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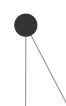
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# Foreword

Don't just put this report on your shelf. This paper is a must-read by all who are serious about understanding where China has come from, where it might be going, and the long-term strategic competition the United States and China are engaged in. This is only the beginning of what we hope will be several volumes of work.

Jackie Deal and Ella Harvey have captured Andy Marshall's dictum that to understand what the future might be like, one must understand the past and how it has led to the present. The analysis is brilliant and the research is meticulous. It will be on General Secretary Xi's reading list.

**Jaymie Durnan**  
Co-founder and Chairman  
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# Acknowledgments & Disclaimers

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Disclaimer: The scenarios in Part 3 are fictional. They were developed for this project as speculative illustrations of potential futures, not as predictions, and include invented organizations. Any resemblance of the latter to real-world institutions is accidental.

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The Chinese Communist Party's (CCP's) approach to the United States today reflects the party's formative competitive experiences a century ago. Starting in the 1920s, the CCP vied with the Nationalist Party (KMT) for control over China, but the CCP was also nominally allied with the KMT in the First United Front, 1924–27. In that context, the Communists waged political warfare against the KMT at the elite and the grassroots level. Initially, the CCP's aim was to coopt the KMT. When cooption failed, the Communists turned to subversion before attacking the Nationalists kinetically. In recent decades, the CCP has used this united-front template against the United States, thanks partly to a foundation of U.S.-CCP cooperation laid during the Sino-Japanese War and reinforced in the late Cold War. This report accordingly traces the CCP's repertoire for strategic competition to the Chinese Civil War (Part 1). It then analyzes the application of this toolkit to the United States across a series of interactions beginning in the late 1930s and continuing through the present (Part 2). The report concludes with two alternative visions of how the coming decades could unfold, hinging upon Washington's ability to counter Beijing's ongoing subversion campaign (Part 3).



# Introduction

Political regimes, like people, carry the imprint of their early experiences. Mechanisms developed in response to formative challenges tend to endure, whether they help or hinder progress down the road. The American revolutionary and Chinese Communist Party (CCP) regimes started from different positions and conceived of their formative challenges very differently. The strategies they developed and continue to employ reflect these differences. The outcome of the contest between the U.S. and CCP regimes may depend on which set of approaches is better suited to the current environment. Overall, the CCP employs a repertoire of techniques that most Americans would associate with domestic contestation or civil war rather than with international competition and conflict. Political rather than kinetic warfare is primary for Beijing; the former enables success in the latter and may even obviate it. The problem for the U.S. regime is that contemporary conditions have proved optimal for the CCP's mode of competing and fighting, at least in recent decades.

The American founders conceived of their revolution in Western liberal terms. The Declaration of Independence described the colonists as the victims of "a long train of abuses and usurpations" that "evinced... a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism," so it was "their right" and "their duty to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security." The colonists, who had embraced such arguments over the preceding decade, accomplished these tasks by raising militia forces and then a continental army to fight the British. Since then, while there have been exceptions, the U.S. tradition has been to fight foreign adversaries if and when they impinge on its freedom by attacking it. At that point, the United States marshals its considerable resources, amassed thanks to the ingenuity and productivity of citizens working under laissez-faire peacetime economic policies, to confront the adversary militarily.

By contrast, at the CCP's First Congress in July 1921, its Central Committee under the tutelage of Soviet advisers framed their revolution in Marxist-Leninist, class-based terms. The party's "basic principle was realization of a dictatorship of the proletariat" domestically as well as internationally. Workers, or the proletariat, were more objects of than participants in this struggle. The CCP deferred arming itself for some time, opting instead to expand its ranks from within and at the expense of the other revolutionary party in China, the Nationalists (or Kuomintang [KMT]), in a series of United Fronts.<sup>1</sup> The underdevelopment of the CCP's military organs through the mid-1920s is striking in

1 Guomindang (GMD) is an older transliteration of the Nationalist Party's name in Mandarin.



hindsight. As Zhang Guotao, an early CCP leader who later defected to the KMT, recalled in his memoir, as of July 1926:

[The Communists'] Military Department was an obscure department...with only two young comrades engaged in the collection of military information from the newspapers. The Central Committee of the CCP was then far from being a headquarters for military command... In the matter of warfare, we were outsiders. On this point, we were very backward compared with the [KMT]. We did not possess communication equipment such as radios, nor did we have intelligence data that could be of use. We had to start from scratch.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the CCP's lack of a military, Chiang Kai-shek, the generalissimo leading the KMT and arguably the strongest military leader in China at the time, considered the Communists a serious threat. In early 1926, he wrote in his diary that he felt an "urgent need to curb the Communist agitation immediately in order to save the [Nationalist] Party and the country." An early CCP leader acknowledged that Chiang's concerns were legitimate; in March, the party was encroaching on the KMT's political territory from all angles:

[Chiang] could not help having some misgivings as he watched the daily growth in influence of the Chinese Communists in the army, in the various local [KMT] headquarters, and among the masses of workers and peasants.... The CCP was an organization in itself, and its members in the army did not subject themselves absolutely to Chiang's control.<sup>3</sup>

The CCP was making inroads in Chiang's army because during the First United Front alliance between the KMT and the CCP, the generalissimo had tasked Zhou Enlai, another early CCP leader, with ensuring the political education and morale of students at the Whampoa Military Academy, the KMT's school for its forces. Zhou was the CCP's original spymaster, the founder of the party's intelligence apparatus.<sup>4</sup> By recruiting Nationalist soldiers clandestinely, the CCP devised a way to compete before it posed an independent military challenge. The KMT never devised an effective answer to such insidious methods.

The Nationalists found the CCP a tough target because the Communists' approach to the competition was so different from their own, which was based on military superiority.<sup>5</sup> The northern warlord kingdoms that the KMT's National Revolutionary Army (NRA) fought and defeated between 1925 and 1928 were like the Nationalists in this regard. The northern militarists' legitimacy depended on a single martial beam, so the KMT only needed to demonstrate its superiority in battle to trigger a collapse in opposition north of the Yangtze. The KMT was perplexed that confronting the CCP with military prowess did not have the same effect. On March 20, 1926, in what is referred to as the "March Twentieth Incident," Chiang declared martial law in Guangzhou to stem the CCP's expansion in and around the Nationalist capital. This was the first of many failed attempts to use overwhelming force to snuff out the Communists' political threat.

Even when the KMT's military superiority was more than overwhelming (until August 1927, the CCP had no military resources to speak of) the Communists were unimpressed by their competitor. One of the earliest publicly available

2 Zhang Guotao, *The Rise of the Chinese Communist Party, 1921-1927*, vol. 1 (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1971), 530.

3 Zhang Guotao, *Rise of the Chinese Communist Party*, 1:497.

4 Peter Mattis and Matthew Brazil, *Chinese Communist Espionage: An Intelligence Primer* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2019), 102.

5 "Chiang wrote a long letter to Sun setting out his views on political strategy. During the fight for unity and national leadership, he said, the KMT should emphasize power over principle... *Military methods, he believed, were to be paramount in the struggle* [emphasis added]." Jay Taylor, *The Generalissimo: Chiang Kai-shek and the Struggle for Modern China* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 42.



official histories of the CCP, compiled in mid-1926, described the KMT condescendingly, as “actually not a party at all but a collection of groups and individuals espousing Sun Yat-sen’s principles. Having no contact with each other, [KMT] members did not have any Party program or regulations.”<sup>6</sup> Zhang Guotao went further, suggesting that the KMT was out of touch with “the new age” because of its leader’s senility and its “old-fashioned organizational system.”<sup>7</sup> The wording of these early assessments reveal a set of criteria that emphasized nonmilitary factors.

Today, of course, the CCP commands a military, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), that has a growing arsenal of cutting-edge missiles and other weapons. Like his revolutionary forebears, however, General Secretary Xi Jinping still considers the United Front to be a “magic weapon” on par with the PLA and the party itself. He has accordingly overseen an effort to upgrade, centralize, and modernize united-front work.<sup>8</sup> He stressed both its historic importance and continuing relevance in his address on the centennial of the CCP in July 2021 and in the November 2021 Third Historical Resolution of the CCP. Xi has a personal connection to this work because his father, Xi Zhongxun, was a founding-era practitioner and served as a leader of the CCP’s United Front apparatus.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, other architects or pioneers of the United Front such as Zhou had remarkable longevity, serving in key roles up to the 1970s and ‘80s.

Compared to the pre-1949 KMT, the United States—now the primary target of the CCP’s infiltrative political warfare—is much stronger and is equipped with deeper reserves of both hard and soft power. But the KMT did not lose the Chinese Civil War because it lacked material or political capital. It lost because it did not protect these resources in the face of the CCP’s united-front strategy to deplete and appropriate them.

Washington is no less vulnerable to this error because of its strategic inheritance. During the 1940s, America by turns over- and underestimated the CCP’s military strength by neglecting its political dimension.<sup>10</sup> First, it proved susceptible to propaganda that inflated the CCP’s contributions against the Japanese, missing the fact that the Red Army was shrinking rather than fighting and that the Communists’ intelligence came mostly from collaborating with Japanese puppets—Chinese local governors who worked for the occupiers. Then, the United States decided that the unwillingness of the CCP to integrate the Red Army into the NRA as promised in April 1946 was because of shame about the Communist forces’ rag-tag condition, which it offered to redress by building a school. In fact, the CCP was on the verge of deciding to forcibly evict U.S. forces from the country, which it was already capable of doing.<sup>11</sup> U.S. misjudgments about the CCP profoundly shaped the rest of the Cold War, and it is still living with the ramifications.

If the United States starts a China strategy from scratch, without reference to the record of the last century, it is likely to repeat these mistakes; instead, it should learn from them. This report contributes to that education. The primary lesson is that the CCP sees all nonmembers, domestic and foreign, as potential instruments in the aggrandizement of the party. It therefore seeks to recruit them, befriend those who cannot be inducted while isolating and discrediting those who prove hostile. This outlook would seem best suited to a domestic context because it assumes that the party can attract nonmembers, which requires access to them. But the CCP has also applied its united-front reper-

6 Anonymous, “A Brief History of the Chinese Communist Party, September 1927,” in *Documents on Communism, Nationalism, and Soviet Advisers in China, 1918-1927*, ed. C. Martin Wilbur and Julie How (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956), 62.

7 Zhang Guotao, *Rise of the Chinese Communist Party*, 1:82, 89.

8 Alex Joske and Peter Mattis, “The Third Magic Weapon: Reforming China’s United Front,” 24 June 2019, <https://warontherocks.com/2019/06/the-third-magic-weapon-reforming-chinas-united-front/>.

9 Joske and Mattis, “The Third Magic Weapon.” As explained below, Xi is not the only recent or contemporary elite party member with a United Front lineage.

10 To be sure, some Americans did perceive the true character of the CCP and tried to shift U.S. policy in light of this understanding, but less realistic views prevailed in key debates.

11 The United States was surprised by this turn of events, and by the support Moscow provided to further train and equip CCP forces.



toire to the United States, starting in the late 1930s. Even then, the Communists managed to shape the views of the U.S. government and the American public by working through key influencers such as the writer Edgar Snow.

In the twenty-first century, thanks to globalization, advances in information technology, and a lax U.S. regulatory environment, the CCP enjoys unprecedented access to the United States: party cells in U.S. banks, TikTok studios in military educational institutions, and DJI drones in the skies. The same is not true of the United States vis-a-vis the Chinese population. This asymmetry reflects U.S. disinterest in the popular or political warfare arena of competition. The American strategic approach was for the most part well-suited to the international environment of the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries. The verdict on the twenty-first century is still out, but there is reason for concern.

This report explains why by first tracing the origins of the CCP's distinctive approach to competition and conflict (Part 1) and then tracing the application of that toolkit to the United States, starting in the late 1930s (Part 2). The report concludes with two alternative visions of how the coming decades could unfold (Part 3). In one, the CCP continues to successfully employ the playbook it has used historically, and the CCP Dream comes to fruition at the expense of the American Dream and global freedom and prosperity. While the PLA has positioned itself to fight and win, this turns out not to be necessary. In the other scenario, such a future is averted because the United States mobilizes to defend itself. Working with allies and partners, Washington develops its own information campaign to impose transparency on the CCP, arousing the concern of governments and populations around the world. The flow of foreign funds and intellectual property into the People's Republic of China (PRC) is arrested. The United States also works on its own and with partners to redress the vulnerabilities it has incurred from allowing the PRC to gain influence over critical supply chains and infrastructure both in the United States and in other geostrategically important locations.

**“If the United States starts a China strategy from scratch, without reference to the record of the last century, it is likely to repeat these mistakes; instead, it should learn from them.”**

# Part 1:

## The Birth of the CCP's United-Front Strategy

The U.S. regime is not the first to face the CCP as a near-peer or peer competitor. The CCP prevailed over the Nationalists in spite of the KMT's initial military superiority and success in establishing itself as the party governing all of China. Just as the Nationalists tried to defend their governing position on the mainland, so now is the United States trying to defend the liberal and republican political principles for which it stands both domestically and globally. Prudence therefore dictates studying the Nationalists' strategic blind spots and how the CCP offset the KMT's conventional advantage by exploiting them. The findings should help the United States address any analogous deficits in its current orientation toward the contest with the PRC and its CCP regime.

This part of the report analyzes how the CCP used united-front techniques against the KMT over its first fifteen years, from the CCP's founding in 1921 until 1934. It covers the Soviet influences behind the CCP's evolving strategy, the structure and function of party cells, and their operation across three distinct phases of the competition: infiltration, when at Moscow's behest the young CCP began operating as a clandestine organization inside the KMT in 1923; preparation for the split, once it became clear that the KMT host would evict the CCP parasite in 1926; and outright warfare, starting with the split in April 1927 and lasting until the CCP fled central China in 1934.

### **Soviet Influence on the CCP's Institutional Development and Political Philosophy**

For most of the decade after the CCP's founding in 1921, it could compete with the KMT only through political, rather than kinetic, warfare. The CCP had little say in this matter: It was a Soviet choice, based on imperatives of Moscow's strategy for territorial aggrandizement in Mongolia and Manchuria. The Soviet-negotiated framework of the First United Front between the CCP and the KMT (1923–27) prevented the CCP from raising its own army. From Moscow's perspective, the CCP's militarization had to be deferred because it threatened to upset the tenuous division of labor and balance of power holding the United Front together. The United Front, in turn, had to be preserved because it was the vehicle for Moscow's ambitions in northern and northeastern China.<sup>12</sup> The Nationalists agreed to work with the Communists only if the KMT's revolutionary leadership was assured. The Soviets took the measure of Sun through a series of interviews and understood that they could satisfy this condition by having the United Front operate under the KMT's mantle, with the KMT Central Committee formally in charge of the United Front's military and executive committees. Accordingly, the Soviets structured the United Front to align with Sun's preferences and appease him. They ordered Chinese communists to shed their CCP affiliation and join the Nationalist Party as individuals, while consistently rejecting CCP requests to raise a communist army.<sup>13</sup> For Sun, this demonstrated the CCP's acceptance of its subordination. For Moscow's agents, this demonstrated Sun's naïve outlook. As the Russians would soon teach the CCP, Sun

12 Even as the Soviets preached anti-imperialism to the CCP, Moscow was using both revolutionary parties in China to pressure northern military governors into territorial concessions.

13 Zhang Guotao, *Rise of the Chinese Communist Party*, 1:300.



had overlooked the ways to seize control with political resources.

The instructions the Soviets delivered to the CCP in May 1923 ordered only the appearance of submission. To be sure, Moscow's first United Front-related wires to the CCP declared that "the [KMT] is the leadership core of the national revolution" and therefore "members of the CCP should join the [KMT]." But beneath the surface, the Communists were to remain a politically separate and tightly ordered unit lurking within the KMT's system. As the Comintern's instructions went on to explain, "In the national revolution, the CCP should preserve its independent organization... The labor movement is still an independent movement, development of which the CCP should actively promote."<sup>14</sup>

Only by maintaining ideological independence while appearing to blend in could the CCP fulfill its role in Moscow's designs. The CCP's initial assignment within the United Front was to make the KMT into a revolutionary party by, in the words of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union's (CPSU's) first adviser to the CCP, "advanc[ing] the idea of mass activity in that party."<sup>15</sup> If the CCP operatives were eliminated, expelled from the United Front, or ideologically compromised—all of which would be likely if Nationalist elites became aware of the Soviet plot—the Soviets would lose their ideological front line.<sup>16</sup> The risk was significant: Moscow had put substantial resources behind its strategy. The Soviets were pumping money, arms, and knowledge into the KMT's party, state, and army. If the CCP succeeded in forging a durable ideological connection between the Nationalist Party and the Soviets' international revolution, these contributions would promote Soviet influence in China. But if the CCP failed, the KMT's ideological development would be left to fate, and Moscow could turn out to have boosted a future enemy.

The Soviets did not just clip the CCP's military wings and leave it to fend for itself. It was in Moscow's interest to provide the CCP Central Committee (CC) with the material it needed to develop and prosecute an alternative way of fighting. From its experience running similar campaigns elsewhere, Moscow understood the challenges the CCP infiltrators would face on the ground. Soviet advisor Hank Sneevliet (alias: Maring), the tactical architect of the CCP's strategy in the First United Front,<sup>17</sup> spoke to the nature of the dilemmas the Soviets prepared the Chinese communists to encounter:

For China, it was...necessary to underline the independence of the Communist Party.... It was to be expected from the very beginning, that the entry of our men would be greeted with suspicion by the [KMT] leaders. The possibility was also created that efforts would be made to buy over our people and to make them the tools of the [KMT]'s own policy. This same risk is always present when we [the CPSU and its foreign operatives] pursue the tactic of working in mass organizations of that kind.<sup>18</sup>

The CCP knew it was being drafted into a dangerous game.

Despite the risks and limits, the CCP agreed to Moscow's scheme in view of how it stood to benefit. Only three hundred members strong at this point, the Chinese Communists saw working through the KMT as a way to use their rival's institu-

14 Zhang Guotao, *Rise of the Chinese Communist Party*, 1:300.

15 Harold R. Isaacs and Albert Treint, "Documents on the Comintern and the Chinese Revolution," *China Quarterly*, 45 (January-March 1971): 105.

16 Isaacs and Treint, "Documents on the Comintern," 106.

17 "In giving this advice, there was not a question for a single moment of concrete specific instructions from Moscow. I left Moscow without instructions. I was only basing myself on the experience of the Javanese movement, the Sarekat Islam." Isaacs and Treint, "Documents on the Comintern," 105.

18 Isaacs and Treint, "Documents on the Comintern," 106.

**“By choosing to project power through infiltration, the CCP (with Soviet encouragement) engaged itself in a perennial battle against assimilation into the Nationalist Party.”**

tions to accelerate their own expansion. For now, Communist cadres acknowledged, “the [CCP] needed the [KMT] as a means to organize and influence the vast masses and to direct the national revolutionary movement.”<sup>19</sup>

By choosing to project power through infiltration, the CCP (with Soviet encouragement) engaged itself in a perennial battle against assimilation into the Nationalist Party. Even with Soviet support, this existential threat was difficult for the CCP to overcome. In April 1924 Secretary Chen Duxiu alerted the CC to signs that the CCP was being “Guomindangized [KMT-ized].”<sup>20</sup>

[Chen Duxiu] said that in some places CCP members had taken over the work of [KMT] organs, occasionally acquiring the bad habits that went with [KMT] departmentalization, and this he did not regard as a salutary situation.... [Chen] criticized the tendency...for members to slacken their efforts in the labor movement in our other undertakings because they were preoccupied solely with [KMT]–CCP cooperation.<sup>21</sup>

The threat of extinction motivated the CCP to be a quick student of Moscow’s lessons.

### **Institutional Adaptation: The Party Cell**

Given the structure imposed by the United Front, a conventional military approach was out of reach for the CCP along with being undesirable. The CCP’s goal was not to overpower the KMT but to brainwash it into putting its political, human, and security resources toward initiatives that advanced the communist agenda in China. To accomplish this, the CCP needed to develop a system that bred internal political discipline while enabling the Communists to weaken and redirect KMT political discipline.

The CCP’s essential organizational adaptation in service of this set of aims was the party cell system. During the First United Front, party cells were groups of communists who served as a vector of party influence within grassroots, nonparty organizations. The term also refers to the management team to which such cell members reported.<sup>22</sup> A layer of cells made up the bottom, frayed rung of the party’s institutional hierarchy. As it stood in 1926:

The organic system of the Party extends from the CC to the regional or local committees, from the regional or local committees to sectional committees, and from the sectional committees to the executive committees of Party cells and conferences of unit chiefs.<sup>23</sup>

Although these units made up the lowest level of the CCP pyramid, the cells played a key role in CCP campaigns. The party machine interacted with the public through them. Because mobilizing mass movements to exert political

19 Anonymous, “A Brief History,” in Wilbur and How, *Documents on Communism*, 87.

20 Zhang Guotao, *Rise of the Chinese Communist Party*, 1:340.

21 Zhang Guotao, *Rise of the Chinese Communist Party*, 1:340-42.

22 Zhang Guotao, *Rise of the Chinese Communist Party*, 1:311.

23 Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, “Resolutions on the Question of Organization, 12 July 1926,” in Wilbur and How, *Documents on Communism*, 113–14.



pressure on the KMT's agenda was central to the CCP's First United Front strategy, these party organs were the CCP's front-line fighters.

Before diving into how the CCP CC wielded the cell network and the mass following it shepherded to rob the KMT of its political agency in peacetime and, later, to overcome the NRA on the battlefield, it is worth noting that Xi's CCP has revived this institutional architecture. In April 2020, a scholar of early CCP history at the Hebei Institute of Socialism drew parallels between the cells of the First United Front period and the CCP groups [中共党组] in nonparty organizations [非党组织] today.<sup>24</sup> The CCP CC issued the "Regulations on the Work of the Leading Party Group of the Communist Party of China" ["中国共产党党组工作条例"] on June 16, 2015 to "standardize the work of the Party Group, strengthen and improve the Party's leadership, improve the Party's governing ability, and better play the central role of the Party's leadership in overseeing the overall situation and coordinating all parties." The Politburo released a revised edition of the document in April 2019,<sup>25</sup> and the system was used domestically at the height of the coronavirus pandemic, when over 4.6 million party cells were mobilized across China to set up quarantine areas in neighborhoods.<sup>26</sup>

Understanding how the cells worked historically to strengthen the Central Committee is therefore relevant today. In the First United Front, the cell served internal and external security purposes: to unify the positions and actions of grassroots CCP members within the KMT and to control the activities of the KMT organizations or groups where they were stationed.<sup>27</sup> To succeed at the latter, the cells had to populate these organizations with new recruits and shepherd them into positions where they could serve CCP ends. This subsection addresses these tasks sequentially.

