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it was appropriately solemn and dignified. Chiang had now reached the pinnacle of his power, and yet he felt that the audience at the inauguration seemed embarrassed, even humiliated—perhaps because of the absence of the diplomatic corps and the cool international response to his big day.\(^3\)

Within a few days, the foreign ministers of Great Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union would meet in Moscow. At the insistence of the United States and over the resistance of Britain and the USSR, the conference would formally include China as one of the postwar Great Powers—a decision that laid the foundation for China's eventual inclusion in the United Nations Security Council.\(^4\) But on his inauguration day, Chiang felt slighted, and soon he was grumbling over the dispirited, foul, corrupt, and selfish members of his administration.\(^5\)

In many ways, this inauguration day captured the spirit of China in 1943. On the one hand, it was a year of great triumphs. The "unequal treaties" that had shackled China since the Opium War a century earlier had been abolished, and the former "sick man of Asia" was now recognized as one of the Four Great Powers. Mme. Chiang Kai-shek made an impressive tour of the United States, including her historic addresses to both houses of Congress. Chiang himself joined Churchill and Roosevelt for a summit meeting in Cairo that produced the memorable photos of the Chinese leader sitting as an equal with the most powerful men in the world. The year also saw China regain full sovereignty over the resource-rich northwestern province of Xinjiang, which in the previous decade had been transformed into a virtual colony of the Soviet Union. Chiang Kai-

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\(^3\) Chiang Kai-shek, weekly reflection (October 1943), in Gao Sulan, ed., *Jiang Zhongzheng zongtong dang'an: Shilüe gaoben* [Archives of President Chiang Kai-shek: Draft chronology] (Taipei: Guoshiguan, 2011), vol. 55, 81 (hereafter cited as SLGB). This source, compiled in the 1950s, contains major sections of Chiang's diaries, as well as other official papers and a record of his activities for each day. I have used this source rather than the less accessible diary copies now held in the Hoover Institution Archives, unless the language of the original diary is significantly different. No foreign diplomats or newsmen were invited to the inauguration (Gauss to Secretary of State, October 19, 1943, in *FRUS 1943*, 361–62). Was the audience perhaps unaware of this, regarding their absence as a snub?


\(^5\) SLGB 55:81 (weekly reflection, October 1943).
shek had celebrated these accomplishments in his book *China's Destiny*, where he proudly proclaimed his vision of China's past and future.

On the other hand, 1943 witnessed critical setbacks and disappointments for Chiang's Nationalist regime. There was the devastating famine in Henan Province, and the embarrassing fact that foreign journalists had spread the news to the world. In the capital and throughout China, inflation raged unchecked despite well-publicized government efforts to control prices. Local rebellions mobilized tens of thousands of disaffected peasants to resist military conscription and state grain requisitions in Gansu and Guizhou provinces. Most importantly, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was spreading its political and military infrastructure throughout north China, displacing local elites loosely linked to the Nationalist regime in the areas behind Japanese lines. Chiang Kai-shek contemplated using the opportunity presented by the Soviet Union's disbandment of the Communist International (Comintern) to launch a military assault on the Communist base and rid China of the Red menace once and for all. He abandoned the planned assault at the last minute, and Communist power continued to grow.

These and other developments are examined in the following chapters as we look at a single year in China's modern history from a variety of perspectives in an effort to uncover the determinants of the nation's trajectory. By focusing on a single year, we hope to capture some of the diversity and contingency of history, without losing sight of the larger forces working inexorably in the background.

**The War**

In 1943, China was a nation at war. Japan's invasion of China began in 1931, when its army units in Manchuria sabotaged a Japanese-owned railroad and used the incident as an excuse to occupy northeast China, then set up the puppet state of Manchukuo headed by the last emperor of the deposed Qing dynasty. The loss of Manchuria deprived China of its key heavy industrial base, with major coal mines, steel mills, and its largest arsenal, whose output had surpassed that of all other Chinese arsenals
combined. From Manchuria, the Japanese slowly encroached on adjacent regions in Inner Mongolia and north China until a clash with Chinese forces near Beijing (then called Beiping) provoked sharp resistance and full-scale war in July 1937. Chiang Kai-shek’s armies put up a determined fight for the nation’s commercial and industrial center in Shanghai, but the Japanese responded with a devastating counterattack, which included an innovation in modern warfare: the sustained use of aerial bombing against civilian targets. By the end of the year, the Japanese had broken through the Chinese lines and then wreaked their revenge on the nation’s capital in the Nanjing Massacre.

The Japanese strategy in China anticipated Hitler’s blitzkrieg tactics in Europe. Overwhelming firepower from the air and land- and sea-based artillery were concentrated in an effort to break through Chinese defenses, allowing infantry to advance rapidly along rail and river transport lines to achieve a quick victory. After their initial valiant but costly attempt to blunt the Japanese assault in Shanghai, Chiang’s armies resorted to the more conservative approach of “trading space for time,” using China’s overwhelming advantage in geographic size and human population to counter Japan’s superior firepower in a protracted war. The brutality of the Japanese assault, from the Rape of Nanjing to ritual executions of prisoners and the use of poison gas during their advance up the Yangzi (Yangtze) River,

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inspired a new sense of national purpose as Chinese rallied to resist the invaders. The government and patriotic businessmen cooperated in a massive effort to move industry and skilled manpower to the interior. Millions of workers, businessmen, technicians, civil servants, intellectuals, students, journalists, and ordinary citizens withdrew up the Yangtze to the new capital in Chongqing and other inland cities to continue the resistance. It was indeed “one of the greatest mass migrations in human history.”

In little more than a year, the Japanese had driven Chinese forces from all the major coastal cities and the central China metropolis of Wuhan, where the Chinese had hoped, but in the end failed, to hold the line. Instead Chiang’s forces hunkered down for a protracted war of attrition from the relative safety of their bastion in the fertile fields of Sichuan, above the treacherous gorges on the Yangtze River. In the spring of 1939, the Japanese launched murderous air raids that destroyed much of the wartime capital in Chongqing, but soon an effective network of air raid shelters and an efficient warning system relying on spotters near the Japanese airfields and along their flight paths cut Chinese casualties to a minimum. As elsewhere in the history of modern warfare, the bombing of civilian targets served mainly to strengthen national resolve to resist.

December 1941 brought the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and a fundamental reshaping of the global strategic picture. After fighting pretty much on its own for four long years (ten years, if one counts from Japan’s Manchurian incursion), China gained a crucial ally in the United States. Unfortunately, despite widespread American sentiment for immediate revenge on Japan, the Roosevelt administration gave priority to the rescue of Britain and the defeat of Hitler in a “Europe first” strategy. Even more sobering for the Chinese was the dismal showing of British forces in Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaya, and Burma and the quick defeat of the

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Americans in the Philippines and the Dutch in Indonesia. In the battle for Shanghai, the Chinese had put up a much more determined fight and inflicted more Japanese casualties than the proud Europeans, but now China stood alone as the European colonial empires in Southeast Asia crumbled before the Japanese assault. To add insult to injury, the British initially declined Chinese military assistance in the battle to keep open the supply line to China through their Burmese colony. In the words of the U.S. State Department, the British stance was motivated by their “reluctance to accept assistance from Orientals as derogatory to British prestige in Asia.” When Burma fell, China lost its last land link to the outside world, and soon despaired of receiving any substantial aid from the Allies.

Fortunately for the Chinese, the Japanese had also suffered chastening

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losses in the fight for Wuhan; their forces were now fighting major battles in Southeast Asia; and soon much of their air force and many first-line army units were diverted to the campaign in the Pacific. As a result, the bombing raids on Chongqing halted and the city was rebuilt; Japanese offensives were largely limited to local foraging operations; and the front lines hardened into a prolonged stalemate. Fighting alone, China became the “forgotten ally.” After suffering enormous casualties in the first years of the war, the Chinese now hunkered down, hoping to hold out until others could defeat Japan on their behalf.

The Generalissimo

No individual was more central to the fate of wartime China than Chiang Kai-shek. The son of a Zhejiang salt merchant and favorite of a doting mother, he received a solid Confucian education in the final years of the Qing dynasty. Imbued with the nationalist fervor of an era that aroused revolutionary sentiments and military aspirations, Chiang enrolled in a Japanese military academy and then China’s premier officers’ training school in Baoding. When the 1911 Revolution toppled the Qing dynasty and established the Republic of China, Chiang became a loyal follower of Sun Yat-sen, leader of what would soon become the Nationalist Party (Guomindang/Kuomintang). In the 1920s, Sun appointed him head of the Whampoa Military Academy to train officers for the party’s National Revolutionary Army. Sun also sent Chiang to the Soviet Union, then the chief financial and military backer of the Nationalist Party, to learn the secrets of the Red Army’s success—but Chiang returned with an abiding suspicion of Soviet intentions in China. After Sun’s death in 1925, Chiang led the Northern Expedition that unified the country, defeating or absorbing the warlord armies that had fractured the country since the early years of the republic. At a crucial juncture in 1927, Chiang turned on the Na-

15 MacKinnon, Wuhan, 2; Peattie, Drea, and van de Ven, Battle for China, 250–51.
16 Mitter, Forgotten Ally.
tionalists’ Soviet sponsors, sending the Soviet advisers back to Russia and massacring thousands of their Communist Party and leftist protégées. The old capital in Beijing was abandoned, and Chiang presided over a relatively cohesive regime from a new capital in Nanjing.\textsuperscript{18}

Chiang’s National Government (Guomin zhengfu) in Nanjing was founded on a commitment to complete the national revolutionary mission of Sun Yat-sen. One of the government’s first acts was to erect an immense mausoleum on the outskirts of the new capital and stage an elaborate procession in which Sun’s body was brought by train from Beijing to be reburied in this new ceremonial center. Chiang himself played a central role in the ritual process and further cemented his ties to Sun’s legacy by marrying Soong Mayling, the sister of Sun Yat-sen’s widow.\textsuperscript{19} The new Mme. Chiang was “cosmopolitan, articulate, intelligent, and wealthy,”\textsuperscript{20} and as an American-educated Christian, she provided an attractive face for the regime’s Western allies. As a condition for the marriage, Chiang had converted to Christianity and regularly read the Bible, said his prayers, and thanked God for his good fortune. But the ideological foundation of his regime was the commitment to Sun Yat-sen’s legacy, and every Monday in schools, government institutions, factories, and military units, Chinese gathered to recite Sun Yat-sen’s political testament and listen to inspirational appeals to dedicate themselves to completing his nation-building mission.\textsuperscript{21} By portraying himself as Sun Yat-sen’s most loyal disciple and linking Sun’s Nationalist Party to the nation’s modern rise, Chiang sought to link his own authority to the national destiny.

Throughout his adult life, Chiang Kai-shek kept a meticulous diary, whose daily entries provide greater insight into his private thoughts and


\textsuperscript{20} Taylor, \textit{Generalissimo}, 74.

psychology than we have for any other Chinese ruler past or present. In these entries we see a man of intense self-discipline, his tightly wrought manner often interpreted as a psychological overcorrection for an admittedly dissolute life as a young man in Shanghai. But his rigid demeanor also came from his military training, and Chiang’s genuine respect for the martial culture of both Japan and Germany was linked to the value he placed on discipline, order, and respect for authority. By the wartime period, Chiang’s discipline was less soldierly than Confucian and Christian, as he maintained a daily routine that began with morning prayers, silent meditation, and calisthenics, and ended with more prayers and meditation. He summarized his accomplishments and failings in regular weekly, monthly, and annual self-reflections (fanxing). When his determined self-composure broke down in occasional explosions of anger, he would congratulate himself if he was able to conduct his next meeting with equanimity. He admitted to being unsociable, disliking public ceremonies, and seemed happiest when alone with his family or silently meditating in some quiet pavilion. As a “Bible-reading Confucian,” he spent long hours in 1943 reading Confucian commentaries and Liang Qichao’s writings on Chinese intellectual history. During one air raid, he was forced to seek refuge in a roadside shelter and took out a book on Confucian philosophers, later commenting that “the profit from reading is greater than any riches or honor.” These studies were not just for pleasure or self-cultivation; he also sought to shape the nation’s intellectual agenda, issuing orders to establish a Society for the Study of Tang Culture to combat the effete Confucianism of the Song and Ming dynasties.

From these multiple sources—Japanese and German military culture,
Christian faith, Confucian philosophy, and loyalty to Sun Yat-sen’s legacy—came an increasingly authoritarian personality. Convinced of his own correctness, he railed against the stupidity, laxity, and selfishness of his subordinates. Surrounded by presumed incompetents, he was unable to delegate authority, once complaining, “I have to do everything myself.”

