have been avoided. An abyss of profound hostility and distrust, and the scars of brutal conflict, separated the two parties, to say nothing of their utterly different social philosophies' (James Sheridan, *China in Disintegration* (Free Press, 1977), p.269).

Why was renewed civil war 'inevitable' at the end of the Sino-Japanese War, according to this historian?

Activity 12

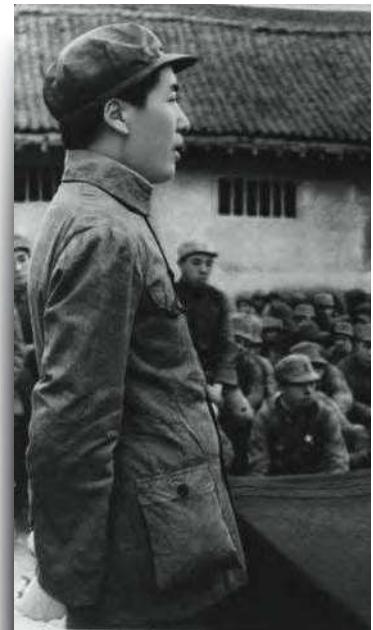
ATL Thinking and social skills

Discussion question

1. In pairs, discuss and make notes on the following question:

Examine the impact of foreign involvement in: a) the first phase of the Chinese Civil War, and b) the war against Japan.

You can use these notes later when planning the essays at the end of this chapter.



▲ Mao talking to the CCP in Yan'an as part of the Rectification Campaign.

Second phase of the Civil War, 1946–1949

By the end of the war with Japan, the CCP was significantly strengthened, and the GMD was weakened, so much so that the Communists could move from the guerrilla warfare phase of combat to a phase of more conventional fighting. The first period of civil war (1927–1937) was an essentially Chinese war. The second period (1946–1949) would be more of an international affair. The polarization of the international political context through the development of the Cold War meant that China's civil war could not be an internal struggle alone. The war between Nationalists and Communists in China had become part of a larger Soviet–American effort to create a new post-war balance of power.

Both superpowers wanted a stable China, and a weakened Japan, and to this end they both wanted the GMD and the CCP to form a coalition government. The USSR wanted influence in Manchuria, and the USA accepted this desire to a certain extent.

Failure of the USA

The Americans worked hard to achieve a diplomatic solution between the CCP and the GMD. Yet neither side was willing to share power. General Marshall was given the responsibility of brokering a deal, and managed to get the GMD and the CCP to agree on the following terms: prepare to set up a coalition government, form a temporary state council, unite their armies in a new national army, and have free elections for local government. But as negotiations were being finalized in February 1946, both sides were moving troops into Manchuria. There would not be a diplomatic solution for China – its fate would be decided on the battlefield.

Despite the growth in strength of the CCP during the Sino-Japanese war, it is important to point out that in 1945, the GMD still had 4 million troops compared to the CCP's 1 million. The GMD also had more heavy weaponry. The events of the next three years are thus important for explaining the success of the CCP.

Initial victories for the GMD (1945–1947)

At first the GMD, with more troops and better equipment, forced the Communists to be on the defensive. Following the Japanese surrender in August 1945, the Red Army under General Lin Biao entered Manchuria to secure this important industrial region under Communist control. At the Yalta Conference in February 1945, the Allies had agreed that the USSR would invade Manchuria following Germany's surrender. The Soviets had duly invaded, and were in control when the CCP forces arrived, whereupon the Soviets gave the CCP large stockpiles of Japanese weapons. The USSR was clearly not neutral. General Albert Wedemeyer, the Allied commander of the South-East Asia Theatre, authorized Jiang to resist the Communists by using US ships and aircraft to transport 500,000 troops to Manchuria, and 50,000 American troops were sent north to occupy Beijing. The USA could no longer claim to be neutral either. Although the CCP forces were better armed than before, the GMD greatly outnumbered them. The CCP also had to fight conventionally in Manchuria, defending and holding its positions and territory. The GMD was able to force the CCP out of the cities, and in December 1945 Mao reverted to his policy of creating bases outside the cities.

Map showing major battles and campaigns, 1946–1949.



