As you read this chapter you need to focus on the following essay questions:

- Analyze the causes of the Chinese Civil War.
- To what extent was the communist victory in China due to the use of guerrilla warfare?
- In what ways was the Chinese Civil War a revolutionary war?

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

### Timeline of events – 1911–27

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>Double Tenth Revolution and establishment of the Chinese Republic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1912</td>
<td>Dr Sun Yixian becomes Provisional President of the Republic. Guomindang (GMD) formed and wins majority in parliament. Sun resigns and Yuan Shikai declared provisional president</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>Japan’s Twenty-One Demands. Yuan attempts to become Emperor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1916</td>
<td>Yuan dies/warlord era begins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>Sun attempts to set up republic in Guangzhou. Russian Revolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>Paris Peace settlement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>May Fourth Movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>Chinese Communist Party (CCP) formed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>First United Front established between GMD and CCP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>Sun dies. National government set up under leadership of GMD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>July: Jiang has control of Beijing, declares China now united. GMD now turns against the communists.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Long-term causes of the Chinese Civil War

#### Socio-economic factors

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

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

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

STUDENT STUDY SECTION

Research question
Before the arrival of Europeans, China had been a great power in Asia for thousands of years. Research:
- Inventions associated with the Chinese
- The political relationship that China had with its neighbouring countries
- The impact of Confucianism on Chinese society
- The Qing dynasty.
In 1850, the Taiping Rebellion spread throughout southern China. The rebellion, which lasted until 1864, was part religious movement, and part political reform movement. It was only put down after the death of millions of Chinese by regional armies. This involvement of regional armies began the move away from centralized control, which would result in the Warlord Era in the 1920s.

There had been attempts to resist Western control by sections of the educated elite in China. However, the Self-Strengthening Movement was divided as to how to modernize China, and the Manchus did not coherently support reform. China remained subjugated to the West, and faced the humiliation of defeat in war to Japan in 1895. China lost more territory to Japan when it was part of the settlement in the Russo-Japanese War (1904–05). The extent of popular anti-Western feeling turned into widespread violent rebellion against Westerners in the Boxer Rebellion in 1899. However, without modern weaponry, the anti-foreign revolt was doomed to fail.

The overthrow of the Manchu dynasty

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

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

In November 1911, in an attempt to seize the political initiative, delegates from the ‘independent’ provinces gathered in Nanjing to declare the creation of a Chinese Republic. A political exile, who had been in the USA during the revolution, was invited to be China’s first President – Dr Sun Yixian.
The imperial government attempted to use the former influential general of the Northern Army, Yuan Shikai, to suppress the rebellion, but he double-crossed them, arranging a deal with Sun Yixian. Sun agreed for Yuan Shikai to be President of the new republic in February 1912, in exchange for the end of Manchu rule in China. On 12 February 1912, Pu Yi abdicated.

The revolution, however, was incomplete. There was no real introduction of democracy, and most former imperial officials kept their positions. The impetus for the revolution was wholly Chinese, but had not been led by the middle classes. It had been the military who ignited the rising and Chinese radicals had joined in later. Michael Lynch argues that the revolution was fundamentally a revolt by the provincials against the centre; ‘The Double Tenth was a triumph of regionalism. It represented a particular phase in the long-running contest between central autocracy and local autonomy, a contest that was to shape much of China’s history during the following forty years’ (China: From Empire to People’s Republic 1900–49, 1999).

**STUDENT STUDY SECTION**

**Review question**

How had the following weakened China in the century leading up to the civil war?

- European imperialism
- Failure of modernization
- Regionalism.

---

**The rule of Yuan Shikai**

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

**The GMD and the Three Principles**

The GMD had been set up by Sun Yixian in 1912. He wanted to create a unified modern and democratic China. He had returned to China after the Double Tenth Revolution in 1911, and established a government in southern China, in Canton. Sun was not a communist, although he was willing to cooperate with them, and the organization of the GMD was along communist lines. Sun also saw the need to develop a GMD army.