This inability to delegate, plus his remarkable attention to detail, made him the ultimate micromanager, scolding a vice minister of foreign affairs for the poor quality of paper used for a diplomatic note, complaining when he saw a copy of the national flag in which the points of the star were not precisely aligned in the vertical axis, and stipulating appropriate

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31 SLGB 52:498 (February 16, 1943). Ray Huang makes the useful point that scarce resources made it difficult for subordinates to make crucial decisions on allocations. As a result, everything was referred to Chiang. Ray Huang, “Chiang Kai-shek and His Diary as a Historical Source,” Chinese Studies in History 28, no. 1–2 (Fall–Winter 1995–1996), 45.


33 SLGB 53:80–81 (March 24, 1943).
dress for formal party meetings after observing with dismay a session in which the four people on the dais were all wearing different types of clothing. Perhaps most difficult for those who sought to serve Chiang and interpret his intentions was his capacity, in the words of one U.S. Foreign Service officer, to be “alternately impassive and overwrought, obstinate and vacillating.” Mme. Chiang, who was presumably accustomed to this behavior, was to experience it when confronted with an invitation to visit Great Britain after her much-acclaimed visit to the United States. Her husband, angered and insulted by a Churchill speech that omitted China from the list of Great Powers, flip-flopped back and forth as he shot off one telegram after another advising on whether or not she should accept.

Chiang’s reaction to Churchill’s speech was indicative of the guiding principle for his political behavior. Chiang was the supreme nationalist, committed to the same slogan—the revival of the Chinese nation (Zhonghua minzu fuxing)—proclaimed by the leaders of the People’s Republic of China today. Every challenge to China’s interests was interpreted as a slight, an insult, a tendency of the Western powers to look down on the Chinese. The British and Churchill, the ultimate modern imperialist, were particular targets of Chiang’s ire, and not without reason. In 1943, the British refusal to consider any concessions on the status of their Hong Kong colony during the negotiations to abolish the “unequal treaties” was particularly galling (see chapter 5). At times, British imperial meddling even provoked sympathy for the Axis Powers and Japan’s anti-Western pan-Asian agenda. After receiving news of British interference in Tibetan affairs and Roosevelt’s failure to end Churchill’s waffling on the commitment to reopen the Burma Road, Chiang would write, “How did we get

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34 SLGB 54:552, 559–60 (September 18, 1943).
36 SLGB 52:586 (February 26, 1943), 587 (February 27); SLGB 53:36–37 (March 14), 77–78 (March 24), 101–2 (March 26), 143 (April 1), 380–81 (May 7), 433 (May 15). On the Chinese reaction to Churchill’s speech, see also Vincent to Secretary of State, April 8, 1943, FRUS 1943, 47.
37 See Chiang’s speech to the leaders of the New Life Movement in SLGB 52:528 (February 19, 1943).
stuck with this sort of dishonest and untrustworthy politician? You can see why Japan and Germany would wish to dispel their hatred and fearlessly embark on aggression.”

Chiang realized, in word if not in deed, that to gain real Great Power stature in the international community, China would have to strengthen itself. “Of the four countries in the United Nations, we are the weakest; and the treatment of the weak is like cripples or vagrants at the hands of local bullies. We must realize that if a person does not strengthen himself, no one can help. If a nation does not endeavor to strengthen itself, then friend and foe alike will treat it like meat on a chopping block. Beware!”

To Chiang and the Nationalist Party, the key to strengthening China was real national unity—overcoming the legacy of warlordism and political fragmentation that had plagued the Republic of China. This had been the purpose of Sun Yat-sen’s revolution in the 1920s, and Chiang realized that his armies had achieved victory as much by absorbing rival warlord forces as by conquering them. The residual power of local warlords posed a constant challenge to the Nationalist regime, and on several occasions in the 1930s they rose in open revolt to Chiang’s central government.

The War of Resistance against Japan rallied the country behind Chiang as never before, but it also seemed to increase his authoritarian tendencies. Theodore White and Annalee Jacoby compiled an incomplete list of the posts that Chiang held during the war. They included “chief executive of the Kuomintang; president of the National Government; chairman of the National Military Council, commander-in-chief of land, naval, and air forces; supreme commander, China theater; president of the State Council; chairman of the Supreme National Defense Council; director general of the Central Planning Board; chairman of the Party and Political Work Evaluation Committee; director of the New Life Movement Association; chairman of the Commission for Inauguration of Constitutional Government; president of the Central Training Corps; president of the School for Descendants of Revolutionary Martyrs; and president of the National

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39 SLGB 52:593 (February 28, 1943); cf. SLGB 54:622 (September 1943 monthly review).
Glider Association.” With so much power concentrated in his hands, Chiang had a distinct tendency to view himself as the embodiment of the nation’s will. Signs of independence or resistance to his wishes were regarded as putting one’s own selfish interests before those of the nation. Such behavior was most likely to provoke Chiang’s ire, with the predictable result that he found himself surrounded largely by yes-men unwilling to bring unwelcome news. Jiang Menglin, the loyal Nationalist intellectual who headed Peking University, reportedly complained, “No one tells him the truth, no one. I used to speak frankly to him, but I stopped doing so—it was no use. No one else would and he could not believe me. He will not listen to anything unpleasant, so nobody tells him anything but pleasant things. It is impossible to reason with him. ... He flies into a rage if anyone argues against with [sic] him.”

The Communist Challenge

Of all the challenges to Chiang Kai-shek’s authority, none was more vexing than the CCP. Soon after its founding by a small group of intellectuals in Shanghai in 1921, the CCP, under strong pressure from the Communist International, had entered an alliance with Sun Yat-sen’s Nationalist Party. While Sun was alive, the United Front worked relatively smoothly, for the Soviet Union provided critical support for both parties. After Chiang engineered the brutal massacre of Communist activists in 1927, however, the two parties became mortal enemies. The remnants of the CCP fled to the hills, built their own Red Army, and transformed their movement into a peasant-based revolution. In 1934–1935, Chiang Kai-shek’s armies drove the Communists from their bases in the highlands of central China, and they embarked on the Long March that carried them
to the barren hills of northern Shaanxi. The Long March was both a heroic escape and a devastating military defeat in which the Red Army lost 90 percent of its forces, but in the end the movement survived with a dedicated band of hardened revolutionaries under the leadership of Mao Zedong.43

From the mid-1930s, as Japanese aggression posed a growing threat to Chinese sovereignty, the Communists reoriented much of their propaganda to appeals for a unified national resistance to Japan. They were encouraged in this by the Soviet Union—itself threatened by both Nazi Germany and the virulently anti-Soviet Japanese army—which encouraged Communist parties around the world to enter antifascist united fronts. From the press, liberal intellectuals, and campuses throughout China came appeals and demonstrations urging Chiang Kai-shek to halt his campaign against the Communists and enter into a united front against Japan. The culmination of this process came in December 1936 when Chiang was kidnapped and held hostage by two of his own generals in Xi’an. With Stalin urging moderation from afar and the CCP leader Zhou Enlai joining the negotiations in Xi’an, an agreement was reached to end the long civil war and prepare to cooperate in resisting Japan.44

When full-scale war broke out the following summer, Chiang’s National Government became the focal point of national resistance. Communists, leftists, and progressive intellectuals joined the Nationalists in a grand coalition to arouse their compatriots to resist the aggressors. As the universities moved to the interior, students joined propaganda corps to stage patriotic dramas, paint anti-Japanese slogans on walls, draw cartoons, print leaflets, and urge on the young soldiers at the front. During the battle for Wuhan, there was a real sense of unified resistance, and in a

43 For an excellent account of the early history of the party and the rise of Mao, see Alexander V. Pantsov, with Steven I. Levine, Mao: The Real Story (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012), 1–288.
few key battles in the north, Communist and Nationalist troops fought together to confront the Japanese advance.\textsuperscript{45}

In addition to the domestic pressure for Nationalist-Communist cooperation, there was a diplomatic incentive for Chiang to work with his erstwhile enemies. After his German military advisers withdrew at the beginning of the war, Chiang’s principal source of foreign military aid was the Soviet Union. The Soviets were fully aware of Japan’s hostility to their regime: Japan had occupied Vladivostok in the early years of the USSR; it had joined Germany and Italy in the Anti-Comintern Pact in 1936; and until the decision to attack Pearl Harbor and the European colonies of Southeast Asia, many in the Japanese Army command still preferred an attack on the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{46} Accordingly, from the first months of the conflict in China, the Soviet Union became the primary source of financial and military support for the Nationalist regime, supplying military advisers, arms, tanks, artillery, and volunteers to fly hundreds of combat aircraft.\textsuperscript{47} This aid provided a key incentive for Chiang Kai-shek to maintain cordial relations with the Chinese Communists.

Under the terms of the United Front, the National Government recognized the Communist armies, the Eighth Route Army and the New Fourth Army, as integral parts of the nation’s armed forces and provided them with arms and provisions, as well as a subsidy for the Communist regional government based in Yan’an. The presumption was that, although the Communist armies would keep their own commanders, those officers would be subject to the unified command of Chiang’s general staff. But from the very beginning of Mao Zedong’s rise to power, he had recognized that for his revolution to succeed, it would need its own army. Mao


was not about to surrender control of his armies to Chiang. So from the outset, the United Front was bedeviled by conflicts over the independence of the Eighth Route and New Fourth armies. In Chiang’s eyes, these independent forces were a fundamental threat to national unity, and by the time he wrote *China’s Destiny* he would refer to them as “disguised war-lords and new feudalists.”

Any effective cooperation between Communist and Nationalist forces came to an end with the New Fourth Army incident of January 1941. Chiang had ordered the New Fourth Army to move north of the Yangtze River by the end of 1940, but the Communists feared a trap and hesitated. In the end, they moved by a circuitous route and were attacked by the Nationalist armies, which decimated the Communist headquarters battalion and took thousands of prisoners. It was a devastating military loss for the Communists, but an even greater propaganda defeat for the Nationalists, who were broadly accused of attacking a patriotic army in the midst of the struggle for national survival. From that time forward, the United Front existed in name only. The Nationalists cut off their subsidy to the Communist armies and regional government, and established a tight blockade of the area around Yan’an. The Communists expanded their bases behind Japanese lines, often displacing Nationalist forces, whom they accused of collaborating with the enemy. The Soviet Union, for its part, began preparing for the expected invasion from Nazi Germany, withdrew its pilots, terminated most of its aid for China, and secured its eastern front by signing a neutrality pact with Japan in April 1941.

### The United States and China

Few relationships were so fraught with tension and misperceptions as China’s wartime relations with the United States. The Allies needed each

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other. China needed U.S. military and financial assistance; the United States needed China to tie down Japanese troops and resources on the Asian mainland so that they were not diverted to confront the American advance across the Pacific. Neither side truly trusted or understood the other. Chiang and his regime were painfully aware of China’s weakness and hypersensitive to any slight from their stronger ally; the United States was frustrated by China’s passivity and defensive stance, giving little heed to the enormous losses China had suffered during the four long years that it had fought alone.\textsuperscript{50}

Even before Pearl Harbor, there was considerable American sympathy for China’s plight. Polls showed that among the public, 74 percent favored China, against only 2 percent for Japan. This sentiment was fueled by the strong pro-China stance of China-born Henry Luce and his influential chain of magazines: \textit{Time} proclaimed Chiang Kai-shek and his wife “Man and Wife of the Year” in 1937.\textsuperscript{51} The U.S. government, alarmed by Japan’s expanding power in East Asia, also tilted toward China. In the summer of 1941, Roosevelt announced an oil embargo on Japan, which left the Japanese with only a few months’ supply to fuel its aggression. In the negotiations with Japan that followed, the United States insisted that Japan abandon all territories seized from China as a condition for resumed trade. At that point, “confronted with military strangulation by oil embargoes and the choice of admitting defeat in China,” the emperor gave final approval to the plan to knock out the U.S. Navy at Pearl Harbor and simultane-


ously attack southward to capture the European and American colonies in Southeast Asia, including the Dutch oil fields in Indonesia.\(^{52}\)