It seemed as though Manchuria had been won by the GMD, but despite their early military achievements they continued to govern the region as they had others during the war with Japan, and this ultimately led to political defeat. Indeed, corruption was worse than it had been before, which encouraged Manchurians to support the CCP. President Truman sent General Marshall to mediate in the conflict, in an attempt to prevent a civil war and to avert US involvement in the fighting. US policy continued to be to promote a coalition government. However, the Americans were in a difficult position, as they did not support single-party states, and wanted to retain the position of mediator – even though they continued to arm Jiang Jieshi. The truce facilitated by Marshall broke down in March 1946. By May, the GMD was in control of the central area of Manchuria. The CCP demanded a ceasefire and condemned US support for Jiang Jieshi.

The CCP on the offensive (1947–1948)

At this point the US intervention, according to Jiang, played a key role in the outcome of the civil war. In June, General Marshall managed to get Jiang to agree to another truce. The ceasefire worked to the CCP's advantage, as it saved them from a final assault on their headquarters. The Communists used the time to train their forces and ready them for the war. Mao also introduced land reforms in the area. As it had done in Yan'an, land reform led to the peasants joining the Communists, as their victory would mean they could keep their land.

Fighting resumed in July, and the Red Army (now called the People's Liberation Army; PLA) reverted to guerrilla warfare. The GMD recaptured the cities of Manchuria and went on in March 1947 to take the CCP capital, Yan'an. Yet cities in Manchuria were now isolated, and Mao could use guerrilla tactics effectively; the PLA cut the GMD forces off by targeting their supply routes – the railways.

By March 1948, the remaining American advisers told Jiang Jieshi to leave Manchuria to protect his forces. At this point, the GMD and the CCP were quite evenly matched in terms of their military power and resources. Jiang refused to acknowledge that the balance had shifted unfavourably, and that the PLA now had more heavy weapons than the GMD. He fought on, but in March 1948 the CCP was in control of Manchuria. Jiang had lost 40,000 troops.

Collapse of GMD resistance

Capitalizing on its success, the PLA launched an offensive against the vital railway junction of Xuzhou. Here the Communists fought a conventional battle, relying on massed heavy artillery. The defeat of the Nationalists was a huge blow for Jiang's men, both strategically and psychologically. In the same month, January 1949, Lin Biao took the cities of Tianjin and Beijing. The whole of northern China, including Manchuria, was now under Communist control. In April the PLA launched the final series of offensives, taking Nanjing and then Shanghai in May. In October, Guangzhou was taken, and throughout November the Communists crushed the remnants of GMD resistance.

On 1 October 1949, Mao proclaimed the establishment of the People's Republic of China in Beijing, saying: 'Our nation will never again be an insulted nation. We have stood up.'

What were the reasons for the Communist success?

Strengths of the CCP

Guerrilla tactics and revolutionary warfare

The CCP used guerrilla tactics successfully in the first phase of the civil war, in the fight against the Japanese, and in Manchuria in the second phase of the civil war.

The leadership of the PLA

The PLA was led by Lin Biao, who was an excellent military commander and who was able to transform the PLA from a guerrilla fighting force into a regular army. The PLA was greatly strengthened in the final stages of the war by desertions from the Nationalist forces and through capturing enemy weapons. Owing to better conditions and political indoctrination, the PLA was a much more effective fighting force, with far higher morale than the Nationalist troops. In addition, the good behaviour of the Communist soldiers attracted much support from the peasantry.

The role of Mao

Mao's leadership was central to the Communist success. It was his leadership in the Long March and his innovative guerrilla tactics that allowed the CCP to survive and then to broaden its support base in Yan'an. He was able to take advantage of the opportunity presented by the war with Japan, and also to adapt his ideas and policies to the changing military situation. For example, although revolutionary ideas involved attacking the bourgeoisie, or middle classes, during the war against Japan, he stressed the idea that this was a *national* struggle in which all classes should cooperate.

The spread of Communist ideas

As we have seen, the Communists used the period during the war with Japan to spread Communist ideas throughout the areas they captured. The policy continued in the second phase of the civil war. Land reform continued in all rural areas captured by the Communists. As the Communists moved into the towns, they similarly spread Communist ideas. The army would take over the control of the towns, working to prevent crime, control food distribution, and establish fairer taxation systems. These activities broadened the base of support for the CCP.

