

Civil War 1946-1949

Things to consider:

The inability of the CCP and the GMD to settle their differences after the defeat of Japan.
The Nationalists initial triumph.

Key turning points

Reasons for the ultimate Communist Victory (military, economic, political, popular support, international intervention, leadership)

Origins of the Civil War:

Ongoing conflict between GMD/CCP since the founding of the CCP. eg GMD attacks through the Long March; Fourth Army incident; NRA (GMD forces) attack on Red Army after the 100 regiments offensive (p111 Lynch)

Several rapprochements eg The Northern Expedition, First United Front 1924; Second United front after the Xian Incident 1936 but these were not really united.

Two leaders had differing views and desire for power for their parties.

The war starts June 1946

GMD try to take control of Manchuria

Relative strength of GMD/CCP at this stage:

GMD still has US support; US has too much vested in the GMD despite lack of confidence in the leadership (see notes on Sino-Japanese war, comments from Stilwell & Chennault; Dixie Mission)

US interests include: lend-lease scheme worth millions of dollars; transportation of GMD troops to accept surrender of Japanese; military advisers.

Also, number of troops are massively in favour of GMD:

GMD troops, known as National Revolutionary Guard (**NRA**) - 5 million

CCP troops, known as the People's Liberation Army (**PLA**) - 1.25 million

Three phases of the War:

1. 1946-47 Nationalists try to take Manchuria, where there were many Communist bases
2. Communists resist successfully, mainly as GMD had not secured supply lines
3. 1947 onwards, Communists take the initiative and head South.

Five major campaigns:

1. The struggle for Manchuria 1946-1947
2. The 'strong point offensive' 1947
3. The Liaoshen campaign Sept-Nov 1948
4. The Huaihai campaign, Nov 1948-Jan 1949
5. The Pingjin campaign, Nov 1948-Jan 1949

1. The struggle for Manchuria 1946-1947

GMD wanted Manchuria as it was a CCP stronghold and it was a very industrially developed area of China.

BUT

GMD forces were many but CCP had strongholds eg Harbin

Local populace knew the CCP and helped uproot airfields and train tracks thus disabling GMD ability to use air force or re-supply army.

GMD treated locals badly where they did have control.

CCP captured weapons and armoury from the NRA

Proof of how support for GMD had shrunk as support for CCP grew.

CCP/PLA had very clear battle strategies: more guerilla in style than outright full frontal attack; be clear in targets; capture weapons from defeated forces (see p127 Lynch)

Holding Manchuria is key:

It had been a main aim of Jiang and he failed - propaganda and real defeat; loses support of own soldiers

CCP now have Manchuria as a key stronghold from which to launch offensives

Importantly, it also exposed how weak the Nationalists were encouraging Mao to be more aggressive. Stalin had urged Mao to accept a partitioned China (see notes on Russia) but controlling all China now seemed possible.

2. The 'strong point offensive' 1947

Manchuria is made up of 3 provinces - Heilongjiang, Jilin, Liaoning (see map p128)

Despite weakness, Jiang still held the capital of Liaoning plus in March 1947 he took **Yanan** demonstrating some strength in Northern China below Manchuria (see map p129).

The loss of Yanan seems great but it was hollow:

- Moles in the NRA has warned the PLA of impending attack so Yanan had been evacuated
- Mao deliberately allowed the NRA to take Yanan as it gave Jiang false hope. It was seen as a 'pawn' in the bigger picture.

Jiang did not see it as a hollow victory but saw it as a major victory which encouraged him to launch the 'strong point offensive'. This was to use his perceived hold over Hebei and Shanxi to take Shandong and Shaanxi.

Jiang overstretched himself, the PLA launched mobile guerilla style attacks and by 1947, Mao held North Eastern China.

Momentum now in favour of CCP and Mao.

Effect of the failed 'strong point offensive' on Mao's strategy:

Having previously thought guerilla tactics were the PLA's only form of attack, Mao now believed he could adopt a full frontal attack and go for 'total destruction' of the GMD/NRA.

3. The Liaoshen campaign, Sept-Nov 1948

Mao decided to decisively take control of Manchuria, by attacking Changchun and Shenyang in Manchuria.

To start, the PLA took the rail hub with Beijing at **Jingzhou** despite massive defence from the NRA, **Oct 1948**.

Changchun falls **late October**; fierce fighting; key aspect that continues NRA officers defect to PLA giving key information on where the NRA troops are.

Jiang was advised to retreat from **Shenyang** but he refused and this fell to the PLA on **2 Nov 1948**. This defeat helped by more defections, no trust in Jiang as food/supplies run out.

Significance of Liaoshen:

3 defeats in one campaign; 400,000 troops killed or deserted; Manchuria lost; North East China now in hands of Communists.

Jiang approached US and USSR for help in trying to resurrect compromise talks; no interest from US/USSR or Mao.

Proof that CCP in the ascendance and GMD on the retreat.

4. The Huaihai campaign, Nov 1948 - Jan 1949

Jiang has to fight to hold the rest of China.

Decides to defend the provinces between the Yellow and the Yangzi rivers. (see map p133)

To protect Nanjing (GMD capital) and Shanghai he chooses to fight at **Xuzhou**, a key junction on the railway.

Jiang thought the PLA/CCP would need time to replenish after Liaoshen but Mao decided to attack straight away - many new recruits were found in 'prisoners' originally in the NRA.

NRA weaknesses:

Continued defections or 'moles' leaking info

No air cover

No food supplies due to weather and bad flying conditions - PLA advertised food and supplies via loudhailer tempting NRA fighters to defect

Commanders asked to withdraw, Jiang refused as it would be another major defeat.

Defeat happened anyway with a major PLA offensive, unlike guerilla attacks in the past.

Significance of the loss of Huaihai campaign:

NRA elite were broken;

NRA equipment, often supplied by the US originally, had gone to the CCP

CCP now controlled 'central' China

US now increasingly disinclined to support the GMD

Southern China for the taking.

Further proof of Jiang's lack of military knowhow and strategic weakness.