**Unifying CCP members within the KMT.** The cells were a platform for developing and monitoring the political discipline of the party's rank and file while also enabling coordination of their actions. Every cell housed an educational propagandist who oversaw the unit's political instruction. While the outward projection of Communist influence was the cell secretary's purview, the propagandist cultivated revolutionary consciousness within the unit. At cell meetings, these educators mouthed the internal propaganda points prescribed by central authorities and challenged their cadre-pupils to interpret current problems through the correct revolutionary lens. The propagandists were also tasked with surveilling the private activities of cell members to gauge levels of political interest and engagement and detect counterrevolutionary behavior.<sup>28</sup> Indicating the CCP CC's concern for the political development of lower level cadres, the Central Propaganda Department requested frequent reports from regional party committees on the volume and content of correspondence among local comrades related to the Central Committee's publications on the current political environment, revolutionary philosophy, and commentary on the labor and peasant movements.<sup>29</sup>

In addition to protecting ideological security, the cells enabled the CCP CC to exercise command and control over

- 24 Wang Yuchen [王宇辰], "Research on the United Front Work Organization of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China during the New Democratic Revolution" [新民主主义革命时期中共中央统战工作机构研究], *Journal of Hebei Institute of Socialism* [河北省社会主义学院学报] 2 (2020): 71.
- 25 Central Committee of the Communist Party of China [中共中央], *Regulations on the Work of the Leading Party Group of the Communist Party of China* [中国共产党党组工作条例], Baidu Baike [百度百科], <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E4%B8%AD%E5%9B%BD%E5%85%B1%E4%BA%A7%E5%85%9A%E5%85%9A%E7%BB%84%E5%B7%A5%E4%BD%9C%E6%9D%A1%E4%BE%8B/17643776>.
- 26 Jane Cai, "Structure of China's Communist Party: Party Cells, Decision-Making Process, Concentration of Power," *South China Morning Post*, May 11, 2021, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3132921/how-chinas-communist-party-structured>.
- 27 Wang, "Research on the United Front," 71.
- 28 Organization Department of the Northern Regional Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, "Plans on the Organization of Party Cells, 10 December 1925," in Wilbur and How, *Documents on Communism*, 107–08.
- 29 Central Committee, "Resolutions on the Work of the Propaganda Department, 12 July 1926," in Wilbur and How, *Documents on Communism*, 127–28.

the rank and file. Through the cell, the CCP's fleet of front-line organizers was tied into the greater party hierarchy. Vertical communication of orders downward from the Central Committee in Shanghai, as well as horizontal communication within ranks to coordinate policy execution, was handled by the CCP's liaison organization. In addition to securely transmitting orders and other intraparty communications, liaison officers collected party dues and managed travel arrangements and accommodations for party officials moving between CCP stations.<sup>30</sup> Beginning in fall 1925, the Central Committee instituted another level of central oversight by appointing special commissioners to direct and oversee the regional and local committees in the execution of their assigned tasks.<sup>31</sup>

**Controlling the KMT.** From their footholds in KMT labor unions, schools, armies, neighborhoods, and peasant associations, the cells turned their powers of organization and indoctrination outward to bring Nationalist communities under the party's ideological sway. While deciding what to do with the recruits was up to the CCP CC, it was up to the lower level cadres to make sure that the center had recruits to direct.

**Recruitment.** The cells sponsored political activities in their vicinities and then channeled the participants into secretly CCP-controlled organizations for future use. As the party put it, these recruits would then be "in preparation for the development of all kinds of struggle."<sup>32</sup> A survey of the various feeder movements stirred up by the cells revealed little consistency in form or political agenda. This shapelessness was actually a centrally mandated principle of CCP operations. As the Central Committee ruled at the Second Enlarged Plenum in July 1926, ideological uniformity, which would have the cells repeat "abstract national political slogans and demands which cannot be applied to practical daily struggles," prevented the cells from becoming "active unit[s] in absorbing workers and organizing unions."<sup>33</sup> Wherever they were stationed, the cells were to center their slogans on "the acute problems of daily life of the masses."<sup>34</sup>

This shapeshifting was not only duplicitous but also much more intelligence intensive than preaching the same message to every audience. Identifying the hot-button issues in the diverse settings of CCP operations created demand for the cell network's ground-level perspectives. From deeply embedded positions in local communities, cell members produced weekly reports summarizing their observations in the field.<sup>35</sup> Based on the accumulated data from cell reports in their jurisdiction, regional committees compiled monthly reports for the Central Propaganda Department commenting on the following topics:

Results of the work of propaganda mobilization of the central and local committees of our Party and other cliques...the work of theoretical propaganda in the clubs and research societies...the number of issues and the current slogans of local publications...the survey of popular opinion...the local effect of the CC's publications...the size and content of correspondence of local comrades with the CC's publications on politics, theories, labor, and peasantry.<sup>36</sup>

From trends identified in this data, the party's regional committees drafted plans for the labor movement in their territories that were submitted to the Central Committee for approval.<sup>37</sup> Clearly, the CCP leaders did not see labor

30 Zhang Guotao, *Rise of the Chinese Communist Party*, 1:409.

31 Central Committee, "Resolution on the Question of Organization," in Wilbur and How, *Documents on Communism*, 112.

32 Central Committee, "Resolutions on the Labor Movement, 12 July 1926," in Wilbur and How, *Documents on Communism*, 294.

33 Central Committee, "Resolutions on the Labor Movement," in Wilbur and How, *Documents on Communism*, 291.

34 Central Committee, "Resolutions on the Labor Movement," in Wilbur and How, *Documents on Communism*, 290.

35 Organization Department, "Plans on the Organization," in Wilbur and How, *Documents on Communism*, 106–09.

36 Central Committee, "Resolutions on the Work of the Propaganda Department, 12 July 1926," in Wilbur and How, *Documents on Communism*, 128.

37 Central Committee, "Resolutions on the Labor Movement," in Wilbur and How, *Documents on Communism*, 292.



work as their primary mission. They had their eyes on a larger prize.

The May Thirtieth Movement of 1925 represents one of the CCP's most successful exploitations of this intelligence during the First United Front period. When several Chinese workers were killed by a foreign police officer in Shanghai, the Communists recognized an opportunity to take advantage of local sensitivity to imperialist abuses. To fan public reaction to the incident, the Guangdong leadership distributed a propaganda script designed to inflame existing frustrations against the combined forces of imperialism, warlordism, corrupt politicians, local tyrants, and the evil gentry.<sup>38</sup>

Activists triggered by these incendiary tropes were then ushered into covertly Communist-controlled labor organizations. On May 31, the CCP-piloted KMT Workers Department inaugurated the Shanghai General Labor Union (GLU) as a means to tether the excited laborers to the CCP.<sup>39</sup> Zhang Guotao described the play's success:

From the day of the founding of the Shanghai General Labor Union, its office was constantly crammed with people. Every day, in an endless line, hundreds of them came to give money.... They were literally overflowing with patriotism.<sup>40</sup>

By the end of the May Thirtieth Movement, the GLU encompassed more than a hundred member unions ripe for cell penetration.<sup>41</sup>

Through these provocations, the CCP's sphere of influence expanded to encapsulate a massive working-class phalanx. According to a manifesto issued by the Second Enlarged Plenum, by summer 1926, the party had succeeded in organizing 1.2 million workers and 800,000 "peasants."<sup>42</sup>

It should be noted that the vast majority of this mobilized population would not be recruited into the CCP. The party was the professional political operator vanguard that was directing the energy of the group. Because so much of the CCP's success depended on the organizational and political discipline of its grassroots vanguard, requirements for entry into the CCP itself, even at the lowest levels, were steep.<sup>43</sup> Instead, most of the excited throngs were channeled into the vaguely defined, relatively progressive-thinking, left wing of the KMT. This gave rise to a peculiar situation in which most participants in CCP campaigns were not aware of their involvement in Communist initiatives.<sup>44</sup>

**Shepherding recruits.** The CCP CC required evidence that a cell-penetrated organization consistently obeyed the cell's orders in order to count the organization as part of its reserve force. As the Central Committee stated in its July 1926 "Resolutions on the Labor Movement," to achieve the level of finely tuned control that the party required, "it is not sufficient for labor unions merely to issue a few proclamations in executing our policy."<sup>45</sup>

38 Huang He [黄河], "Iron-Clad Convoy: The First Regular Armed Forces Directly Led by the CCP" [铁甲车队: 中共直接领导的首支正规武装], *Yanhuang Chunqiu* [炎黄春秋] 8 (2018): 15.

39 Hans J. van de Ven, *From Friend to Comrade: The Founding of the Chinese Communist Party, 1920-1927*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 154.

40 Zhang Guotao, *Rise of the Chinese Communist Party*, 1:437.

41 Zhang Guotao, *Rise of the Chinese Communist Party*, 1:437.

42 Commentary by the editors of the document collection, Wilbur and How, *Documents on Communism*, 285.

43 "At present, we face a grave shortage of personnel for the labor movement, particularly low-level cadres. We should immediately establish at such places as Shanghai, Hankow, Tientsin, and Canton, training classes to cultivate personnel as lower-level cadres in the labor movement. Central Committee, "Resolutions on the Labor Movement," in Wilbur and How, *Documents on Communism*, 295.

44 Li Zhiyu [李志毓], "Rethinking the 'KMT Leftist' Problem (1924-1931)" [关于"国民党左派"问题的再思考 (1924-1931)], *Research on the History of the Communist Party of China* [中共党史研究] 10 (2016): 90.

45 Central Committee, "Resolutions on the Labor Movement," in Wilbur and How, *Documents on Communism*, 290.



**“The cells habituated their communities into following the CCP’s lead by engaging them in a battery of political activities. The CCP’s thinking was that frequent activation would strengthen the cells.”**

In the interval between a cell’s establishment and its mobilization in party campaigns, cell workers were tasked with cultivating influence over the rank and file of the host organization. The cells habituated their communities into following the CCP’s lead by engaging them in a battery of political activities. The CCP’s thinking was that frequent activation would strengthen the cells. An instructional document distributed to them in December 1925 makes clear that the purpose was generating influence, not achieving the activities’ stated demands:

When the Party’s masses achieve victory, we should hold out new demands or augment old ones in order to strengthen mass organizations. We should explain to them that not all our victories are presented to us by the objective situation, but that they are the results of our own struggle.... When our Party achieves victory we must not be arrogant. We should be judicious in further consolidating the foundation of our mass organizations in order to strengthen our fighting force.<sup>46</sup>

A Beijing cell’s report about local labor movement activity provides an example of exactly what the Central Committee wanted to hear. The cell cited, as proof of its control, Beijing leftists’ unquestioning acceptance of CCP nominees for the KMT’s Municipal Party Headquarters elections: “In short, all of the policies of Our School [the CCP] can influence the Left Wing at any time.”<sup>47</sup> The cell thus declared: mission accomplished.

### Using the System to Fight the KMT: Three Models

The latter half of the 1920s proved tumultuous for the CCP. The First United Front ended abruptly in 1927, but the cell structure endured. After exhausting the possibilities for operating clandestinely within the KMT and trying to take it over via its left wing, the CCP CC used the cell structure to prepare for a split with the Nationalists and then to wage conventional war against them.

**Model 1: Internal takeover.** The CCP used the cell network to direct the political reshuffling precipitated by the death of KMT founder Sun Yat-sen in March 1925. For the first two years of the United Front, the CCP’s position was secured by Sun’s understanding that his receipt of Russian military aid was contingent upon the KMT’s continued cooperation with the CCP.<sup>48</sup> Sun fulfilled his side of the bargain by silencing elite critics of communist activity and granting chief Soviet adviser Mikhail Borodin free rein over the Nationalist Party’s institutional design.<sup>49</sup>

But when Sun fell ill in early 1925, this arrangement collapsed, forcing the CCP to find new grounds for its continued existence within the KMT. In March, Sun died without designating a successor. A leadership struggle ensued. It seemed as if the Nationalist clique that was best organized (i.e., the Communists or their KMT left wing proxies)

46 Central Committee, “Plans on the Organization of Party Cells,” in Wilbur and How, *Documents on Communism*, 106.

47 Po Hai, “Report on the Work of the Peking Local Committee in the National Movement, 10 February 1927,” in Wilbur and How, *Documents on Communism*, 442.

48 Example of the grandiose lethal aid the Soviets heaped upon the GMD to buy their loyalty: “In June 1924...Sun presided over the opening of the Whampoa Military Academy, made possible by a Russian gift of 2.7 million Chinese yuan plus a monthly stipend of 100,000 yuan. In his address on the occasion, Sun declared that the goal was to create ‘a new revolutionary army’ modeled after the Soviet Red Army.” Taylor, *Generalissimo*, 45.

49 Commentary by the editors of the document collection, Wilbur and How, *Documents on Communism*, 148–49.



would be able to take the helm.<sup>50</sup> But anticommunist voices whom Sun had previously suppressed unexpectedly filled the vacuum.<sup>51</sup> In July 1925, the head of the KMT's Shanghai Executive Headquarters, Dai Jitao, released a polemic calling for the CCP's ejection from the KMT. Dai's writings enjoyed wide circulation among KMT elites.<sup>52</sup>

The CCP's panicked response illuminates how attuned it was to political threats. An internal party document distributed by the CCP's local committee in Beijing in November 1925 described Dai's writings as "furnishing the reactionaries with a weapon to attack the Left and the Communists."<sup>53</sup> The circular goes on to specify the nature of the challenge posed by Dai's writings:

Reactionary influence tends towards gradual concentration.... The result of [Daijitaotism] is...the formulation of the Right Wing's working principle in the [KMT]: "Raise the left hand to drive out the Communists! Raise the right hand to overthrow the reactionaries".... Since the appearance of [Daijitaotism], the Right has leaned further to the Right, to the extent that it has allied itself with the reactionaries to destroy the alliance of the Left and the Communists.<sup>54</sup>

In the Communists' eyes, by applying a slogan to the fight against the CCP's presence in the KMT, Dai's writings threatened to consolidate an anticommunist coalition. A Soviet document describes a doomsday scenario in which Dai's message found traction among KMT centrists: "The Right Wing of the [KMT] will...draw over to its side the majority of the petty bourgeoisie under the slogan, 'Struggle against Bolshevism!'"<sup>55</sup>

The CCP fought back using a time-tested Soviet formula for transforming existing, internally divided institutions into Bolshevik organs. In a retrospective interview focused on his role in the United Front operation in China, Soviet advisor Maring explained that the "form of cooperation" the Soviets forged "in China with the [KMT] was based directly on the successful experience in Java," where the Soviets had transformed the Sarekat Islam into the Indonesian Communist Party (ICP).<sup>56</sup> As Maring recalled:

[The Sarekat Islam] had as its left wing...a formation which accepted the propaganda of the Indian Social Democratic Association [ISDA] which I helped organize and develop...propaganda in the lines of the class struggle. This propaganda had strong support inside the Sarekat Islam, and especially was this so in the war years, 1914–18. The result was that in the Congress of 1918 the declaration of principles accepted the idea of struggle against "sinful capitalism."<sup>57</sup>

The Indonesian communists thus used propaganda to build out the Sarekat Islam's left wing until it was the party's dominant coalition; then, in May 1920, the Sarekat Islam was rechristened the ICP. At a stroke, the old Sarekat Islam's assets formally fell under the Comintern's umbrella. By 1922, the ICP and its affiliated organizations had fifty

50 Dan N. Jacobs, *Borodin: Stalin's Man in China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 173.

51 Zhang Guotao, *Rise of the Chinese Communist Party*, 1:410.

52 Zhang Guotao, *Rise of the Chinese Communist Party*, 1:461.

53 Beijing Local Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, "Our Immediate Attitude Toward the Guomindang in the North, 25 November 1925," in Wilbur and How, *Documents on Communism*, 238.

54 Beijing Local Committee, "Our Immediate Attitude," in Wilbur and How, *Documents on Communism*, 238.

55 Anonymous, "Soviet Advisors in South China, February 1926," in Wilbur and How, *Documents on Communism*, 246.

56 Isaacs and Treint, "Documents on the Comintern," 105.

57 The Indonesian Communists built out the Sarekat Islam's left wing until it was the party's dominant coalition. In May 1920, the Sarekat Islam was rechristened the Indonesian Communist Party. With this change in signage, the subsumed party's assets came under the Comintern's sway. By 1922, the ICP and its affiliated organizations had 50,000 members, making it, by far, the largest communist party in East Asia. Michael Williams, "Sneevliet and the Birth of Asian Communism," *New Left Review*, 1 (September/October 1980): 85.

thousand members, making it, by far, the largest communist party in East Asia.<sup>58</sup>

The CCP used a similar formula to eclipse the rise of the KMT right wing. The KMT left wing was fostered by the CCP and served as a vehicle for promoting CCP propaganda. From the start, the CCP's messaging was more targeted than the ISDA's propaganda had been. Rather than pushing Marxist ideas of class struggle, the KMT left wing advocated directly for Nationalist cooperation with the CCP through the United Front and framed critics of this program as enemies of the revolution.<sup>59</sup>

The CCP used the assassination of left-leaning KMT Central Executive Committee member Liao Zhongkai on August 20, 1925, to create a martyrdom narrative that boosted the left in Nationalist discourse.<sup>60</sup> Uncertainty surrounding the circumstances of Liao's murder enabled Communist manipulation of facts. The deceased had been viewed as a supporter of close CCP-KMT relations since he advocated the formation of an all-Chinese-revolutionary united front at the First KMT Congress.<sup>61</sup> This history granted plausibility to the Communist framing of the murder as an attack on progressive political principles. Borodin, whose profile in KMT elite politics had risen since Sun's death, created a select committee of the KMT Central Executive Committee to investigate Liao's assassination. The commission determined that Liao's murder evidenced an ongoing "Leftist liquidation plot" by the KMT's counterrevolutionary right wing. On the basis of this determination, the committee initiated a purge of outspoken critics of the CCP.<sup>62</sup>

The CCP critics' attempts to defend themselves backfired thanks to Communist propaganda. On 23 November, the newly minted rightists of the KMT Central Executive Committee convened a rump plenum in the Western Hills of Beijing. Claiming a quorum, the assembly released a sweeping anticommunist bill that canceled KMT membership for CCP members, dismissed Borodin, expelled left-leaning KMT members, called for reevaluating the Nationalists' relationship with the Soviet Union, abolished the CCP-dominated KMT Political Council, and transferred the KMT's Central Executive Committee to Shanghai to keep a closer eye on CCP labor work in that city.<sup>63</sup> Three days after the plenum convened, the Beijing committee of the CCP published an internal party document setting out how to respond to it. Rather than dwelling on the attacks sustained by their party, CCP members were instructed to highlight how the Western Hills conference violated specific areas of KMT protocol. The script cited the illegality of the rump plenum as proof that it was the rightists, not the Communists, who needed to be suppressed:

The laws governing election to the Second National Congress were determined by the Third CEC Plenum [May-June, 1925], and therefore cannot possibly be changed at any illegal meeting. Yet the Right Wing dared propose changing the election laws at the illegal CEC [Central Executive Committee] meeting. Who is actually rebelling against the [KMT]?<sup>64</sup>

By citing KMT law to attack the Western Hills delegates, the Communists characterized the congress-goers as rule breakers while framing the CCP's left wing coalition as ardent defenders of Nationalist institutions.

The CCP used the cells to have their recruits amplify this line. An internal party document adopted by the CCP's Beijing branch on 25 November 1925 shows how this initiative was operationalized. The document outlined a plan to "create an anti-Right atmosphere among the masses" through outreach and propaganda activities. At meetings

58 Williams, "Sneevliet," 85.

59 Beijing Local Committee, "Our Immediate Attitude," in Wilbur and How, *Documents on Communism*, 239.

60 Zhang Guotao, *Rise of the Chinese Communist Party*, 1:460.

61 Zhang Guotao, *Rise of the Chinese Communist Party*, 1:326.

62 Zhang Guotao, *Rise of the Chinese Communist Party*, 1:460.

63 Zhang Guotao, *Rise of the Chinese Communist Party*, 1:463; Taylor, *Generalissimo*, 53-54.

64 Beijing Local Committee, "Our Immediate Attitude," in Wilbur and How, *Documents on Communism*, 242.



of their respective organizations, CCP organizers were to steer the discussion toward attacking “the Right’s counterrevolutionary slogan[s],” exposing the “conspiracy of the Right and the reactionaries to destroy the organization of the [KMT],” and explaining “the necessity of cooperation between the [CCP] and the [KMT] in the national revolutionary movement.”<sup>65</sup> While the cells propagated these ideas through direct engagement, this sentiment was also broadcast through KMT publications controlled by CCP agents hiding out in the Nationalist Propaganda Department. One article published in the *Guangzhou Republic of China Daily* on December 18, 1925, read, “The Left is uncompromising. Those who are not Leftists are not worthy of being called [members of] the revolutionary party.... In this revolutionary period, the [KMT] should only have Leftists, it should not have Rightists.”<sup>66</sup> How the centrists of the KMT elite reacted to this propaganda campaign was the test of its success.

The Communists were specifically concerned with the reception of Wang Jingwei and Chiang Kai-shek. Soviet strategists were interested in building this pair into the left wing’s figureheads. Their selection for this role stemmed partially from Wang and Chiang’s lack of an elite support base, meaning that the CCP would not have to compete with other cliques for the men’s loyalty. Moreover, despite their limited political networks, Wang and Chiang possessed a claim to the throne as legitimate as any other based on their reputation as Sun’s closest disciples.<sup>67</sup> Chiang was also the commander of the KMT’s military. The Communists claimed this clout for the pro-CCP coalition by making the pair central to their praise of the left wing.