The role of intelligence

The superior intelligence of the Communists in the second phase of the civil war played an important role in their victory. Jiang's Assistant Chief of Staff, Liu Fei, was a Communist spy, as was the head of the GMD's War Planning Board. This meant that the Communists knew all intended GMD moves in advance. In addition, several of the Nationalist commanders were in fact Communist agents. In Manchuria, for example, the Nationalist commander Wei Lihuang was a Communist agent, and his actions helped secure the PLA victory there. In contrast to this situation, the Nationalists were unable to infiltrate the Communists.

Activity 13

ATL Thinking skills

1. Give specific examples from this chapter of how guerrilla tactics were used by the Communists in their struggle.

Add notes under the following themes:

- Survival of the CCP from 1927
- the Long March
- expansion of Communist influence/control
- the war with Japan
- final phase of civil war 1946–1949

Jiang Jieshi's errors

Political

Jiang Jieshi continued to resist democratic changes, and his increasingly repressive regime alienated liberals and the middle classes. He failed to win mass support and his government relied on a narrow, wealthy section of businessmen and landlords for its survival. The GMD's corruption and inefficiency further alienated the middle classes and also the peasants, who bore the brunt of the unfair tax system.

Economic

Jiang Jieshi's support base was further damaged by rampant inflation, which had a devastating effect on the middle classes. Jiang only took decisive action to deal with this in 1948, when a new currency was introduced and rationing started. These reforms were too late, however, and there was economic collapse by 1949 in those areas under Nationalist control.

Military

US observers continually commented on the poor quality of many of Jiang's troops, and their low morale contributed to the high number of desertions at the end of the civil war. The behaviour of the army towards ordinary Chinese was also in sharp contrast to that of the Communist army, with its strict rules of behaviour. In terms of military leadership, Jiang also made serious mistakes – for instance, choosing to pour resources into Manchuria, far from his real bases of support. His decision to fight it out at Xuzhou was also a disaster. Furthermore, he tried to interfere too much in the actual running of the campaigns, even though he was far removed from the actual action.

What was the role of foreign support in the final outcome?

The USA

The Americans, as discussed earlier, had economic and strategic interests in China, and they had supported the GMD from the first phase of the civil war. This support should have given the GMD key advantages over the CCP, and despite the problem of getting effective aid to the GMD, the USA provided Jiang with almost \$3 billion in aid and large supplies of arms throughout World War Two. At the beginning of the second stage of the civil war, the Americans transported GMD forces by sea and air to the north of China, and US troops occupied Tianjin and Beijing to hold them until the GMD were ready. In short, the USA did what it could to assist Jiang, but his regime was too ineffective to survive.



Cartoon by Leslie Gilbert Illingworth in the British Daily Mail, 16 September 1946. What does this show about American interests in China?

Yet some historians believe that there should have been *more* military commitment from the USA, and that this could have 'saved' China from Communism. The Americans were held responsible by Jiang for pressurizing him to agree to truces at critical times during his war on the CCP. Finally, their mere presence also gave Mao excellent anti-GMD propaganda.

The USSR

The Soviets had been rather reluctant to support the CCP, and did not in the end give them the same military and economic assistance that the GMD received from the USA. The involvement of the Comintern in the early stages of the CCP's struggle with the GMD had led to division and near annihilation in Jiang's final Encirclement Campaign. Mao waged the Rectification Campaigns to oust Soviet supporters from the CCP. The USSR had backed both United Fronts, and Stalin did not see that the CCP could win the civil war until the later stages in 1948. Some historians view the Soviet assistance in Manchuria, which also included establishing military training colleges and the training of CCP pilots, as essential to establishing the PLA as a more modern and effective force. Nevertheless, Stalin was worried that the USA would involve itself further in the Chinese Civil War, and attempted to limit Mao's successes in the later stages of the conflict. In 1949, Stalin told Mao to consolidate his gains in the north and not cross the Yangtze into southern China. Mao ignored his advice.