Sun stated that he and his party had three guiding principles:

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

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

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

**Short-term causes of the Chinese Civil War**

**Political weakness: regionalism – the warlords 1916–28**

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

With the abdication and death of Yuan, China lost the only figure that had maintained some degree of unity. China broke up into small states and provinces, each controlled by a warlord and his private army. These warlords ran their territories independently, organizing and taxing the people in their domains. They had their own laws and even their own currencies. As warlords extended their power and wealth by expanding their territories, it was the peasants who suffered in their continuous wars. None of the warlords was willing to relinquish his armies or power to the central government.

The warlord period increased the sense of humiliation felt by many Chinese and, coupled with their desire to get rid of foreign influence, led to an increase in nationalism during the decade of warlord rule.
China had all but ceased to exist – it was in a state of internal anarchy. If the warlords remained, China would remain divided.

**The May Fourth Movement**

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

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

Other Chinese were inspired by the GMD nationalist party, which had grown much stronger during the warlord period. These two groups – communists and nationalists – were to come together in an alliance in 1922.

**Communists and nationalists**

By the time Sun died in 1925, the GMD had made little progress towards fulfilling their ‘Three Principles’. They had been limited by their lack of power beyond the south, and the fact they had to rely on alliances with warlords due to the weakness of their military power.

After the death of Sun, a general took over leadership of the GMD, General Jiang Jieshi. Jiang was a committed nationalist, and had enthusiastically joined the GMD. He had had military training before World War I in Japan, and then in the USSR. Indeed, the Soviets had begun to invest in the GMD, providing aid and assistance to the party. The Soviets believed they could foster good relations with a nationalist China. As well as the GMD, another revolutionary party emerged during the warlord period, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). This communist party was officially set up in 1921. Initially, its membership was mainly intellectuals, and it had no real military strength. It was due to this weakness, and some shared aims, that the CCP agreed to work with the GMD. It was also consistently encouraged to cooperate with the nationalists by the USSR.

**Attempt to unify China: the First United Front**

Both the GMD and the CCP wanted a unified China. They agreed that the first step to this was to get rid of the warlords, and in 1922 they formed the First United Front. Both parties also agreed that China needed to be free of the foreign imperialist powers. The Third Principle of Sun Yixian’s, ‘the People’s Livelihood’, was often called ‘socialism’, which convinced the Comintern that this was a party they could back. In addition, Jiang had studied in Moscow in 1923, and then ran the Whampoa Military Academy, which was set up and funded by the USSR to train GMD officers. Despite his Soviet links, however, Jiang was not a communist. Indeed, he became increasingly anti-communist, and began his leadership of the GMD by removing communists from key positions in the party. He stopped short of breaking off the alliance with the communists, as he knew that he must first take out his primary obstacle to a unified China – the warlords.
Jiang now determined to act on the first of the Three Principles and attempt to unify China by putting an end to the warlords’ power. Together with the communists, the GMD set out on the ‘Northern Expedition’ in 1926 to crush the warlords of central and northern China. This operation was a great success; by 1927, the GMD and the communists had captured Hangzhou, Shanghai and Nanjing. They took Beijing in 1928. Within two years, the United Front of the GMD and the CCP had destroyed the power of the warlords, and the GMD announced that it was the legitimate government of China and the new capital and seat of government would be Nanjing.

Immediate cause of the Chinese Civil War: the GMD attacks the CCP

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

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

Jiang now expelled all communists from the GMD, and his attacks on the communists reached a peak in Shanghai in the ‘White Terror’ in April 1927. A powerful ‘workers’ army’ under Zhou Enlai had proved very effective during the Northern Expedition and Jiang turned on them, using informants from the underworld of triads and gangsters – 5,000 communists were shot. The GMD carried out similar attacks in other cities, in what became known as the ‘purification movement’ – ‘purification’ meant the massacre of thousands of communists, trade unionists and peasant leaders. About a quarter of a million people were killed. Despite attempts to resist (Mao’s Autumn Harvest Rising failed), the CCP was very nearly crushed by the end of 1927.

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

### STUDENT STUDY SECTION

**Review questions**

1. Why did support for communism grow in China?
2. Why did Jiang turn against the communists?

**Review activity**

In groups, create a diagram (mind map or flow diagram) on a large sheet of paper to show the causes of the first period of the civil war in China. Decide what themes you want to develop, how you are going to show long-term and short-term causes, and how you are going to show any links between the causes. Each group should then present and explain its diagram to the rest of the class.