Wang and Chiang took the bait. In a private letter, Chiang blamed the failure of the revolution to date on the “arrogance and corrosive jealousies” demonstrated by the Western Hills group.<sup>68</sup> On December 25, 1925, Chiang upheld the policy of admitting communists into the KMT and disputed accusations that Borodin was despotic and dictatorial.<sup>69</sup> Before an assembly of military cadets later that month, Chiang declared, “I will die for the Three People’s Principles, namely for Communism.”<sup>70</sup> The Second KMT Congress in January 1926 was the stage for Wang’s debut. Wang opened the congress with a speech that Zhang Guotao described as:

Emphasizing the harmony between the Communists and non-Communists on the battlefield. He said that their blood had flowed together and congealed in a single blot so that no distinction could be made between the two. Since they had died for the same goal, they could all the more live for the same goal.<sup>71</sup>

The pair was generously rewarded for their compliance with power and position. In a reversal of the Western Hills plenum’s decisions, the Communists and their collaborators swept the Second Congress elections to the KMT’s highest offices. Wang was elected head of the party and the government. Chiang was elected for the first time to the KMT Central Executive Committee and Standing Committee.<sup>72</sup> Meanwhile, the Communists rode the left wing’s momentum to a position of greater direct influence. Seven communists were elected to the KMT Central Executive Committee, three of whom were elected to its nine-man Standing Committee, the KMT’s titular decision-making body.<sup>73</sup>

65 Beijing Local Committee, “Our Immediate Attitude,” in Wilbur and How, *Documents on Communism*, 240.

66 Li, “Rethinking,” 92.

67 Jacobs, *Borodin*, 173.

68 Taylor, *Generalissimo*, 54.

69 Commentary by the editors of the document collection, Wilbur and How, *Documents on Communism*, 215.

70 Taylor, *Generalissimo*, 55.

71 Zhang Guotao, *Rise of the Chinese Communist Party*, 1:479.

72 Zhang Guotao, *Rise of the Chinese Communist Party*, 1:479–80.

73 Commentary by the editors of the document collection, Wilbur and How, *Documents on Communism*, 214.

**Model 2: Preparation for the split.** But this fruitful consensus was short lived. The Communists lost faith in their ability to execute a lasting leftist takeover when Chiang abruptly moved against the CCP camp in spring 1926. When the Soviet advisers rejected Chiang's plan to unite China militarily in early 1926, the generalissimo put in motion a plan to loosen the Communists' grip on the Nationalist revolution's reins.<sup>74</sup> On March 20 (hereafter, "March Twentieth"), claiming that the crew of a communist-commanded warship was planning to take him hostage, Chiang placed Guangzhou under martial law and arrested fifty high-level communists.<sup>75</sup> At the Second Plenum of the KMT Central Executive Committee on May 15, 1925, Chiang proposed a set of resolutions that significantly curtailed the CCP's freedom of movement within the KMT. Most significantly, these ruled that communists could no longer serve as the heads of KMT departments. Accordingly, the CCP members then presiding over the KMT's Organization Department (Tan Pingshan), Propaganda Department (Mao Zedong), Peasant Department (Lin Boqu), and the Secretariat (Liu Fen) were all replaced by true Nationalists.<sup>76</sup>

March Twentieth and its aftermath convinced the CCP that the United Front's end was near. The Communists accordingly accelerated preparations for waging an independent struggle against the KMT. A report from the CCP's Guangdong District Committee dated November 23, 1926, reads like a declaration of war. The document warned that a period of confrontation between the "masses" and the National Government was fast approaching and ordered the CCP's rank and file to "exert every effort to prepare united forces for a great uprising."<sup>77</sup>

For the moment, breaking off was ill advised. The CCP recognized that the Northern Expedition would likely herald a period of rapid expansion of the KMT's power. This judgment was based on a political assessment of the military competition between the northern warlords and the KMT's NRA. The odds favored the Nationalists because the idea of liberating China from imperialist-militarist oppression worked to unify Chiang's coalition, while the northern militarists were mired in internal territorial disputes.<sup>78</sup> The CCP was loath to cut ties before Chiang's army began to exploit this opportunity, lest the Communists find themselves dwarfed by a nationally dominant KMT.<sup>79</sup> Recollecting the apprehensive tenor of discussions at the CCP CC's Second Enlarged Conference in July 1926, Zhang Guotao wrote, "We felt that lagging behind a single step in the race of the Northern Expedition would be the worst thing possible."<sup>80</sup>

Staying in the United Front provided ways for the CCP to keep pace with the KMT as its sphere of influence expanded northward. The Communists would follow behind the NRA, organizing the laborers, farm workers, and soldiers it had liberated.<sup>81</sup> Herein lies the ruthless realpolitik underlying the CCP CC's belief "that opposition to [Chiang] and the adoption of a positive attitude toward the Northern Expedition were not mutually exclusive."<sup>82</sup> Properly organized, the CCP could turn the Northern Expedition's progress against the KMT.

The CCP was preparing for war from within its competitor's system. The Communists engaged with the Nationalists

74 James Pinckney Harrison, *The Long March to Power: A History of the Chinese Communist Party, 1921-72* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), 78; Taylor, *Generalissimo*, 56; commentary by the editors of the document collection, Wilbur and How, *Documents on Communism*, 218.

75 Taylor, *Generalissimo*, 56.

76 Commentary by the editors of the document collection, Wilbur and How, *Documents on Communism*, 229.

77 Commentary by the editors of the document collection, Wilbur and How, *Documents on Communism*, 377.

78 Zhang Guotao, *Rise of the Chinese Communist Party*, 1:523; Central Committee, "Political Report of the Central Committee, 12 July 1926," in Wilbur and How, *Documents on Communism*, 272.

79 Zhang Guotao, *Rise of the Chinese Communist Party*, 1:528.

80 Zhang Guotao, *Rise of the Chinese Communist Party*, 1:529.

81 Harrison, *Long March*, 84; Zhang Guotao, *Rise of the Chinese Communist Party*, 1:529.

82 Zhang Guotao, *Rise of the Chinese Communist Party*, 1:529.



in order to arm against them. This was a Soviet approach that the Chinese comrades observed first hand through their involvement with Moscow's erstwhile ally, the northern military governor Feng Yuxiang. In April 1925, the Soviets had sent an advisory mission to Feng's base in Zhangjiakou with orders to integrate his 150 thousand men into the KMT's armed forces.<sup>83</sup> The advisory force was composed exclusively of CCP members, including Deng Xiaoping, who acted as Feng's personal political adviser.<sup>84</sup> Judging Feng to be useful but unreliable, the Soviets instructed the CCP to make him capable of carrying out their assigned tasks while weakening his capacity for independent work. The goal was to force Feng into a position of dependency "in such a manner that should [Soviet aid be refused], Feng would be reduced to a secondary position if not completely defeated."<sup>85</sup> For this strategy to have deterrent value, the CCP political operatives were to "impress upon [Feng] his utter dependence on [Soviet] supplies."<sup>86</sup> As a final measure of insurance, Borodin ordered the Communists to develop elements within Feng's army capable of bringing about the general's collapse should he defect.<sup>87</sup>

**"The CCP was preparing for war from within its competitor's system."**

To use this approach on Chiang, the United Front needed to last long enough for the KMT to recognize its dependence on the CCP and for insurrection teams to be developed in the KMT's rear. The cells would drive both of these substrategies, but first the CCP CC needed to project an appearance of surrender to buy the party time. The Central Committee therefore moved to "allay the [KMT]'s fear of the [CCP]" to draw out the United Front arrangement.<sup>88</sup> In late March, the CCP CC ordered the Guangdong District Committee to adopt a servile attitude vis-à-vis KMT counterparts. As Zhang Guotao recollected:

On the basis of the national political situation, the Central Committee of the CCP had decided on a policy of compromise and had demanded that all comrades abide by it unanimously. We were to express to Chiang our readiness to grant concessions, and comrades were not to exhibit any discrepancies in their statements or their actions involving outside parties.<sup>89</sup>

Over the following weeks, Zhang Guotao observed, "[KMT]-CCP relations, which had been about to break down, were finally eased."<sup>90</sup> In response to the CCP walkout, Chiang praised the Communists for their spirit. Their withdrawal proved to him the CCP's great love for the KMT's army and military academy.<sup>91</sup> Needless to say, Chiang's interpretation of communist motives was incorrect.

*Developing leverage.* Having bought time by feigning obeisance, the Communists adopted a more assertive stance in their dialogue with the KMT. For as long as the United Front existed, CCP personnel had served as the backbone

83 Commentary by the editors of the document collection, Wilbur and How, *Documents on Communism*, 322.

84 Commentary by the editors of the document collection, Wilbur and How, *Documents on Communism*, 321–24; Harrison, *Long March*, 70; June Teufel Dreyer, "Deng Xiaoping: The Soldier," *China Quarterly* 135 (September 1993): 536; Benjamin Yang, "The Making of a Pragmatic Communist: The Early Life of Deng Xiaoping, 1904–49," *China Quarterly*, 135 (September, 1993): 447–48.

85 Jen Te-chiang, "The Soviet Union's Conspiratorial Plans for Utilizing Feng Yuxiang, 6 June 1925," in Wilbur and How, *Documents on Communism*, 341–42.

86 Jen, "A Letter from Jen Te-chiang to Frunze, Chairman of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Soviet Union, 22 May 1925," in Wilbur and How, *Documents on Communism*, 343.

87 Jen, "Letter from Jen Te-chiang to Frunze," in Wilbur and How, *Documents on Communism*, 337.

88 Central Committee, "Political Report of the Central Committee, 26 January 1927," in Wilbur and How, *Documents on Communism*, 433.

89 Zhang Guotao, *Rise of the Chinese Communist Party*, 1:499.

90 Zhang Guotao, *Rise of the Chinese Communist Party*, 1:505.

91 Commentary by the editors of the document collection, Wilbur and How, *Documents*, 222.

of the Nationalists' recruitment and mobilization apparatus. After March Twentieth, the CCP went to greater lengths to make obvious to KMT decision makers their command of this arena, and, as stated in a January 1927 CCP CC circular, how "the National Revolution is still in the period of very difficult struggle and therefore needs mass support."<sup>92</sup>

Just prior to the Northern Expedition's launch, the CCP highlighted its influence over the nation's urban and rural work force to the KMT. In an act of political warfare shock and awe, the Communists convened the Third National Congress of Labor and the Second Guangdong Provincial Peasants' Congress on May 1, 1926, in the shadow of Chiang's Guangzhou headquarters. The CCP's national network of cells in labor unions and peasant associations mobilized an impressive showing for the congresses. Altogether, the two conferences attracted seven hundred delegates from across the country who claimed to represent a cumulative two million members of trade unions and peasant associations. The Communists then staged a large rally of Guangzhou laborers to make more explicit that this population's support was the prize for KMT cooperation with the CCP. Blurring the line between the military and political faces of the Chinese revolution, the crowd's calls for an early start to the Northern Expedition intermingled with demands for stronger protections of working-class interests.<sup>93</sup> The demonstrators' Marxist rhetoric telegraphed who was pulling the strings.

Highlighting the loyalty of the KMT's support base to the CCP was necessary but not sufficient. To convince Chiang's post-March Twentieth base of anti-CCP corps commanders of their dependence on the Communists,<sup>94</sup> the CCP also needed to demonstrate the military value of this support base. In a conversation with the deputy chief of the KMT's general staff, Zhang Guotao framed the working class as a potential extension of the Nationalist army's support channels:

I proposed to him that in order to enable the masses in the North to "welcome the righteous army with food and water," the Northern Expeditionary Army should draw up detailed plans for implementing the political program laid down by the Central Executive Committee of the [KMT] and should order their rigid enforcement.<sup>95</sup>

This idea caught on with the NRA leadership. Zhang Guotao recalled how General Pai Chengxi suggested paralyzing the enemy's transport channels by mobilizing railway workers. The CCP thus created demand for its services in a customarily anticommunist corner.<sup>96</sup>

Once his post-March Twentieth entourage was seduced, Chiang also came to appreciate the CCP's value as a force multiplier. Before the May 1 conferees disbanded, the generalissimo invited them to a banquet at the military academy, where he restated his commitment to revolutionary goals.<sup>97</sup>

After the Northern Expedition took off, the Communists' efforts to inflate the importance of their contributions to KMT initiatives continued. Playing into the KMT general staff's delusions, the CCP erected the party's first Military Department to mobilize grassroots organizations for participation in the war. But this office was more symbol than substance.<sup>98</sup> It was only after the Northern Expeditionary Army occupied Changsha, Yueyang, Hanyang, and

92 Central Committee, "Political Report of the Central Committee, 26 January 1927," in Wilbur and How, *Documents on Communism*, 433.

93 Zhang Guotao, *Rise of the Chinese Communist Party*, 1:507.

94 Taylor, *Generalissimo*, 57.

95 Zhang Guotao, *Rise of the Chinese Communist Party*, 1:527.

96 Zhang Guotao, *Rise of the Chinese Communist Party*, 1:527.

97 Zhang Guotao, *Rise of the Chinese Communist Party*, 1:507.

98 Zhang Guotao, *Rise of the Chinese Communist Party*, 1:530.





Hankou in September that the Central Committee started to invest any real energy into this endeavor. When Wuhan was on the brink of collapse in late August, Zhou finally reorganized and expanded the Military Department's staff and activities.<sup>99</sup> Communist support was not as important to the Nationalists' military success as Chiang's general staff believed it was.<sup>100</sup> The stage was set for the KMT to overestimate the impact of any rift with the CCP.

*Seeding dissent.* While the CCP was stoking Chiang's sense of dependence on Communist resources, the CCP was preparing forces within the KMT's coalition to turn against the generalissimo after the decoupling. Through slight adjustments in propaganda, the CCP loosened the KMT left's identification with Chiang's Central Executive Committee. At the Second Enlarged Conference of the CCP CC in July 1926, Chiang and his elite allies in the KMT's armed center were reclassified in the CCP's propaganda guidelines as the leaders of the "new right."<sup>101</sup> To focus the left wing's anger and frustrations on these new targets, the Communists "launch[ed] a propaganda drive from the Central Committee down to the Party cells to explain that the present attacks on us by the reactionary Right and a segment of the [KMT] Center...are in reality counterrevolutionary actions."<sup>102</sup>

Amid this comprehensive anti-Chiang atmosphere, the Central Committee mobilized sections of its cell network to generate the resources the party would need after the split. Cells within the KMT's army were put into overdrive to prepare armed forces for the CCP. Through Zhou's personnel assignment powers as the political head of the KMT's Whampoa Military Academy, Communist operative Ye Ting had maneuvered himself to the top of the Twenty-Fourth Regiment of the Twelfth Division of Chiang's Fourth Army, later renamed the Independent Regiment of the Fourth Army.<sup>103</sup> After March Twentieth, the Guangdong District Committee secretly transferred more than forty party members into Ye's force.<sup>104</sup> The CCP CC instructed these cadres to:

Organize soldiers' cells under our direction in reactionary military armies, and secure close contact with the masses of soldiers. We should utilize daily events in the army for oral and written propaganda among the soldiers. At the same time, we should devote all efforts to agitation and organization of Party cells in arsenals and ordinance bureaus to cut the supply of weapons to reactionary militarists.

To clear the way for future rural base areas, in villages along the Northern Expedition's line of march, the CCP used slogans against exorbitant taxes and rent to prod participation in peasant organizations to "secure the force of the peasantry and the directing power in the peasant movement."<sup>105</sup>

Counterintuitively, among certain demographics, the cells were instructed to put space between the KMT left and the CCP. In these corners, the left wing was being groomed to persist as an anti-Chiang coalition within the KMT after the United Front's dissolution. By stoking the ire of civilian Nationalists against the NRA's concentration of power, the CCP seeded future internecine struggles.<sup>106</sup>

99 "The Northern Expeditionary Army occupied Changsha on July 11, occupied Yochow on August 22, and then went forward to Wuhan... It was only in the midst of these drastic changes that the CC of the CCP gradually changed its viewpoint on the Northern Expedition and adopted a more positive policy [emphasis added]." Zhang Guotao, *Rise of the Chinese Communist Party*, 1:529–31)

100 Harrison, *Long March*, 89.

101 Zhang Guotao, *Rise of the Chinese Communist Party*, 1:528–29.

102 Central Committee, "Resolutions on Relations Between the Chinese Communist Party and the Guomindang, 12 July 1926," in Wilbur and How, *Documents on Communism*, 278.

103 Huang, "Iron-Clad Convoy," 15.

104 Huang, "Iron-Clad Convoy," 15; Zhang Guotao, *Rise of the Chinese Communist Party*, 1:526.

105 Central Committee, "Resolutions on the Peasant Movement, 12 July 1926," in Wilbur and How, *Documents on Communism*, 297.

106 Li, "Rethinking," 90.



When the United Front collapsed in April 1927, it was a bloody separation, but the CCP CC was at least partly prepared. The Shanghai Massacre set off Chiang's communist extermination campaign (also known as the White Terror), which would continue in various forms until the Japanese breached the Great Wall in 1937.<sup>107</sup> With the KMT in pursuit, the Central Committee moved to reap the fruit of the party's past three years of infiltration work. As Zhang Guotao recounted, the Communists believed that the Nanchang Uprising would catalyze a KMT disintegration:

[Zhou] earnestly asked us to make plans for mobilizing the labor and peasant forces in Hunan, [Hubei], [Jiangxi], and the East River region of [Guangdong], so that they would rise at the time of the [Nanchang] insurrection.... All these things were needed in order to win a victory.<sup>108</sup>

The disintegration did not materialize all at once as the CCP hoped. The August 1 Nanchang Uprising failed in its immediate objective of establishing a functioning revolutionary government, but it succeeded as a pretext for breaking off a sizable contingent of the Nationalist army. Communist cells in the NRA separated their units under the leadership of Zhu De, He Long, and Ye Ting.<sup>109</sup> In the weeks that followed, rural workers whom CCP cells had recruited into peasant associations were mobilized through the Autumn Harvest Uprisings. This campaign involved a series of attacks on major cities in Guangdong, Hunan, Hubei, Shaanxi, and Henan.<sup>110</sup> After retreating into the countryside, survivors from these offensives joined to form the first CCP rural base areas. By the end of 1929, at least a dozen armed communist outposts had come into existence across central and southern China.<sup>111</sup> Not all would survive, but the Jiangxi Soviet led by Mao Zedong and Zhu De became a hub of both theoretical and military work. In resolutions drafted in October 1928 for the Second Congress of the Party branch in the Hunan–Jiangxi Border Area, Mao credited the preparations the CCP accomplished under the United Front:

The places in China where small areas under Red political power have come into existence and lasted for a relatively long time are...regions like Hunan, Guangdong, Hubei and Jiangxi, where the masses of workers, peasants, and soldiers rose in great numbers in the course of the bourgeois-democratic revolution two years ago. In many parts of these provinces, trade unions and peasant associations were organized on a wide scale.... As for the emergence of the present-day Red Army, it can only be split-off from the National Revolutionary Army, which underwent democratic political training and came under the influence of the masses of workers and peasants.<sup>112</sup>

While the CCP amassed forces in the countryside, the communist-engineered left wing political time bomb weakened the KMT internally. Chiang attempted to isolate old leftist rivals such as Wang after the United Front's collapse, but instead of fading from the scene, they established an opposition clique, self-titled the reorganization faction. Over the following years, this coalition instigated a barrage of anti-Chiang political movements that attracted participation from Nationalist China's student, urban labor, rural worker, and military circles; launched a leftist newspaper; organized annual conferences of the Chinese Kuomintang Reorganized Comrade Association; codified their ideology in a pamphlet titled, "ABC of the Left of the Chinese Kuomintang;" and organized grassroots organizations in cities across China and among the overseas Chinese population. These initiatives portrayed Chiang and

107 Taylor, *Generalissimo*, 67.

108 Zhang Guotao, *Rise of the Chinese Communist Party*, 1:660.

109 Harrison, *Long March*, 121; Zhang Guotao, *The Rise of the Chinese Communist Party: 1921-1927*, vol. 2 (Lawrence: The University of Kansas Press, 1971), 11–12.

110 Harrison, *Long March*, 127.

111 Harrison, *Long March*, 163; Zhang Guotao, *Rise of the Chinese Communist Party*, 2:165–66.

112 Mao Zedong, "Draft Resolution of the Second Congress of Xian Party Organizations in the Hunan-Jiangxi Border Area, 5 October 1928," in *Mao's Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings 1912-1949*, ed. Stuart R. Schram and Nancy J. Hodes, vol. 3, *From the Jinggangshan to the Establishment of the Jiangxi Soviets July 1927–December 1930*, (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 1990), 65–66.



## **“The goal of cell instruction in the military context was to transform the cadets into a team of expert, armed political operatives.”**

his colleagues as corrupt, disorganized, unpopular, hidebound, and undemocratic militarists.<sup>113</sup>

The conventional wisdom is that the KMT's weak governance and attendant unpopularity contributed to its defeat in the Chinese Civil War. Western histories tend to depict these problems on the Nationalist side as independent variables, separate from the damage wrought by the CCP's offensives. This report finds that the KMT's internal divisions were at least partly a product of Communist aggression prior to the war's outbreak.

**Model 3: Scripted military confrontation.** The CCP's political warfare instincts followed it to the battlefield. Party cells and infiltration techniques proved as useful in a rural military context as they had been in cities like Guangzhou and Shanghai during the United Front.

*Institutional continuity.* The CCP used the party cell system to implement control over the Red Army. As the Communist military expanded in the countryside, a civilian party cell was embedded in each newly minted Red Army company. These military cells served the same purpose as had the cells planted in labor unions, peasant associations, and NRA units during the First United Front. Each cell in the Red Army had responsibility for ensuring its company's implementation of CCP policy by steering the soldiers' ideological development.<sup>114</sup>

The CCP's cell work in the Red Army differed from its work with the KMT left wing in a few key ways. As discussed above, most of the cells' grassroots recruits into the KMT's left wing were not inducted into the CCP; for security reasons, the CCP's reserves of leftist activists were kept ignorant of their involvement in Communist operations. Unlike the laborers, the soldiers subjected to cell instruction were aware that they were undergoing communist training. The goal of cell instruction in the military context was to transform the cadets into a team of expert, armed political operatives. In this sense, the arrangement that developed between each party cell and its Red Army company was reminiscent of the relationship between the expert Soviet advisers and their novice CCP pupils during the First United Front.

*Strategic continuity.* Through the cell network, the Red Army was made into an appendage of the party's expansionist political warfare machinery. Mao's use of united-front tactics to take control of the Jinggangshan base area in late 1927 illustrates both how the party used its military as a political instrument and how the CCP repurposed the deceptive stratagems of the First United Front to serve its objectives after 1927. Although CCP party organs were already operating in the Jinggangshan region when Mao's troops arrived in the area, up to this point, the armed forces of local bandit leader Wang Zuo had limited the ability of Communists to consolidate control. Under Mao, the Red Army broke this impasse, but not by fighting. Rather than challenging Wang militarily, the Communists incorporated his army and territory through an influence campaign.<sup>115</sup> Mao's guidance to the CCP's Jinggangshan cells about this campaign echoes the insidious approach the CCP applied to the KMT during the First United Front:

We should only deal with [Wang's forces] through words, not force. [We must] strive to transform them,

113 Li, "Rethinking," 93–94.

114 Chen Gang [陈钢] and Xiao Yunling [肖云岭], *The History of Cultural Construction in the Revolutionary Base Areas of Jinggangshan*, [井冈山革命根据地地文化建设史] (Jiangxi: People's Publishing House [江西人民出版社], 2007), 55.

115 Stephen C. Averill, Joseph W. Esherick, and Elizabeth J. Perry, *Revolution in the Highlands: China's Jinggangshan Base Area* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

to turn them into a real revolutionary force that will march with us.... To the greatest extent possible, we should use the workers and peasants revolutionary army to influence them.... If we were to send many men now, he would fear we were trying to overtake him, to disarm him. [If you instead] start by doing work [for him], he will [start to] desire improvement and revolution [on his own], and call for us to send more men. This is best. Once he desperately wants us to send more men, if he calls for one man, we can send ten.<sup>116</sup>

Just as the CCP had convinced the KMT generals of the Communists' military utility as they brought up the Northern Expedition's rear, so Mao ingratiated his forces to Wang by seemingly selflessly offering a military tip. Wang was starstruck when his adoption of a battle plan recommended by the Communists led to the defeat of his long-time local rival Yin Daoyi in October 1927.<sup>117</sup> Mao had Wang attack Yin's camp when the targets were in the middle of an ancestral worship ceremony.<sup>118</sup> Even though this was less than expert or honorable, Mao's seduction of Wang is recorded as a glorious victory in modern CCP histories.<sup>119</sup> Fulfilling Mao's prophecy, Wang then requested a CCP advisory team to supervise his militia's development.<sup>120</sup> Later that month, Wang formally invited Red Army members to shelter in his headquarters at Ciping.<sup>121</sup> Four months later, in the face of a Nationalist bombardment, Wang's forces joined the Red Army to avoid annihilation.<sup>122</sup> Thus, in mid-February 1928, the bandit forces were integrated into the Red Army as the Second Regiment of its First Division.<sup>123</sup>

Just as the CCP used Borodin's chummy relations with Sun and then Chiang to plant CCP cells across the Nationalist state, so the Red Army used the political opening provided by Wang's reverence for Mao's strategic brilliance to initiate grassroots agitation work in and around Jinggangshan. In this lower level work, the Communist soldiers participated in a nonconventional military capacity. The Red Army used its weapons for demonstrative purposes, attacking symbolic individuals and institutions (e.g., county seats, official buildings, and local elites). In physical terms, these gambits had little effect on the local leadership's assets or capabilities. Symbolically and psychologically, however, the raids mounted an explicit challenge to existing patterns of social and political dominance. With some pomp and circumstance, the Red soldiers would redistribute the cash, grain, and other resources seized from elite targets to impoverished locals.<sup>124</sup> Finally, in the wake of the opening attack, a Red Army unit would linger in the community to stir up mass movements and offer a variety of public and political services. Under these circumstances, the First Red Army became "part traveling political road show, attracting widespread popular attention by its numerous mass rallies, processions, and exemplary acts of public violence, and part mobile political clinic, examining local conditions, diagnosing difficulties, and suggesting courses of remedial action."<sup>125</sup> Village communities impressed by, if not swept up into, these Red Army performances became the CCP's new left-wing reserve—a potential source of wealth, personnel, and information.