Activity 14

ATL Thinking skills

Source analysis

- Historians, of course, often disagree on the key reasons for the CCP's victory over the GMD. Read the sources below and identify in each case what reason the historian is emphasizing as the most important for CCP victory. What similarities and differences can you identify between these interpretations?

Source A

“The most important *near cause* for the downfall of the Nationalists was the eight-year Japanese war, which completely exhausted the government militarily, financially and spiritually. Had there been no Japanese war, the situation in China would have been very different ... [M]any of the disastrous repercussions of the war ... continued to plague the Nationalists during their struggle with the Communists. The price the Nationalists paid to win the Japanese war was also the first instalment toward its eventual downfall.

From Immanuel Hsu, *The Rise of Modern China* (Oxford University Press, 1995), p.639.

Source B

“China in fact was a classical eve-of-revolution situation. The ruling elite had lost its confidence and its will to rule. In these circumstances the final victory of the Communists, although it was gained by war, was actually a political victory. In 1947 the Communist armies faced Nationalist superiority in men and materials of two-and-a-half to one. After less than a year of fighting, they had reversed the proportion, as a result of the corruption, demoralisation and frequent defection to the Nationalist armies ... The actual military events of the communist conquest of China are of little interest. The Nationalist armies, as Lenin had said of the soldiers of the tsar in 1917, voted with their feet. The war-lord allies of the Guomindang retreated into their own bailiwicks and from them made their peace with Mao Zedong.

Jack Gray, *Rebellions and Revolutions: China from the 1880s to the 1980s* (Oxford University Pres, 1990), p.286.

Source C

What finally undermined the Nationalist government was not war or politics but economics. The military and political success of the Communists under Mao Zedong certainly played a vital part in determining their takeover in 1949, but it is arguable that the single most powerful reason for the failure of the GMD government was inflation ... By 1949 China's monetary system had collapsed, the government was discredited, and the people of Nationalist China were demoralised. Even had the Nationalists not been defeated in civil war and driven from the mainland it is difficult to see how Jiang Jieshi and the GMD could have continued to hold power in China.

From Michael Lynch, *China: From Empire to People's Republic 1900–49*, 2nd ed. (Hodder, 2010), p.142.

Source D

It is clear that a host of factors went into the Communist success ... But the central factor was unquestionably the mobilization of vast numbers of Chinese, primarily peasants, into new political, social, economic, and military organizations, infused with a new purpose and a new spirit. This mobilization largely accounted for the Communist victory ...

James Sheridan, *China in Disintegration* (Free Press, 1977), p.283.

Source E

The Communists won because they made fewer military mistakes than the government and because Chiang (Jiang) Jieshi – in his search for a powerful, centralized post-war state – antagonized too many interest groups in the country. As a party, the GMD was weakened by the drubbing it had got during the war against Japan. Meanwhile, the Communists became masters of telling different groups of Chinese exactly what they wanted to hear and of cloaking themselves in Chinese nationalism. Only they themselves, they insisted, were the bearers of the fate of the nation. Chiang was lampooned as a stooge of imperialism.

Odd Arne Westad, *Restless Empire* (Bodley Head, 2012), p.291.

Source F

In Yanan in 1942–43, Mao had built an efficient instrument by terrorising his power base, the members of the Communist Party. Now [by the start of 1948] he was terrorising his economic and cannon-fodder base, the peasantry, in order to bring about total, unquestioning conformity. The result was that the peasants put up little resistance to Mao's requisitioning of soldiers, labourers, food, and anything else he wanted for his goals.

Mao regarded this process of terrorisation as indispensable for winning the war ... Although people in the White areas knew quite a lot about the brutality of the land reform, not least through the hundreds of thousands who escaped, they often attributed it to passing excesses by the oppressed. In any case, they had no way of doing anything to stop Mao's advance, and having no great affection for the existing regime, often willed themselves to give Mao the benefit of the doubt.

Jung Chang and John Halliday, *Mao: The Unknown Story* (Jonathan Cape, 2005), pp.329–331.

Activity 15

ATL Thinking skills

1. What was the impact of a) the USSR's and b) the USA's involvement in the Chinese Civil War?
2. To what extent were political/ideological factors more important to the CCP's victory than military factors?