The Japanese attack and declaration of war against the United States and Great Britain gave China two powerful allies, but, as noted above, the initial results were discouraging. The British fought poorly to defend their Asian colonies, and soon Burma was lost and with it China’s last lifeline to the outside world. For the next three years, the main route for military supplies to China was the Hump, the air route from India over the Himalayan foothills to Kunming in southwest China. Described as “the most dangerous, terrifying, barbarous aerial transport run in the world,” the route took planes well above their designed altitudes, in treacherous weather, with only visual navigation, so that many planes and airmen were lost. Tonnage was necessarily limited and further constrained by the poorly maintained railway that served the Indian airfields in Assam.\(^{53}\) As a result, between 1941 and 1944, China received only a tiny fraction of the aid that the United States offered to the Allied Powers: less than 1 percent of the Lend-Lease total.\(^{54}\)

Given the minimal aid China received from abroad, it mattered greatly who was to be the recipient. Here, from the beginning, Chiang’s regime became embroiled in a conflict between two proud and determined American competitors. On one side was General Joseph W. Stilwell, an acerbic infantry commander with considerable prior experience in China as a military attaché, who was the choice of U.S. Chief of Staff George Marshall to command U.S. operations in China. His rival was Claire Lee Chennault, an early advocate for air power in modern warfare, accomplished pilot, and brilliant aerial tactician who had left the Army Air Corps to organize the American Volunteer Group (more commonly known as the Flying Tigers) to assist China’s war effort. After the United States joined the war, Chennault was given command of the U.S. Army’s Fourteenth Air Force in China. The story of the conflict between Stilwell and Chennault has been much told. Suffice to say, Stilwell’s disdain for the


Generalissimo (whom he called “Peanut” in his diary) was widely known, and his brusque and intemperate manner made him a most inappropriate choice as the ranking U.S. officer in China. Chennault, by contrast, got on well with the Generalissimo, in part because he promised to defeat the Japanese from the air, a strategy that required little contribution from the Chinese side.\footnote{Tuchman, \textit{Stilwell and the American Experience}, 307–74; see also the protagonists’ own accounts: Theodore White, ed., \textit{The Stilwell Papers} (New York: Sloane, 1948); Claire Lee Chennault, \textit{Way of a Fighter} (New York: Putnam, 1949).}

When Stilwell was ordered to China in January 1942, he went as commanding general of U.S. forces in China and chief of staff to the supreme commander of the China Theater, who was Chiang Kai-shek. In the latter capacity, Stilwell was to discharge his primary duty: keeping open the Burma Road in “command [of] such Chinese forces as may be assigned to him.”\footnote{Tuchman, \textit{Stilwell and the American Experience}, 246.} The 1942 campaign in Burma was a disaster. The British defense was inept and feeble, and they scarcely disguised their disinterest in Chinese assistance. Stilwell urged more aggressive tactics, but in the process put Chinese troops in danger in ways that were repugnant to the Generalissimo. In the end, with his army in retreat to India (where they would be retrained and rearmed to reopen the Burma Road later in the war), Stilwell led a ragtag band of American officers, Chinese guards, and assorted British, Burmese, and Indians in a month-long retreat through the jungle. Chiang Kai-shek understandably thought the lonely trek a dereliction of Stilwell’s command responsibilities, and by the summer of 1942 voices in both Chongqing and Washington were already calling for Stilwell’s recall.\footnote{Ibid., 266–325; Marshall to Roosevelt, October 6, 1942, \textit{FRUS 1942}, 159; Taylor, \textit{Generalissimo}, 194–216; Qi Xisheng, \textit{Jianba nuzhang}, 101–296; memo of conversation with Stilwell, Chiang Kai-shek and Mme. Chiang, March 10, 1943, T.V. Soong papers, Box 60, Folio 1, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, California. For a searing critique of Stilwell in China, see van de Ven, \textit{War and Nationalism}, 19–63.}

\textbf{The World at War, 1943}

In the global struggle against the Axis Powers, 1943 was unquestionably the year in which the tide of battle turned in the Allies’ favor. The North
African campaign ended with a convincing Anglo-American victory, which was quickly followed by the invasion of Sicily and then the Italian mainland, bringing the surrender of Italy and its fleet and Allied control of the Mediterranean. Though the Germans quickly occupied northern Italy and hard fighting remained on that front, as many as forty Axis divisions were diverted from the eastern front, considerably easing pressure on the Russians. By the summer of 1943, submarine warfare in the Atlantic was basically concluded in the Allies’ favor, allowing the Americans to send ceaseless convoys of war material to Britain and the Soviet Union. The year also saw the development of the long-range B-29 bomber and the strategic bombing of German industry—an effort now known to have had limited impact but at the time a major boost to British and Russian morale after the pounding they had received early in the war.

Developments on the East European front were even more encouraging, as the relentless German advance was blunted and turned back. Hitler had publicly proclaimed Stalingrad a major objective, but in the bitter winter of 1942–1943 his forces were surrounded and besieged. In the end, after losing some 250,000 German soldiers in the effort, the last men surrendered in February. At the same time, the siege of Leningrad was broken, and during the course of 1943, the Germans were steadily driven back across the killing fields of Eastern Europe. By this time the Soviets were outproducing the Germans in both planes and tanks, and the outcome of the war was no longer in doubt.58

Meanwhile in the Pacific came progress of great import to the Chinese. The American-led offensive was beginning to show costly signs of progress in the Solomon Islands and New Guinea as MacArthur’s forces moved north from Australia. American casualties in the bitter battles for Guadalcanal and Bougainville were greater than any other battles in the war, but they forced the Japanese to cancel a planned attack on Chongqing and to transfer several elite divisions and most of their aircraft to the war in the Pacific.59 This naturally concerned the Americans, who pressed the Chinese to do more on their front. When Roosevelt made a speech stressing the importance of the China theater as well as the Pacific, Chiang

59 Peattie, Drea, and van de Ven, Battle for China, 43, 428.
Kai-shek was furious, complaining in his diary that FDR was “treating China like a sacrificial offering.” But gradually over the course of the year, the great air, sea, and land battles of the island-hopping campaign were turned by the overwhelming power of the American forces. By the end of the year, preparations were underway for the attack on the Gilberts and then the Marshall Islands, including Guam and Saipan, which would bring the Japanese homeland within range of the new American B-29s—the same long-range bombers that would eventually carry the atom bombs that brought the war to its conclusion.

**THE CHINA THEATER, 1943**

In contrast to the major Allied victories elsewhere in the world, the China front was largely static. In January, when Chiang Kai-shek listed his priorities for the year, he stressed national unity and economic stabilization and made no mention of the war. The consensus of foreign observers, even Chiang’s supporters, was that Chiang’s regime was not ready for any offensive but was instead “conserving its strength for … postwar internal supremacy.” There were widespread reports of apathy and venality in the army, and Chiang himself complained of the poor discipline, inept administration, and low morale of his forces. With most Chinese forces uninterested in offensive action, the Japanese were able to deploy their

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60. *SLGB* 52:544 (February 21, 1943); cf. *SLGB* 52:445–46 (February 6), 52:491 (February 14). The offending words in Roosevelt’s speech were the statement, “Great and decisive actions against the Japanese will be taken to drive the invader from the soil of China.” Address to the White House Correspondents’ Association, February 12, 1943, in Samuel I. Rosenman, ed., *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt*, vol. 12: *The Tide Turns* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1950), 79.


64. Davies memoranda, March 9 and March 15, 1943, *FRUS 1943*, 27, 35. Corruption, war weariness, and official venality are major themes in Graham Peck’s account of his experiences in these years, *Two Kinds of Time*, 357–550.

elite units to the Pacific front, pulling their forces in China back to defend only major transport hubs, and leaving the task of peacekeeping in the occupied territories to Chinese, Manchukuo, and Korean puppet troops.\textsuperscript{66}

By this stage of the war, Chiang was using his best troops to maintain the blockade against the Communists and prepare the offensive in Burma. The front lines were often held by the armies of former warlords. Some of these forces fought bravely and well, but the soldiers were ill fed, diseased, mistreated, and understandably prone to desertion. Among the officer corps, there was growing discontent over Chiang’s preferential treatment of his own favorite commanders.\textsuperscript{67} At the front, local commanders left to

\textsuperscript{66} SLGB 53:209 (April 10, 1943), 228 (April 14), and 339 (May 3); Everett Drumright to Gauss, October 2, 1943, in FRUS 1943, 138–39; Peattie, Drea, and van de Ven, Battle for China, 43, 423–24.

\textsuperscript{67} White and Jacoby, Thunder out of China, 129–44; Lloyd E. Eastman, “Nationalist China during the Sino-Japanese War, 1937–1945,” in Lloyd E. Eastman, Jerome Chiên, Su-
their own devices made opportunistic accommodations with the enemy—especially as the Japanese front lines were increasingly manned by Chinese puppet troops. Smuggling across the lines became common, as neglected advance units sought to support their own men. Some of this smuggling was certainly detrimental to the war effort, as the Chinese provided tungsten vital for Japanese munitions in exchange for gasoline or even luxury items.⁶⁸

Through most of the early years of the war, the American press had been filled with stories of China’s brave resistance to the Japanese invaders. But by 1943, more skeptical views were heard. At Mme. Chiang’s February 19 press conference in Washington, one hesitant reporter asked about reports that “the Chinese were not utilizing their manpower to the full extent” in the war.⁶⁹ Pearl Buck published a widely read article in Life, which deftly balanced fervent praise of Mme. Chiang’s visit with pointed warnings of stasis and corruption in the army and officers “going into business.”⁷⁰ Most damningly, the New York Times’ respected military correspondent Hanson Baldwin published a scathing article, calling any Chinese “victories” (his quotes) “Pyrrhic ones” and declaring bluntly that “Japan, not China, is winning.”⁷¹ The official Chinese reaction was intense and bitter, Chiang calling Baldwin’s article “slanderous rumors” spread by the British and the Communists.⁷² The U.S. Embassy noted that the various critiques had caused “some quiet satisfaction in the more liberal quarters,”⁷³ though “deeply ingrained slavishness to considerations of face” had

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⁷² SLGB 54:186 (July 30, 1943).
⁷³ Acheson to Secretary of State, August 13, 1943, FRUS 1943, 87. One suspects that
caused “reactionary Chinese leaders” to reject all such criticism and respond with deep resentment.\textsuperscript{74}

The most important fighting in 1943 was along the Yangtze River in western Hubei. The Japanese advance may have been a probe against the defenses of the capital, but more importantly it seems to have been a foraging expedition in the rich central China rice bowl. There were credible reports of looting and rape by Chinese troops after they ordered the residents to withdraw. Most disturbing, it seems that the invading army was composed largely of Chinese and Korean puppet troops under Japanese officers, yet still they inflicted over ten times the casualties that they themselves endured.\textsuperscript{75} Chiang Kai-shek was clearly disheartened to learn that Chinese soldiers were fighting more effectively for Japan than for his cause, and he railed against the premature withdrawals, false reporting, and poor coordination of his own troops.\textsuperscript{76} At the conclusion of the battle, Nationalist propaganda hailed the Japanese retreat to its prior positions as the “great victory of western Hubei” (\textit{Exi dajie}), though Chiang privately attributed the enemy withdrawal to the protection afforded China by the Lord and Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{77}

The strong performance of the Chinese puppet soldiers in the west Hubei battles was a notable and worrisome development. Because Japan lost the war and history is written by the victors, those who collaborated with the Japanese have been demonized as traitors (\textit{Hanjian} in Chinese). In recent years, several studies have explored the complex motives of those who chose collaboration.\textsuperscript{78} In January 1943, disagreements with Great

the satisfaction was especially over the Buck article, which stressed the need to promote democracy in China.

\textsuperscript{74} Acheson to Secretary of State, August 26, 1943, \textit{FRUS} 1943, 106–7.

\textsuperscript{75} White and Jacoby, \textit{Thunder out of China}, 143–44; Peck, \textit{Two Kinds of Time}, 532–34; Gauss to Secretary of State, November 5, 1943, \textit{FRUS} 1943, 158–59 (reporting a \textit{Dagongbao} special report that was apparently the source of Jacoby and White’s account); Acheson to Secretary of State, June 19 and August 31, 1943, \textit{FRUS} 1943, 67–68, 108–9.

\textsuperscript{76} \textit{SLGB} 53:511 (May 27, 1943), 54:21–24 (July 3, 1943).