In the CCP's first military battles with the KMT, the Red Army overcame the numerically and materially stronger NRA

116 Anonymous, "How Mao Zedong Reformed the Local Armed Forces in Jinggangshan" [毛泽东如何改造井冈山地方武装], *Sina History* [新浪历史], 2013-12-21, <http://history.sina.com.cn/bk/ds/2013-12-21/101377588.shtml>.

117 Anonymous, "How Mao Zedong Reformed."

118 Averill, Esherick, and Perry, *Revolution in the Highlands*, 164.

119 Anonymous, "How Mao Zedong Reformed."

120 Averill, Esherick, and Perry, *Revolution in the Highlands*, 174–75; Anonymous, "How Mao Zedong Reformed."

121 Averill, Esherick, and Perry, *Revolution in the Highlands*, 164.

122 Averill, Esherick, and Perry, *Revolution in the Highlands*, 169.

123 Anonymous, "How Mao Zedong Reformed."

124 Averill, Esherick, and Perry, *Revolution in the Highlands*, 170.

125 Averill, Esherick, and Perry, *Revolution in the Highlands*, 176.



**“To make the fighting environment particularly hostile to the attacking forces, prior to the outbreak of hostilities, the CCP enacted the traditional Chinese warfare strategy of strengthening defenses and clearing the fields.”**

by engaging the attackers in one of these politically prepared communities. At the outset of an engagement, the Red Army would take the initiative through a strategic retreat. Rather than pushing the front into enemy territory, the Communist forces would lure the KMT fighters to a designated location in the heart of their base area.<sup>126</sup> Chinese scholars have argued that laying a proper foundation for the retreat’s destination was actually the deciding factor of the lure in deep [诱敌深入] battle plan. As Zhang Tianben described in the Chinese journal *Century Bridge*:

The most important consideration [when carrying out a] strategic retreat is the selection of the retreat’s end point. This end point is not just a geographical concept. It must be based on the formation of a [situation] that is “favorable to me and not beneficial to the enemy,” an overall and local context that will benefit the Red Army’s counter-offensive.<sup>127</sup>

To make the fighting environment particularly hostile to the attacking forces, prior to the outbreak of hostilities, the CCP enacted the traditional Chinese warfare strategy of strengthening defenses and clearing the fields [坚壁清野] in their chosen location. The basic idea of this Three Kingdoms era concept was to empty the battlefield of resources that would benefit the enemy’s offensive efforts. In addition to removing food products, natural resources, and weaponry and destroying the roads the Nationalists would need to transport reinforcements to the front, the party evacuated political dissidents [政治异己分子]—comrades who could be easily convinced to defect.<sup>128</sup> A Chinese history of the first armed battles of the Civil War (referred to in the historiography as the Encirclement and Suppression Campaigns [围剿战争]), which occurred prior to the Long March in the early 1930s, offers specific examples of how the Red Army’s civilian support network bolstered the Communists’ performance:

The masses of the Soviet area organized a large number of logistics teams during the war, such as stretcher teams, ambulance teams, transport teams, etc., providing the Red Army with a large amount of materials and logistics support, demonstrating the military–civilian integrated military strategy. The secret operations of the Red Army not only depended on the high degree of principle and discipline of the Red Army commanders and fighters, but were also the result of the masses in the Soviet area keeping secrets and helping the Red Army block news.<sup>129</sup>

Thus, even if the Nationalists entered the battlespace as the stronger force in terms of lethal material, they struggled to sustain their attack for long. As a result of these strategies and tactics, the KMT had to execute five Encirclement Campaigns, each of which fielded well over one hundred thousand soldiers, to drive the CCP from its bases in southeastern China.<sup>130</sup>

126 Marc Oppen, “Revolution Defeated: The Collapse of the Chinese Soviet Republic,” *Twentieth-Century China* 43 (January 2018): 57.

127 Zhang Tianben [张天本], “On Mao Zedong’s War Guiding Principle of Luring the Enemy in Deep” [论毛泽东诱敌深入的战争指导原则], *Century Bridge* [世纪桥] 5 (2009): 10.

128 Zhang Yanxin [张延新] and Chen Ke [陈珂], *Re-Exploration of the Fourth Anti-Encirclement and Suppression Military Strategy in the Central Soviet Area and the Reasons for Winning* [中央苏区第四次反‘围剿’军事策略与获胜原因再探究], Dada Document Network [达达文档网], November 11, 2020, <https://www.zqwdw.com/yingyongwenshu/2020/1111/955726.html>; Averill, Esherick, and Perry, *Revolution in the Highlands*, 274.

129 Zhang Yanxin and Chen [陈珂], *Re-Exploration*.

130 Oppen, “Revolution Defeated,” 57. The Red Army defeated the First (November–December 1928), Second (February–June 1931), Third

The best demonstration of the centrality of mass support to the Red Army's successes against the KMT's First through Fourth Encirclement Campaigns is what transpired in the Fifth Encirclement Campaign, when the KMT targeted the ideological basis of the CCP's support. In this campaign (September 1933–October 1934), the KMT perfected a siege warfare tactic that it had tried and failed to carry out in the earlier campaigns. To make the barrier the NRA was raising between the economy of the CCP base areas and the outside world airtight, the Nationalist army constructed concentric rings of blockhouses as it advanced from all sides into the heart of the Communists' territory. In previous campaigns, the CCP spared its base area population from extractive policies by financing its military through raids on surrounding noncommunist areas. This was an important factor in the Communists' access to mass support because the CCP had won the allegiance of base-area residents by promising to relieve them of exploitative taxation by local landlords and militarists.<sup>131</sup> Deprived of the fruits of raids on land bully [土豪] households in surrounding areas, the CCP was forced to lean on its domestic population's stores. In the summer and early autumn of 1934, the local Soviet campaigned to borrow 840,000 piculs of grain from the already impoverished base area peasantry by immediate levy (confiscation).<sup>132</sup> The area's hard-pressed and thin-skinned citizens grew disillusioned with the Communists' ideology and stopped cooperating freely. Needing resources fast, the Communist leadership tried to force compliance through widespread campaigns of violence against civilians, which only drove the public further from the party.<sup>133</sup> In April 1934, tens of thousands of civilians fled to the KMT.<sup>134</sup> Forced to compete without the logistical and informational advantages provided by its ideological control of the local population, the Communists floundered. Under these circumstances, the Central Committee began discussing what would become the Long March retreat to Yan'an.

(Summer 1931) and Fourth (Spring–Summer 1932) Encirclement Campaigns.

131 Tso-liang Hsiao, *The Land Revolution in China, 1930-1934: A Study of Documents* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1969), 221.

132 Gregor Benton, *Mountain Fires: The Red Army's Three-Year War in South China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 10.

133 Opper, "Revolution Defeated," 59.

134 Opper, "Revolution Defeated," 59.



# Part 2:

## The United Front vs. the United States

Part 1 traced the origins of the CCP's united-front playbook to interactions with the KMT in the 1920s. Part 2 explains how united-front work dominated the CCP's approach to the United States from their earliest contacts in the 1930s and '40s. The United States in the World War II period was a very different target from the KMT during the First United Front. The CCP was not competing with the United States for control over all of China. The Communists did not have to destroy America to win a final victory in the Civil War; the party just needed to discredit the KMT enough that the United States did not support it at the CCP's expense.<sup>135</sup> The United States was nonetheless in a position to help the Nationalists prevail in the competition to take over all of China, so the Americans were linked to what the Communists considered an existential threat. Today, however, the CCP appears to believe that the playing field on which it is competing spans the globe; thus, the United States now occupies the position of the KMT during the Civil War period (as discussed further in Part 3). For this reason, it is perilous to ignore the united-front approach.

By highlighting the role of united-front techniques below, we illuminate a strategic dynamic central to the CCP's understanding of this period. As discussed in Part 1, in the First United Front the CCP developed a facility for (a) finding friends among rivals—attracting sympathizers without formally recruiting most of them; (b) ingratiating the party by downplaying its communist ideology and ambition; and (c) promoting the idea of cooperation, in part by exaggerating communist virtues and capabilities. These tactics were intrinsic to the internal takeover model of united-front work (Model 1), but when that reached its limits, the repertoire also proved conducive to preparing for a rupture (Model 2) and then fighting former allies (Model 3). These steps positioned the CCP to reduce its adversary's size, situational awareness, cohesion, self-confidence, and access to resources. Engagement was thus weaponized to weaken the rival and constrain its options. The negotiation of a Second United Front with the KMT in 1937 demonstrated that even after a violent split, the CCP could reengage and initiate another round of united-front work. When the party decided a new campaign was warranted, it had a foundation of friends or sympathizers and goodwill on which to build, and the target's understanding of the character of the CCP remained sufficiently compromised or clouded that fresh overtures could succeed.

From the CCP's perspective, the Second United Front included not only the KMT but also the United States. Part 2 traces the CCP's united-front work vis-à-vis the United States to the Communists' successful cultivation of Snow, whose 1937 book *Red Star over China* convinced readers worldwide that the CCP was an "incredible brotherhood" seeking to democratize China.<sup>136</sup> Snow was the first American (or Westerner) to be granted access to the Communist base at Yan'an, and he was personally selected for this privilege to ensure that the resulting product would be favorable. The visit was choreographed to support this outcome, and his account was edited, disseminated, and amplified by CCP agents and friends. Party Chairman Mao gave Snow a series of exclusive interviews during his stay, and Zhou oversaw Snow's selection and handling as head of the CCP's united-front work and foreign affairs. This suggests the priority assigned to shaping Western views. The investment paid off insofar as it created fertile ground for Americans to believe contradictory things about the Communists and to retain faith in them even after they attacked U.S. forces. Snow was not the only target of this campaign. He was picked because he

135 Ideally, the CCP could also siphon off some U.S. assistance for itself.

136 Edgar Snow, *Red Star over China: The Rise of the Red Army* (London, Victor Gollancz, 1937), 90, 121, 421, *passim*.

## **“The question is whether the CCP has prepared the battlefield well enough to ensure victory against the United States if and when the clash comes.”**

was part of a circle of writers, intellectuals, and activists that also included left-leaning U.S. government representatives, and a network of activists in the United States was already in place to publicize Snow’s work. The result was a remarkably durable American view of the CCP as a potential partner in liberating China.

Two case studies illustrate the CCP’s use of this image and further execution of united-front techniques against the United States. First, during World War II, the CCP anticipated the resumption of hostilities against the Nationalists and sought to prevent the United States from working too closely with Chiang. Instead, the CCP wanted U.S. assistance that it could use in the coming Civil War. But then the Yalta Conference designated the CCP’s Soviet allies as the arbiters of power in northern China after the defeat of Japan, even as the increase in U.S. forces in China after the Allied victory in Europe posed a mounting challenge to this outcome. So, the CCP rapidly transitioned from cultivating the United States to targeting U.S. forces, which the party now saw as threatening. Second, when President Harry Truman sent General George Marshall to mediate between the CCP and the KMT right after the end of the war, the Communists again identified opportunities and risks. The CCP sought to prevent Marshall from working closely with Chiang while buying time for to receive training and other assistance from the Soviets, which the Communists now understood they needed. As this unfolded, the CCP again came to see U.S. troops, whose numbers had increased after Japan’s surrender, as the main threat to its prospects, so the CCP targeted them once more.

By the end of World War II, the CCP had shown its true colors, yet the charter for the Marshall mission cast the Communists as a coalition government partner for the KMT. This is a testament to the potency of CCP united-front work. Throughout this period, the Nationalists failed to persuade the United States to have an alternative understanding of the CCP. This reflects a deficit of KMT capacity that dates back to the period covered in Part 1. A downstream effect of the CCP’s domination of KMT propaganda operations during the First United Front is that the Nationalists underestimated the importance of such operations and failed to develop an independent capacity for them. There was no Nationalist counter to the narratives emanating from Yan’an, which meant the CCP could engage in acts of overt aggression without sacrificing its image as a potential partner. This left open the possibility of future united-front campaigns.

If the United States had not retained faith in the democratic potential of the CCP, it might have helped the KMT conclude the Chinese Civil War more favorably. The world is obviously still living with the consequences of the cross-Strait split; in other ways, too, the rest of the twentieth century might then have had a markedly different trajectory. The Cold War could have been less tense and ended sooner. Instead, the Korean War erupted, and the United States suffered major setbacks because of successful CCP information operations. The U.S.–PRC rapprochement that led to today’s condition of rivalry amid interdependence renews a cycle that began in the 1930s. As in the earlier cases, the CCP continues to have friends and defenders in the United States even as tensions mount and a break seems inevitable. The question is whether the CCP has prepared the battlefield well enough to ensure victory against the United States if and when the clash comes. Part 3 of this report will explore potential paths for U.S.–PRC relations in the coming decades.

### **Snow Dance: How Snow Was Identified, Courted, and Used**

Snow’s Yan’an visit was ground zero for the CCP’s united-front work against the United States, and the resulting *Red Star over China* proved a major strategic coup. It had a favorable, long-lasting influence on U.S. opinion and behavior toward the Communists. The details of the visit’s origins, conduct, narrative output, circulation, and reception





merit attention not just for their own sake but also because Snow was representative of a class of writers, scholars, and officials who subsequently received similar treatment. It is also worth outlining the organizational structures that supported this campaign, both in China and in the United States. The CCP side of the story has come out patchily, but evidence now available makes it clear that there was a strategy to shape and amplify the message of people like Snow and that this strategy was executed via organizations operating at home and abroad.

**Origins: The renewal of the United Front and selection criteria.** Snow's courtship was part of a renewed united-front cycle. Like the First United Front described in Part 1, the Second United Front that inspired the CCP's outreach to Snow was encouraged by the Soviets and reflected a combination of necessity and opportunism. Mao's remaining troops had arrived in Sha'anxi Province in northern China in late 1935. They were desperate for Soviet aid, having been decimated by the KMT's Fifth Encirclement Campaign and their ensuing Long March from central China. Joseph Stalin's priority was to use China to counter Japan lest its invasion turn northward; at this point, as in the early 1920s, the KMT looked to be in a stronger position to lead a Chinese coalition against the invaders. The Nationalists were running a national government out of their capital at Nanjing, while the CCP had mostly been relegated to a small, peripheral base area near Mongolia. Hence, in August 1935, Moscow instructed the CCP to engage in another united front with, but subordinate to, the KMT. The CCP also recognized the need for a new united front but diagnosed the Japanese invasion and the suffering it was causing as an opportunity to rally Chinese public support around itself. By blaming Chiang for China's weakness and vulnerability to Japan, the CCP could attract new followers from all classes and "turn the Red Army into the armed forces of the whole nation."<sup>137</sup> The CCP's initial framing of the Second United Front in a December 1935 resolution was therefore not with the KMT but against "Japanese imperialists and the chief traitor and collaborator Chiang Kai-shek."<sup>138</sup> The resolution also included the aim of cultivating "close and friendly relations with the nations and countries that show sympathy, assistance, and friendly neutrality toward the Chinese national movement."<sup>139</sup> Unstated but obviously implied was that by cultivating the United States and other foreign powers, the Communists would be in a position to redirect these countries' support from the KMT to the CCP.

By 1937, with the Japanese advancing further into China, the Soviets convinced the CCP to enter the Second United Front under KMT leadership. But the Communists retained their ambition to benefit asymmetrically from a façade of cooperation. This required convincing the United States that the CCP, not the Nationalists, was most deserving of its support. Zhou specifically prioritized outreach to journalists and writers as a way of "using the foreign media to the utmost in order to push forward the development of China's foreign relations."<sup>140</sup> Snow was thus targeted as an emissary and instrument for this purpose.

Who was Snow, and how was he selected? Snow arrived in Shanghai in 1928 as a young man after a brief stint in advertising in New York. He wrote for an English-language newspaper and fell in with a crowd of Westerners who were studying Mandarin and engaging with the leaders of the student movement against foreign imperialism in China.<sup>141</sup> This circle included communists, including the father-in-law of current PRC vice president and former CCP

137 Central Committee, "Resolution of the Central Committee on the Current Political Situation and Party's Tasks, 25 December 1935" in *The Rise to Power of the Chinese Communist Party*, ed. Tony Saich with Benjamin Yang (Armonk, NY: Eastgate, 1996), 723.

138 Central Committee, "Resolution on the Current Political Situation," in Saich with Yang, *Rise to Power*, 711.

139 Central Committee, "Resolution on the Current Political Situation," in Saich with Yang, *Rise to Power*, 714.

140 "周恩来通知怎样做外国记者工作" ["How comrade Zhou Enlai worked on foreign journalists"], 对外宣传参考 [Foreign Propaganda Reference], 6 (1994), cited in Anne-Marie Brady, *Making the Foreign Serve China: Managing Foreigners in the People's Republic* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 52.

141 John S. Service Oral History Interview, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum, chap. 3–4, <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/oral-histories/service2#129> and <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/oral-histories/service2#130>.



Politburo Standing Committee member Wang Qishan, who used the circle to recruit new members and cultivate friends such as Snow.<sup>142</sup> One of the group's other liaisons was Sun's widow, Song Qingling, who was supportive of the CCP though not a member herself. After deciding to pursue the Second United Front, the party asked Song to identify a sympathetic foreign journalist who was not affiliated with the international left.<sup>143</sup> Snow was her pick.

In addition to Snow's credibility-enhancing lack of affiliation, Song would have observed from his participation in her progressive circle that he had several desirable attributes. First, he contributed to high-circulation outlets such as the *Saturday Evening Post* and the *New York Herald Tribune* in the United States, as well as the *Daily Herald* in London. Second, his writing aligned with his leftist political views. His first book, *Far Eastern Front*, published in 1933, on the Japanese invasion of Manchuria, called the KMT "a lifeless body, soulless and spiritless, the private chancellery of a military dictator" and predicted its eclipse based on "the logic of history."<sup>144</sup> Third, he was energetic and engaged beyond the page, as he and his wife had been involved in fundraising for trade unions and the CCP, as well as helping organize anti-Japanese student protests that excoriated the KMT for not fighting back harder.<sup>145</sup> Finally, as part of the vetting process, Snow agreed to submit his questions ahead of his visit, and he promised to allow the CCP to edit his draft before publishing it.<sup>146</sup> His commitment and malleability were thereby established.

**Visit choreography.** All these circumstances augured well for the success of the venture, but in a move that would be repeated for other united-front targets, the party sealed the deal by granting Snow VIP treatment from his arrival. Snow even confessed as much, not in *Red Star* but in an unpublished diary entry:

Reaching the main road leading to the gate we were met by most of the officials of the government.... Posters and banners of welcome decorated the walls of the town, some written in English.... It was the first time I had been greeted by the entire cabinet of a government, the first time a whole city had been turned out to welcome me. The effect pronounced on me was highly emotional.<sup>147</sup>

His sense of awe and gratitude would have only increased over four months of CCP hospitality, including ten days of interviews with Mao himself. Snow's activism prior to the visit indicates that he had already dispensed with journalistic objectivity, but even if he had intended to maintain it, the red-carpet treatment would have made that very difficult.

**Narrative.** The contents of *Red Star* bear out this proposition. The party's goals during this period were to attract American support while preventing the United States from working too closely with the KMT. The united-front information operations to achieve these ends involved (a) concealing the party's Marxist-Leninist identity and agenda,<sup>148</sup> (b) exaggerating its contributions to the fight against Japan, and (c) encouraging negative views of the Nationalists. All three elements figured prominently in Snow's account of his stay in Yan'an.

Snow's comparisons between Yan'an and America indicated the CCP's success at minimizing ideological differenc-

142 Chen Hanbo, "Memories of Edgar Snow: Amidst [the] Student Movement..." *Beijing Review*, 25, no. 7 (February 15, 1982): 23–25.

143 Janice R. MacKinnon and Stephen MacKinnon, *Agnes Smedley: The Life and Times of an American Radical*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 173.

144 Snow, *Far Eastern Front* (New York: H. Smith and R. Haas, 1933), cited in Kenneth Shewmaker, *Americans and Chinese Communists* (Cornell University Press, 1971), 49–50.

145 John Israel, "The December 9<sup>th</sup> Movement: A Case Study in Chinese Communist Historiography," *The China Quarterly*, 23 (July–September 1965): 143.

146 Jung Chang and Jon Halliday, *Mao: The Unknown Story* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005), 199.

147 Edgar Snow, notes, 8–18 July 1936, Folder 121, Edgar Snow Papers, University Archives, University of Missouri, Kansas City, cited in Brady, *Making the Foreign Serve China*, 44–45.

148 Snow's lack of affiliation with the international left helped with this aim.



es and emphasizing common ground. “Most of the time I felt completely at ease in the...[Communists’] company, as if I were with some of my countrymen,” Snow wrote. He described Mao as “a Lincolnesque figure”<sup>149</sup> and repeated Mao’s argument that the CCP, not the KMT, was the party of “liberty, equality, [and] democracy.”<sup>150</sup> Despite its nominal Marxism, moreover, Snow’s CCP was tolerant of religious diversity: “Freedom of worship was a primary guarantee, in fact.”<sup>151</sup> The party’s actual hostility, which had in the past and would soon again result in the murder of clergy,<sup>152</sup> was thus reframed as an exercise of its “freedom to oppose worship.”<sup>153</sup> Snow recorded all this without a hint of skepticism, much less quarrel.

To inflate the CCP’s contributions to the anti-Japanese fight while disparaging the Nationalists, Snow repeated the party line that the Communists alone were repelling the invader.<sup>154</sup> The KMT, on the other hand, having “received much help from America, England, and other countries,” diverted the lion’s share of this aid to opposing the CCP:

Only when Nanking [Nanjing, the KMT capital] determines to cease civil war and to fight against Japanese imperialism and unites with the people’s revolution to organize a democratic national defense government – only then can such help be of real benefit to the Chinese nation.<sup>155</sup>

In other words, the KMT was neither democratic nor resolutely anti-Japanese, and therefore it was not a worthy partner for the West. For good measure, Mao clarified that unlike in the past, the CCP’s brand of anti-imperialism in the late 1930s was confined to the Japanese. “The American, British, French, and Soviet Russian nations,” regardless of their former status, were now all in the same boat with China, Mao explained. “Japanese imperialism is not only the enemy of China but also of...those peoples with interests on the Pacific Ocean.”<sup>156</sup>

**Edits and omissions.** Snow’s account struck all the right notes for the CCP, but this was not spontaneous. The author preserved credibility with readers—and probably complied with CCP wishes—by not disclosing the multiple rounds of editorial review (i.e., censorship) he granted it.<sup>157</sup> His hosts demanded that he downplay their references to “class struggle” and amplify expressions of CCP anti-Japanese resolve,<sup>158</sup> presumably to maximize the chances that Mao’s pledges of friendship in exchange for Western material support would bear fruit.

