

THE CHINESE CIVIL WAR, 1946 - 9

PART 1: COMMUNISTS AND NATIONALISTS

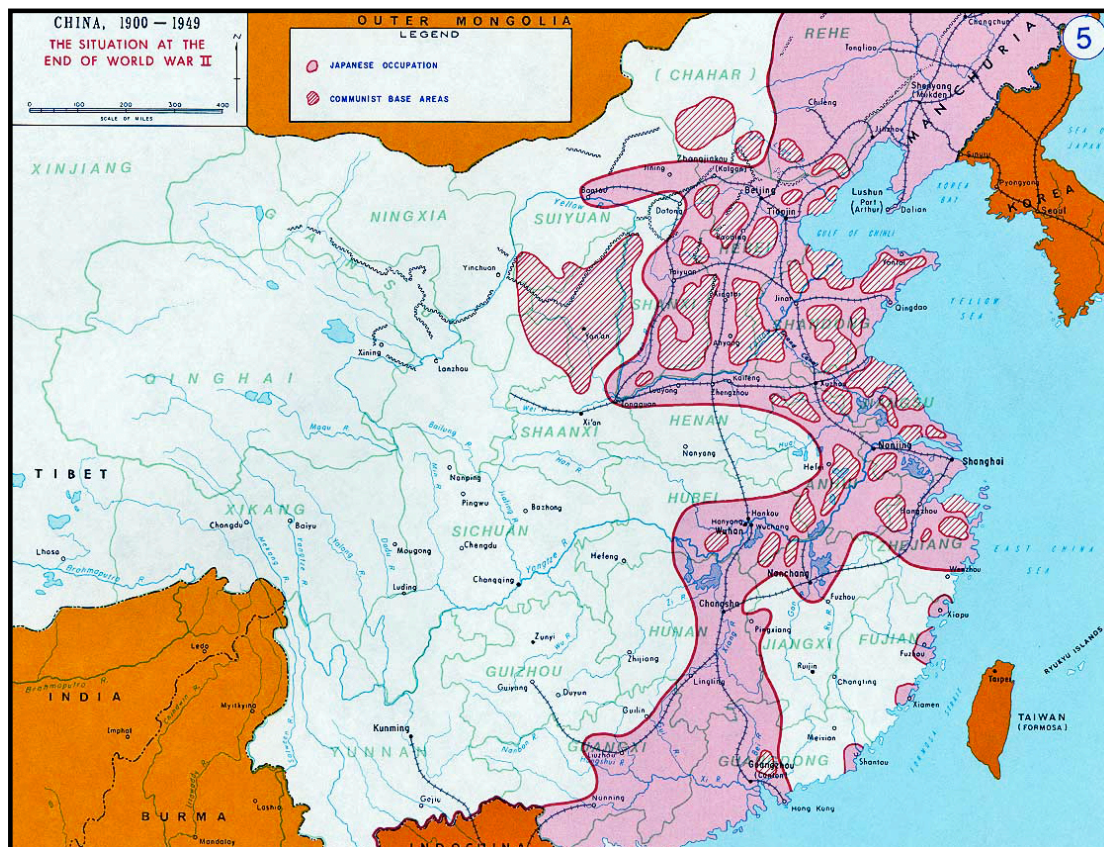
AIMS:

1. Why did Civil War break out in China in 1946?
2. What happened during the Civil War?

INTRODUCTION

China is a huge country riven by major cultural and ethnic divisions. The challenge facing both **CHIANG KAI-SHEK** and **MAO ZEDONG** was how to unite this territory under their own political system. The struggle to do so would create one of the bloodiest civil wars in history.

Source 1: The situation in China at the end of the Second World War, 1945



WHAT WERE THE LONG-TERM CAUSES OF THE CIVIL WAR?

Conflict between Nationalists and Communists

The Chinese Civil War, which began in 1946 as a struggle for control of China, had its roots between Communists and Nationalists that had begun in 1927. Throughout the years 1927 – 37, the nationalist government of Chiang Kai-shek had tried to eradicate the Communist Party and impose one-party rule on the whole of China. By 1937, after the episode of the **Long March**, the Communists were confined largely to the area around Yan'an.