\textsuperscript{78} Timothy Brook, \textit{Collaboration: Japanese Agents and Local Elites in Wartime China
Britain over the status of Hong Kong delayed the announcement of the new treaties with Britain and the United States. As a result, the Japanese renounced their extraterritorial privileges before the Allies, much to the annoyance of the Generalissimo.\(^{79}\) In October, Japan signed an alliance with the Nanjing government of Wang Jingwei in which it promised complete withdrawal of all its forces within two years of the end of the war.\(^{80}\) In November, Wang joined pro-Japanese leaders from India, Burma, and elsewhere in Asia for a grand conference to celebrate the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere.\(^{81}\) Though the world war at large was certainly moving in the Allies’ favor, in China, there was concrete evidence that “the process of ‘conciliation’ and ‘pacification’ in the occupied areas [was] proceeding steadily.”\(^{82}\) As Baldwin had warned, “Japan, not China, is winning.”\(^{83}\)

**THE ECONOMY**

In the summer of 1943, T.V. Soong met with Roosevelt’s trusted White House aide, Harry Hopkins. Both Soong and Hopkins were keen supporters of Chennault’s air-based strategy in China, and the Chinese foreign minister observed that with “growing American air strength in China, I am no longer much worried about our military situation. It is the economic outlook, inflation, which looks alarming.”\(^{84}\) The deteriorating economy and its effect on Chinese morale were a common refrain in reporting from China in 1943. In February, the State Department acknowledged that “the economic and psychological situation in China is

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\(^{79}\) *SLGB* 52:224 (January 9, 1943).


\(^{82}\) Hornbeck memorandum, April 3, 1943, *FRUS 1943*, 43.

\(^{83}\) In contrast to this contemporary assessment, Rana Mitter (in *Forgotten Ally*, 6) writes that “Chiang won the war, but lost his country.” This seems to me to perpetuate a dangerous myth. The defeat of Japan was accomplished by the United States and the Soviet Union. China was a vital ally, but Chiang did not “win the war.”

\(^{84}\) T.V. Soong memorandum, August 16, 1943, T.V. Soong Papers, Box 59, Folio 22.
already critical and is deteriorating.” In May the embassy in Chongqing reported that “economically the deterioration is rapid and is leading toward something that may eventually spell disaster.” Chiang Kai-shek would not have disagreed with this gloomy prognosis. Reviewing another week in the same month, he confessed, “My spirits are depressed. … On the economic, diplomatic, party affairs and military fronts, there has been no progress. Dangers lurk everywhere in society, and the people’s will is wavering.”

Given Free China’s predominantly peasant economy, informed observers agreed that a full economic collapse was unlikely. Unless the harvest failed (as indeed it had in Henan: see chapter 10), most of the population would survive on what they could grow and produce locally. But by 1943, the Japanese blockade, persistent transport bottlenecks, and the lack of raw materials had brought an end to early wartime industrial growth, and manufacturing entered a period of decline. Factories closed, and labor unrest increased. By December, the Generalissimo judged that industry and the economy had registered “the most failures” of the year.

As discussed in detail in chapter 9, the heart of wartime China’s economic problem was its galloping inflation, which was in turn caused by government revenues lagging expenditures by about 75 percent. That gap was covered by printing money. This inflation affected the population unevenly, with salaried employees in China’s small middle class suffering the most and moneyed speculators profiting. Capital was diverted from investment to speculation and hoarding of scarce goods, with predictable effects on national morale and growing cynicism toward the war effort. Most critically, the utter failure of the government’s much-advertised price controls was a major blow to the legitimacy of Chiang’s regime. Needless to say, reports that price controls in the Japanese-occupied areas were more effective only further damaged popular morale.

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86 Atcheson to Secretary of State, May 28, 1943, FRUS 1943, 57.
87 SLGB 53:392 (Weekly review, May 9, 1943).
89 Eastman, “Nationalist China,” 152.
90 Memorandum of the British Foreign Office, July 5, 1943, in FRUS 1943, 71.
Politics

Domestic and international politics were intricately intertwined in wartime China, and 1943 provided several examples of this concatenation. The year began on an optimistic note, as the National Government’s prestige was enhanced by the end of the “unequal treaties,” a diplomatic achievement that Chiang Kai-shek hailed as the “greatest ever.” The recovery of Xinjiang was similarly greeted as “the greatest accomplishment since the founding of the National Government.” Both of these successes represented significant steps forward in China’s quest to reclaim full national sovereignty—the first a concession of legal sovereignty by the Western allies, the second a reluctant relinquishment of economic and political influence in China’s northwest periphery by the beleaguered Soviet Union. For a time, the recovery of Xinjiang even promised a new route for military assistance from the outside world, until the Soviets blocked the truck convoys that were to travel from Karachi to Tehran and then through the USSR to Xinjiang (see chapter 3).

On purely domestic matters, the signs were less encouraging. In the poor provinces of Gansu in the northwest and Guizhou in the southwest, there were significant local rebellions provoked by state demands for taxes and conscripts. Resistance dragged on for several months and represented a notable challenge to central authority before a major deployment of troops restored order. Meanwhile, students and intellectuals were becoming increasingly restive over the stifling censorship of news and information and the debilitating effects of inflation. On several occasions,

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91 SLGB 52:153 (1942 annual review).
92 SLGB 52:157.
93 On the proposed route to Xinjiang through the USSR, see FRUS 1942, 591–600; FRUS 1943, 590–613. When the Chinese request for supplies over this route included 1,100 tons of ammunition for Hu Zongnan, the American Lend-Lease administrator commented, “It is perhaps significant that in the eyes of the Chinese the most important item to be shipped in on the very first lot of supplies transported over this route was a consignment of over a thousand tons of ammunition to the general detailed by Chungking to hem in and watch the Chinese Communists.” Stanton memorandum, July 12, 1943, FRUS 1943, 606.
Chiang’s diaries express concern over the spreading student unrest and attacks on Nationalist Party organizations in the schools.\textsuperscript{95} It was presumably these challenges, as well as the larger threat from the Communists, that induced the Generalissimo to propose a transition to constitutional government (chapter 8).

There was, however, no threat of greater concern to Chiang Kai-shek than the Communists, and 1943 saw dramatic developments on that front. As noted above, the United Front joining the Communists and Nationalists in the fight against Japan had broken down with the New Fourth Army incident of 1941. The Communist armies operated with total autonomy and relative impunity behind Japanese lines, their guerrilla forces avoiding major battles with the better-armed Japanese, but engaging in periodic harassment that helped to keep the enemy contained in urban centers and safely away from the rural population. Despite their minimal contribution to the military struggle against Japan, the Communists were gaining significant support among the peasants of north China. Their programs of rent and interest reduction, highly progressive taxes that exempted many of the poorest peasants, and village elections (even if tightly controlled) appealed to the rural majority. In addition, Communist cadres tended to live simply, and their troops were better disciplined than either the Nationalists or the puppets. For these reasons, the Communist armies found it easier to survive and even prosper as guerrillas behind Japanese lines than did their Nationalist adversaries.\textsuperscript{96}

Through much of 1942–1943, Chiang hoped and expected that relief

\textsuperscript{95} SLGB 53:466 (May 20, 1943), 545 (June 1, 1943).
from the Communist menace would come from a Japanese attack on the
Soviet Union. In Chiang’s eyes, the Chinese Communist Party was en-
tirely a creature of the Soviet Union. He disdained the Communist
armies as “rabble” (literally, “a flock of crows”—wuhe zhi zhong), and was
convinc ed that without Soviet aid, they would crumble before his forces.
Accordingly, the optimal solution to Chiang’s predicament was a Japanese
attack to weaken or even (together with Germany’s invasion) destroy the
Soviet Union, an attack that would also deflect Japanese forces from their
aggression against China. Chiang had been confidently predicting such an
attack since 1941, encouraged by the Anti-Comintern Pact that Japan had
signed, but by 1943 there was a renewed urgency to his wishful thinking.
When Roosevelt’s speech in February said that Japan could not be de-
feated from the Pacific alone, that China would also play a role, Chiang
complained, “our strategy for the past three years has been almost com-
pletely destroyed by [FDR]. The result is that Japan will not dare attack
Russia.”

His strategy, it seems, had been to keep the China front quiet so that Japan would be emboldened to attack the Soviets. A few months
later, hopes revived with “clear intelligence” of a June attack on Russia. By June, he was losing sleep worrying about this, calling it “the key to our
nation’s survival.” And when in the end it seemed the Japanese would
not attack, he found this unhappy development “the greatest danger to our
country.” Chiang could not, it seems, escape the conception of China as
a victim, whose fate lay entirely in the hands of untrustworthy foreign
powers.

As prospects faded for Japanese assistance in solving his Communist
problem, Chiang was presented with another source of hope, Moscow’s
May 1943 announcement that it was disbanding the Communist Interna-

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97 SLGB 54:496, 499 (September 9, 1943). This theme would later become the thesis of
Chiang’s book, Soviet Russia in China: A Summing Up at Seventy (Taipei: China Publishing,
1969), and a persistent theme of anti-Communist propaganda.
98 SLGB 54:12–13 (September 11, 1943).
99 Vincent to Secretary of State, April 24, 1943, FRUS 1943, 50–51; Davies to Stilwell,
100 SLGB 52:491 (Weekly review, February 14, 1943).
102 SLGB 53:610 (June 12, 1943).
103 SLGB 53:650 (Weekly review, June 20, 1943).
tional. Chiang called it a “historic watershed,” the “only great event of the early twentieth century.” Immediately he started planning to attack the Communist base in northern Shaanxi. “The Communist bandit problem,” he wrote, “can only be resolved by force.”

In the area surrounding Yan’an, he ordered airfields prepared, roads and bridges repaired, maps drawn, and extra funds allocated to nearby Nationalist armies. In August, he prepared a major policy document on the Communist problem. Clearly pleased with his product, he called it “one of the great scholarly achievements of my entire revolutionary career.” The plan called for ten armies to attack the Communist base and turn the Reds into roving bandits, who could then be pursued by Chiang’s troops. Timing was essential. Yan’an must be attacked before the defeat of Germany so that Soviet forces could not intervene. American victories in the Pacific were another important consideration. In Chiang’s mind, they reduced the Japanese threat to manageable proportions. As a result, he said, “the problem for the future is entirely internal: how to eradicate the Communist bandits.”

September would bring a critical meeting of the Nationalist Party’s Central Executive Committee. Chiang sent special planes to bring each of the leading northwest warlords to the conclave, and on September 11, a wide range of central and regional leaders met to decide on measures to address the Communist problem. Military plans had been drawn up earlier that day, but in the end, Chiang reversed course, abandoning the military option and choosing instead to treat the Communists’ independent strategy as a matter of disobedience to central authority requiring legal and constitutional remedies. Accordingly, the Central Executive Committee issued a strong condemnation of Communist insubordination, but declared that the issue would be resolved by political, not military, means.

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104 SLGB 53:498 (May 25, 1943), 531 (Monthly review, May 1943).
105 SLGB 54:261 (August 9, 1943).
106 SLGB 53:634 (June 17, 1943), 54:122 (Weekly review, July 18), 319–20 (August 17), 341–42 (August 19), 347–48 (August 20), 366, 368 (August 24), 404 (August 29), 415 (August 29); Gong’anbu, Tang Zong riji, 365 (June 29, 1943), 374 (August 17), 378 (September 9).
107 SLGB 54:410 (Weekly review, August 29, 1943).
108 Chiang Kai-shek memo on CCP and USSR policy, SLGB 54:378–89.
109 SLGB 54:431 (Monthly review, August 1943).
110 SLGB 54:485 (September 8, 1943), 509–16 (September 11), 55:724–25 (1943 annual review).
Divisions in the Guomindang leadership played a role in this decision, as well as fears that an attack would only unify the Communists. Of greatest concern, however, were American warnings against civil war, though Chiang was convinced that the United States and the White House in particular had been misled by Communist propaganda. That was one problem that he hoped to clear up at the coming Cairo summit.

A Politics of “Trusting One’s Own”

The sudden cancelation of military action against the Communists was not the only time in 1943 that Chiang changed his mind at the last minute. It would occur again in the context of Chiang’s longstanding conflict with General Stilwell. Although this time it was not foreign pressure that brought the reversal but domestic politics that bore all the hallmarks of a family feud, it also illustrates important characteristics of Chiang’s regime.