Snow similarly declined to mention the Communists’ security apparatus or political detention policies, not even the sanitized account of them he received.<sup>159</sup> Yan’an was at that time the home of a fierce internal political rectification

149 Snow, *Red Star*, 90. Snow also offers this description: “Mao seemed to me a very interesting and complex man. He had the simplicity and naturalness of the Chinese peasant, with a lively sense of humor and a love of rustic laughter.” *Red Star*, 92.

150 Snow, *Red Star*, 206.

151 Snow, *Red Star*, 345.

152 In 1932, the CCP had kidnapped a Canadian missionary and paraded him through the streets of Anhui in a cage. He died from the stress. During the Long March, the CCP also took a number of foreign missionaries hostage, killing some and holding others until they were ransomed. In 1940, CCP forces would kill Father Lebbe, a Belgian missionary, along with several nuns. Brady, *Making the Foreign Serve China*, 40–42; Maochun Yu, *OSS in China: Prelude to Cold War* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2011), 219, 314, n. 34.

153 Snow, *Red Star*, 345.

154 Snow, *Red Star*, 103.

155 Snow, *Red Star*, 103.

156 Snow, *Red Star*, 103.

157 He did finally disclose it in the appendix of the 1968 revised and expanded edition, however. Snow, *Red Star*, 487.

158 Brady, *Making the Foreign Serve China* 45, 47; Chang and Halliday, *Mao*, 199–200.

159 Snow interviewed one of the security chiefs at Yan’an, Zhou Xing [周兴, Chou Hsing], on the treatment of political prisoners, but omitted that material from *Red Star*. “The First ‘Foreign Affairs’ Activity in the History of the CCP’s Defense” [“中共保卫史上第一次‘外事’活动”], *People’s Public Security Daily* [人民公安报], July 9, 2021, <https://archive.ph/wip/HO3BA>. See also Mattis and Brazil, *Chinese Communist Espionage*, 30; Snow, *Red Star*, 431.

campaign. Mao's memorable description was "Spies are as thick as hemp" [特务如麻] as he sought to ensure his elevation over returning CCP personnel who had been trained in Moscow and as internal refugees from the Japanese invasion of eastern China arrived at Yan'an and needed to be vetted.<sup>160</sup> A July 2021 article in the Chinese *People's Public Security Daily* explained that handling Snow's questions about this was the "first 'foreign affairs' activity" of the CCP secret police.<sup>161</sup> Credit the CCP with misleading the writer about the character of the Communist police state, or at least deterring him from reporting any suspicions, while censoring his text. By omitting this aspect of the party's regime, Snow protected its claim to be a protodemocracy. This advanced Zhou's effort to divert U.S. aid from the Nationalists to the CCP within the Second United Front.

**Circulation and initial reception.** As the efficacy of Operation Snow depended not only on what he wrote but also on the breadth of *Red Star's* readership, the CCP did its part to ensure wide dissemination. It is primarily a credit to Snow that his book became a best-seller and has never gone out of print; however, a recent CCP-sponsored research effort traced *Red Star's* successful "publicity of Chinese culture and...acceptance by foreign readers" to Snow's "exclusive reports based on first-hand materials" when he got back from Yan'an.<sup>162</sup> In other words, the first step was to favor Snow with exclusive access so his book would be regarded as a unique source of insight. As contemporary audiences noted, the CCP granted Snow "the scoop of the century,"<sup>163</sup> enabling him to write an "irreplaceable" resource on Mao's life and the Long March.<sup>164</sup> And as Anne-Marie Brady pointed out, even after the CCP started granting other invitations to Yan'an, it was careful to exclude all but fellow travelers.<sup>165</sup> In this way, favorable publicity was all but guaranteed.

The Chinese scholars' analysis also indicated that a bit of intrigue aroused interest in the book. Although it is not clear whether the CCP was responsible, they suggested that rumors of Snow's demise made for a helpful PR stunt:

Snow returned [to] Peiping [Beijing] on October 25, 1936, and two days later word got round that he was executed by [the] Red Army, so he decided immediately to clear the rumors at a news conference in [the] American consulate in Peiping [Beijing]. Snow's talk about his journey in northern Shaanxi spread through news agencies like *Associated Press* and *Reuters*, which, in turn, flew back into China and was [sic] published by major newspapers in [the] Far East, catching many readers' attention.<sup>166</sup>

Snow fed the demand by quickly converting his notes from the trip in late 1936 into 22 articles published abroad by early 1937.<sup>167</sup> The CCP network also played a role in disseminating the book. *Red Star's* first publisher, a sometime communist, immediately selected it for his socialist Left Book Club, the first book club in Britain, prompting the sale of more than one hundred thousand copies in the book's first weeks.<sup>168</sup> This in turn led Random House,

160 Jin Chongji, ed., 毛泽东传 [Biography of Mao Zedong] (Beijing: 中央文献出版社 [Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, Party Literature Publishing House], 1996), 676, cited in Mattis and Brazil, *Chinese Communist Espionage*, 247.

161 "The First 'Foreign Affairs' Activity."

162 Yong Chen and Bu-fen Hu, "On Publicity Channels of *Red Star* over China and Their Impact," in *Proceedings of the 2016 International Conference on Humanities and Social Science*, 895–96.

163 A. Tom Grunfeld, "Review of S. Bernard Thomas, *Season of High Adventure: Edgar Snow in China* and Robert M. Farsworth, *From Vagabond to Journalist: Edgar Snow in Asia, 1928-1941*," *The China Journal* 37 (January 1997), 224; Charles W. Hayford, "China by the Book: China Hands and China Stories, 1848–1949," *The Journal of American-Asian Relations* 16, no. 4 (Winter 2009), 303.

164 Stuart Schram, *Mao Tse-tung*, (New York: Penguin, 1966).

165 Brady, *Making the Foreign Serve China*, 52.

166 Chen and Hu, "On Publicity Channels," 896.

167 Snow, *Red Star*, 487.

168 The publisher was Victor Gollancz in London. See Chen and Hu, "On Publicity Channels," 897, and Roger van Zwanenberg, "The Origins of the Left Book Club," Pluto Press. <https://www.plutobooks.com/blog/the-origins-of-the-left-book-club/>.



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Snow’s American publisher, to move up the release date.<sup>169</sup> Amid all the attention, perhaps CCP elites were most pleased that even hardline anticommunists and their outlets published glowing reviews,<sup>170</sup> validating the party’s choice of the publicly nonaligned Snow. That said, it must also have been gratifying to receive praise from United States-based communists and underground CCP members.<sup>171</sup>

The book’s dissemination further benefited from Snow’s leftist connections inside China. In the 1968 revised and expanded edition, Snow recounted how he gave his early English-language articles to friendly (i.e., left-leaning)<sup>172</sup> Chinese professors, who in turn “translated and published them (semilegally)”<sup>173</sup> in Mandarin as *Impressions of Northwest China*. In July 1937, he also had the manuscript of *Red Star over China* translated, and it was published as *Travels in the West*.<sup>174</sup> Snow assigned the rights to *Travels* to the National Salvation Association, an organization that had been advocating for the Second United Front, and he directed the proceeds to the Chinese Red Cross, which was dispensing medical care to the Red Army.<sup>175</sup> The Communist cause thus benefited from the book’s domestic success even before *Red Star*’s foreign popularity helped rally Western support.

Perhaps the most important downstream effect of the book came from its popularity within Snow’s circle of Western writers, scholars, and government officials in China. The latter included John Paton Davies and John Stewart Service, boyhood friends who served as U.S. State Department officers in China. Davies later boasted that he knew Snow before he became famous,<sup>176</sup> and Service remembered his excitement upon receiving a preview of *Red Star* before it was published.<sup>177</sup> Both would go on to advise the general in charge of American cooperation with the Nationalists in World War II, while other members of the circle served in the military during the war. Intrigued by Snow’s example, many of these friends would make their way to Yan’an and experience similar treatment there in

169 Chen and Hu, “On Publicity Channels,” 897.

170 For instance, Henry Luce’s magazine published flattering pictorial essays called “First Pictures of China’s Roving Communists,” *Life* 2 (January 25, 1937): 9–15; “An Army of Fighting Chinese Communists Takes Possession of China’s Northwest,” *Life* 2 (February 1, 1937), 42–45. Also Rodney Gilbert, *A Chinese State Hitherto Unknown to Us: The First Authentic Report of What Goes on among China’s Reds* (New York: New York Herald Tribune Books, 1938), 1–2. All three are cited in Shewmaker, *Americans and Chinese Communists*, 54–56.

171 Snow published “Chinese Communists and World Affairs: An Interview with Mao Tse-tong,” *Amerasia* 1 (August 1937): 263–69. *Amerasia* was a New York-based, CCP-sympathizing journal. Also, a future CCP foreign affairs officer who went to school in New York mentions receiving the book from his pro-CCP father in 1946: “He had left me several books to study, telling me to start with *Red Star over China*.” Ji Chaozhu, *The Man on Mao’s Right* (New York: Random House, 2008), 49.

172 They were part of the CCP underground, according to Snow’s biographer S. B. Thomas, *Season of High Adventure: Edgar Snow in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 156–57.

173 Without approval from the Nationalist government, that is.

174 Snow, *Red Star*, 487 also notes that a pirated version appeared in English and in Chinese in 1938 under the title *The Autobiography of Mao Tse-tung*. That version omitted Snow’s framing and was reprinted in Hong Kong with slight alterations in English in 1949.

175 MacKinnon and MacKinnon, *Agnes Smedley*, 167, 181, 203.

176 John Paton Davies, Jr., *China Hand: An Autobiography* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 21.

177 John S. Service, “Edgar Snow: Some Personal Reminiscences,” *China Quarterly*, 50 (1972): 209–219; see also <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/oral-histories/service2#126>.

the ensuing months and years.<sup>178</sup> The CCP continued to screen visitors carefully, only granting access to those who were already well-disposed. The communists thus ensured that like-minded friends had a monopoly on first-hand information and reduced the credibility of skeptics.

**Organizational dimension.** The web of personal relationships connecting CCP members and friends was not a substitute for but rather a complement to the party organizations behind the Snow campaign. Even today, Chinese sources on this are not as abundant as one would hope, but it is possible to piece together the outlines of the institutions and roles that, for example, enabled the CCP to coordinate Snow's reporting with the dispatch of a delegation to the United States tasked with reinforcing "the impression of CCP military efficacy and determined anti-Japanese resistance, and to stress the sorry Nationalist record."<sup>179</sup> A summary of a Politburo meeting from March 1938 explained how this was to be accomplished:

We propose: (i) All parties, groups, and mass organizations of our country issue a joint declaration to the world proletarian organizations (the Comintern, the Socialist Democratic International, the International Labor Union in Amsterdam, and the parties and unions it leads) and to all the international organizations that help to maintain world peace (the international antiwar organizations, the Association of the Friends of the League of Nations, etc.), asking that they lend us more powerful moral and material support. (ii) Quickly dispatch a delegation of prestigious representatives of workers, peasants, soldiers, students and merchants and representatives of women, children, and refugees to Europe and the United States to propagandize the details of the Japanese atrocities in China and our country's heroic War of Resistance. (iii) Produce several vivid films that portray the lives of the Chinese people, expose the atrocities of the Japanese, and depict our country's national unity and self-defense against aggression, to be sent to Europe and the United States for public viewing. (iv) Immediately provide all kinds of appropriate books, materials, and pictures to the newspapers, magazines, and news agencies of Europe, the United States, and the countries in the East. (v) For this undertaking to proceed smoothly, the government must cooperate closely with all parties, groups, and mass organizations.<sup>180</sup>

To facilitate such cooperation, shortly after the Second United Front was cemented in mid-1937, the CCP set up both an official office and a party affairs bureau in the Nationalist capital, which had moved to Chongqing, staffed by senior cadres and overseen by Zhou.<sup>181</sup> Similar to his position at Whampoa in the First United Front, Zhou had the perfect cover for promoting the CCP's role in the Second United Front: his official position under the Nationalist government was to coordinate anti-Japanese propaganda. His guidance was to focus on liaising with foreigners in addition to the Nationalist government. The execution of this task involved the establishment of a propaganda team to translate CCP materials into English and disseminate them.<sup>182</sup> The CCP's *New China Daily* [*Renmin Ribao*] newspaper also set up offices in Nationalist-controlled areas to host Western journalists, as did the party's Red Army.<sup>183</sup> Conveying the CCP forces' prowess to foreigners ranked ahead of fighting in this period. The theory continued to be that Western governments would favor the CCP if they perceived the Red Army to be more capable and stalwart than the Nationalist NRA.

178 Edgar's wife Helen Foster Snow and their friends Agnes Smedley, Jack Belden, Harold Isaacs, Anna Strong, Theodore White were writers and activists who visited Yan'an. The U.S. Marine Evans Carlson was another guest and the first military officer. He produced a memorable chronicle that echoed *Red Star* in depicting his hosts as democrats, whom he likened to America's founding fathers.

179 Michael H. Hunt, *The Genesis of Chinese Communist Foreign Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 152.

180 Wang Ming, "Summary of the March Politburo Meeting – The Current War Situation in the War of Resistance and How to Continue the War and Gain Victory, 11 March 1938," in Saich with Yang, *Rise to Power*, pp. 802–12, 809.

181 Yu, *OSS in China*, 42.

182 Brady, *Making the Foreign Serve China*, 49.

183 Brady, *Making the Foreign Serve China*, 52. Specifically, the CCP established the Eighth Route Army Liaison Office in Chongqing, Mattis and Brazil, *Chinese Communist Espionage*, 118.



Getting down to brass tacks, Zhou instructed his agents to “establish friendly feelings with the foreign media, make friends with every single one of them, and form close friendships.”<sup>184</sup> He also counseled searching for points of commonality with targets,<sup>185</sup> a way of reducing mistrust or breaking down barriers to Communist input. One might imagine him taking credit whenever a Western writer described the CCP as democratic or compared a party member to an American revolutionary leader or president. Zhou practiced what he preached with aplomb. Davies found him “fine featured, animated, quick-witted, and magnetic” upon their meeting in 1938,<sup>186</sup> and his colleague Service admitted that his admiration for Snow extended to envy of his relationship with Zhou.<sup>187</sup> Validating Zhou’s method, they would soon prove eager to redirect American assistance in China to the CCP, and, as discussed below, the military leaders they advised had similar reactions.

More speculatively, Zhou’s coordination effort likely involved Ji Chaoding, an old friend from student days whom the party had sent to New York in the early 1920s.<sup>188</sup> Ji formally joined the CCP after the end of the First United Front in 1927 but kept this secret while earning a PhD in economics at Columbia. He returned to China after fifteen years in 1937 to consult with Zhou, by this time his handler. According to Ji’s brother, who also worked for the CCP, Zhou told Ji that a world war was imminent and that despite the Second United Front, the party would need foreign friends and capital to buy weapons:

Furthermore, the Americans were giving all their aid to Chiang’s Nationalists. Chiang had converted to Christianity, and the Americans hoped that, when the war was over, the Nationalists would defeat the Communists and China would become a Christian democracy. It was decided that Chaoding would be more valuable [back] in the States helping raise money and secretly looking out for the Communist cause.<sup>189</sup>

Accordingly, Ji returned to China and was appointed adviser to the KMT minister of finance, gaining insight into the flow of funds and other assistance from the United States to the Nationalists. From his KMT perch, he liaised with U.S. Treasury officials, including two who were secretly Comintern agents and worked to support his rise in the Finance Ministry.<sup>190</sup> The party’s effort to amplify, reinforce, and build on Snow’s messages in the late 1930s thus likely involved units or cells spanning its united front, propaganda, military, and espionage apparatuses.

## CASE STUDY 1: The Dixie Mission during World War II

This wide-ranging Second United Front effort entered high gear in early 1941, when Zhou’s prophecy of world war and significant Western aid materialized. The United States authorized Lend-Lease funds for China in its conflict with Japan. As President Franklin Roosevelt sent representatives to Chongqing to help disperse funds to the Nationalist government, the Communists moved to prevent the United States from working too closely with Chiang and to channel American assistance to themselves. The arrival of the CCP-instigated United States Army Observers Group (i.e., the Dixie Mission<sup>191</sup>) in Yan’an in 1944 was a product of this effort. The presence of American diplomats and military offi-

184 “周恩来通知怎么样做外国记者工作” [“How comrade Zhou Enlai worked on foreign journalists”], 对外宣传参考 [Foreign Propaganda Reference] 6 (1994), cited in Brady, *Making the Foreign Serve China*, 52.

185 Brady, *Making the Foreign Serve China* 52–53, 97; CCP handbooks continue to describe this as a way to cultivate foreigners, Brady, *Making the Foreign Serve China*, 14.

186 Davies, *China Hand*, 27.

187 Service, “Edgar Snow,” 209–19; see also <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/oral-histories/service2#126>.

188 Ji, *Man on Mao’s Right*, 13–14, 19.

189 Ji, *Man on Mao’s Right*, 19.

190 Mattis and Brazil, *Chinese Communist Espionage*, 118.

191 “Dixie” as in “rebel” in the U.S. context. Taylor, *Generalissimo*, 283.

**“Just as the Communists had stoked and then used the division between the KMT’s left and right wings to try to take over the First United Front from within in the 1920s, so they could use the tension that would emerge between U.S. forces in Chongqing and any who showed up in Yan’an.”**

cers at the Communist headquarters signaled confidence in the Red Army and diverted U.S. resources from Chongqing. As the Second United Front started to collapse in 1945, the delegation also proved to be an instrument of more directly destructive CCP tactics.

The CCP waged a multimode campaign to achieve its goals in the Second United Front just as it did in the First United Front. Luring the Dixie Mission to Yan’an was initially part of an internal takeover bid, Model 1. This required doubling down on the messages Snow had transmitted—that the CCP was not Marxist-Leninist but rather protodemocratic, Communist forces were doing most of the fighting and had the best intelligence on the Japanese, and the KMT was neither trustworthy nor militarily capable—to persuade Americans to send a delegation. But just as in the 1920s, recruiting friends and treating them to the same level of hospitality Snow received was also a way of sowing division and mistrust within the allied camp as Model 2, preparation for a split. Finally, the detachment of Americans sent to Yan’an found themselves in unfamiliar territory, physically separated from other Americans in China and from the KMT. This meant that when the Second United Front reached its end, the CCP was better prepared and better positioned than it had been in 1927 to ambush its former allies, Model 3. Conflict broke out after the Allies’ Yalta Agreement obviated the Second United Front for the CCP by establishing that the ideologically aligned Soviets would occupy northeastern China after the war. The U.S. presence in that region then became more threatening than helpful for the Communists. When the CCP shifted to kinetic responses to this threat, it built on the foundation it had laid of superior information about the political and physical environment. This allowed the party to render U.S. forces isolated and vulnerable before targeting them. Even so, as Case Study 2 shows, the CCP retained American defenders and decision makers in Washington failed to perceive the depth of the party’s hostility. This enabled another cycle of united-front work to begin.

**Model 1: Internal takeover.** Inducing the United States to send a delegation to Yan’an was overdetermined for the CCP, as it would help them achieve multiple aims in one stroke. These included (1) pulling U.S. resources from Chongqing, (2) legitimating the party’s base as a rival political center, and (3) enabling further face-to-face engagement through which the CCP could work to alienate Americans from the KMT and from compatriots working with the Nationalists. Objectives 1 and 2 would be at least partly fulfilled just by having the Americans arrive. Objective 3 was the real united-front play. Just as the Communists had stoked and then used the division between the KMT’s left and right wings to try to take over the First United Front from within in the 1920s, so they could use the tension that would emerge between U.S. forces in Chongqing and any who showed up in Yan’an. For this to occur, the first step was to get the Americans sufficiently interested in coming to Yan’an that they would pressure Chiang into consenting to it. Chiang held veto power because Washington recognized the KMT regime as China’s national government, and the generalissimo was formally in charge of Allied forces on the mainland.

The foundation laid by Snow’s *Red Star* and similar depictions of the CCP in the late 1930s created a base of influence on which the party could build to accomplish this. Many American leaders and China hands already saw the Communists as sympathetic, freedom-loving patriots backed by a loyal army—in contrast to their image of a compromised, splintered, ineffectual KMT. The CCP encouraged this sentiment and used it to enlist its American friends, including Snow himself and at least one United States-based CCP intelligence asset, in its persuasion campaign. The





campaign operated on two tracks, via diplomatic channels and in the media, which proved complementary when American officials who favored working with the CCP leaked their views to the press. The goal was to convince the commander-in-chief that the Communists were the key to the war against Japan, militarily superior to the KMT, and armed with special intelligence the United States could only gain access to in Yan'an. The CCP's success in making this case helped it progress toward coopting the Second United Front.

*Background.* The Communists did have unusual insight into Japanese force posture, but that was because of the way they were exploiting World War II to strengthen themselves for the coming conflict with the KMT. In early 1940, Zhou secretly reported to Stalin that of the more than one million Chinese soldiers killed or wounded in the war as of August 1939, only thirty-one thousand were CCP troops—3 percent of the total.<sup>192</sup> Through the rest of Japan's occupation, the only major engagement between CCP forces and the Japanese would be the One Hundred Regiments Campaign of late 1940, which Peng Dehuai initiated without Mao's approval.<sup>193</sup> By late 1941, the CCP Central Committee was directing cadres to refocus away from military activity toward political mobilization. This was being done, the CCP CC said, to husband "military strength and wait for favorable timing."<sup>194</sup> In fact, the CCP lacked the funds to support its expanded Red Army and was actually downsizing it. Resources were tight not only because of the Japanese blockade but also because the Communists had been collaborating with Japanese puppet forces, buying weapons from them to use against the KMT.<sup>195</sup> Political mobilization, not fighting Japan, was the priority.

*The official channel.* The CCP's external message was the opposite: It was working devotedly to defeat the Japanese, while the KMT was shirking this duty in order to focus on domestic political competition. Zhou told Lauchlin Currie, Roosevelt's visiting deputy, in February 1941 that Chiang's hostility to the CCP threatened to destroy the United Front and undermine Chinese resistance to Japan.<sup>196</sup> In the same meeting, he invited the United States to establish a presence in Yan'an, where it could benefit from the party's superior intelligence on Japan.<sup>197</sup> Of course, no mention was made of the fact that this intelligence came from paying off Japan's proxies.

After Pearl Harbor, the campaign to attract a U.S. delegation became both more promising and more urgent, and the CCP effort intensified. The United States formally entered the war against Japan, sending General Joseph Stilwell to serve as Chiang's chief of staff, commander of U.S. forces in the China-Burma-India theaters, and supervisor of Lend-Lease matériel. With the U.S. involvement in China increasing, the Communists were likely to garner more resources, but the importance of diverting the United States from close cooperation with the KMT increased as well. Zhou therefore issued at least four separate invitations, each with a slightly different pitch or rationale, for the United States to come to Yan'an.