Source 2: The execution of a Communist worker in Shanghai, 1927



The Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1937 led to a temporary cessation of hostilities between the Nationalists and the Communists, which formed the **United Front** against the invaders. Chiang Kai-shek, however, was still unwilling to accept the Communists as partners in the struggle against the Japanese.

In 1941, Chiang's NRA forces launched an attack against communist forces in the south of China, thereby breaching the United Front. Despite this being a military setback for the Communists, politically they gained from this incident.

Their propaganda was able to portray Chiang as being more interested in fighting his fellow Chinese and thus dividing the nation, whereas the Communists were able to present themselves as the true Chinese patriots in concentrating on the fight against the Japanese. The stage was set for a full-scale renewal of hostilities between the two forces once the war against Japan was over.

TASK: Find out more

From your research, type/write 5 interesting and relevant information on the following, and explain why this would increase the likelihood of conflict between the Nationalists and Communists:

EVENT	INFORMATION	WHY IT WAS A CAUSE FOR CONFLICT?
Differences between the Nationalist & Communist		
The White Terror, 1926 - 28		

Nationalist rule and Communist survival, 1927 - 37		
The Long March, 1934-5		
War against Japan, 1931-41		

<p>The Nationalists and the Communists during the Second World War, 1941-45</p>		
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The Second World War in the Far East

For China, the war against Japan began in 1937. For western powers that had military bases, colonial possessions and economic interests in the Far East, the war began in December 1941 when the Japanese navy launched a surprise attack on the American fleet at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. British bases in Singapore and Hong Kong were attacked and captured soon after.

The entry of the USA and Britain into the war in the Far East in December 1941 provided Chiang's government with much needed foreign allies. The Americans began to supply Chiang's armies with weapons and ammunitions, and built airbases on Chinese soil, which were used to launch bombing raids on Japan itself. In response, the Japanese started the **Ichigo offensive in April 1944**, which was aimed at capturing American bases. This was the first major offensive against nationalist forces in China since 1938. Many of the

Chinese forces gave up their positions without a fight, exposing serious problems within the nationalist armies. Morale was low because troops were unpaid, unfed and unfit, and lacked basic training and equipment. Corrupt officers stole money which was intended for pay and supplies. Chiang did not trust his generals and was constantly interfering in their decisions, even though he was far removed from the action. The result was a major defeat from the nationalist forces and a serious blow to Chiang's prestige.

Source 3: The Guomintang leader, Chiang Kai-shek, with his wife



The end of the war

The Second World War in the Far East ended in August 1945 with the surrender of Japanese forces to the Allies after the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. At the end of the war, Chiang Kai-shek's government in Chongqing was still recognized by foreign powers as the legitimate government of China. The Communists had strengthened their position in Yan'an and had impressed many nationalist-minded Chinese with their energy, determination and discipline in the fight against the Japanese. Given the legacy of nearly 20 years of conflict between the GMD and CPC, it was likely that the internal struggle would continue once the war was over. In

this renewed conflict, however, the odds were stacked heavily in favour of Chiang Kai-shek and his government.

TASK: ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

Which of the two sides in China's internal conflict, the Nationalists and the Communists, had gained the most from the war against the Japanese?

Nationalist gains

Communist gains

Your interpretation

WHAT WERE THE SHORT-TERM CAUSES OF THE CIVIL WAR?

A Divided Country

At the end of the war China was once again a divided country. Although Chiang Kai-shek's nationalist government claimed to be the government of the whole of China, it actually controlled only a fraction of the country's territory. As Source 1 (p.1) shows, the main territorial divisions were:

- Japanese forces still occupied the north of China, much of the Chinese coastline and most of the large cities.

- The Nationalists (Guomindang) controlled a large area of southern and central China from their capital in Chongqing.
- The Communists (CPC) controlled much of the countryside in northern and north-eastern China from their base in Yan'an.
- The Soviet Union's Red Army had moved into Manchuria on 8 August 1945.

At the time of the Japanese surrender, Nationalists and Communists tried to occupy as much territory as possible. Both sides were trying to strengthen their position. At this stage, however, the Nationalists had a distinct advantage. Chiang Kai-shek's government was recognized by foreign powers as the legitimate government of China and was therefore given the right to take the surrender of Japanese forces still based in China.