As one reads Chiang’s diary or the daily chronology of his activities, the small circle of close associates is notable. Again and again he meets with the same people: his secretaries, especially the talented Chen Bulei; Dai Li, the sinister head of the secret service; He Yingqin, his chief of staff; Chen Lifu, the minister of education and leader of the Nationalist Party’s powerful C.C. Clique; H.H. Kung (Kong Xiangxi), Chiang’s brother-in-law and acting head of the Executive Yuan; his other brother-in-law, the foreign minister T.V. Soong, on the rare occasions when Soong was in Chongqing; and of course his wife, Soong Mayling. This reliance on a close circle of trusted associates was not just a matter of Chiang’s aloof personality but an explicit aspect of his governing philosophy. He believed that effective governance required “trusting one’s own” (xin qi suo si) and giving them authority within their areas of responsibility. If one were to rely on capable people from society, he believed, the result would be discord and obstruction as they formed self-interested bureaucratic

111 Atcheson to Secretary of State, July 14 and September 17, 1943, FRUS 1943, 283–84, 340; Gauss to Secretary of State, October 14, 1943, FRUS 1943, 351–60; SLGB 52:480 (February 12, 1943) and 54:276–77 (August 11, 1943); Gong’anbu, Tang Zong riji, 380 (September 12, 1943).
cliques. Beyond this small circle of trusted associates, Chiang repeatedly complained of his officials’ “incompetence and stupidity.” In some cases, the problem probably was incompetence, but more commonly it was their failure to correctly discern and carry out Chiang’s wishes. At one point he moaned, “Nobody understands my intentions.” Most importantly, Chiang demanded loyalty, and nothing was more apt to provoke his anger than signs of independence, which were inevitably interpreted as selfishness and arrogance. In these cases, the only way to regain the favor of the autocrat was to offer an abject apology.

The problematic consequences of this style of governance based on personal relations, trust, and loyalty were illustrated in a dramatic confrontation in the fall of 1943. As noted above, Chiang Kai-shek had long been frustrated by his troubled relations with the American commander in China, General Joseph Stilwell. The two men openly despised each other, Stilwell describing Chiang as “a vacillating, tricky, undependable old scoundrel, who never keeps his word,” and Chiang complaining of Stilwell’s “stubbornness, stupidity, and despicable manners.” In the spring of 1943, Chiang actively pressed for Stilwell’s removal, working through T.V. Soong and Mme. Chiang, who were both in Washington at the time. After Mme. Chiang’s return, T.V. Soong aggressively continued the effort, using all his connections in Washington and eventually receiving Roosevelt’s agreement to replace Stilwell. Soong returned to Chongqing in

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112 Chiang Kai-shek diary, August 23, 1943. The SLGB version (54:363–64) changes this term to qinxin (亲信), avoiding the unorthodox endorsement of si (私). The alert reader will note the contrast to Abraham Lincoln’s approach to governance described in Doris Kearns Goodwin, Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012).

113 SLGB 53:290 (April 27, 1943); cf. SLGB 52:228 (January 10), 301 (January 12), 54:240 (August 4).

114 SLGB 53:430 (May 14, 1943).

115 See Chiang’s pleasure at Bai Chongxi’s apology, SLGB 53:126 (March 31), 54:345 (August 20), 55:717 (1943 annual review).

116 Cited in Chennault, Way of a Fighter, 226.


118 SLGB 54:418–20 (T.V. Soong August 30 cable on meeting with Roosevelt), 532 (T.V. Soong September 15 cable on meeting with Hopkins), 607 (Soong September 29 cable on meeting with Roosevelt); see also T.V. Soong memoranda of May 10, August 20, and October 13, 1943, in T.V. Soong Papers, Box 60, Folios 3–4; FRUS 1943, 135–37.
October to join the meetings with the new commander of the China-Burma-India Theater, the dashing young British Lord Louis Mountbatten. In the meantime, however, Mme. Chiang was having second thoughts about the consequences of Stilwell’s removal. Accordingly, together with her sister, the wife of T.V. Soong’s rival H.H. Kung, minister of finance and acting head of the Executive Yuan, she began maneuvering to save the general’s career.119

In many ways, T.V. Soong was the odd man out in Chiang Kai-shek’s inner circle. Wealthy, intelligent, Harvard-educated, with a firm grasp of economics (he had overseen the modernization of China’s currency and banking system in the 1930s), he was thoroughly Westernized in his man-

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119 Tuchman, Stilwell and the American Experience, 388–95; Qi Xisheng, Jianba nuzhang, 386–408; Davies, China Hand, 170–73. T.V. Soong returned on October 11, the day after Chiang’s inauguration, and one wonders if Chiang might have been irritated that Soong had not hurried to arrive in time for the ceremony (SLGB 55:84 [October 11, 1943]).
ners. He wore expensive Western suits, preferred Western food, and typically addressed his Foreign Ministry associates in English. Simplistic American accounts analyzed Chongqing politics as a contest between the “modern” T.V. Soong and the “reactionary” H.H. Kung, the latter condemned as much for his Chinese scholar’s gown as his corruption.\textsuperscript{120} Soong had been extraordinarily successful in Washington, lobbying for aid for China, gaining support for Chennault in his battles with Stilwell, and now getting Roosevelt’s agreement to replace Stilwell. Kung, by contrast, was wildly unpopular, and stories of his family’s extravagance and his own corruption constantly circulated in both Chongqing and the provinces.\textsuperscript{121}

For reasons that are not clear, relations between Chiang and his wife were not entirely harmonious after her return from the United States. By August, she was staying in the nearby house of her sister, the wife of H.H. Kung, returning only briefly in the evening for dinner with the Generalissimo.\textsuperscript{122} This made it easier, in September, for the two sisters to work actively against Stilwell’s recall, meeting several times with him and convincing him that “they [were] a pair of fighters.” According to Stilwell, “May [Soong Mayling] let out that she has a hell of a life with Peanut: no one else will tell him the truth so she is constantly at him with disagreeable news.”\textsuperscript{123} Clearly the two women were playing a desperate game, and there is some evidence that their determination was motivated, in part, by perceived threats to H.H. Kung’s position.\textsuperscript{124}

The whole affair finally came to a head with T.V. Soong’s return to Chongqing in mid-October. There he continued to spearhead the campaign to remove Stilwell, even translating for Chiang Kai-shek in the first

\textsuperscript{121} Gong’anbu, Tang Zong riji, 252 (January 22, 1942), 327–28 (December 29, 1942); Peck, Two Kinds of Time, 357–60, 556.
\textsuperscript{122} Gong’anbu, Tang Zong riji, 373 (August 15, 1943), 384 (October 3), 387 (October 16). For a taste of the rumors circulating in Chongqing regarding the Chiangs’ domestic discord, see John S. Service, “Domestic Troubles in the Chiang Household,” May 10, 1944, in Esherick, Lost Chance in China, 93–96.
\textsuperscript{123} White, Stilwell Papers, 223–38, quotes from 229, 232.
\textsuperscript{124} Gong’anbu, Tang Zong riji, 373 (August 15, 1943).
meetings with the American general Brehon Somervell about replacing Stilwell. Suddenly the whole deal fell apart. Chiang's own account is noteworthy:

On the question of whether or not to remove Stilwell, my intent was to follow the analysis of October 15 [to state my clear objections to Stilwell but leave the decision to the United States]. In the first two meetings with Somervell, I proceeded in this way to effect the changes necessary to achieve our objectives. But T.V. insisted on sticking to his own hatred of Stilwell and his personal opinions. So in translating he did not convey my views. In his telling, Stilwell would definitely have to be removed. After Somervell left, I considered carefully and decided to endeavor to save the situation and make a 180 degree turn.

Mme. Chiang was sent to warn Stilwell of his fate unless he offered a sincere apology and promised to reform. This was done, and the next day Chiang met Somervell to announce the reversal. Stilwell had dodged another bullet and would stay on for another year before one final crisis in U.S.-China relations would at last bring about his removal. T.V. Soong was not so lucky. On the morning after Stilwell made his apology, Soong held a stormy meeting with the Generalissimo in which both sides lost their tempers, Chiang smashed teacups, and T.V. ended up in disgrace, banned from attending the Cairo Conference, removed from power, and allowed to return only months later when friends found someone with better Chinese than his own to pen an appropriately contrite apology.

Two points are particularly notable in this incident. First, T.V. Soong’s crime had been to adhere to his own position—though in this case, the position was originally Chiang’s own. The problem was, in presenting it to

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126 Wu, Huang, and Liu, Wu Guozhen zhujuan, 399–406; Alsop with Platt, “I’ve Seen the Best of It,” 223–27; SLGB 55:122 (October 18, 1943) cleans up the diary a little, changing Chiang’s order that Song “get the hell out” (gundan) to “leave” (likai); Gong’anbu, Tang Zong riji, 386 (October 16, 1943).
the American representative, Soong had spoken more forcefully than Chiang wished: Chiang had long hoped that expressing his dissatisfaction with Stilwell would suffice to persuade Roosevelt to remove him. He was, after all, used to a politics in which subordinates readily discerned his position and adopted it as their own. Soong was wiser to American ways and recognized the need for a more direct statement of Chiang’s wishes. When they had their final fight, Soong protested that his failing was that he had been “too loyal” in carrying out Chiang’s wishes, but this only further enraged the Generalissimo.127 Chiang compared Soong’s behavior to an obscure incident in 1921 when Sun Yat-sen’s lieutenant Hu Hanmin had deliberately ignored several of Sun’s orders that he deemed unwise. Sun had forgiven Hu and later entrusted him with even more important positions. But Chiang took a dimmer view of the incident, saying that Soong’s conduct in 1943 threatened “another catastrophe like 1921.” Soong was “holding his own personal views and treating our party-state’s foreign policy like his personal plaything.”128 Chiang so identified himself with the Chinese nation that views even slightly different from his own were regarded as self-interested and contrary to the national interest.

Second, the lesson that Chiang drew from his sudden change of mind was that “in deciding and changing policy, success or failure depends completely on the last five minutes.”129 Although the Allies were certainly glad that Stilwell, a trusted commander for all his faults, would remain in China to direct the Burma campaign, the process that led to this result could hardly have encouraged them. One constant complaint against the Generalissimo was his unpredictability, his indecision, his tendency to vacillate. Now, on the eve of the Cairo Conference, Chiang had not only removed T.V. Soong, his most experienced foreign affairs deputy, he had changed his stance “180 degrees” in successive conversations with Somervell and raised last-minute policy change to the status of an essential governing principle.

127 SLGB 55:122 (October 18, 1943).
129 SLGB 55:118 (and again, 121) (October 17, 1943); cf. Huang, “Chiang Kai-shek and His Diary,” 105 (diary entry of April 2, 1939).
Hsiao-ting Lin has provided an excellent discussion of Chiang Kai-shek at the Cairo Conference (chapter 13), so it is not necessary to repeat the narrative here. Nonetheless, the conference encapsulated so many of the successes and failings of 1943 that a few words on the issues raised in this prologue are required. Most importantly, one must admit the historic significance of including China among the Great Powers in 1943. From the perspective of the present, it seems obvious that China should be considered a Great Power, but in the early twentieth century, poor, weak, and internally divided China certainly did not look like a Great Power. In this respect, Roosevelt’s insistence that China’s size and the energy of its people made its rise in the postwar world inevitable was an act of considerable foresight. Churchill, of course, resisted, describing China as a “faggot vote” for the United States in the United Nations; and Stalin, understandably given his own nation’s sacrifices, thought China had not fought well enough to deserve such recognition.  

We should not imagine that it was only prescience or altruism that drove Roosevelt to treat China in this way. As FDR told his son after his first meeting with Chiang in Cairo, “The job in China can be boiled down to one essential: China must be kept in the war, tying [sic] up Japanese soldiers.” To this end, it was essential to boost Chinese morale. Unable to supply much material assistance over the perilous Hump lifeline, the United States offered symbolic gestures: the termination of the “unequal treaties,” the inclusion of China in the Four Powers, and now the summit in Cairo. At Cairo, the Allies could make cost-free promises that would be welcome to China and boost Chiang’s standing—most notably the return of Taiwan and Manchuria. They could pose for the photographs of Roosevelt, Churchill, and Chiang—photos that are perhaps the most en-

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131 Elliott Roosevelt, *As He Saw It* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1946), 143.
during legacy of the conference. Indeed, in reading the official conference record, one gets the impression that, putting aside the heated debates over the Burma campaign, for Roosevelt the confab was largely about atmospherics and taking the measure of Chiang Kai-shek. In contrast to the Tehran Conference with Stalin that would follow, the Cairo record is incredibly sparse, with no American minutes on Roosevelt’s key conversations with Chiang.  

As for the measure of Chiang, the inescapable conclusion is that he came off poorly. Above all, he was seen as indecisive, vacillating, constantly changing his mind. Some have blamed this on Mme. Chiang’s translation, but it must be remembered that T.V. Soong was banned from the conference precisely for his failure to properly interpret the Generalissimo’s intentions. Mme. Chiang would not have made the same mistake. The more plausible explanation is that the Americans and British had been meeting in these strategic conferences for almost two years. They knew how to debate and bargain with each other and did so in their native language. The Chinese were outsiders in this club. Chiang was utterly unused to negotiation among equals and felt limited by his poor English. In his first summit outing, he was simply not up to the task.