How important is the study of history to our understanding of international relations today? What are the knowledge issues involved in how politicians use history? Does the study of China's relationship with the West give us a better understanding of modern foreign relations?

Results of the Chinese Civil War

For China

Human cost

It has been estimated that around 3.5 million were killed in the Chinese Civil War. However, in the war against Japan (1937–45) the figures that historians have arrived at are horrific: between 15 million and 20 million people died. Of this figure around 4 million were military personnel, 10 million were civilians killed by military actions, and an additional 5 million were casualties to war-related starvation and disease. The historian Rana Mitter, in his book *Forgotten Ally: China's World War II, 1937–1945*, suggests that China's contribution to the war in the Pacific has often been overlooked in the west and had a significant impact in shaping the PRC.

Social impact

The victory of the Communists led to a social revolution in family life. A new marriage law that was passed in 1950 gave equal rights to women, forbade arranged marriages, and allowed women to hold land in their own names. Children born out of marriage were also given equal rights, and divorce was made equally available to men and women.

Likewise, centuries-old beliefs in religion were attacked. Christianity, Buddhism and Confucianism were all denounced in Communist propaganda as superstitions that could not be allowed to be part of the new China.

Economic impact

The Civil War left China economically devastated. There was widespread starvation and thousands died from hunger. Mao's new regime implemented land reform in the countryside; violence accompanied this reform as the landowners were often killed. From 1956 the CCP enforced collectivisation on the countryside and all land, tools and livestock were taken by the state from the farmers. Farmers had to hand over their grain to the state for a set price, which meant that by the mid-1950s people in the countryside were on starvation rations.

From 1952 the business community was attacked. All industry and commerce was put under the control of the All-China Federation of Industry & Commerce, and in 1956 the government took control of all private enterprises. Then in 1957, Mao launched the Great Leap Forward which was intended to bring about rapid industrialization. It was a catastrophic economic failure and led to what some historian have termed the worst man-made famine in human history.

Political impact

After the civil war, the CCP consolidated its control in China, and pursued the key ideas that it had initiated in Yan'an. The experiences of the long war were a guidebook for the new Chinese Communist regime. Society had been militarized and Mao had a god-like status. Society would be changed by short and 'total' campaigns, and all obstacles would be overcome by the power of the people. Indeed, within a year of victory Mao implemented a 'Great Terror' in which the regime eliminated all 'enemies of the Party'. Anyone could be accused of being an 'enemy' and quotas were set for those to be executed. Dikötter writes, 'School children as young as six were accused of spying for the enemy and tortured to death.' 2 million people had been killed in the terror by 1951 and a vast network of prison camps held hundreds of thousands of political prisoners. All laws were abolished and a legal system along similar lines

to the Soviet Union was established. Free speech, even mild criticism of the party or regime, was silenced. One of the key legacies of the Chinese Civil War is the continued authoritarian rule by the CCP. China remains a single-party state in which individual rights and freedoms are suppressed. In 1989, when young protesters on the streets of Tiananmen Square, Beijing, were forcibly dispersed with guns and tanks, the battles of the civil war were used to justify the actions of the state.

For Asia

Mao's victory led to the globalization of the Cold War, which spread from its seedbed in Europe to Asia. Asia was now a region in which the superpowers would struggle for control and influence. The Communist victory inspired insurgencies in Indonesia, Malaya, Indochina, and Thailand. It also led to the first 'hot war' of the Cold War – the Korean conflict (1950–1953).

For the USSR

Although the CCP's victory should have been viewed as a victory for the spread of Communism and for the USSR, Stalin feared Mao as a rival for the leadership of the communist world, and he had not wanted the Cold War to spread to Asia. Jiang's GMD would have recognized disputed border territory along frontiers in Manchuria and Xinjiang as Soviet. Fundamentally, Stalin did not view Maoism as 'genuinely revolutionary' and did not agree with Mao's 'hybrid' ideology, which was a mix of traditional Chinese culture and Marxism.