American aircraft airlifted 100,000 nationalist troops to the north so that they could do this, but in doing so they were moving into areas that were under Communist control. In response, the Communists began to move into Manchuria, where they received from the Red Army many of the weapons and ammunition captured from the Japanese. There were clashes between communist and nationalist troops in many parts of China.

A legacy of conflict

Years of conflict and rivalry between the Nationalists and Communists had left a legacy of mistrust and suspicion. It seemed to many observers at the time of the Civil War in China was unavoidable. The aims of the two parties were very different. The Guomindang had close links with business interests and landlords and was in favour of maintaining a capitalist system in China. The Communists aimed for a revolutionary overthrow of the regime followed by confiscation of large estates from the landlords and of businesses from the private owners. This would prepare the way for a more equal, classless society in which ownership of land and business would be shared by all. Few

Communists believed that a communist revolution in China was a realistic possibility in the near future. In the short-term their aim was to consolidate their position in the areas under their control and to take what opportunities they might find to extend their influence. For tactical reasons, Mao had been prepared to cooperate with the Guomindang in the past and there was a possibility that such cooperation might continue in the future.

Attempts to find a peaceful solution

Both the USA and the USSR wished to avoid a civil war in China so soon after the Second World War. Under American pressure, Chiang Kai-shek agreed to peace talks with the Communists. On 28 August 1945, the American ambassador to China, Patrick Hurley, personally escorted Mao Zedong to Chongqing for talks with Chiang Kai-shek. Although a ceasefire was supposed to be in operation while the talks progressed, fighting continued in some parts of the country. By October 1945 an agreement was reached in which both sides committed in principle to:

- A democratic political system, with free elections and guarantees of personal freedoms
- A unified military force
- Elections for a **national assembly**.

Agreement on these broad, general principles were relatively easy to achieve; much more difficult to resolve were the details over who should control the military forces and local governments in areas under communist control. Mao was not prepared to give up communist control on the ground whereas Chiang was determined to extend nationalist control over the whole of the country. Almost immediately after the agreement was signed, therefore, fighting intensified when Chiang sent his forces north into Manchuria. The communist position was severely weakened when Stalin, the Russian leader,

ordered the Communists to hand over the cities in Manchuria to the Nationalists.

Source 4: Mao and Chiang toast broad agreement at the peace talks in Chongqing



The start of the Civil War

In December 1945, President Truman of the USA sent General George Marshall to China as his envoy on a mission to mediate between the two sides in the conflict. Marshall succeeded in persuading both sides to agree to a ceasefire in January 1946 and pressured Chiang into calling a political conference to discuss the future government of China. The conference, with representatives from all of China's main political parties, succeeded in reaching an outline agreement on a constitution. Once again, however, the agreement fell apart almost as soon as it was signed. When the Guomindang tried to make crucial changes to the terms of the agreement, which would have created an autocratic form of government headed by them, the Communists and other parties withdrew their cooperation. The Nationalists went ahead anyway and drafted a new constitution without the participation of other parties.

Marshall made another attempt at bringing a ceasefire to Manchuria in June 1946, but even as he did so the Guomindang forces were preparing for a major offensive against communist forces in Manchuria, which began in July. At the same time, the Communists seized the key industrial city of Harbin in northern Manchuria and consolidated their power in the rural areas. By the late summer of 1946, an all-out civil war had begun in China. The USA's attempts at mediation had failed and Marshall returned home in January 1947.

WHAT WERE THE EVENTS OF THE CIVIL WAR?

PHASES OF THE WAR

Phase 1: Early setbacks for the Communists, July 1946 to May 1947

In the first few months of the Civil War the Guomindang, with a larger army and better equipment, took the initiative and forced the Communists on to the defensive. The Guomindang offensive, which began in **July 1946**, succeeded in capturing control of large cities and establishing a GMD-controlled 'corridor' along the coast of Manchuria from Jinzhou to Shenyang and on to Changchun. Communist forces in Manchuria were forced to retreat northwards across the Sungari River. Elsewhere in China the Communists were also in retreat. They lost their former base in Yan'an from which LIN BIAO, one of Mao's most senior and trusted military commanders, had already moved the Communist **EIGHTH ROUTE ARMY** northwards to Manchuria in order to strengthen Communist forces there.