His stock would fall even further after Churchill and Roosevelt met with Stalin. In contrast to Chiang’s “characteristic myopia” in seeing Burma as the key to the struggle for Asia, Stalin quickly appreciated the conflicting demands of the Burma campaign, the Pacific War, Mediterranean options, and the planned invasion of northern France. Indeed, the British chief of staff found Stalin a better strategic thinker than either Roosevelt or Churchill. This judgment was no doubt colored by the fact

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133 FRUS Cairo, passim, but esp. 322–23, 334–35. At Tehran, Charles Bohlen from the State Department translated and left detailed minutes and analysis of the meetings with Stalin, but at Cairo, Mme. Chiang translated, and no State Department representative was present. See also Davies, China Hand, 149–51.
135 Taylor, Generalissimo, 248–50.
137 Qi Xisheng, Jianba nuzhang, 412–13; Davies, China Hand, 144–47.
138 Sainsbury, Turning Point, 184, 226.
that Russia and Britain agreed on the low priority of the Burma campaign. More importantly, when Stalin repeated his promise to enter the war against Japan once Germany was defeated, an alternative was provided to a costly campaign through the jungles of Burma. \(^{139}\) In the run-up to Cairo, Chiang Kai-shek had insisted that he meet Roosevelt before the president met Stalin. \(^{140}\) Obviously he wanted to state his case to Roosevelt first, but the unhappy result was that Stalin got the last word on the critical strategic issues of the war.

In September, when Chiang abandoned his plan to solve the Communist problem by force, he resolved to do his utmost to disabuse his American allies of any illusions they had of the CCP as a potential partner in the war against Japan. \(^{141}\) The need for this had been brought to him forcefully when, on the first day of the Guomindang Central Executive Committee meetings that would decide policy toward the Communists, Stilwell had presented him a military plan that involved a combined Communist-Nationalist offensive in north China. \(^{142}\) In Chiang’s planning for Cairo, relations with the Communists were a matter that he expected the Americans to raise, and there is no question that they came up in the Generalissimo’s private talks with the president. The precise nature of those conversations is not known, but Roosevelt told his son Elliott, who accompanied FDR to Cairo, “Chiang would have us believe that the Chinese Communists were doing nothing against the Japanese. Again, we know differently.” \(^{143}\) So Chiang, as he intended, had used the opportunity to press his argument that the Communists were not, in fact, resisting Japan.

Roosevelt, obviously, was not convinced. The predicament that this presented for Chiang was that whether or not the Communists were resisting Japan was a matter of fact that could be investigated. This is precisely what the Americans started requesting soon after the conference in

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\(^{140}\) SLGB 53:594–95 (June 9, 1943), 55:38 (October 7, 1943).

\(^{141}\) See also Hurley to Roosevelt, November 20, 1943, *FRUS 1943*, 163–66.

\(^{142}\) SLGB 54:519 (Weekly review, September 12, 1943). Naturally, Stilwell’s suggestion only confirmed Chiang’s conviction that Stilwell was a “despicable, stupid little man.” See also Stilwell diary, October 5, 1943, Stilwell Papers, Box 39, Folder 10.

\(^{143}\) Roosevelt, *As He Saw It*, 163.
Joseph W. Esherick

Cairo: permission to send a mission to Yan’an to better understand the Communist movement. Eventually, in June 1944, Chiang was forced to agree, and the Dixie Mission of U.S. military and foreign service experts was sent to investigate the Communist resistance. Their reports were uniformly favorable to the Communists, and while there has been much subsequent debate on whether the American observers were hoodwinked by their Communist hosts, the undeniable fact is that the Dixie Mission together with simultaneous visits by Chinese and Western newsmen brought back reports of a powerful political and military movement growing in north China and independent of Chiang’s control. Their reports left no doubt that China’s destiny no longer lay exclusively in Chiang Kai-shek’s hands.144

The approval of the Dixie Mission came just as Chiang’s own troops were reeling before Japan’s Ichigo offensive. Stilwell had long argued that if Chennault was successful in his air offensive against Japanese supply lines, Japan would respond by taking the Chinese airfields. Chiang Kai-shek promised that his ground forces could defend the airfields,145 but he was wrong. The Japanese rolled over his forces and opened a land corridor that stretched all the way from Korea and northeast China to Vietnam and Southeast Asia. Chiang lost 750,000 men in the fight, and his prestige suffered a crushing blow.146 In domestic politics, as discussed in chapter 8, his constitutional preparations were overtaken by growing support for the rival Communist call for a coalition government—an idea that Roosevelt had also pressed at Cairo.147 In the famous words of an earlier era, “Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold.”148 And in many respects, the seeds for the collapse were planted in 1943.

145 SLGB 53:312 (April 30, 1943), 331–32 (May 1, 1943).
146 Peattie, Drea, and van de Ven, Battle for China, 392–418. For contemporary accounts, see White and Jacoby, Thunder out of China, 179–98; Peck, Two Kinds of Time, 551–83.
147 Roosevelt, As He Saw It, 164.
it was appropriately solemn and dignified. Chiang had now reached the pinnacle of his power, and yet he felt that the audience at the inauguration seemed embarrassed, even humiliated—perhaps because of the absence of the diplomatic corps and the cool international response to his big day.3 Within a few days, the foreign ministers of Great Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union would meet in Moscow. At the insistence of the United States and over the resistance of Britain and the USSR, the conference would formally include China as one of the postwar Great Powers—a decision that laid the foundation for China’s eventual inclusion in the United Nations Security Council.4 But on his inauguration day, Chiang felt slighted, and soon he was grumbling over the dispirited, foul, corrupt, and selfish members of his administration.5

In many ways, this inauguration day captured the spirit of China in 1943. On the one hand, it was a year of great triumphs. The “unequal treaties” that had shackled China since the Opium War a century earlier had been abolished, and the former “sick man of Asia” was now recognized as one of the Four Great Powers. Mme. Chiang Kai-shek made an impressive tour of the United States, including her historic addresses to both houses of Congress. Chiang himself joined Churchill and Roosevelt for a summit meeting in Cairo that produced the memorable photos of the Chinese leader sitting as an equal with the most powerful men in the world. The year also saw China regain full sovereignty over the resource-rich northwestern province of Xinjiang, which in the previous decade had been transformed into a virtual colony of the Soviet Union. Chiang Kai-

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3 Chiang Kai-shek, weekly reflection (October 1943), in Gao Sulan, ed., Jiang Zhongzheng zongtong dang’an: Shilüe gaoben [Archives of President Chiang Kai-shek: Draft chronology] (Taipei: Guoshiguan, 2011), vol. 55, 81 (hereafter cited as SLGB). This source, compiled in the 1950s, contains major sections of Chiang’s diaries, as well as other official papers and a record of his activities for each day. I have used this source rather than the less accessible diary copies now held in the Hoover Institution Archives, unless the language of the original diary is significantly different. No foreign diplomats or newsmen were invited to the inauguration (Gauss to Secretary of State, October 19, 1943, in FRUS 1943, 361–62). Was the audience perhaps unaware of this, regarding their absence as a snub?


5 SLGB 55:81 (weekly reflection, October 1943).
shek had celebrated these accomplishments in his book *China’s Destiny*, where he proudly proclaimed his vision of China’s past and future.

On the other hand, 1943 witnessed critical setbacks and disappointments for Chiang’s Nationalist regime. There was the devastating famine in Henan Province, and the embarrassing fact that foreign journalists had spread the news to the world. In the capital and throughout China, inflation raged unchecked despite well-publicized government efforts to control prices. Local rebellions mobilized tens of thousands of disaffected peasants to resist military conscription and state grain requisitions in Gansu and Guizhou provinces. Most importantly, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was spreading its political and military infrastructure throughout north China, displacing local elites loosely linked to the Nationalist regime in the areas behind Japanese lines. Chiang Kai-shek contemplated using the opportunity presented by the Soviet Union’s disbandment of the Communist International (Comintern) to launch a military assault on the Communist base and rid China of the Red menace once and for all. He abandoned the planned assault at the last minute, and Communist power continued to grow.

These and other developments are examined in the following chapters as we look at a single year in China’s modern history from a variety of perspectives in an effort to uncover the determinants of the nation’s trajectory. By focusing on a single year, we hope to capture some of the diversity and contingency of history, without losing sight of the larger forces working inexorably in the background.

**The War**

In 1943, China was a nation at war. Japan’s invasion of China began in 1931, when its army units in Manchuria sabotaged a Japanese-owned railroad and used the incident as an excuse to occupy northeast China, then set up the puppet state of Manchukuo headed by the last emperor of the deposed Qing dynasty. The loss of Manchuria deprived China of its key heavy industrial base, with major coal mines, steel mills, and its largest arsenal, whose output had surpassed that of all other Chinese arsenals.
combined. From Manchuria, the Japanese slowly encroached on adjacent regions in Inner Mongolia and north China until a clash with Chinese forces near Beijing (then called Beiping) provoked sharp resistance and full-scale war in July 1937. Chiang Kai-shek’s armies put up a determined fight for the nation’s commercial and industrial center in Shanghai, but the Japanese responded with a devastating counterattack, which included an innovation in modern warfare: the sustained use of aerial bombing against civilian targets. By the end of the year, the Japanese had broken through the Chinese lines and then wreaked their revenge on the nation’s capital in the Nanjing Massacre.

The Japanese strategy in China anticipated Hitler’s blitzkrieg tactics in Europe. Overwhelming firepower from the air and land- and sea-based artillery were concentrated in an effort to break through Chinese defenses, allowing infantry to advance rapidly along rail and river transport lines to achieve a quick victory. After their initial valiant but costly attempt to blunt the Japanese assault in Shanghai, Chiang’s armies resorted to the more conservative approach of “trading space for time,” using China’s overwhelming advantage in geographic size and human population to counter Japan’s superior firepower in a protracted war. The brutality of the Japanese assault, from the Rape of Nanjing to ritual executions of prisoners and the use of poison gas during their advance up the Yangzi (Yangtze) River,

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inspired a new sense of national purpose as Chinese rallied to resist the invaders. The government and patriotic businessmen cooperated in a massive effort to move industry and skilled manpower to the interior. Millions of workers, businessmen, technicians, civil servants, intellectuals, students, journalists, and ordinary citizens withdrew up the Yangtze to the new capital in Chongqing and other inland cities to continue the resistance. It was indeed “one of the greatest mass migrations in human history.”

In little more than a year, the Japanese had driven Chinese forces from all the major coastal cities and the central China metropolis of Wuhan, where the Chinese had hoped, but in the end failed, to hold the line. Instead Chiang’s forces hunkered down for a protracted war of attrition from the relative safety of their bastion in the fertile fields of Sichuan, above the treacherous gorges on the Yangtze River. In the spring of 1939, the Japanese launched murderous air raids that destroyed much of the wartime capital in Chongqing, but soon an effective network of air raid shelters and an efficient warning system relying on spotters near the Japanese airfields and along their flight paths cut Chinese casualties to a minimum. As elsewhere in the history of modern warfare, the bombing of civilian targets served mainly to strengthen national resolve to resist.

December 1941 brought the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and a fundamental reshaping of the global strategic picture. After fighting pretty much on its own for four long years (ten years, if one counts from Japan’s Manchurian incursion), China gained a crucial ally in the United States. Unfortunately, despite widespread American sentiment for immediate revenge on Japan, the Roosevelt administration gave priority to the rescue of Britain and the defeat of Hitler in a “Europe first” strategy. Even more sobering for the Chinese was the dismal showing of British forces in Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaya, and Burma and the quick defeat of the

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Americans in the Philippines and the Dutch in Indonesia. In the battle for Shanghai, the Chinese had put up a much more determined fight and inflicted more Japanese casualties than the proud Europeans, but now China stood alone as the European colonial empires in Southeast Asia crumbled before the Japanese assault. To add insult to injury, the British initially declined Chinese military assistance in the battle to keep open the supply line to China through their Burmese colony. In the words of the U.S. State Department, the British stance was motivated by their “reluc-
tance to accept assistance from Orientals as derogatory to British prestige in Asia.” When Burma fell, China lost its last land link to the outside world, and soon despaired of receiving any substantial aid from the Allies.