### The course of the war

#### Timeline of events – 1930–50

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1930–31</td>
<td>Jiang’s First Encirclement campaign attacks Jiangxi Soviet, defeated by CCP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>Japanese attack Manchuria. Twenty-Eight Bolsheviks take over Central Committee of CCP. Jiang launches Second and Third Encirclement Campaigns against Jiangxi Soviet; both are defeated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>Japanese attack Shanghai. Jiangxi Soviet declares war on Japan. Fourth Encirclement Campaign begins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>Truce with Japan. Fifth Encirclement Campaign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>Long March begins</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

/continued
CIVIL WAR CASE STUDY 2: THE CHINESE CIVIL WAR (1927–37 and 1946–49)

1935  Survivors of Long March reach Shaanxi Soviet base
1936  Jiang Jieshi taken hostage by warlord Zhang Xueliang in Xi’an. Second United Front established
1937  Apr  Second United Front is formed
      Jul  Japanese invade China
      Nov  Jiang Jieshi moves government to Chongqing
      Dec  Rape of Nanjing
1940  Aug  Hundred Regiments assault on Japanese by Red Army
1941  Jan  Anhui incident ends Second United Front
1944  Oct  US commander General Joseph Stilwell leaves China at Jiang Jieshi’s request
1945  Aug–Oct US Ambassador Hurley leads talks between GMD and CCP
      Oct  Agreement announced, but both sides send forces to Manchuria
      Sep  Japan formally surrenders in China theatre
      Dec  US General George C. Marshall arrives to lead negotiations
1946  Jan  Truce between CCP and GMD
      Mar  USSR begins to withdraw from Manchuria. Fighting breaks out in Manchuria between GMD and CCP
1947  Jan  Marshall leaves China
      Mar  Jiang Jieshi takes Yan’an
      Oct  Mao announces land reforms
1948  Apr  US Congress passes China Aid Act – aid sent to GMD again
      Nov  Battle of Huai-Hai begins
1949  Jan  GMD lose battle of Huai-Hai
      Apr  CCP capture Nanjing
      May  CCP take Shanghai
      Oct  Mao announces the establishment of the People’s Republic of China
      Dec  Jiang flees to Taiwan

STUDENT STUDY SECTION

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

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

The Jiangxi Soviet

The CCP were forced to retreat into Jiangxi province in order to survive the GMD onslaught. This territory became known as the ‘Jiangxi Soviet’. Mao’s writings suggest that the White Terror had only confirmed what he had already thought about the United Front, i.e. that this cooperation with the GMD would destroy the CCP. He also believed that the GMD and the Comintern had the wrong strategy for China, basing their revolution on urban areas. Mao’s revolution would be based on the peasants. Essentially, this was a more realistic strategy, as the vast majority of Chinese were not urban workers but rural peasants. From a population in China of around 500 million, only 12 per cent were in urban areas, whereas 88 per cent lived in rural regions. From a total workforce of approximately 259 million, 205 million were agricultural workers and a mere 54 million were non-agricultural or industrial workers.

Mao arrived at Jiangxi and organized the Jiangxi Soviet around his idea of the central revolutionary role of the peasant – ‘The peasants are the sea; we are the fish. The sea is our habitat’, he stated. His ideological shift away from orthodox Marxism, which placed the proletariat at the centre of the revolution, put him at odds with more orthodox members of the CCP. But his success in recruiting and organizing the peasants in the Jiangxi Soviet began to win him the argument.

STUDENT STUDY SECTION

Review activity

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

Division within the CCP

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

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

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

**GMD attempts to exterminate CCP**

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

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

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

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

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

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**Mao and the Twenty-Eight Bolsheviks**

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

**STUDENT STUDY SECTION**

**Document analysis**

**Document A**

Kuomintang [GMD] armies all fought by the usual Japanese military tactics, always advancing in one column with front and flank guards… But we split up into small, swift combat units which got in their rear and on their flanks and attacked, cutting them into segments. There’s nothing secret about such tactics … and the militarists later tried to use them against us. They failed because such guerilla warfare requires not only a thorough knowledge of the terrain of the battle area but also the support of the common people.


**Document B**

The eight rules of the Red Army:

- Return and roll up the straw matting on which you sleep.
- Be courteous and polite to the people and help them when you can.