Further south in China there were more reverses for the Communists. They were forced to abandon their isolated positions in the eastern Yangzi River area and, in October, they lost their last remaining city stronghold outside Manchuria at Zhangjiakou. Manchuria was the key battleground in the early

stages of the war. Chiang committed over half a million of his best troops to the capture of the region. In **October 1946**, a renewed offensive by GMD forces against the Communist stronghold of northern Manchuria failed to break the **PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY (PLA)** defenses.

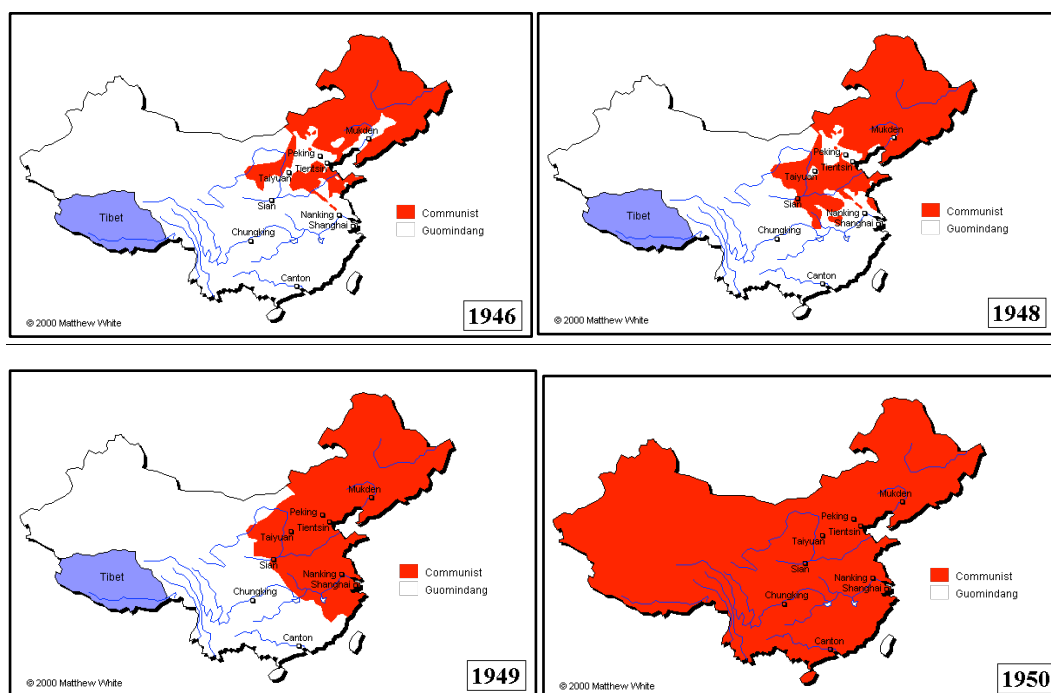
From their rural base the Communists adopted an effective **guerilla warfare** strategy against the GMD. By ambushing GMD units that ventured outside the cities and blowing up railway lines on which the GMD's city-based forces depended for their supplies and reinforcements the PLA and local communist militia forces were able to isolate the Nationalists' city strongholds. **By the spring of 1947**, the Communists' control over northern Manchuria was virtually unshakeable and Lin Biao decided to move on to an offensive strategy.

PROFILE: LIN BIAO



Lin Biao (1908 – 71) was the son of a landlord from Hubei province. He graduated from the Whampoa Military Academy in 1925 and quickly established himself as one of the Communist Party's most able military commanders. His talents as a guerilla leader were put to the test in the Communists' struggle for survival in Jiangxi in the early 1930s and later in Yan'an. During the Civil War, he was the PLA commander in Manchuria and, later, in the northern China. He successfully transformed the PLA from a guerilla force into a modern professional army.