Fortunately for the Chinese, the Japanese had also suffered chastening

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losses in the fight for Wuhan; their forces were now fighting major battles in Southeast Asia; and soon much of their air force and many first-line army units were diverted to the campaign in the Pacific. As a result, the bombing raids on Chongqing halted and the city was rebuilt; Japanese offensives were largely limited to local foraging operations; and the front lines hardened into a prolonged stalemate. Fighting alone, China became the “forgotten ally.” After suffering enormous casualties in the first years of the war, the Chinese now hunkered down, hoping to hold out until others could defeat Japan on their behalf.

THE GENERALISSIMO

No individual was more central to the fate of wartime China than Chiang Kai-shek. The son of a Zhejiang salt merchant and favorite of a doting mother, he received a solid Confucian education in the final years of the Qing dynasty. Imbued with the nationalist fervor of an era that aroused revolutionary sentiments and military aspirations, Chiang enrolled in a Japanese military academy and then China’s premier officers’ training school in Baoding. When the 1911 Revolution toppled the Qing dynasty and established the Republic of China, Chiang became a loyal follower of Sun Yat-sen, leader of what would soon become the Nationalist Party (Guomindang/Kuomintang). In the 1920s, Sun appointed him head of the Whampoa Military Academy to train officers for the party’s National Revolutionary Army. Sun also sent Chiang to the Soviet Union, then the chief financial and military backer of the Nationalist Party, to learn the secrets of the Red Army’s success—but Chiang returned with an abiding suspicion of Soviet intentions in China. After Sun’s death in 1925, Chiang led the Northern Expedition that unified the country, defeating or absorbing the warlord armies that had fractured the country since the early years of the republic. At a crucial juncture in 1927, Chiang turned on the Na-
nationalists’ Soviet sponsors, sending the Soviet advisers back to Russia and massacring thousands of their Communist Party and leftist protégées. The old capital in Beijing was abandoned, and Chiang presided over a relatively cohesive regime from a new capital in Nanjing.¹⁸

Chiang’s National Government (Guomin zhengfu) in Nanjing was founded on a commitment to complete the national revolutionary mission of Sun Yat-sen. One of the government’s first acts was to erect an immense mausoleum on the outskirts of the new capital and stage an elaborate procession in which Sun’s body was brought by train from Beijing to be reburied in this new ceremonial center. Chiang himself played a central role in the ritual process and further cemented his ties to Sun’s legacy by marrying Soong Mayling, the sister of Sun Yat-sen’s widow.¹⁹ The new Mme. Chiang was “cosmopolitan, articulate, intelligent, and wealthy,” and as an American-educated Christian, she provided an attractive face for the regime’s Western allies. As a condition for the marriage, Chiang had converted to Christianity and regularly read the Bible, said his prayers, and thanked God for his good fortune. But the ideological foundation of his regime was the commitment to Sun Yat-sen’s legacy, and every Monday in schools, government institutions, factories, and military units, Chinese gathered to recite Sun Yat-sen’s political testament and listen to inspirational appeals to dedicate themselves to completing his nation-building mission.²¹ By portraying himself as Sun Yat-sen’s most loyal disciple and linking Sun’s Nationalist Party to the nation’s modern rise, Chiang sought to link his own authority to the national destiny.

Throughout his adult life, Chiang Kai-shek kept a meticulous diary, whose daily entries provide greater insight into his private thoughts and


²⁰ Taylor, Generalissimo, 74.

psychology than we have for any other Chinese ruler past or present. In these entries we see a man of intense self-discipline, his tightly wrought manner often interpreted as a psychological overcorrection for an admittedly dissolute life as a young man in Shanghai. But his rigid demeanor also came from his military training, and Chiang’s genuine respect for the martial culture of both Japan and Germany was linked to the value he placed on discipline, order, and respect for authority. By the wartime period, Chiang’s discipline was less soldierly than Confucian and Christian, as he maintained a daily routine that began with morning prayers, silent meditation, and calisthenics, and ended with more prayers and meditation. He summarized his accomplishments and failings in regular weekly, monthly, and annual self-reflections (fanxing). When his determined self-composure broke down in occasional explosions of anger, he would congratulate himself if he was able to conduct his next meeting with equanimity. He admitted to being unsociable, disliking public ceremonies, and seemed happiest when alone with his family or silently meditating in some quiet pavilion. As a “Bible-reading Confucian,” he spent long hours in reading Confucian commentaries and Liang Qichao’s writings on Chinese intellectual history. During one air raid, he was forced to seek refuge in a roadside shelter and took out a book on Confucian philosophers, later commenting that “the profit from reading is greater than any riches or honor.” These studies were not just for pleasure or self-cultivation; he also sought to shape the nation’s intellectual agenda, issuing orders to establish a Society for the Study of Tang Culture to combat the effete Confucianism of the Song and Ming dynasties.

From these multiple sources—Japanese and German military culture,
Christian faith, Confucian philosophy, and loyalty to Sun Yat-sen’s legacy—came an increasingly authoritarian personality. Convinced of his own correctness, he railed against the stupidity, laxity, and selfishness of his subordinates. Surrounded by presumed incompetents, he was unable to delegate authority, once complaining, “I have to do everything myself.”

This inability to delegate, plus his remarkable attention to detail, made him the ultimate micromanager, scolding a vice minister of foreign affairs for the poor quality of paper used for a diplomatic note, complaining when he saw a copy of the national flag in which the points of the star were not precisely aligned in the vertical axis, and stipulating appropriate

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31 SLGB 52:498 (February 16, 1943). Ray Huang makes the useful point that scarce resources made it difficult for subordinates to make crucial decisions on allocations. As a result, everything was referred to Chiang. Ray Huang, “Chiang Kai-shek and His Diary as a Historical Source,” Chinese Studies in History 28, no. 1–2 (Fall–Winter 1995–1996), 45.


33 SLGB 53:30–81 (March 24, 1943).
dress for formal party meetings after observing with dismay a session in which the four people on the dais were all wearing different types of clothing. Perhaps most difficult for those who sought to serve Chiang and interpret his intentions was his capacity, in the words of one U.S. Foreign Service officer, to be “alternately impassive and overwrought, obstinate and vacillating.” Mme. Chiang, who was presumably accustomed to this behavior, was to experience it when confronted with an invitation to visit Great Britain after her much-acclaimed visit to the United States. Her husband, angered and insulted by a Churchill speech that omitted China from the list of Great Powers, flip-flopped back and forth as he shot off one telegram after another advising on whether or not she should accept.

Chiang’s reaction to Churchill’s speech was indicative of the guiding principle for his political behavior. Chiang was the supreme nationalist, committed to the same slogan—the revival of the Chinese nation (Zhong-hua minzu fuxing)—proclaimed by the leaders of the People’s Republic of China today. Every challenge to China’s interests was interpreted as a slight, an insult, a tendency of the Western powers to look down on the Chinese. The British and Churchill, the ultimate modern imperialist, were particular targets of Chiang’s ire, and not without reason. In 1943, the British refusal to consider any concessions on the status of their Hong Kong colony during the negotiations to abolish the “unequal treaties” was particularly galling (see chapter 5). At times, British imperial meddling even provoked sympathy for the Axis Powers and Japan’s anti-Western pan-Asian agenda. After receiving news of British interference in Tibetan affairs and Roosevelt’s failure to end Churchill’s waffling on the commitment to reopen the Burma Road, Chiang would write, “How did we get

34 SLGB 54:552, 559–60 (September 18, 1943).
36 SLGB 52:586 (February 26, 1943), 587 (February 27); SLGB 53:36–37 (March 14), 77–78 (March 24), 101–2 (March 26), 143 (April 1), 380–81 (May 7), 433 (May 15). On the Chinese reaction to Churchill’s speech, see also Vincent to Secretary of State, April 8, 1943, FRUS 1943, 47.
37 See Chiang’s speech to the leaders of the New Life Movement in SLGB 52:528 (February 19, 1943).
stuck with this sort of dishonest and untrustworthy politician? You can see why Japan and Germany would wish to dispel their hatred and fearlessly embark on aggression.”

Chiang realized, in word if not in deed, that to gain real Great Power stature in the international community, China would have to strengthen itself. “Of the four countries in the United Nations, we are the weakest; and the treatment of the weak is like cripples or vagrants at the hands of local bullies. We must realize that if a person does not strengthen himself, no one can help. If a nation does not endeavor to strengthen itself, then friend and foe alike will treat it like meat on a chopping block. Beware!”

To Chiang and the Nationalist Party, the key to strengthening China was real national unity—overcoming the legacy of warlordism and political fragmentation that had plagued the Republic of China. This had been the purpose of Sun Yat-sen’s revolution in the 1920s, and Chiang realized that his armies had achieved victory as much by absorbing rival warlord forces as by conquering them. The residual power of local warlords posed a constant challenge to the Nationalist regime, and on several occasions in the 1930s they rose in open revolt to Chiang’s central government.

The War of Resistance against Japan rallied the country behind Chiang as never before, but it also seemed to increase his authoritarian tendencies. Theodore White and Annalee Jacoby compiled an incomplete list of the posts that Chiang held during the war. They included “chief executive of the Kuomintang; president of the National Government; chairman of the National Military Council, commander-in-chief of land, naval, and air forces; supreme commander, China theater; president of the State Council; chairman of the Supreme National Defense Council; director general of the Central Planning Board; chairman of the Party and Political Work Evaluation Committee; director of the New Life Movement Association; chairman of the Commission for Inauguration of Constitutional Government; president of the Central Training Corps; president of the School for Descendants of Revolutionary Martyrs; and president of the National

39 SLGB 52:593 (February 28, 1943); cf. SLGB 54:622 (September 1943 monthly review).
Glider Association.” With so much power concentrated in his hands, Chiang had a distinct tendency to view himself as the embodiment of the nation’s will. Signs of independence or resistance to his wishes were regarded as putting one’s own selfish interests before those of the nation. Such behavior was most likely to provoke Chiang’s ire, with the predictable result that he found himself surrounded largely by yes-men unwilling to bring unwelcome news. Jiang Menglin, the loyal Nationalist intellectual who headed Peking University, reportedly complained, “No one tells him the truth, no one. I used to speak frankly to him, but I stopped doing so—it was no use. No one else would and he could not believe me. He will not listen to anything unpleasant, so nobody tells him anything but pleasant things. It is impossible to reason with him. … He flies into a rage if anyone argues against with [sic] him.”

THE COMMUNIST CHALLENGE

Of all the challenges to Chiang Kai-shek’s authority, none was more vexing than the CCP. Soon after its founding by a small group of intellectuals in Shanghai in 1921, the CCP, under strong pressure from the Communist International, had entered an alliance with Sun Yat-sen’s Nationalist Party. While Sun was alive, the United Front worked relatively smoothly, for the Soviet Union provided critical support for both parties. After Chiang engineered the brutal massacre of Communist activists in 1927, however, the two parties became mortal enemies. The remnants of the CCP fled to the hills, built their own Red Army, and transformed their movement into a peasant-based revolution. In 1934–1935, Chiang Kai-shek’s armies drove the Communists from their bases in the highlands of central China, and they embarked on the Long March that carried them

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40 White and Jacoby, Thunder out of China, 124. A footnote adds thirty-six additional posts, many of them president of various schools that Chiang periodically visited to exhort the students.

41 SLGB 54:524 (September 13, 1943), 55:717 (1943 annual review); White and Jacoby, Thunder out of China, 126–31.

42 “The Peanut. Thoughts by Ch.M.L.,” Stilwell Papers, Box 41, Folder 2, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, California.
to the barren hills of northern Shaanxi. The Long March was both a heroic escape and a devastating military defeat in which the Red Army lost 90 percent of its forces, but in the end the movement survived with a dedicated band of hardened revolutionaries under the leadership of Mao Zedong.43

From the mid-1930s, as Japanese aggression posed a growing threat to Chinese sovereignty, the Communists reoriented much of their propaganda to appeals for a unified national resistance to Japan. They were encouraged in this by the Soviet Union—itself threatened by both Nazi Germany and the virulently anti-Soviet Japanese army—which encouraged Communist parties around the world to enter antifascist united fronts. From the press, liberal intellectuals, and campuses throughout China came appeals and demonstrations urging Chiang Kai-shek to halt his campaign against the Communists and enter into a united front against Japan. The culmination of this process came in December 1936 when Chiang was kidnapped and held hostage by two of his own generals in Xi’an. With Stalin urging moderation from afar and the CCP leader Zhou Enlai joining the negotiations in Xi’an, an agreement was reached to end the long civil war and prepare to cooperate in resisting Japan.44

When full-scale war broke out the following summer, Chiang’s National Government became the focal point of national resistance. Communists, leftists, and progressive intellectuals joined the Nationalists in a grand coalition to arouse their compatriots to resist the aggressors. As the universities moved to the interior, students joined propaganda corps to stage patriotic dramas, paint anti-Japanese slogans on walls, draw cartoons, print leaflets, and urge on the young soldiers at the front. During the battle for Wuhan, there was a real sense of unified resistance, and in a

43 For an excellent account of the early history of the party and the rise of Mao, see Alexander V. Pantsov, with Steven I. Levine, Mao: The Real Story (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012), 1–288.

few key battles in the north, Communist and Nationalist troops fought together to confront the Japanese advance.\textsuperscript{45}

In addition to the domestic pressure for Nationalist-Communist cooperation, there was a diplomatic incentive for Chiang to work with his erstwhile enemies. After his German military advisers withdrew at the beginning of the war, Chiang’s principal source of foreign military aid was the Soviet Union. The Soviets were fully aware of Japan’s hostility to their regime: Japan had occupied Vladivostok in the early years of the USSR; it had joined Germany and Italy in the Anti-Comintern Pact in 1936; and until the decision to attack Pearl Harbor and the European colonies of Southeast Asia, many in the Japanese Army command still preferred an attack on the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{46} Accordingly, from the first months of the conflict in China, the Soviet Union became the primary source of financial and military support for the Nationalist regime, supplying military advisers, arms, tanks, artillery, and volunteers to fly hundreds of combat aircraft.\textsuperscript{47} This aid provided a key incentive for Chiang Kai-shek to maintain cordial relations with the Chinese Communists.