/ cont
Return all borrowed articles.
Replace all damaged articles.
Be honest in all transactions with the peasants.
Pay for all articles purchased.
Replace all doors when you leave a house.
Be sanitary, and, especially, establish latrines a safe distance from people's houses.
The Eight Rules of the Red Army (1928), quoted by the American journalist Edgar Snow

Document C
The GMD troops burned down all the houses in the surrounding area, seized all the food there and blockaded us... We were sick and half-starved. The peasants were no better off, and we would not touch what little they had. But the peasants encouraged us. They dug up from the ground the grain they had hidden from the GMD troops and gave it to us... they wanted us to win. Tactics are important, but we could not exist if the majority of our people did not support us. We are nothing but the fist of the people beating their oppressors.
Statement by CCP general Peng Dehuai, in 1936

Questions
1 According to Document A, how was guerrilla warfare waged?
2 According to Documents B and C, why would the CCP have the support of the peasants?
3 Why was peasant support so crucial to the CCP?
4 Using these sources and your own knowledge, explain why Mao's guerrilla tactics were successful in this first phase of the Chinese Civil War.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1930–31</th>
<th>MILITARY STRATEGY 1930–34</th>
<th>1932–33</th>
<th>1934</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mao in charge</td>
<td>Zhu De in charge of Red Army</td>
<td>Twenty-Eight Bolsheviks in charge of Red Army</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guerrilla warfare</td>
<td>Guerrilla warfare</td>
<td>'Stand and fight'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GMD Encirclement Campaigns 1–3</td>
<td>GMD Encirclement Campaign 4</td>
<td>GMD Encirclement Campaign 5 (began 1933)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GMD campaigns 1–3 fail</td>
<td>GMD campaign 4 fails</td>
<td>GMD campaign 5 succeeds – German military advice. Red Army breaks out / Long March</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The CCP faced annihilation. Mao decided that the only chance the CCP had was to break through the GMD’s lines and set up another base. They succeeded in doing this on 19 October and then embarked on what became known as the 'Long March'. The Long March took the CCP on a seemingly impossible 9,600km trek to Shaanxi across some of the most inhospitable territory in China. It took 368 days and it led to the death of more than 90 per cent of the 90,000 communists that broke through their encirclement at Jiangxi.
ToK Time
Read the two sources here, and answer the ToK question in pairs. Write up your discussion in your ToK journal.

Well, we ourselves at the beginning did not know that we were actually on the Long March… All we knew was that we were getting out of the bases; we were surrounded and being choked; a million men against us, tanks, aeroplanes… we broke through one cordon of encirclement, then a second, then a third… We thought if we could get to Szechuan [Sichuan] all would be well; for Szechuan was not letting Jiang Kai-Shek in; the warlord of Szechuan did not want Jiang there.


Hardships and Hope
We are short of grain,
For three months we have tasted no meat;
In summer we feed on berries, in winter bamboo;
Hunting wild boars we pant over the mountains,
And after dark catch snakes.
The enemy searches the whole mountainside,
Trees and grass scorched and burnt;
Never before was savagery like this,
But our people resist with ever greater vigour;
We shall give battle again.
We put our trust in the people…
And never forget their support;
They are second parents to us,
We are good sons in the fight,
The best soldiers for the revolution.
From Chen Yi, ‘Guerrillas in South Kiangsi’

Question
Can a contemporary poem or song give us a better understanding of an historical event than a contemporary diary or journalist’s report?
What are the Knowledge Issues involved in using imaginative literature as historical documents?

Map showing the route of the Long March.

STUDENT STUDY SECTION

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

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

Zunyi Conference
In January 1935 the CCP, this time using ‘guerrilla tactics’, managed to capture the town of Zunyi. The Twenty-Eight Bolsheviks had been discredited due to their disasters at Jiangxi and the Xiang River. At a party conference held here to determine future CCP policy, Mao emerged as leader.

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

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

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

Songpan Marshes

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

Shaanxi

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

Mao and revolutionary warfare

Mao’s war against the GMD can be classed as a revolutionary war, as he was not only trying to defeat the GMD but also to impose a revolutionary ideology on the Chinese people. The choice the Chinese people had was between Maoism, with its total restructuring of society, economy and government, and the nationalists’ policy, which basically involved maintaining the status quo. Mao believed that the peasants were central to revolutionary war, and so his priority had to be to persuade them to support the communist cause.