Source 5: map showing the communist takeover of China



Phase 2: Communists seize the initiative, May 1947 to November 1948

In May 1947, the PLA launched full-scale assaults on GMD positions but, without an air force to provide support, these first attacks were unsuccessful. Nevertheless, the heavy fighting inflicted heavy losses on the GMD forces and sapped the morale of its troops. Throughout the rest of 1947, the Communists maintained their pressure on the Nationalists using guerilla tactics.

During 1948, the PLA moved from a strategy of mainly guerilla warfare to one of **conventional battles** with massed forces of infantry and artillery. In northern China the PLA **captured the important city of Luoyang** on the Yellow River in **April 1948** and began to make significant gains in the province of Shandong, isolating the GMD's main city stronghold of Jinan.

In **June 1948**, the **Communists captured Kaifeng** also on the Yellow River. As the Yellow River valley was a crucial means of access from the coast into the western interior of China, gaining control over these cities meant that the Communists could begin to threaten nationalist control over Xian and Sichuan

in the west. **The city of Jinan** (Shandong province) was **captured in September 1948**.

There were a series of spectacular **communist victories in Manchuria in October and November**. On 15 October, the PLA captured the key railway junction at Jinzhou, in many ways the gateway to Manchuria from the rest of China. With Jinzhou in communist hands, the nationalist forces in Manchuria were now trapped and the PLA was able to pick them off one at a time. **The capture of Changchun in October** was followed by the **fall of Shenyang on 2 November**. The loss of Manchuria was a body blow to the Nationalists; over **400,000 troops were lost** while the damage to GMD morale was considerable.

Phase 3: the final stages, December 1948 to October 1949

Source 6: PLA forces entering Beijing, January 1949



Moving quickly to take advantage on its successes in Manchuria and Shandong, the PLA launched two new offensives in northern China; the first against the vital **railway junction at Xuzhou** resulted in battle **lasting 65 days** in **December 1948 and January 1949**. With 600,000 troops on each side committed to this battle, both sides recognized its military and

psychological importance. The defeat for the Nationalists was yet another major blow.

The second offensive was directed against **Beijing**, the old imperial capital. Lin Biao and the PLA moved first against Tianjin to the south of Beijing in January 1949, thereby cutting off Beijing from the rest of China. **Beijing itself was captured with little resistance on 31 January**. The whole of northern China, including Manchuria, was now under Communist control.

In the spring of 1949, there was a lull in the fighting. The PLA rested its troops while consolidating its position in China north of the Yangzi River. A communist-led provisional people's government was set up in northern China.

In April, the PLA returned to the offensive by attacking key cities on the Yangzi River. **Nanjing**, which had been the nationalist stronghold and capital city of China since 1927, was **captured on 23 April** and **Shanghai**, the commercial capital of China, **fell to the Communists in late May**. The way to the south was now open.

After the **capture of the Wuhan in May**, the PLA forces were divided for the final assault on GMD territory. One force, led by Peng Dehuai, struck westwards from Wuhan towards **Xi'an and Lanzhou, both of which were taken in August 1949**. Another PLA force led by Lin Biao marched south towards **Guangzhou which was captured in October**, while part of Lin Biao's force was sent south-westwards to mop up the remaining GMD resistance in **Guizhou and Chongqing, both of which were taken in November**.

By late September, with most of China under communist control, **Mao called a Political Consultative Conference in Beijing**. Although dominated by the Communists, there were representatives from 14 other parties at the conference. This conference elected members of the new central government

of the **PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA**, including Mao Zedong as its Chairman. Desperate to avoid capture by the Communists Chiang Kai-shek fled to Taiwan and established a Guomindang government there.

TASK: REVISION ACTIVITY

Complete the table below

	MAJOR EVENTS OF EACH PHASE OF THE CIVIL WAR	KEY TURNING POINTS AND THEIR IMPORTANCE
PHASE 1		
PHASE 2		
PHASE 3		

More revision questions

Provide a summary for the following questions:

- 1. Explain why civil war was likely by August 1945?**
- 2. Explain why civil war broke out in 1946.**
- 3. What were the turning points in the Civil War?**

SL & HL Paper 2: Single Party States
HL: Paper 3: China 1912 - 1949