First, shortly after Stilwell's March 1942 arrival, Zhou met with Snow to reiterate the CCP's interest in hosting a military and press delegation and to give him a letter to pass to Roosevelt's aide Currie. Through this conversation,

192 Taylor, *Generalissimo*, 169. The respite from KMT attacks afforded by the Second United Front also allowed the party to expand its ranks under the Nationalists' nose, and in violation of promises to Chiang. From 1937 to 1940, the CCP grew more than tenfold, to about 800,000 members, thanks in part to a subsidy the KMT was paying the Communists as part of the United Front. Taylor, *Generalissimo*, 163, 142, 171.

193 This would remain the communists' sole contribution to the fighting. Tony Saich, "Commentary F: Problems in the United Front, 1939-1941," in Saich with Yang, *Rise to Power*, 859.

194 Taylor, *Generalissimo*, 214.

195 A June 1944 CCP Central Committee directive on recovering urban areas from the Japanese confessed: "The purpose of past work [in Japanese-occupied cities] was to preserve the organization, survive the dark days, obtain intelligence information, and purchase [necessary] goods [emphasis added]." Central Committee, "Instruction of the CC Concerning Urban Work, 5 June 1944," in Saich with Yang, *Rise to Power*, 1158. See also Yu, *OSS in China*, 42, 167.

196 Michael M. Sheng, *Battling Western Imperialism: Mao, Stalin, and the United States* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 69; Taylor, *Generalissimo*, 180.

197 Yu, *OSS in China*, n.61, 307.



Zhou rewarded the journalist with another scoop, began to normalize the idea of a U.S. presence at Yan'an in the West, and promoted Snow to informal courier. The latter ensured his entrée into White House circles, where he could spread his enthusiasm about U.S.–CCP cooperation. The letter to Currie boasted of the Red Army's achievements against the Japanese and for the first time formally requested that the United States reallocate some of its aid for China from the KMT to the CCP.<sup>198</sup>

Second, that July, Zhou asked to meet with Currie to deliver these requests in person. Roosevelt had sent his aide back to China for consultations because the Allied campaign in Burma was faltering. Currie was unavailable, so Zhou had a deputy relay his comments to Davies, who reported:

There were two special messages which General Chou desired to be delivered to Mr. Currie. (1) The Chinese Communists hope that the American Government will take steps which will insure the use of lend-lease supplies in accordance with the purpose of such American aid. The fear was expressed that unless the American Government maintained a firm and constantly watchful attitude on this score lend-lease supplies would be hoarded for use after the war in maintaining the position of the ruling faction. (2) The Chinese Communists would welcome a visit to Communist-controlled areas by one or several representatives of the American Government. It was suggested that the Generalissimo could reasonably be requested to grant permission for such an inspection tour on the grounds that the American Government should, in view of the possibility of a Japanese attack on Siberia, have first-hand information with regard to this vital border region and the Communist armies. American Army officers were mentioned as the most logical officials to be sent.<sup>199</sup>

Zhou's message about Lend-Lease diversion thus accused the KMT of the very fraud that the CCP was hoping to commit if it gained greater access to U.S. supplies. This was paired with a suggestion about how to frame a Yan'an delegation in a way that Chiang would be hard pressed to refuse. The United States could privately promise to share any insights about the disposition of the Red Army with the generalissimo, after all.<sup>200</sup> While Chiang would be reluctant to consent to a U.S. mission to Yan'an, the CCP's successful efforts to erode his reputation reduced his ability to deny this request from his American partners.

Third, having relied on his deputy to convey these notes for Currie to Davies, in early 1943 Zhou favored Davies with an in-person meeting. This protocol upgrade could not have hurt Davies's willingness to consider Zhou's proposal that "for really effective liaison we [the Americans] should have a small group of officers stationed in their territory." Davies's meeting memo continued: "[Zhou's] supply of incoming information from North China is obviously limited. But they [the Communists] had at their command at [Yan'an] and in northern [Shaanxi] a steady flow of intelligence regarding the Japanese."<sup>201</sup> This was a compelling pitch, as Davies left believing that the Communists had the best information sources in China and urged Stilwell to lobby for the liaison mission. Davies also recommended that a number of like-minded foreign service colleagues participate, including his old friend Service.<sup>202</sup>

198 Sheng, *Battling Western Imperialism*, 76; Hunt, *Genesis*, 154.

199 "Memorandum by the Second Secretary of Embassy in China (Davies) to Mr. Lauchlin Currie, Administrative Assistant to President Roosevelt," in *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1942, China*, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1942China/d178>.

200 Chiang, however, knew by this point that any U.S. visitors would be unlikely to see anything that the CCP did not want them to see. He had already begun to marvel in his diary that because the communists "have long been working underground, ...they have a tightly organized structure and an iron discipline that defies that of other parties." Chiang Diaries, November 18, 1938, box 40, folder 1, cited in Taylor, *Generalissimo*, 157.

201 "Memorandum of Conversation, by the Second Secretary of Embassy in China (Davies)," in *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1943, China*, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1943China/d168>.

202 Yu, *OSS in China*, 107.



Fourth, in fall 1943, Zhou met with Snow again in Chongqing and “expressed the hope that American military and journalist delegations would soon visit Yan’an,” an overture that Snow immediately relayed to U.S. officials.<sup>203</sup> In late January 1943, Snow had already reported a warning from Zhou to the State Department:

Due to such factors as (1) deteriorating economic condition of the people in areas under the control of the National Government, (2) deterioration of the National Government’s armies resulting from economic and financial situation and from the static condition of China’s warfare against Japan, and (3) the growing strength of the Chinese communist armies through defections from National Government armies and sale of arms to communist forces by soldiers of the National Government armies, the National Government may in the near future take repressive steps against the communists which might result in outbreak of civil war.<sup>204</sup>

Thus, Zhou’s bid to promote Snow to an expert consultant to the U.S. government appears to have worked. The fact that the secretary of state asked the U.S. ambassador in China for his thoughts on the above warning suggests the potency of this channel. With growing defections from the National Army strengthening its ranks, the Red Army would have appeared to be a promising partner, enhancing the attractiveness of the CCP’s invitation to Yan’an.

*The media channel.* Consistent with the Snow/Red Star precedent, the CCP’s strategy benefited from the fact that the targets of its information campaigns engaged in their own media outreach. They seeded negative reporting on the KMT that further enhanced the desirability of an American liaison mission to Yan’an. At times, these reports also disturbed U.S.–KMT relations. Service, on a visit home in February 1943, gave a series of interviews to a *Washington Post* syndicated columnist whose reporting on Chiang soured apace.<sup>205</sup> For example, his next piece stated, “For a long time, domestic political resentment [in China] has increased against Chiang Kai-shek because his policy of U.S. friendship has netted no real returns.”<sup>206</sup> Another column later that month complained of “Chinese political dissension” that was leading to the diversion of U.S. weapons for “personal armies.”<sup>207</sup> There was some truth to this, but only because the Japanese had eliminated so much of the Nationalist army in earlier battles. With the CCP bribing puppets for their weapons from the sidelines, Chiang was relegated to coaxing China’s remaining local military governors—warlords—into contributing troops to the war. In April, Davies arranged a press dinner hosted by the publisher of the *Washington Post* at which he and his boss sounded off on Chiang.<sup>208</sup> A *Reader’s Digest* reporter in attendance then wrote such a negative story about the KMT that it caused a diplomatic incident, prompting correspondence between the U.S. secretary of war and the secretary of state about Nationalist “distress” over the piece.<sup>209</sup>

Under the weight of these private and public appeals inspired by the CCP, Roosevelt requested permission from Chiang for a delegation to visit Yan’an in early February 1944. The generalissimo initially demurred, but he did agree to allow a visit by a few American journalists. This resulted in a *New York Times* article quoting Mao saying the CCP had “never wavered from its policy of supporting Chiang” and that China’s most serious problems were caused by its “lack of democracy.” The Russians, meanwhile, had “never shown any interest in the Chinese communists,” according to the correspondent, who also called Yan’an “a Chinese Wonderland City” and marveled at how

203 Taylor, *Generalissimo*, 242.

204 “Telegram: The Secretary of State to the Ambassador in China (Gauss),” in *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1943, China*, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1943China/d154>.

205 Taylor, *Generalissimo*, 230.

206 Drew Pearson, “The Washington Merry-Go-Round,” *The Daily Illini*, February 7, 1943.

207 Pearson, “Washington Merry-Go-Round,” *The Daily Illini*, February 25, 1943.

208 Taylor, *Generalissimo*, 236.

209 “The Secretary of War (Stimson) to the Secretary of State,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1943, China*, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1943China/d106>.

the Red Army was “tying down four-fifths of all the Imperial forces in China.”<sup>210</sup> The article appeared two weeks before Vice President Henry Wallace traveled to China,<sup>211</sup> where he reiterated the president’s request to Chiang and invoked many of the same claims as talking points.

*The intelligence channel.* Wallace secured Chiang’s permission for the Dixie Mission “reluctantly” on the last day of his trip<sup>212</sup>—perhaps because the generalissimo felt he had to oblige his main benefactor. The vice president’s translator in China was Ji. How Ji was selected for this role is unclear, but in 1940, the Columbia-trained economist and undercover CCP agent had been appointed to represent the KMT’s Finance Ministry in the United States,<sup>213</sup> so he would have been known at least in Treasury circles as a native Mandarin-speaking ally. According to an article on the website of the Tsinghua University alumni network, Ji spent the trip telling Wallace how corrupt Chiang was.<sup>214</sup> Wallace heard a similar message from Song,<sup>215</sup> the CCP sympathizer who had identified Snow for the party almost a decade prior.

Wallace’s trip report echoed these judgments: “Chiang showed himself so prejudiced against the Communists that there seemed little prospect of satisfactory or enduring settlement” from negotiations, “there were already signs of disintegration of his authority,” and “the loyalty of [Nationalist] military factions...is uncertain.” Meanwhile, upon receiving Roosevelt’s request to send a delegation to Yan’an, the generalissimo had recorded in his diary his disappointment that not only “young and naïve American military officers in China” but also “senior” Americans back in the States “believed the CCP’s propaganda.”<sup>216</sup>

**Model 2: Preparation for the split.** The arrival of the eighteen-member Dixie Mission in summer 1944 offered the CCP an opportunity to both intensify its bid for U.S. resources and prepare for the possibility of a rupture with the Americans if they favored the KMT as the war against Japan ebbed. According to the logic of united-front work, the familiar techniques of outreach and propaganda could advance both goals. Cultivating the Dixie Mission members so they would become proponents of closer U.S.-CCP cooperation could result in more American aid for Yan’an if their advocacy succeeded. Additionally, befriending mission members who were already physically separated from their compatriots would facilitate isolating them psychologically or politically as well. The Communists’ approach to the Dixie Mission thus involved two components. The first was developing leverage by turbocharging the messages that CCP-friendly writers such as Snow had already sent to reinforce feelings of affinity, faith in the potential for increased cooperation, and ultimately, dependence on that prospect. The second was seeding dissent by encouraging the Americans in Yan’an to think of themselves as an independent unit, operating in parallel with rather than beneath other U.S. authorities. The latter was accomplished by coaxing the Dixie Mission into taking initiatives without consulting Chongqing or Washington. This also flattered the mission members, reinforcing the goodwill produced through prior outreach, and made it more likely that their affinity would translate into material benefits for the CCP.

210 Taylor, *Generalissimo*, 274. Sheng, *Battling Western Imperialism*, 80.

211 United States Department of State, *United States Relations with China, with Special Reference to the Period 1944-1949*, (Washington: Department of State, 1949), 549–59; see also Taylor, *Generalissimo*, 274. Wallace was also there to check on the relationship between Stilwell and Chiang in light of major setbacks to allied forces in Burma. Some in Washington had been calling for General Claire Lee Chennault, head of the U.S. Army Air Forces in China (formerly the American Volunteer Group a.k.a., the Flying Tigers) to replace Stilwell, but General Marshall was not interested in that solution. Chennault was much closer to the Nationalists than was Stilwell, but his influence in Washington was more limited.

212 “The Ambassador in China (Gauss) to the Secretary of State,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1944, China*, vol. 6, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1944v06/d22>.

213 Ji, *Man on Mao’s Right*, 32–33.

214 Yao Xiaoping [姚小平], “Those Brave Young Men – Graduation Portrait of Class A Classmates of Tsinghua University in 1924” [“那些英姿勃发的年轻人—87年前的清华学甲子级同学1924年毕业照”], 31 Aug. 2011, <https://archive.ph/38fsc>.

215 “Vice President Wallace to President Roosevelt,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1944, China*, vol. 6, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1944v06/d224>.

216 Chiang Diaries, Hoover Institution, February 13, 1944, box 43, folder 15, cited in Taylor, *Generalissimo*, 265.



*Developing leverage.* The CCP newspaper in Yan'an celebrated Independence Day on the eve of the Americans' arrival: "The work which we Communists are carrying on today is the very same work which was carried on earlier in America by Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln."<sup>217</sup> After several interviews with Mao in this vein, Service, Dixie's lead scribe, was so impressed that he reported, "The Communist political program is simple democracy. This is much more American than Russian in form and spirit."<sup>218</sup> In contrast, Service compared Chiang's book *China's Destiny*, published a few months prior, to *Mein Kampf*.<sup>219</sup> Underpinning the favorable assessment of the CCP was Service's outsized view of its contributions to the conflict with Japan: "The military accomplishments of the Chinese Communist Party during the present war, and the fact that these depend on a political base of popular support which the Communists have created, are now fairly well known."<sup>220</sup> The Americans' foundational positive view of the CCP, inspired by Snow, was so strong that layering on fresh new signs of commonality and virtue gave the Communists a lot of leeway to take liberties with reality.

**"The Americans' foundational positive view of the CCP, inspired by Snow, was so strong that layering on fresh new signs of commonality and virtue gave the Communists a lot of leeway to take liberties with reality."**

Service recommended arming and equipping the Communists on the basis of his view that "politically, any orientation that the Chinese Communists may have had toward the Soviet Union seems to be a thing of the past...and they are carrying out democratic policies which they expect the United States to approve and sympathetically support."<sup>221</sup> Service also passed along Mao's explanation of this issue:

For America to insist that arms be given to all forces who fight Japan, which will include the communists, is not interference. For America to give arms only to the Kuomintang will in its effect be interference because it will enable the Kuomintang to continue to oppose the will of the people of China.<sup>222</sup>

Finally, Service argued that politically, U.S. support to the Communists "will actually be a constructive influence in China" because "the Kuomintang will be forced to compete not only for our support but for that of the Chinese people," and "the aid we [the Americans] give the Communists will almost certainly make it impossible for the Kuomintang to start a civil war. At the same time, we will not likely be contributing to a Communist-provoked civil war; their policies are against civil war."<sup>223</sup> The CCP's political alignment with the United States and democratic prospects were thus key to Service's endorsement. His framework cast the KMT as the aggressive party that needed to be checked.

At the same time, he warned that the CCP's sincerity in seeking U.S. support "does not preclude their turning back toward Soviet Russia if they are forced to in order to survive [an] American-supported Kuomintang attack."<sup>224</sup> Logically speaking, this line of argument should have backfired, considering the lengths to which Mao and Zhou

217 Hunt, *Genesis*, 154.

218 John S. Service, *Lost Chance in China: The World War II Dispatches of John S. Service*, ed. Joseph Esherick (New York: Random House, 1974), 312.

219 Service, *Lost Chance*, 90.

220 Service, *Lost Chance*, 321.

221 Service, *Lost Chance*, 308.

222 Service, *Lost Chance*, 301.

223 Service, *Lost Chance*, 324.

224 Service, *Lost Chance*, 309.

had gone since Snow's visit to depict themselves as admirers of American democracy rather than Marxist-Leninist proteges of Moscow. Service's warning suggests that the CCP could have it both ways, benefiting from an image of friendship with Washington and from the threat of alignment with the CPSU.

*Seeding dissent.* Even as they cultivated the Americans in Yan'an, the Communists consciously worked to divide Dixie Mission members from their colleagues in Chongqing and Washington. The gambit was successful, judging by the chasm that opened between U.S. military and State Department representatives in Yan'an and their superiors located elsewhere.

A CCP CC directive on diplomatic work from August 1944 explained to cadres that they should think of the Dixie Mission as "semi-independent":

Foreign journalists and American military personnel came to our border region and base areas behind enemy lines. This is the beginning of actual contacts after their initial understanding of our new democratic China. Therefore, we should not treat their visits and observations as ordinary events, but as the development of our international united front and the beginning of our diplomacy. However, it must be pointed out that now this kind of diplomacy is a semi-independent diplomacy. On the one hand, the Chongqing Nationalist government is still the central government recognized by the Chinese people (including us) and the allied countries. Many diplomatic activities have to be recognized by it. On the other hand, the [KMT] does not want us to conduct independent diplomatic activities. Only by breaking through all kinds of prohibitions and restrictions set by the [KMT] can we further our diplomatic activities with the allied countries and gain direct international support. Therefore, our diplomacy is already of a semi-independent nature.<sup>225</sup>

The Central Committee was explicit about analyzing divisions among Americans: "We should not treat their government personnel as the same, but should study and analyze them." The personnel could be classified according to their attitudes toward the CCP: "progressive, neutral, and diehard," with progressives being most friendly and anticommunist diehards "account[ing] for a minority. Therefore, the focus of our diplomacy should be placed on expanding our influence."<sup>226</sup>

The directive went on in a more tactical vein about how to conduct this kind of semi-independent work. The key was to shape the Americans' perceptions in such a way that they would think they were acting on their own initiative (e.g., in proposing new forms of U.S.–CCP cooperation) when they were really responding to subtle cues from what the CCP was presenting to them at Yan'an:

All things that we can, and are willing to, let outsiders know and participate in can be actively arranged by us. We can even make them [the outsiders] spontaneously make requests [to their governments] that are [really] our own, such as for material aid. The [KMT] is begging everybody loudly and daily; it wants this and that. Temporarily, we should not mention this [requests for aid]. On the contrary, this will increase their respect for us, and they will make offers to us first. However, this will be difficult to realize because of opposition from the [KMT].<sup>227</sup>

This course of action was followed. Service noted in an early dispatch that the Communists refrained from direct appeals for military aid, perhaps "to avoid giving any impression of 'begging.'"<sup>228</sup> The Americans had a special stake in advocating courses of action that they thought were their own ideas.

225 Central Committee, "Directive of the CC on Diplomatic Work, 18 August 1944," in Saich with Yang, *Rise to Power*, 1212.

226 Central Committee, "Directive of the CC on Diplomatic Work," in Saich with Yang, *Rise to Power*, 1213.

227 Central Committee, "Directive of the CC on Diplomatic Work," in Saich with Yang, *Rise to Power*, 1214.

228 Service, *Lost Chance*, 265.



As predicted, the Communists' reticence regarding weapons and supplies enhanced their standing with their guests, and by November 1944, Army Colonel David Barrett, the leader of the U.S. delegation, and Davies were talking with the Red Army commander and Zhou not only about weapons transfers but also about a joint U.S.–CCP landing at a port within the Japanese-occupied zone between Shandong and Jiangsu.<sup>229</sup> This would have vaulted the party into position to occupy areas left behind once Japan surrendered. The timing was also optimal for the Communists insofar as U.S. forces would have been diverted from defending the Nationalist government in Chongqing against escalating Japanese attacks, and the landing would have drawn Japanese forces southward as the Soviets were preparing their own invasion in the north.<sup>230</sup>

To ensure a favorable reception of the joint landing plan, Mao promised Barrett on December 10, 1944:

We would serve with all our hearts under an American general, with no strings or conditions attached. That is how we feel toward you. If you land on the shores of China, we will be there to meet you, and to place ourselves under your command.<sup>231</sup>

This commitment was evidently convincing, as Barrett and Davies enthusiastically endorsed the landing idea. By mid-December, the Dixie Mission was offering to have the United States arm and train twenty-five thousand CCP troops, as well as provide a radio network and other logistical support.<sup>232</sup>

The Americans in Yan'an were now well ahead of official U.S. policy, suggesting that the CCP's semi-independent diplomacy was working. The exchanges between Dixie Mission members and their CCP counterparts were clearly occurring on a separate track from formal U.S.–CCP discussions. For instance, when retired General Patrick Hurley, the U.S. ambassador in Chongqing, proposed that an American lead CCP troops in any coming operations against Japan in January 1945, Mao reacted angrily, accusing him of trying to turn "Chinese troops ... into colonial ones. We shall never agree."<sup>233</sup> It was as if Mao had not offered to subordinate CCP forces to Barrett less than a month earlier. The Americans in Yan'an also contributed to this de facto separation from Chongqing. When Hurley had visited Yan'an on November 7 to set the stage for peace talks between the CCP and the KMT, Davies and Barrett did not tell him about their discussions of a potential joint landing with the Red Army.<sup>234</sup>

The Communists encouraged such information gaps, in keeping with the strategy of separating Dixie members from the rest of the U.S. government. On January 11, 1945, Zhou told a U.S. representative in Yan'an that the KMT was holding secret peace negotiations with Japan to sell out U.S. interests. Zhou therefore recommended that the United States cease working with Chiang, but he also requested that this intelligence be kept from Ambassador Hurley.<sup>235</sup> The Americans at Yan'an complied by not cabling Hurley, but they sent a message via radio to the commander of U.S. forces in China, General Albert Wedemeyer,<sup>236</sup> who shared the contents with his housemate, the ambassador. Predictably, Hurley was suspicious; upon investigation of the back story, he grew angry. He realized that the CCP had been stalling his peace initiative because the Communists had no incentive for cooperating with the KMT: the

229 Yu, *OSS in China*, 183. The United States had been considering launching landings on the coast in response to the Japanese Ichigo offensive that had allowed the occupiers to build a north–south supply line across the mainland and forced the United States to pull back air bases from eastern China into the interior.

230 Yu, *OSS in China*, 184, 311; Sheng, "America's Lost Chance in China? A Reappraisal of Chinese Communist Policy Toward the United States Before 1945," *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 29 (January 1993): 153.

231 Sheng, "America's Lost Chance?" 154; Taylor, *Generalissimo*, 299.

232 Yu, *OSS in China*, 186.

233 Sheng, "America's Lost Chance?" 154.

234 Yu, *OSS in China*, 184.

235 Yu, *OSS in China*, 189.

236 Stilwell had been recalled in October. Wedemeyer was his replacement.

United States had already invited Red Army forces to land with U.S. forces on the coast. Hurley had Davies transferred, and Barrett and Bird were also relieved of their duties.<sup>237</sup> This encounter with colleagues whom Hurley saw as undermining U.S. interests was not a one-off. Continuing frustration with his staff would impel the ambassador to resign later that year.

If the upheaval stemming from the secret joint landing plan had occurred earlier, perhaps the outcome would have been different, but by 1945, almost a decade of internal government reporting and public press accounts had depicted the Communists as viable partners who were at once not very ideological and very militarily capable. American attitudes were set, and the CCP could get away with manipulating the Dixie Mission members without risking a major break.