Mao’s revolutionary warfare consisted of several stages:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mao called for another ‘United Front’ to fight the Japanese, and this was supported by all who had suffered under Japanese occupation – including the northern warlords Zhang Xueliang and Yan Xishan. Yet in the end it was the Comintern and not Mao that pushed the alliance between the CCP and the GMD. Stalin was worried about Japanese expansion in and from Manchuria. By 1936 he saw Jiang Jieshi as the only leader in China who could effectively fight them. The Second United Front was sealed when Jiang Jieshi was kidnapped in Xi’an by the warlord Zhang (he had been there planning his next assault on the CCP). It shocked both the Chinese and the Soviets – and although some wanted to shoot Jiang, he was released on Comintern orders after 13 days.
In April 1937 the Second United Front was formed. The civil war was suspended, and there was instead a ‘National War of Resistance’. The GMD would benefit from support from the USSR, and potentially aid from the USA. The CCP benefited from the legitimacy the alliance gave them – they could no linger by, dismissed as ‘bandits’. The communists also hoped that the war against Japan would exhaust the GMD.

The Japanese responded to this new situation with a show of force – attacking the Marco Polo bridge outside Beijing in July 1937. This was the beginning of the war proper between Japan and China. In the battle for Shanghai, Jiang Jieshi’s forces were forced to retreat after losing around 300,000 troops. The capital, Nanjing, was relocated 1,200km to the west to Chongqing for the remainder of the war. Nanjing was left to face the onslaught of the Japanese. The atrocities that were then perpetrated there became known as the ‘Rape of Nanjing’ (see p.135).

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

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

CCP successes

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

GMD errors

In contrast to the CCP, the GMD forces made several errors. Their decision to deal with the CCP before the Japanese lost them patriotic support. In addition, the poor treatment of peasants by the GMD forces further degraded their popularity. They had also failed to implement Sun’s Three Principles (see p.255).

The Sino-Japanese War

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

The impact of the war on the GMD

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

As large areas of the GMD’s support base were under Japanese occupation, Jiang Jieshi lost much-needed tax revenue. He faced the problem by printing more money, which led to high levels of inflation,
and in turn impacted badly on the middle classes, who were the natural supporters of the GMD. The peasantry were also hardest hit by taxes. Other problems facing the GMD were:

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

**STUDENT STUDY SECTION**

**Document analysis**

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

From June Grasso, Jay Corrin and Michael Kort, _Modernization and Revolution In China: From the Opium Wars to the Olympics_, 2009

**Questions**

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

The impact of the war on the CCP

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

The CCP also gained support through its egalitarian policies. Everyone had the same living conditions and the intellectuals had to work with the peasants. Women were treated as equals with men for the first time in Chinese history. Women had been seen as property
in traditional Chinese society, having no rights to divorce or inheritance, no education, no political rights and often being bought and sold to be wives, labourers or prostitutes. The communists offered them freedom to marry whom they chose and gave them the rights to divorce, education, voting at 18, military service and to form women’s associations.

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

To establish unity within the party and to spread Maoist ideology further, a series of Rectification Campaigns were launched between 1941 and 1944. The ‘correct ideas’ were Mao’s, and any deviation would not be tolerated. The primary ideas were: the ‘mass line’, which meant policies were to be taken to the people and ideas taken from the people, Mao’s peasant-based communism and the military strategy of guerrilla warfare. The Rectification Campaigns were successful in ridding the communists of their factions, including pro-Russian groups.

Historians do not agree on the military contribution of the CCP in the war against the Japanese. Some suggest that it was rather more limited than Mao claimed. There is little doubt, however, that there was a general perception within China and internationally that the CCP gave good leadership during the war. This perception led many Chinese to see the communists as the true nationalists, and support the CCP rather than the GMD. Indeed, the CCP’s Hundred Regiments Offensive in 1940 was the largest single campaign of the Sino-Japanese War and provoked a brutal retaliation from the Japanese, expressed in the ‘kill all, burn all, loot all’ policy.

