

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 Japanese responded to this new situation with a show of force – attacking the Marco Polo bridge outside Beijing in July 1937. This was the beginning of the war proper between Japan and China. In the battle for Shanghai, Jiang Jieshi's forces were forced to retreat after losing around 300,000 troops. The capital, Nanjing, was relocated 1,200km 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 p.135).

## 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.

Japanese expansion in China, 1937–44.



### 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 p.255).

## 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, but did little to resist the Japanese. Jiang Jieshi's best troops were sent to Yan'an, and he gambled on the USA winning the war against Japan for him, a choice that had a bad impact on the morale of the army.

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 facing the GMD were:

- Corruption was rife in the GMD army, and its troops were ill-treated and unmotivated (see Document Analysis exercise below). 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 it was sitting back and waiting for the Americans to win the war.

### STUDENT STUDY SECTION

#### Document 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*, 2009

#### Questions

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

#### 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 analyze the CCP politically and militarily in order to establish whether the American war effort would benefit from working with them. 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.

## 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 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*, 1977).

The CCP also gained support through its egalitarian policies. Everyone had the same living conditions and the intellectuals had to work with the peasants. Women were treated as equals with men for the first time in Chinese history. Women had been seen as property



Chairman Mao shown chatting with steel workers while inspecting a factory in Anhwei Province in 1959.

### The Rectification Campaigns

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

in traditional Chinese society, having no rights to divorce or inheritance, no education, no political rights and often being bought and sold to be wives, labourers or prostitutes. The communists offered them freedom to marry whom they chose and gave them the rights to divorce, education, voting at 18, military service and to form women's associations.

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*, 1990).

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.

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. Indeed, the CCP's Hundred Regiments Offensive in 1940 was the largest single campaign of the Sino-Japanese War and provoked a brutal retaliation from the Japanese, expressed in the 'kill all, burn all, loot all' policy.

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.

### STUDENT STUDY SECTION

#### 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*, 1977).

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

#### Review activity

In pairs, discuss and make notes on the following question: 'What was the impact of foreign involvement in: a) the first phase of the Chinese Civil War, and b) the war against Japan?'

## Second phase of the Civil War, 1946–49

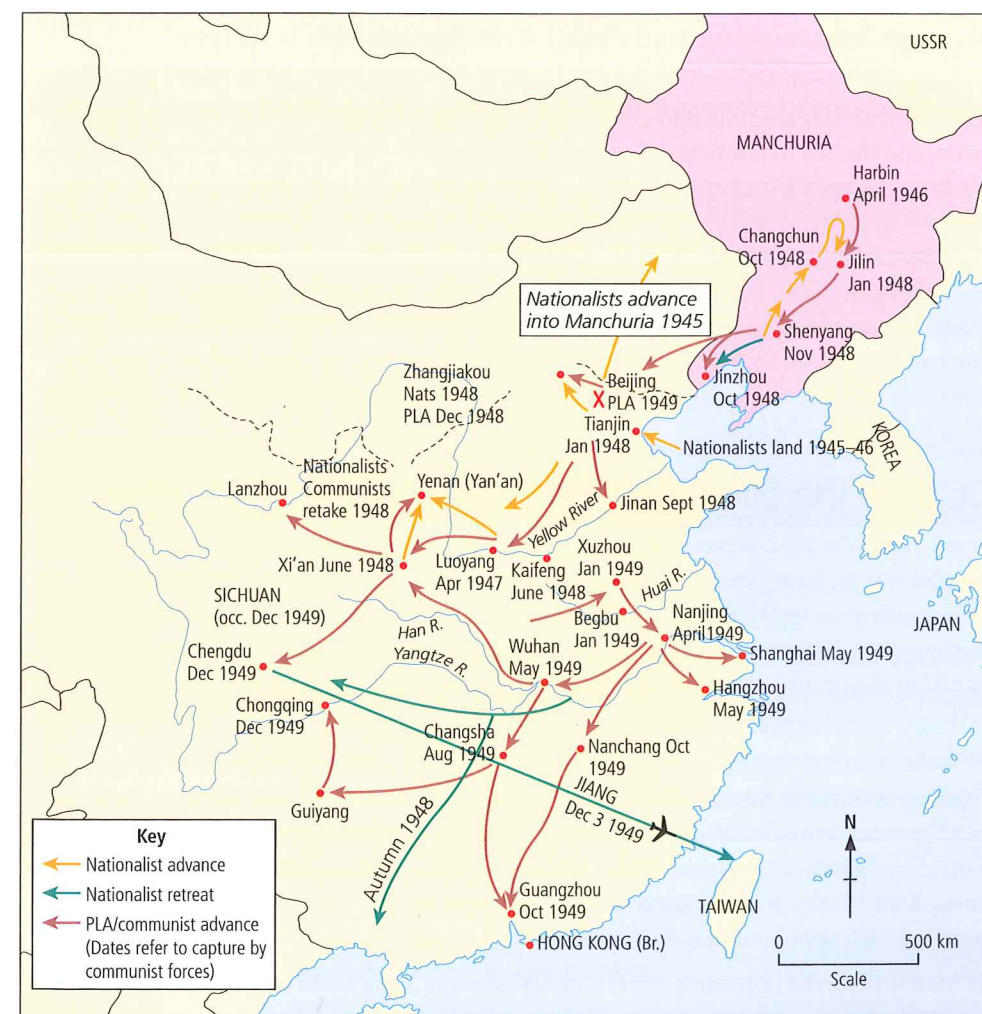
By the end of the war with Japan, the CCP was significantly strengthened, and the GMD weakened, so much so that the communists could move from the guerrilla warfare phase

of combat to a phase of more conventional fighting. The first period of civil war (1927–37) was an essentially Chinese war. The second 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 in China; its fate would be decided on the battlefield.



Map showing major battles and campaigns, 1946–49.