**Model 3: Scripted military confrontation.** The CCP's efforts to weaken and divide the American camp left U.S. forces vulnerable when the Communists responded kinetically to a perceived threat from them later that year. The CCP had abruptly stopped seeking cooperation with the United States after learning that, at the February 1945 Yalta Conference, the Allies agreed to let the Soviets occupy northeastern China.<sup>238</sup> The Soviets lived up to CCP hopes by refusing to let Nationalist forces land at the ports they controlled. But American forces, with their legacy ties to Chiang, complicated Communist efforts to secure control at the expense of the KMT in the wake of Japan's departure from the region. Mao told the Communists to prepare for war against the United States and Chiang.<sup>239</sup> In CCP united-front terms, fighting the United States would entail exploiting the Communists' superior situational awareness in northeastern China so they could target isolated, outnumbered American units.

Thanks to the CCP's prior propaganda work and influence operations, many U.S. military leaders grasped neither the depth of the party's hostility nor the extent of its ambition. Americans poured into the theater to fight Japan after the Allied victory in Europe at the beginning of May, roughly doubling from around thirty thousand to about sixty thousand over the next three months.<sup>240</sup> U.S. forces continued to try to work with the Communists behind Japanese lines and were shocked by the CCP response. The Communists launched surprise attacks at a time when Americans believed they were engaged in cooperation. Even after this backlash, U.S. government representatives remained convinced of the viability of a partnership.

On May 28, 1945, the five-member U.S. Spaniel Mission parachuted into an area in Hebei near Japanese forces to contact local CCP members about joint intelligence operations. The nearest CCP unit captured and detained them.<sup>241</sup> The CCP did not want U.S. forces present in the areas where they were supposedly taking on the Japanese but were actually paying off their proxies and preparing to seize ground at the KMT's expense when the invaders departed. Indeed, the Spaniel Mission eventually reported that the "amount of actual fighting" the Communists were undertaking "has been grossly exaggerated."<sup>242</sup>

**"By 1945, almost a decade of internal government reporting and public press accounts had depicted the Communists as viable partners who were at once not very ideological and very militarily capable."**

237 Yu, *OSS in China*, 189–90, 193.

238 Yu, *OSS in China*, 236.

239 Taylor, *Generalissimo*, 301.

240 Xixiao Guo, "Paradise or Hell Hole? U.S. Marines in Post-World War II China," *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 7, no. 3/4 (Fall–Winter 1998): 157.

241 Yu, *OSS in China*, 220. The interrogation was co-led by General Geng Biao, future head of the CCP's International Liaison Department and Secretary General of the Central Military Commission from 1979–81, during which period Xi Jinping served as his personal secretary.

242 Yu, *OSS in China*, 221.





Spaniel members remained in captivity until after the CCP murdered John Birch, the American leader of another detachment sent into northeastern China. In the wake of Japan's surrender in August 1945, Birch had been trying to get to the Shandong Peninsula to negotiate with the local Chinese puppet commander for access to airfields that the United States could use to evacuate American prisoners of war as they rescued them. What Birch and his compatriots did not appreciate is that the Communists had no interest in seeing any American presence develop in the area and had penetrated the commander's headquarters. The CCP was trying to persuade the commander to commit his forces to them in the coming civil conflict with the KMT.<sup>243</sup> Hence the ambush of Birch's group.

When confronted about these events, Mao pleaded ignorance.<sup>244</sup> After Wedemeyer mentioned that the "the killing of an American officer by Communists would be deeply resented by Americans both here and in America," the CCP chairman promised to investigate and punish anyone found guilty. Notwithstanding any resentment, the Communists retained the option of engaging with the United States. When Soviet support receded (temporarily) and circumstances on the ground in northeastern China deteriorated, the CCP exercised this option, initiating a new cycle of united-front work over the next two years. Thanks to *Red Star* and other formative influences on U.S. public opinion, even after the CCP became explicitly hostile, Americans continued to view their interlocutors through rose-colored glasses.

## Case Study 2: Marshall Mission during the Chinese Civil War

Space constraints prohibit a full exploration of the Marshall Mission, but the very existence of this next chapter in U.S.-CCP diplomacy illustrates the remarkable durability of CCP united-front techniques. The CCP's collusion (in lieu of confrontation) with puppet governors had been exposed, the Communists had spent the better part of the last half decade bad-mouthing the KMT, and in the past several months Red Army troops had abducted and murdered U.S. forces. All of this could have been interpreted as evidence that the CCP's aims were zero-sum and incompatible with representative government. Yet the premise of the Marshall Mission was that the KMT and CCP could agree to share power. The positive sentiment that the Communists had cultivated with help from Snow and his colleagues had such a long tail that the CCP could use a fresh cycle of negotiations to strengthen its position at the expense of its rivals and interlocutors.

By late 1945, the race between the CCP and the KMT to occupy northeastern areas left behind by departing Japanese forces, along with clashes elsewhere, signaled the outbreak of a civil war. The Soviets were friendly but constrained in the aid they could provide; they had to keep their assistance discreet lest they be seen to violate the terms of the Yalta Agreement, which might lead the United States to stay engaged.<sup>245</sup> Meanwhile, the CCP discovered the Red Army needed time to train for conventional warfare, having downsized it and confined it to guerrilla tactics during World War II. When Truman sent Marshall to try to negotiate a unity government between the generalissimo's KMT and his democratic and communist rivals, the CCP saw an opportunity for another united-front campaign. The goals were to buy time, further degrade the U.S.-KMT relationship, and if possible secure U.S. assistance in addition to Soviet for the coming war. The techniques again revolved around (Model 1) courting the U.S. side of the three-party talks to coopt the process, while (Model 2) reducing cooperation between the United States and the Nationalists to weaken the opposition, in case (Model 3) conventional attacks were necessary.

**Models 1 and 2: Internal takeover and preparation for a split.** Consistent with the united-front playbook,

243 Yu, *OSS in China*, 236–37.

244 "Telegram: The Ambassador in China (Hurley) to the Secretary of State," in *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945, The Far East, China*, vol. 7, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1945v07/d401>.

245 The agreement required the Soviets to return the three northeastern provinces to the KMT. Central Committee, "Directive of the CC Concerning Swiftly Occupying the Northeast and Controlling the Vast Countryside, 29 August 1945," in Saich with Yang, *Rise to Power*, 1269–70; Northeast Bureau, "Directive of the Northeast Bureau on Evacuating Large Cities, 26 November 1945," in Saich with Yang, *Rise to Power*, 1270–1271.



the CCP undertook to befriend Marshall and draw the American resources at his disposal into the Communist camp, away from the KMT. Convincing Marshall that a CCP regime was inevitable was part of this campaign, as it made the Communists both natural partners for the United States and the power brokers for China's future whose dictates the Americans would have to follow.

The first step was persuading Marshall that the Communists were the choice of the Chinese people and would ascend to power if the KMT allowed democracy to proceed. Upon arriving in China, Marshall was charmed by Zhou and received the usual hospitality on a visit to Yan'an.<sup>246</sup> Chiang cautioned that the Communists were merely using him "as their protector while building up influence in the Government and reorganizing their armies," at which point they would emerge as "loyal to Soviet Russia and in the final test, on the side of the Russians."<sup>247</sup> But this warning fell on deaf ears. Instead, Marshall viewed Zhou as his "kind of guy"<sup>248</sup> and believed his assertion that the CCP favored a coalition government "based upon the American style of democracy."<sup>249</sup> When the Communists brazenly violated their April 1946 promise to integrate the Red Army into the KMT's NRA, Marshall decided this was because of embarrassment at their troops' inability to "at least march and parade in a presentable manner." He offered to help by setting up a U.S. military school in China.<sup>250</sup> Just as Snow believed that the denizens of Yan'an were a brotherhood of democrats while agreeing to censor his work and omit any mention of their internal security apparatus as a condition of visiting, so once again CCP united-front work succeeded in inducing an American interlocutor to hold contradictory views—in this case, that the Communists' triumph was inevitable and their forces were so rag-tag that they needed American training.

Marshall's unwillingness or inability to detect the Communists' duplicity ceded the initiative to them. Following Japan's surrender, additional U.S. troops had flowed into China to help with the repatriation of foreign nationals and the transfer of power from the Soviets to the Nationalists, peaking at 113 thousand Americans in 1946.<sup>251</sup> The United States had promised to transport Nationalists to the areas the Soviets were supposed to vacate after accepting Japanese commanders' surrender. The Soviets lingered, however, as they appropriated Japanese matériel and conspired with the CCP to bolster the Communists' position in the surrounding areas. As this process drew to a close in spring 1946, Zhou reported to the CCP Central Committee, "The chances of making use of the United States and Marshall are diminishing daily...but we should still make every effort to delay the onset of civil war."<sup>252</sup>

This effort resulted in deflecting what scholars judge to have been Chiang's last chance to prevail, the Nationalist conquest of Sipingjie and Changchun in Manchuria in late May 1946. While Chiang was leading government forces at the front, Zhou "talked a great deal" with Marshall back in Nanjing, with one session lasting six hours.<sup>253</sup> Marshall then "pulled out all the stops" to make Chiang agree to a cease-fire on June 6, which Chiang would later identify as his "most grievous mistake."<sup>254</sup> Three hours after the cease-fire, the Communists began attacks in five zones in southern and central China, while they used the pause in the north to "regroup, amass weapons, train, and transition from a

246 Larry I. Bland and Sharon Ritenour Stevens, eds., *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall* (Lexington, VA: The George C. Marshall Foundation, 1981–), electronic version based on *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall*, vol. 5, "The Finest Soldier," January 1, 1945–January 7, 1947 (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 490.

247 "Memorandum of Conversation, by General Marshall," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946, The Far East: China*, vol. 9, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1946v09/d230>.

248 Taylor, *Generalissimo*, 333.

249 Bland and Stevens, *Papers of George Catlett Marshall*, 401–02.

250 George Catlett Marshall, "Memorandum for the Generalissimo, 20 April 1946" in Bland and Stevens, *Papers of George Catlett Marshall*, 527–28.

251 Xixiao, "Paradise or Hell Hole?" 157.

252 Taylor, *Generalissimo*, 351.

253 Bland and Stevens, *Papers of George Catlett Marshall*, 578.

254 S.C.M. Paine, *The Wars for Asia, 1911–1949*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 250; Taylor, *Generalissimo*, 353.



guerrilla to a conventional force.”<sup>255</sup> Marshall still somehow accepted Zhou’s line that the Nationalists were to blame for the CCP’s truce violations.<sup>256</sup> More importantly, by this stage Marshall assessed that, barring a massive U.S. intervention for which there was no appetite, the Communists would win the Chinese Civil War. The CCP’s campaign had succeeded in narrowing the U.S. view of the range of possible outcomes such that the party possessed all the leverage.

**Model 3: Scripted military confrontation.** By summer 1946, the U.S. presence had exhausted its usefulness and become an obstacle to CCP progress against the KMT. American forces in Hebei province around Beijing found themselves in areas newly liberated by the CCP as Nationalist forces flowed north to contest Communist takeovers of cities from which the Soviets finally departed. The Red Army began working to evict the American interlopers by staging an ambush. Using united-front techniques, the CCP shaped the reporting on the attack to ensure that rather than triggering a war with the United States, it convinced Americans to depart.

At the end of July 1946, three hundred CCP troops ambushed a convoy of fifty-five U.S. marines guarding a railroad south of Beijing, killing seven in what would be known as the Anping Incident, and this followed an incident earlier that month in which Communist forces briefly detained seven U.S. marines guarding a railroad east of Beijing. Amid confusion over the culprits,<sup>257</sup> the CCP obstructed the investigation while claiming (falsely) that Nationalists were among the U.S. forces and that they were the target.<sup>258</sup> This message was broadcast by the CCP via press conference, press release, and *New China News Agency (Xinhua)*,<sup>259</sup> effectively shaping global views of the incident. Meanwhile, Marshall warned the Nationalists that they were losing the public opinion battle in the United States, as recorded in a memo of a July 31 conversation with a KMT general:

The public reaction towards China was getting out of hand. When he [Marshall] was [back] in the United States [for a visit in March-April], he talked to practically all the correspondents, editors and radio commentators, some 600 of them. He knows them and he had them lined up almost solidly behind him in influencing public opinion which would be favorable to China. Now all this is coming apart at the seams. The tide of American public opinion is swinging the other way.<sup>260</sup>

In his first message to the president upon receiving word of the ambush, Marshall acknowledged that the likely outcome would be “a strong demand for the withdrawal of Marines,” and he pinned the blame on “violent Communist propaganda against so-called American military support of the National Government.”<sup>261</sup> But when Marshall met with Zhou to discuss the “disastrous” incident on August 1, he said he “assume[d]” it was “due to the attitude of the local commander in that region.”<sup>262</sup> Zhou was still his trusted partner in peace making: “We have been endeavoring

255 Paine, *Wars for Asia*, 250.

256 Taylor, *Generalissimo*, 353–54.

257 “Minutes of Meeting Between General Marshall and General Yu Ta-wei at No. 5 Ning Hai Road, Nanking, July 31, 1946, 6:45 p.m.,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946, The Far East: China*, vol. 9, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1946v09/d718>.

258 Bland and Stevens, *Papers of George Catlett Marshall*, 645. The U.S. investigation found that no Nationalists were present with the American forces that day, “Final Report on the Anping Incident,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946, The Far East: China*, vol. 10, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1946v10/d168>.

259 “In the Anping Incident in 1946, the U.S. Military Suffered 15 Casualties. Why Did They Finally Adopt a Calm Attitude?” 25 March 2022, <https://archive.ph/GBPv8>; “The U.S. ‘Provocatively’ Killed 15 People in the Liberated Area. Ye Jianying Made Four Demands, but the U.S. Had No Choice but to Withdraw Its Troops,” 22 March 2022, [archive.ph/wip/Y3fba](https://archive.ph/wip/Y3fba).

260 “Minutes of Meeting, July 31, 1946,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States*, vol. 9.

261 “General Marshall to President Truman,” *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946, The Far East: China*, vol. 9, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1946v09/d716>.

262 “Minutes of Meeting Between General Marshall and General Chou En-lai at No. 5 Ning Hai Road, Nanking, August 1, 1946, 4 p.m.,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946, The Far East: China*, vol. 9, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1946v09/d722>.

**“The CCP united-front strategy had succeeded in using talks to buy time, divide the adversary coalition, and thereby ensure victory.”**

to bring to a quick conclusion this fighting before it spread into general uncontrollable civil war.... [Your] purpose at the present time and my purpose are almost identical.”<sup>263</sup> Hope springs eternal.

The CCP-sponsored press attacks were clearly straining Marshall’s patience, though: “I have been pursuing this course and ignoring entirely the vicious Communist propaganda which is virtually directed against me because I am responsible,” he told Zhou, even as the latter handed him a New China News Agency piece that was “wholly different” from what Marshall had heard from investigating officers. Indeed, the Chinese story was, “a complete, and I think a deliberate, misrepresentation,” Marshall said. He also predicted that it would hurt their shared cause of pressuring Chiang for another cease-fire, “because Americans don’t accept this sort of thing calmly.”<sup>264</sup> Marshall was, wittingly or not, reprising Wedemeyer’s move during the Spaniel Incident, when he used the threat of negative publicity in the United States to induce Zhou to release the captives.

A year later, however, the situation was very different. CCP propaganda had already established a favorable narrative about the incident in the United States, accusing the U.S. military of having “directly participated in the Chinese civil war and violated China’s sovereignty.”<sup>265</sup> Further, “Many foreign journalists with a sense of justice believe that the U.S. military has always lacked basic respect for China’s sovereignty and people. The occurrence of this incident was most likely provoked by the U.S. military, and the local military and civilians rose up in self-defense.”<sup>266</sup> The U.S. ambassador cabled the secretary of state on August 3 to report on all the negative media U.S. forces were receiving, including a long story dictated to a New York reporter that ended, “It is generally believed that U.S. aid will play [a] decisive role in prolonging or calling halt to Chiang Kai-shek’s game of stalling peace and democratization of KMT Government in China.”<sup>267</sup> By appealing to foreign media and through other messaging inside and outside China, the CCP thus converted its own aggression into a public relations opportunity.

This increased pressure on the Americans to the point where Marshall sent the marines home. On August 3, he also recommended that the president communicate to Chiang: “Unless convincing proof is shortly forth coming that genuine progress is being made toward a peaceful settlement of China’s internal problems, it must be expected that American opinion will not continue in its generous attitude towards your nation.”<sup>268</sup> The final report on the ambush, issued a month later, assigned exclusive blame to the CCP: “This ambush was methodically planned, prepared and executed by the Communist Party Military Forces...[and] these Communist Forces engaged in the conflict with the full knowledge, consent and orders of their superior commanders.”<sup>269</sup> Again, this was too little, too late, both for public opinion and for the future of the Marshall Mission. Truman blamed the Nationalists for the escalating Civil War and cut off military assistance to the KMT,<sup>270</sup> and Marshall left China empty handed in January 1947. The CCP united-front strategy had succeeded in using talks to buy time, divide the adversary coalition, and thereby ensure victory.

263 “Minutes of Meeting, August 1, 1946,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States*, vol. 9.

264 “Minutes of Meeting, August 1, 1946,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States*, vol. 9.

265 “The U.S. ‘Provocatively’ Killed 15 People.”

266 “The U.S. ‘Provocatively’ Killed 15 People.”

267 “Telegram: The Ambassador in China (Stuart) to the Secretary of State,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946, The Far East: China*, vol. 9, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1946v09/d731>.

268 Bland and Stevens, *Papers of George Catlett Marshall*, 651–652.

269 “Final Report on the Anping Incident,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States*, vol. 10.

270 Paine, *Wars for Asia*, 251. Chiang assessed that “Marshall had leverage to use against the Nationalist government, but absolutely none against the Communists, so he used what he had.” Taylor, *Generalissimo*, 358.



## China with Tears: U.S.–CCP Relations from the Korean War to Rapprochement

The initial mistakes in its dealings with the CCP set the United States on a path from which it has yet to recover. Instead of sending Marshall on an impossible mission to broker a unity government, the United States could have pursued partitioning China into northern and southern zones. This would have reflected a more realistic view of the prospects that the CCP and KMT would work together. If Washington had focused Chiang on shoring up his traditional base in the south and consolidating his hold on central China, he would not have overextended in the north and given the CCP a chance to exploit his army's resulting vulnerability. This solution would likely have satisfied Moscow's appetite for influence in the border areas of Mongolia and Manchuria, while potentially accelerating the Sino-Soviet split by compressing the space for their interactions.

As explained by Arthur Waldron in his counterfactual essay "China without Tears: If Chiang Kai-shek Hadn't Gambled in 1946," the rest of the Cold War would then have unfolded very differently, too.<sup>271</sup> A free southern China would have rapidly eclipsed its northern neighbor economically, just like West and East Germany. Kim Il-Song would not have had a model to inspire his invasion of the south, and Ho Chi Minh would have lacked a patron to his north. The communist world would thus have been smaller, and both the Korean and the Vietnam Wars could have been avoided. This would have moderated the Cold War, which might also have ended sooner. Finally, under these conditions it is unlikely that the United States would have needed or wanted to reach out to the northern Chinese regime in the 1970s.

This line of thought was very far from the minds of U.S. policy makers in the wake of the events described above, however. As the 1940s concluded, the Cold War was taking shape and the CCP was cementing its conquest of the mainland. Not "What if?" but rather "Who lost China?" was the question of the day—a question more conducive to covering up mistakes than to learning from them. The China White Paper produced by the Truman State Department thus portrayed the CCP's victory as a tragic inevitability, a result of the Chinese people's brainwashing and Nationalist ineptitude.<sup>272</sup> No mention was made of the brainwashing of Americans in China, who might have done more to help Chiang win (or less to help his opponents) if not for the CCP's manipulation of their thinking.

In the decades that followed, the Communists were complicit in this suppression of the record. Mao did not want to share credit for the revolutionary victory with his deputy Zhou and the CCP's spymasters, many of whom had been trained in Moscow.<sup>273</sup> But it was a combination of the chairman's peasant mobilization and the spymasters' intelligence operations that enabled the party to endear Americans in China in the 1930s and '40s. This two-sided effort went on, of course. Even as Mao imposed a Marxist-Leninist party-state across the mainland, the CCP continued to invest in the image of being a popular, democratic regime that had fought heroically against Japan, amid other feats of anti-imperialism. The CCP now added the liberation of China to the list of accomplishments for which it sought, and received, credit.

**Korean War: Missed signals and lost chances.** What impact did this have on subsequent U.S.–CCP relations? The success of the Chinese People's Volunteers in ambushing UN coalition forces in Korea in November and December 1950 has been attributed to a familiar combination of CCP deception and U.S. imprudence or willful blindness.<sup>274</sup> This combination, left over from the 1940s, was particularly effective for Beijing and damaging to the

271 Arthur Waldron, "China Without Tears: If Chiang Kai-shek Hadn't Gambled in 1946" in Robert Cowley, ed., *What If? The World's Foremost Military Historians Imagine What Might Have Been* (New York: Penguin, 2000).

272 United States Department of State, *United States Relations with China*, vi, xiv.

273 Yu, *OSS in China*, xiv; David Ian Chambers, "Edging in from the Cold: The Past and Present State of Chinese Intelligence Historiography," *Studies in Intelligence*, 56:3 (Sept. 2012), pp. 31–46, 32–33.

274 Eliot A. Cohen and John Gooch, *Military Misfortunes: The Anatomy of Failure in War* (New York: Free Press, 1990), 165–95; Chen Jian,

**“In an echo of its Civil War strategy, the CCP used cease-fires not to negotiate in earnest but rather to gain vital breathing space and improve its position. If the U.S. side appreciated that this was the Communists’ strategy, it did not do anything to counter it.”**

United States during the armistice negotiations.

Mao’s logic for launching a series of surprise attacks against U.S. forces on the peninsula was that he was surrounded by the United States and its allies on three sides. The French were in Indochina, American support for the KMT on Taiwan was enabling cross-strait bombardment raids, and now the UN forces in Korea were progressing toward the border with the PRC. Something had to be done to roll back this unfavorable set of trends, and Korea offered favorable terrain for making a stand. As in the Model 3 examples above, the CCP used force when it believed victory was guaranteed.

Part of this opportunity lay in the ability of the Communists to conceal the entry of their forces into Korea in October 1950. The Chinese elements coalition troops encountered or took prisoner after early clashes at the end of that month convincingly acted like rag-tag volunteers who were operating on their own, not as part of a much larger intervention force. They sold their cover story well, and they had a receptive audience in General Douglas MacArthur and his lead intelligence officer, General Charles Willoughby. In addition to misidentifying the Chinese forces that attacked UN positions in late October, American officials failed to heed evidence from a small communications intelligence detachment that warned of the movement of troops from southern and central China to the Korean border through the summer and early fall.<sup>275</sup> Willoughby’s oversight has been attributed to a desire to please MacArthur, who had his own ambitions. These were not related to the prior history of U.S.-CCP relations, but it is striking that just as Americans dismissed evidence of the Communists’ duplicity in the Civil War, so they neglected data about the CCP’s plans for Korea.