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

**STUDENT STUDY SECTION**

**Review questions**

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

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

**Review activity**

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

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

By the end of the war with Japan, the CCP was significantly strengthened, and the GMD weakened, so much so that the communists could move from the guerrilla warfare phase
of combat to a phase of more conventional fighting. The first period of civil war (1927–37) was an essentially Chinese war. The second would be more of an international affair. The polarization of the international political context through the development of the Cold War meant that China’s civil war could not be an internal struggle alone. The war between nationalists and communists in China had become part of a larger Soviet–American effort to create a new post-war balance of power.

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

Failure of the USA

The Americans worked hard to achieve a diplomatic solution between the CCP and the GMD. Yet neither side was willing to share power. General Marshall was given the responsibility of brokering a deal, and managed to get the GMD and the CCP to agree on the following terms: prepare to set up a coalition government, form a temporary state council, unite their armies in a new National Army and have free elections for local government. But as negotiations were being finalized in February 1946, both sides were moving troops into Manchuria. There would not be a diplomatic solution in China; its fate would be decided on the battlefield.
Despite the growth in strength of the CCP during the Sino-Japanese war, it is important to point out that in 1945, the GMD still had four million troops compared to the CCP’s one million. The GMD also had more heavy weaponry. The events of the next three years are thus important for explaining the success of the CCP.

**Initial victories for GMD (1945–47)**

At first the GMD, with more troops and better equipment, forced the communists onto the defensive. Following the Japanese surrender in August 1945, the Red Army under General Lin Biao entered Manchuria to secure this important industrial region under communist control. At the Yalta Conference in February 1945, the Allies had agreed that the USSR would invade Manchuria following Germany’s surrender. The Soviets had duly invaded, and were in control when the CCP forces arrived, whereupon the Soviets gave the CCP large stockpiles of Japanese weapons. The USSR was clearly not neutral. General Albert Wedemeyer, the Allied commander of the South-East Asia Theatre, authorized Jiang to resist the communists by using US ships and aircraft to transport 500,000 troops to Manchuria, and 50,000 American troops were sent north to occupy Beijing. The USA could no longer claim to be neutral either.

Although the CCP forces were better armed than before, the GMD greatly outnumbered them. The CCP also had to fight conventionally in Manchuria, defending and holding its positions and territory. The GMD was able to force the CCP out of the cities, and in December 1945 Mao reverted to his policy of creating bases outside the cities.

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

**CCP on the offensive (1947–48)**

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

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

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

**Collapse of GMD resistance**

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

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

**What were the reasons for the communist success?**

**Strengths of the CCP**

- **Guerrilla tactics and revolutionary warfare** – The CCP used guerrilla tactics successfully in the first phase of the civil war, in the fight against the Japanese and in Manchuria in the second phase of the civil war.

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<td><strong>Review activity</strong></td>
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<td>Give specific examples from this chapter of how guerrilla tactics were used by the communists in their struggle.</td>
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- **The leadership of the PLA** – The PLA was led by Lin Biao, who was an excellent military commander and who was able to transform the PLA from a guerrilla fighting force into a regular army. The PLA was greatly strengthened in the final stages of the war by desertions from the nationalist forces and through capturing enemy weapons. Through better conditions and political indoctrination, the PLA was a much more effective fighting force, with far higher morale than the nationalist troops. In addition, the good behaviour of the communist soldiers attracted much support from the peasantry.

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

- **The spread of communist ideas** – As we have seen, the communists used the period during the war with Japan to spread communist ideas throughout the areas they captured. The policy continued in the second phase of the civil war. Land reform continued in all rural areas captured by the communists.

As the communists moved into the towns, they similarly spread communist ideas. The army would take over the control of the towns, working to prevent crime, control food
distribution and establish fairer taxation systems. These activities broadened the base of support for the CCP.

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

**Jiang Jieshi’s errors**

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

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

- **Military** – US observers continually commented on the poor quality of many of Jiang’s troops, and their low morale contributed to the high number of desertions at the end of the civil war. The behaviour of the army towards ordinary Chinese was also in sharp contrast to that of the communist army, with its strict rules of behaviour.

In terms of military leadership, Jiang also made serious mistakes – for instance choosing to pour resources into Manchuria, far from his real bases of support. His decision to fight it out at Xuzhou was also a disaster. He also tried to interfere too much in the actual running of the campaigns, even though he was far removed from the actual action.