Mao became convinced that Stalin planned to create a divided and weak China, which would leave the USSR dominant in Asia. He saw Stalin's policies as rooted in self-interest rather than true revolutionary doctrine. Mao later said that in 1945 Stalin refused China permission to carry out revolution and told him: 'Do not have a civil war; collaborate with Jiang Jieshi. Otherwise the Republic of China will collapse.' Mao believed that Stalin saw him as another Tito (the Communist revolutionary who became the leader of post-war Yugoslavia).

Nevertheless, once the CCP had won the civil war, Mao visited Moscow in 1950 and this visit produced the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Alliance. The USSR had become enthusiastic about the CCP's victory, and the Soviet press had poured praise and admiration on Mao and the new People's Republic of China (PRC). The US State Department referred to the alliance as 'Moscow making puppets out of the Chinese'. Soviet planners and engineers in China developed 200 construction projects in the 1950s, traditional buildings were pulled down for Soviet-style constructions, and Soviet scientific technology was prioritized in China over Chinese technology.

Sino-Soviet relations chilled again during the Korean War. When American forces, under the UN flag, came close to the Chinese border, Stalin encouraged the PRC to send troops into Korea. The Soviets gave material assistance to the 1 million Chinese troops engaged in battle, but despite this support for PRC intervention in the Korean War, Mao bitterly complained when the Soviets demanded that the Chinese pay for all weapons and materials they supplied.

Relations between the USSR and the PRC worsened dramatically after the death of Stalin. Khrushchev's attack on Stalin's cult of personality was seen by Mao as an attack on his own style of leadership, and the USSR's handling of the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 caused Mao to accuse Khrushchev of being a 'paper tiger'. The Sino-Soviet split worsened, culminating in border clashes in 1969.

China's relations with the USA and the West

Mao's victory led to much anxiety in the USA, and seemed at the time to shift the balance of power in the Cold War in the USSR's favour. Many in the USA initially saw the Communist victory as inevitable given the lack of support that existed for the Nationalists in China in 1949; nevertheless, as the Cold War intensified and **McCarthyism** took hold in the USA, state officials were accused of having 'lost' China. Stalin was now seen as having been the mastermind behind Mao's CCP. The USA failed to understand the different types of Communism or that there was increasing tension and hostility between Mao and Stalin. The USA also refused to recognize the PRC as a legitimate state. Instead, they backed Jiang Jieshi and the Chinese Nationalists, who had fled at the end of the civil war to the island of Taiwan, about 160 kilometres off the coast of mainland China. The Americans then ensured that Taiwan and not the PRC had China's seat at the UN.

The USA initially perceived the CCP victory as opening a new front in the Cold War – there was the Iron Curtain in Europe and now the Bamboo Curtain in Asia. Mao's victory was a key reason for the passing of a vast new military budget to fund the struggle against the spread of Communism. It also led the USA into the Korean War and confrontations over Taiwan. However, by the end of the 1960s there was a radical change by both the Americans and the Communist Chinese in their policies and strategies towards one another. During the late 1960s, China and the USA entered into a period of dialogue and rapprochement.

CHALLENGE YOURSELF



First, reflect on your understanding of the causes of war in the 20th century, and then reflect on the causes of the Chinese Civil War. Can you identify and understand the political, economic, and social causes of a war? What factors do you find more difficult to understand?

Activity 16

ATL

Thinking and self-management skills

	GMD: Policies / Actions	CCP: Policies / Actions	Foreign intervention: Policies / Actions	Historians' comments
1927–1937				
1937–1945				
1945–1949				

Copy out the grid above and use it to help you answer the following essay questions.

1. Discuss the reasons for the victory of one side in one 20th-century civil war.

You can divide this essay into the following headings:

- strengths/successes of the CCP, 1928–1949
- weakness failures of the GMD, 1928–1949
- the impact of the Sino-Japanese War
- the impact of foreign intervention.

2. Examine the role of foreign intervention in one 20th-century civil war.

For this essay, consider

- long-term European involvement
- the impact of Japan
- the impact of the Soviets
- the impact of America.

Also try answering these questions:

3. Discuss the long- and short-term causes of one 20th-century civil war.

4. Evaluate the impact of guerrilla tactics on the outcome of one 20th-century civil war.