Perhaps less forgivable is that after the CCP intervened and the UN coalition managed to withstand its initial surprise attacks, the United States failed to recognize the peril Beijing faced by spring 1951. The Chinese strategy had been designed to deliver a series of knockout blows in November and December of the previous year. The United States was not supposed to stay in the fight after that, and the Chinese troops were woefully unprepared for a winter of combat. Facing a major deficit of warm clothes, food, and other critical supplies, these soldiers started deserting en masse, to the extent that Chinese commander Peng had to rely on tightening the border and augmenting his corps of political commissars who were tasked with prosecuting stray troops. What really saved the Communists was the time that the armistice talks bought them to regroup, augment supply lines, and dig in across the peninsula. In an echo of its Civil War strategy, the CCP used cease-fires not to negotiate in earnest but rather to gain vital breathing space and improve its position. If the U.S. side appreciated that this was the Communists’ strategy, it did not do anything to counter it. The war dragged on for two more years, and to this day the CCP boasts of having fought the United States to a draw.

**Rapprochement and “Reform and Opening.”** After the Korean War, the United States had decades during which it could review the record of its interactions with the CCP and learn from them—in peace, during crises (e.g.,

*China’s Road to the Korean War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 180–81; Shu Guang Zhang, *Mao’s Military Romanticism* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 22, 93–94; Patrick Roe, *The Dragon Strikes* (Novato, CA: Presidio, 2000), ix-x.

275 David A. Hatch with Robert Louis Benson, *The Korean War: The SIGINT Background*, (Fort George G. Meade, MD: Center for Cryptological History, National Security Agency, 2000).



across the Taiwan Strait), and during proxy conflicts (e.g., the Indochina Wars). This learning seems to have occurred only spottily, however, or at least the lessons were not uniformly adopted across the U.S. policy community. It is, in a way, remarkable that when the United States and the PRC decided to work together to defeat the Soviets in the early 1970s, the very Chinese leaders who cultivated American government officials in the 1940s and '50s for strategic reasons pulled off the same feat again. Through the development of personal ties with U.S. government officials and other sympathetic Americans, and by dangling the promise of U.S. access to the Chinese market, the CCP was able to expand from narrow military-related cooperation against the Soviets to broader cooperation that not only enabled the PRC to escape the impoverishment inflicted by Mao's rule but also put it on track to rival the United States.

It is now known, thanks to reports from former party insiders such as Cai Xia, that the CCP approached its relations with the United States purely instrumentally. The goals were to outflank the Soviets in the early 1970s and then gain access to U.S. capital and technology to increase its power. Under Mao's successor Deng, the CCP pursued a strategy of "Reform and Opening" [改革开放] to the West. By this means, the CCP could rescue the country from desperation and thereby preserve its rule. From the beginning, however, this was paired with a more expansive vision of enabling Chinese rejuvenation, at the expense of the United States and the liberal international order. Yet Secretary of State and National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger, present at the initiation of the rapprochement in the early 1970s and a beneficiary of reform and opening since starting his consultancy in 1982, never appreciated this aspect of the CCP's ambition. In 1979, Kissinger remarked, "Once China becomes strong enough to stand alone, it *might* discard us. A little later it *might* even turn against us, if its perception of its interests requires it [emphasis added]." <sup>276</sup> In 2011 he told *Xinhua*, "Friendship with China should be one of the key elements of American foreign policy.... What has remained in my experience is the friendship and loyalty that Chinese people show to their friends." In the same year, he told the *Wall Street Journal*, "I will not now discuss a confrontational strategy with China in a formal way." <sup>277</sup> As Isaac Stone Fish concluded, "How can one be a nuanced thinker and public intellectual if one refuses to countenance the great possibility of an aggressive Beijing?" <sup>278</sup>

This report cannot do justice to the remarkable staying power of the positive impression of the CCP exhibited by the first Americans who encountered it and their heirs such as Kissinger. Perhaps the theme can be conveyed by two anecdotes. First, in 2003, one of the authors attended a conference at Harvard University called Mao Re-evaluated. The purpose of the event was to celebrate the work of Stuart Schram, a nuclear physicist-turned-Sinologist who devoted his career to overseeing the translation and compilation of Mao's writings, with support from the U.S. Defense Department. In 1966, Schram had published a biography of Mao that called *Red Star over China* "irreplaceable in learning about Mao's early years" and "by far the most important single source regarding his life," notwithstanding its "many errors of detail." In 2003, Schram's assessment at the conference was that "faulty judgment, a failure to face facts, impetuosity, and vindictiveness" marked Mao's 27 years of rule: "He made loyalty to himself the touchstone of ideological thinking, and the conviction that the party had become revisionist provided a fig leaf for an increasingly autocratic dictatorship." So far, so good, except for the implication that Mao's rule progressively degenerated into dictatorship. This overlooks the fact that as early as the late 1930s, as discussed above, Mao oversaw a police state in Yan'an and engaged in brutal purges. What is most revealing is that Schram went on to conclude:

276 Taylor, *Generalissimo*, 570.

277 Isaac Stone Fish, *America Second: How America's Elites Are Making China Stronger* (New York: Knopf, 2022), 78–79.

278 Fish, *America Second*.



In many ways his [Mao's] political instincts were sound. He tried to invest in the Chinese people. But in his personal feelings he was emotional, wrong-headed, and hysterical, and these qualities increasingly took over in the 1950s. But despite enormous blunders and crimes, he was a great leader who was trying to do the best for China. I think he'll be remembered for that.<sup>279</sup>

The other author of this report was assigned Snow's *Red Star over China* as her textbook in a popular class on modern Chinese history at Tufts University in the late 2010s. The course professor earned two degrees at Beijing University before coming to the United States for her PhD.

If *Red Star* remains the touchstone, the United States may be doomed to repeat past mistakes. Part 3 will consider whether the pattern observed across Parts 1 and 2 of this study is still operative. In other words, if the U.S. view of the CCP is still obscured or clouded by friends of the CCP, does that set America up for a similar rude break from superficial cooperation to open hostility—only now, with much higher stakes?

279 Ken Gewertz, "Mao Under a Microscope," *Harvard Gazette*, December 11, 2003, <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2003/12/mao-under-a-microscope/>.



# Part 3:

## Two Visions of the Future

The PRC pursued Model 1 in its relationship with the United States for roughly four decades – from the Mao–Nixon rapprochement through the reform and opening initiated by Deng. Over this period, Beijing made the Western order work for it while outwardly humoring Washington’s predictions that long-term exposure to liberal values and international economic norms would lead to the PRC’s democratization.<sup>280</sup> Instead, the CCP effectively shielded its domestic political system from external influence or scrutiny. Its penetration of Chinese industry, meanwhile, meant that access to dual-use Western information technology boosted the PRC’s GDP and its defense capabilities.

Ideally, from Beijing’s perspective, coopting the United States would have enabled the PRC to achieve undisputed economic and technological dominance and put it in a position to dictate terms to other countries in trade negotiations and other areas. The Trump administration put an end to the Model 1 phase by calling attention to, and taking steps to defend the United States against, Beijing’s abuses of the Western world’s trust. Through the trade war and other executive action on economic exchanges, the Trump administration started to slow the flow of U.S. capital and know-how to the PRC and to reverse the related trend of American deindustrialization.

This happened before the party-state had become the world’s biggest economy or overcome the technological chokepoints [卡脖子] that it sees as standing between it and mastery of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.<sup>281</sup> Beijing has also not quite built out a global maritime system that would enable it to ensure imports of critical raw materials and other inputs and access to foreign markets.<sup>282</sup> The CCP has therefore shifted to a Model 2 approach designed to continue cooperation with Washington long enough to enable it to secure a leading technoeconomic position that would allow it to defeat the United States if necessary. Encouraging feelings of dependence on Beijing is a key plank of the CCP’s push to deter the United States (and the broader West) from making further moves to protect itself. Perhaps the most dramatic example occurred in March 2020, when Xinhua threatened to “sink” the United States “into the hell” of the pandemic by stopping shipments of drugs to its hospitals.<sup>283</sup> Only slightly subtler was the 2021 slowdown in exports of rare earth metals necessary for production of wind turbines, electric vehicles, and

280 Aaron Friedberg, *Getting China Wrong* (London: Polity, 2022).

281 Ben Murphy, “Chokepoints: China’s Self-Identified Strategic Technology Import Dependencies,” Center for Security and Emerging Technology, May 2022, <https://cset.georgetown.edu/publication/chokepoints/>.

282 Nadège Rolland, “China’s Southern Strategy,” *Foreign Affairs*, June 9, 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2022-06-09/chinas-southern-strategy>.

283 Matt Spetalnick, David Brunnstrom, and Andrea Shalal, “Trump Risks Blowback from War of Words with China over Coronavirus,” *Reuters*, March 25, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-usa-china/trump-risks-blowback-from-war-of-words-with-china-over-coronavirus-idUSKBN21C3KS>.



**“Beijing made the Western order work for it while outwardly humoring Washington’s predictions that long-term exposure to liberal values and international economic norms would lead to the PRC’s democratization.”**

U.S. defense platforms such as the F-35 aircraft.<sup>284</sup> Recognition that many critical American supply chains relied on mainland-based production may have dampened successive administrations’ appetite for confrontation.

Washington passed legislation to redress these vulnerabilities—for example, the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act of 2021 and the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022. These bipartisan bills specifically targeted imports of solar panels, batteries, and other green goods likely to incorporate the labor of enslaved people if procured from the mainland. The new laws signaled to Beijing that the dependence narrative’s days are numbered. The first scenario below considers how the CCP could use environmentalism to weaken the United States from within while drawing out U.S.–PRC cooperation until the party no longer views it as constructive. At that point, the CCP would see the entanglement it has exploited for so long as more of a liability than an asset. In the past, Model 2 has led to war. Based on the history in Parts 1 and 2, we posit that if and when the CCP believes it is positioned to win, it would respond kinetically to perceived U.S. threats, expecting to use force to settle the political question of hierarchy once and for all.

The CCP may win short of launching a war, or at least go a long way toward ensuring victory in a future conflict, by weaponizing both its access to the United States and lingering U.S. reliance on Chinese imports. The goal would be to further polarize U.S. society, reducing the country’s cohesion and resolve. In the same way that anti-imperialism in the First United Front and anti-Japanese sentiment in the Second United Front served as ideological justifications for unlikely alliances, the CCP has already started to use appeals to the world’s shared fight against climate change as a pretext for subversion.<sup>285</sup> The promise of such a strategy should not be underestimated. From the perspective of late 2022, it may seem that American public opinion toward the CCP has already turned too hostile for this kind of manipulation to work. However, the party’s history, especially before 1949, demonstrates that even after its relationship with another state has soured to the point of turning violent (a point that the U.S.–PRC relationship has yet to reach), the common enemy strategy can still bear fruit. The party knows this history well and draws wisdom and confidence from it today. Indeed, if the recent laws are not effectively executed, the green-energy transition could increase American (and broader Western) dependence on PRC inputs, from solar panels to electric-vehicle batteries, reducing U.S. freedom of action to counter threatening moves from Beijing in other domains.

## CCP Dream

As in the twentieth century, the CCP has developed cells in the United States and other Western countries that allow the party to promote its views throughout its opponent’s society and alliance network. A *Newsweek* investigation that cited authorities from the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation and the National Counterintelligence and Security Center recently estimated that there are more than five hundred such cells operating in the United States.<sup>286</sup> This fictional

284 Su Yu and Demetri Sevastopulo, “China Targets Rare Earth Export Curbs to Hobble U.S. Defence Industry,” *Financial Times*, February 16, 2021, <https://www.ft.com/content/d3ed83f4-19bc-4d16-b510-415749c032c1>.

285 Filip Jirouš, “Make the Green Serve China: Chinese Influence Operations Target International Environmentalism,” The Jamestown Foundation, September 9, 2022, <https://jamestown.org/program/make-the-green-serve-china-prc-influence-operations-target-international-environmentalism/>.

286 Didi Kirsten Tatlow, “Exclusive: 600 Groups Linked to Chinese Communist Party Influence Effort with Ambition beyond Election,” *Newsweek*, October 26, 2020, <https://www.newsweek.com/2020/11/13/exclusive-600-us-groups-linked-chinese-communist-party-influence-effort-ambition-beyond-1541624.html>.



scenario shows how Beijing could apply united-front techniques and the narrative of the world's shared fight against climate change to outcompete the United States and the broader West in the coming decades.

To get in position, the CCP directs its cell network to orchestrate a takeover of Extinction Revolt (ER), an international organization that leads a loosely networked, decentralized, grassroots environmental coalition. ER's stated aims—forcing governments to declare a climate emergency and getting climate-focused candidates elected to the highest political offices—parallel the rest of the eco movement. ER is a global institution, with local groups spread over eighty countries; reflecting the statelessness of the climate change challenge, the organization has no national loyalties. Its audience is not sensitive to signs of united-front cooption. With young adults at the forefront of climate change activism, the CCP's cell network on college campuses in America and around the world takes the lead.<sup>287</sup>

**CCP cell takeovers of ER branches at the ground level.** The party secretary of a CCP cell in a northern California university reaches out to the lead organizer of San Francisco's ER branch to ask how the school's membership can get involved in local climate action. Over the following months, the students mobilized for protest by the CCP cell become some of the most consistent participants in local ER actions. In recognition of their contributions, several cell members are offered leadership positions on ER's board.

The cell representatives are ordered by Beijing to aim for publicity management, global action coordinator, and membership education roles. Through these offices, the CCP will be able to transform ER into an effective propaganda organ and then push the party line through ER's media outlets. Such takeovers are attempted wherever a CCP cell jurisdiction abuts the turf of an ER branch. In CCP cell jurisdictions that lack an ER organization, the CCP node establishes one.

**Broadcasting the CCP's line through ER outlets.** Long before the CCP begins to push the idea of a twenty-first century anti-climate change United Front through these channels, the party launches an ER recruitment drive by building up the specter of the climate threat. Six months before an American midterm election, party ER publicists flood TikTok with apocalyptic imagery of cities drowning, forests burning, desertification, and climate migration. At the same time, the party mobilizes its foot-soldier cells in ER to stage protests in their jurisdictions. Footage of these demonstrations is also broadcast on social media. This content blast is paired with an ER advertisement campaign urging TikTok users to get involved with or donate to their local ER chapter.

This content is not spread blindly. Like all content on TikTok, these videos are delivered straight to the screens of the users the algorithm determines will be most receptive to them. In this case, users with a history of interacting with videos related to climate activism, nature, social justice, leftism, anarchism, populism, veganism, or worker unions are targeted. Hit especially hard are the influencers within this sphere—content creators whose opinions and behaviors influence the beliefs of their large followings. When the targeted creators post videos reacting to the crisis, or better yet, call on their many followers to take action, party moderators boost the content's spread.

The goal of these actions is to trigger and sustain a social media climate that precipitates dramatic displays of climate action and climate consciousness on social media from image-conscious Gen Z users. In such an environment, appearances of nonparticipation or even insufficient participation in local activism, as judged through individuals' social media activity, become punishable offenses in the eyes of other young users. The Cultural Revolution is the model.

287 In 2017, the party-aligned *Global Times* newspaper reported cell penetration in universities across 56 countries and regions. Bethany Allen-Ibrahim, "The Chinese Communist Party Is Setting up Cells at Universities across America," *Foreign Policy*, April 18, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/04/18/the-chinese-communist-party-is-setting-up-cells-at-universities-across-america-china-students-beijing-surveillance/>.

The next step is channeling the energy of this mass mobilization into a shift in the rhetoric of Washington's political elites. Less than a year into the CCP's reorganization of ER, not only has the size of its active membership exploded but it has also become wealthy. A steady flow of public donations combined with significant CCP support turns out to be a profitable business model. With this money and sway over a large and growing number of voting-age American citizens, ER enters the ranks of the special interest groups that are on the radars of left-wing and centrist political candidates. ER funnels support into the campaigns of climate-focused candidates. Moreover, ER members show up en masse to these candidates' rallies, carrying signs bearing symbols associated with the movement. These office seekers are also granted significant screen time on ER's TikTok pages, content that is, of course, boosted to virality by moderators in Beijing.

**“Based on the PRC’s blatant disregard for the environmental impact of its development over the past forty years, climate activists should be targeting Beijing.”**

To attract the support of this voting bloc to their own campaigns, an increasing number of Democratic candidates skew their talking points and promises in a thinly climate-focused direction. Once a candidate associates publicly with the movement's slogans, these candidates receive the same special treatment from ER (sizable donations, packed rallies, free marketing). In no small part due to the momentum drummed up by ER, Democrats, dominated by the climate clique, take the House and the Senate. These legislators continue to be responsive to ER's evolving slogans throughout their terms.

At this point, once the movement has firmly taken hold in the United States, Beijing begins to ratchet up its own climate-focused rhetoric. Seemingly in response to the mounting excitement surrounding climate action, at the next National People's Congress (NPC) session, Xi downplays Wolf Warrior diplomacy and pledges to reallocate a portion of the PLA's budget to the construction of fifty climate-tech innovation parks in cities across the mainland. The general secretary vows to use the technology developed in these parks to meet the most ambitious emissions reduction targets set by any nation to date. Xi also announces the date for an international climate forum among all UN member states in Beijing. In this invitation, Xi calls on the world's leaders to set their differences aside and come together to fight for the only cause that matters: saving the earth for future generations. Any country that refuses to participate is short sighted, effectively condemning posterity to death.

In the wake of the NPC session, ER media platforms blast Xi's most moving sound bites and call on the White House to make a statement in support of Beijing's brave climate pivot. Climate-faction members of Congress release similar statements on their official social media pages.

A wave of international protests is triggered when, three days after the NPC session, the U.S. president refuses Beijing's invitation to the China Climate Accord. The president's attempts to convince the American public that Beijing's pivot should not be trusted are drowned out in the news cycle by reports of massive ER demonstrations that paralyze major cities across the United States and the greater Western world. Banners carried by the protesters call the U.S. government rightist, isolationist, war mongering, racist, and imperialist for rejecting Beijing's offer to turn over a new leaf in the U.S.–PRC relationship to save the planet.

From then on, being hawkish on the CCP threat is equated with climate change denial in young minds. The connection between these issues is crystallized, as climate-focused legislators express willingness to cooperate with any nation that wants to work with the United States toward a greener future, regardless of regime type. For an understanding of how this popular resistance to escalation of conflict with the PRC could negatively affect American defense and national security readiness, consider the impact of Vietnam War-era protests on the U.S. military.



The result is that the CCP buys time to continue to accumulate Western capital and appropriate cutting-edge Western technology while finishing its buildout of infrastructure to ensure global sea-lane access. Eventually, the party judges that it has mastered the technological chokepoints and blockade risks that had deterred it from confronting its powerful rival. Now the CCP is in the driver's seat, prepared to withstand a blockade or even threaten to cut off the United States from critical inputs that Beijing has come to control. At this point, Washington can either cease to oppose the extension of CCP influence and power across the globe, or it can learn the hard way that it is no longer in a position to stand up for international law, free markets, and the like. In this world, the party-state's might will make right and the West's freedom and global prosperity will be significantly reduced.

## CCP Nightmare

Preventing, or effectively responding to, united front-style threats from the PRC such as those in that scenario would likely require the U.S. security establishment to enhance its political-warfare defense capability. The first step is recognizing that political offensives can be as damaging to national security as armed offensives. This is particularly true in the U.S.–PRC competition. The historical episodes illuminated in this study demonstrate that the CCP initially fights on the plane of perceptions, through which the party prepares the ground to take up arms when it believes victory is assured. This pattern has significant implications for how the United States should consider deterring the CCP. This scenario conveys how a more developed information security system might respond to a Chinese attempt to construct a pro-CCP, climate change-focused political force in the United States.

A national security system that thinks in political-warfare terms would recognize that an essential aspect of defense readiness is convincing a majority of the American population that fighting is necessary. In the competition with the PRC, this means communicating to the American public in plain English why the PRC's rise should be conceived as the nation's greatest security threat. The American public is not monolithic; it contains many different interest groups with as many different policy priorities. To mobilize support for defense from as many of these demographics as possible, the U.S. government needs to frame the PRC threat in different ways for different audiences.

Audiences with outsized social influence are the most important to win over. In today's America, the climate-conscious may fall into this category. According to a May 2021 Pew Research poll, 24% of Americans made efforts to support climate action in the past year. Among the younger, more politically impressionable population, participation in climate action is even more widespread. A third of Gen Z adults participated in climate-related activities in the last year.<sup>288</sup> Winning or losing the climate-conscious population would make a difference in the level of U.S. public support for mobilizing against the CCP threat.

Based on the PRC's blatant disregard for the environmental impact of its development over the past forty years, climate activists should be targeting Beijing. But a national security system that thinks in political-warfare terms would realize that facts only influence public perceptions when they are actively, effectively, and repetitively communicated to the public. When the facts are not converted into common knowledge, more effectively communicated lies can fill the void. As Chiang found in the mid-1940s, such lies are difficult to debunk once accepted, especially when they are nurtured by experts such as those in the CCP.

In this scenario, the U.S. government is proactive rather than reactive in drawing the American public (and the world's) attention to the PRC's environmental crimes. Based on the PRC State Council's carbon emission targets for 2025, 2030, and 2060 announced in 2021, the director of national intelligence tasks American assets and contracted commercial satellite providers to collect data on emissions from the mainland and its overseas investment

288 "Gen Z, Millennials Stand out for Climate Change Activism, Social Media Engagement with Issue," Pew Research Center, May 26, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/science/2021/05/26/climate-engagement-and-activism/>.



locations. These satellites record every time the PRC erects a new coal-burning plant at home or abroad or recommissions a formerly shuttered coal plant. The U.S. government publishes these numbers annually and in real time when major increases in emissions are detected. Washington also funds in-depth studies of the environmental and public-health impact of the PRC's global overfishing, ecosystem destruction in the South China Sea, groundwater pollution, plastic pollution, other forms of air pollution, and biodiversity loss.

This narrative counteroffensive is paired with steps to stop the flow of intellectual property and capital into the PRC while securing U.S. and third-party critical supply chains from CCP interference. For instance, instead of letting the PRC build out the power plants and electricity systems of developing countries in Southeast Asia, the United States and its allies construct relatively clean, higher quality coal or natural gas facilities. At the same time, the U.S. military reinforces its ability to put pressure on Beijing by targeting its sea lines of communication. All this work is done in conjunction with U.S. allies, partners, and friends, whose governments and publics are on a similar wavelength because they have been privy to this information campaign.



# Conclusion

The CCP has employed the united-front approaches it honed during its early years in its encounters with the United States from the 1930s and '40s to the present. These approaches are so foreign to American ways of operating that they have hardly been understood, a gap this report has sought to fill. The CCP's current goals and behavior come into focus through study of the modern history of Sino-American relations from the party's perspective: what the Communists were trying to do, when, and with what means. Applying lessons from past U.S.–CCP interactions should help the United States shape future interactions favorably while avoiding negative surprises.

The United States risks letting united-front techniques compromise its understanding of the character of the CCP threat. By failing to protect Americans against this distortion and not mobilizing defenses, Washington abets the CCP Dream. If the U.S. government instead rouses itself to help expose and confront the truth about the CCP, its techniques, and its ambition, the country will be able to counter Beijing's unfolding twenty-first century united-front offensive. This would entail educating the U.S. (and the broader Western) population, ceasing to enable the PRC's economic rise and technomilitary build up, and securing critical infrastructure and supply chains against CCP interference.

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## **The Andrew W. Marshall Foundation**

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