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

**The USA**

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

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

The Soviets had been rather reluctant to support the CCP, and did not in the end give them the military and economic assistance that the GMD received from the USA. The involvement of the Comintern in the early stages of the CCP’s struggle with the GMD had led to division and near annihilation in Jiang’s final Encirclement Campaign. Mao waged the Rectification Campaigns to oust Soviet supporters from the CCP. The USSR had backed both United Fronts, and Stalin did not see that the CCP could win the civil war until the later stages in 1948.

Some historians view the Soviet assistance in Manchuria, which also included establishing military training colleges and the training of CCP pilots, as essential to establishing the PLA as a more modern and effective force. Nevertheless, Stalin was worried that the USA would involve itself further in the Chinese Civil War, and attempted to limit Mao’s successes in the later stages of the conflict. In 1949, Stalin told Mao to consolidate his gains in the north and not cross the Yangtze into southern China. Mao ignored his advice.

**STUDENT STUDY SECTION**

**Document analysis**

Historians, of course, often disagree on the key reasons for the CCP’s victory over the GMD. Read the documents below and identify in each case what reason the historian is emphasizing as the most important for CCP victory.

**Document A**

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

From Immanuel Hsu, *The Rise of Modern China*, 1995
Document B

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

From Jack Gray, Rebellions and Revolutions: China from the 1880s to the 1980s, 1990

Document C

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

From Michael Lynch, China: From Empire to People's Republic 1900–49, 1999

Document D

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

From James Sheridan, China in Disintegration, 1977

Review questions

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

Results of the Chinese Civil War

For China

After the civil war, the CCP consolidated its control in China, and pursued the key ideas that they had initiated in Yan’an. The experiences of the long war were a guidebook for the new Chinese communist regime. Society had been militarized and Mao had a god-like status. Society would be changed by short and ‘total’ campaigns, and all obstacles would be overcome by the power of the people. One of the key legacies of the Chinese Civil War is the continued authoritarian rule by the CCP. China remains a single-party state in which individual rights and freedoms are suppressed. In 1989, when young protesters on the streets of Tiananmen Square, Beijing, were forcibly dispersed with guns and tanks, the battles of the civil war were used to justify the actions of the state.

For Asia

Mao’s victory led to the globalization of the Cold War, which spread from its seedbed in Europe to Asia. Asia was now a region in which the superpowers would struggle for
control and influence. The communist victory inspired insurgencies in Indonesia, Malaya, Indochina and Thailand. It also led to the first ‘hot war’ of the Cold War – the Korean War (1950–53).

For the USSR

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

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

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

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

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

China’s relations with the USA and the West

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

The USA initially perceived the CCP victory as opening a new ‘front’ in the Cold War; there was the iron curtain in Europe and now the bamboo curtain in Asia. Mao’s victory was a key reason for the passing of a vast new military budget to fund the struggle against the spread of communism. It also led the USA into the Korean War and conflict over Taiwan. However, by the end of the 1960s there was a radical change by both the Americans and the communist Chinese in their policies and strategies towards one another. During the late 1960s, China and the USA entered into a period of dialogue, known as ‘ping pong diplomacy’.

### STUDENT STUDY SECTION

**Review activity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>GMD: Policies / Actions</th>
<th>CCP: Policies / Actions</th>
<th>Foreign intervention: Policies / Actions</th>
<th>Historians’ comments</th>
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**Questions**

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

1. Why did the CCP win the Chinese Civil War?
   You can divide this essay into the following headings:
   - Strengths/successes of the CCP, 1928–49
   - Weakness/failures of the GMD, 1928–49
   - The impact of the Sino-Japanese War
   - The impact of foreign intervention.

2. How significant was the role of foreign intervention in the Chinese Civil War?
   You can divide this essay into the following headings:
   - The impact of foreign intervention (consider long-term European intervention, as well as Japanese and superpower involvement)
   - Strengths/successes of the CCP, 1928–49
   - Weakness/failures of the GMD, 1928–49.

3. Also try answering this question:
   In what ways can the Chinese Civil War be seen as a ‘revolutionary war’?
   Refer back to p.266 to help you with this question.

**IBLP link – Reflective**

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