Under the terms of the United Front, the National Government recognized the Communist armies, the Eighth Route Army and the New Fourth Army, as integral parts of the nation’s armed forces and provided them with arms and provisions, as well as a subsidy for the Communist regional government based in Yan’an. The presumption was that, although the Communist armies would keep their own commanders, those officers would be subject to the unified command of Chiang’s general staff. But from the very beginning of Mao Zedong’s rise to power, he had recognized that for his revolution to succeed, it would need its own army. Mao


was not about to surrender control of his armies to Chiang. So from the outset, the United Front was bedeviled by conflicts over the independence of the Eighth Route and New Fourth armies. In Chiang’s eyes, these independent forces were a fundamental threat to national unity, and by the time he wrote *China’s Destiny* he would refer to them as “disguised war-lords and new feudalists.”

Any effective cooperation between Communist and Nationalist forces came to an end with the New Fourth Army incident of January 1941. Chiang had ordered the New Fourth Army to move north of the Yangtze River by the end of 1940, but the Communists feared a trap and hesitated. In the end, they moved by a circuitous route and were attacked by the Nationalist armies, which decimated the Communist headquarters battalion and took thousands of prisoners. It was a devastating military loss for the Communists, but an even greater propaganda defeat for the Nationalists, who were broadly accused of attacking a patriotic army in the midst of the struggle for national survival. From that time forward, the United Front existed in name only. The Nationalists cut off their subsidy to the Communist armies and regional government, and established a tight blockade of the area around Yan’an. The Communists expanded their bases behind Japanese lines, often displacing Nationalist forces, whom they accused of collaborating with the enemy. The Soviet Union, for its part, began preparing for the expected invasion from Nazi Germany, withdrew its pilots, terminated most of its aid for China, and secured its eastern front by signing a neutrality pact with Japan in April 1941.

**The United States and China**

Few relationships were so fraught with tension and misperceptions as China’s wartime relations with the United States. The Allies needed each


other. China needed U.S. military and financial assistance; the United States needed China to tie down Japanese troops and resources on the Asian mainland so that they were not diverted to confront the American advance across the Pacific. Neither side truly trusted or understood the other. Chiang and his regime were painfully aware of China’s weakness and hypersensitive to any slight from their stronger ally; the United States was frustrated by China’s passivity and defensive stance, giving little heed to the enormous losses China had suffered during the four long years that it had fought alone.50

Even before Pearl Harbor, there was considerable American sympathy for China’s plight. Polls showed that among the public, 74 percent favored China, against only 2 percent for Japan. This sentiment was fueled by the strong pro-China stance of China-born Henry Luce and his influential chain of magazines: Time proclaimed Chiang Kai-shek and his wife “Man and Wife of the Year” in 1937.51 The U.S. government, alarmed by Japan’s expanding power in East Asia, also tilted toward China. In the summer of 1941, Roosevelt announced an oil embargo on Japan, which left the Japanese with only a few months’ supply to fuel its aggression. In the negotiations with Japan that followed, the United States insisted that Japan abandon all territories seized from China as a condition for resumed trade. At that point, “confronted with military strangulation by oil embargoes and the choice of admitting defeat in China,” the emperor gave final approval to the plan to knock out the U.S. Navy at Pearl Harbor and simultane-


ously attack southward to capture the European and American colonies in Southeast Asia, including the Dutch oil fields in Indonesia.\textsuperscript{52}

The Japanese attack and declaration of war against the United States and Great Britain gave China two powerful allies, but, as noted above, the initial results were discouraging. The British fought poorly to defend their Asian colonies, and soon Burma was lost and with it China’s last lifeline to the outside world. For the next three years, the main route for military supplies to China was the Hump, the air route from India over the Himalayan foothills to Kunming in southwest China. Described as “the most dangerous, terrifying, barbarous aerial transport run in the world,” the route took planes well above their designed altitudes, in treacherous weather, with only visual navigation, so that many planes and airmen were lost. Tonnage was necessarily limited and further constrained by the poorly maintained railway that served the Indian airfields in Assam.\textsuperscript{53} As a result, between 1941 and 1944, China received only a tiny fraction of the aid that the United States offered to the Allied Powers: less than 1 percent of the Lend-Lease total.\textsuperscript{54}

Given the minimal aid China received from abroad, it mattered greatly who was to be the recipient. Here, from the beginning, Chiang’s regime became embroiled in a conflict between two proud and determined American competitors. On one side was General Joseph W. Stilwell, an acerbic infantry commander with considerable prior experience in China as a military attaché, who was the choice of U.S. Chief of Staff George Marshall to command U.S. operations in China. His rival was Claire Lee Chennault, an early advocate for air power in modern warfare, accomplished pilot, and brilliant aerial tactician who had left the Army Air Corps to organize the American Volunteer Group (more commonly known as the Flying Tigers) to assist China’s war effort. After the United States joined the war, Chennault was given command of the U.S. Army’s Fourteenth Air Force in China. The story of the conflict between Stilwell and Chennault has been much told. Suffice to say, Stilwell’s disdain for the


Generalissimo (whom he called “Peanut” in his diary) was widely known, and his brusque and intemperate manner made him a most inappropriate choice as the ranking U.S. officer in China. Chennault, by contrast, got on well with the Generalissimo, in part because he promised to defeat the Japanese from the air, a strategy that required little contribution from the Chinese side.55

When Stilwell was ordered to China in January 1942, he went as commanding general of U.S. forces in China and chief of staff to the supreme commander of the China Theater, who was Chiang Kai-shek. In the latter capacity, Stilwell was to discharge his primary duty: keeping open the Burma Road in “command [of] such Chinese forces as may be assigned to him.”56 The 1942 campaign in Burma was a disaster. The British defense was inept and feeble, and they scarcely disguised their disinterest in Chinese assistance. Stilwell urged more aggressive tactics, but in the process put Chinese troops in danger in ways that were repugnant to the Generalissimo. In the end, with his army in retreat to India (where they would be retrained and rearmed to reopen the Burma Road later in the war), Stilwell led a ragtag band of American officers, Chinese guards, and assorted British, Burmese, and Indians in a month-long retreat through the jungle. Chiang Kai-shek understandably thought the lonely trek a dereliction of Stilwell’s command responsibilities, and by the summer of 1942 voices in both Chongqing and Washington were already calling for Stilwell’s recall.57

THE WORLD AT WAR, 1943

In the global struggle against the Axis Powers, 1943 was unquestionably the year in which the tide of battle turned in the Allies’ favor. The North

56 Tuchman, Stilwell and the American Experience, 246.
57 Ibid., 266–325; Marshall to Roosevelt, October 6, 1942, FRUS 1942, 159; Taylor, Generalissimo, 194–216; Qi Xisheng, Jianba nuzhang, 101–296; memo of conversation with Stilwell, Chiang Kai-shek and Mme. Chiang, March 10, 1943, T.V. Soong papers, Box 60, Folio 1, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, California. For a searing critique of Stilwell in China, see van de Ven, War and Nationalism, 19–63.
African campaign ended with a convincing Anglo-American victory, which was quickly followed by the invasion of Sicily and then the Italian mainland, bringing the surrender of Italy and its fleet and Allied control of the Mediterranean. Though the Germans quickly occupied northern Italy and hard fighting remained on that front, as many as forty Axis divisions were diverted from the eastern front, considerably easing pressure on the Russians. By the summer of 1943, submarine warfare in the Atlantic was basically concluded in the Allies’ favor, allowing the Americans to send ceaseless convoys of war material to Britain and the Soviet Union. The year also saw the development of the long-range B-29 bomber and the strategic bombing of German industry—an effort now known to have had limited impact but at the time a major boost to British and Russian morale after the pounding they had received early in the war.

Developments on the East European front were even more encouraging, as the relentless German advance was blunted and turned back. Hitler had publicly proclaimed Stalingrad a major objective, but in the bitter winter of 1942–1943 his forces were surrounded and besieged. In the end, after losing some 250,000 German soldiers in the effort, the last men surrendered in February. At the same time, the siege of Leningrad was broken, and during the course of 1943, the Germans were steadily driven back across the killing fields of Eastern Europe. By this time the Soviets were outproducing the Germans in both planes and tanks, and the outcome of the war was no longer in doubt.58

Meanwhile in the Pacific came progress of great import to the Chinese. The American-led offensive was beginning to show costly signs of progress in the Solomon Islands and New Guinea as MacArthur’s forces moved north from Australia. American casualties in the bitter battles for Guadalcanal and Bougainville were greater than any other battles in the war, but they forced the Japanese to cancel a planned attack on Chongqing and to transfer several elite divisions and most of their aircraft to the war in the Pacific.59 This naturally concerned the Americans, who pressed the Chinese to do more on their front. When Roosevelt made a speech stressing the importance of the China theater as well as the Pacific, Chiang

59 Peattie, Drea, and van de Ven, Battle for China, 43, 428.
Kai-shek was furious, complaining in his diary that FDR was “treating China like a sacrificial offering.” But gradually over the course of the year, the great air, sea, and land battles of the island-hopping campaign were turned by the overwhelming power of the American forces. By the end of the year, preparations were underway for the attack on the Gilberts and then the Marshall Islands, including Guam and Saipan, which would bring the Japanese homeland within range of the new American B-29s—the same long-range bombers that would eventually carry the atom bombs that brought the war to its conclusion.

THE CHINA THEATER, 1943

In contrast to the major Allied victories elsewhere in the world, the China front was largely static. In January, when Chiang Kai-shek listed his priorities for the year, he stressed national unity and economic stabilization and made no mention of the war. The consensus of foreign observers, even Chiang’s supporters, was that Chiang’s regime was not ready for any offensive but was instead “conserving its strength for … postwar internal supremacy.” There were widespread reports of apathy and venality in the army, and Chiang himself complained of the poor discipline, inept administration, and low morale of his forces. With most Chinese forces uninterested in offensive action, the Japanese were able to deploy their

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60 SLGB 52:544 (February 21, 1943); cf. SLGB 52:445–46 (February 6), 52:491 (February 14). The offending words in Roosevelt’s speech were the statement, “Great and decisive actions against the Japanese will be taken to drive the invader from the soil of China.” Address to the White House Correspondents’ Association, February 12, 1943, in Samuel I. Rosenman, ed., The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt, vol. 12: The Tide Turns (New York: Russell and Russell, 1950), 79.
61 Weinberg, World at Arms, 642–56.
62 SLGB 52:204 (January 6, 1943).
64 Davies memoranda, March 9 and March 15, 1943, FRUS 1943, 27, 35. Corruption, war weariness, and official venality are major themes in Graham Peck’s account of his experiences in these years, Two Kinds of Time, 357–550.
65 SLGB 55:723 (1943 annual review).
elite units to the Pacific front, pulling their forces in China back to defend only major transport hubs, and leaving the task of peacekeeping in the occupied territories to Chinese, Manchukuo, and Korean puppet troops.66

By this stage of the war, Chiang was using his best troops to maintain the blockade against the Communists and prepare the offensive in Burma. The front lines were often held by the armies of former warlords. Some of these forces fought bravely and well, but the soldiers were ill fed, diseased, mistreated, and understandably prone to desertion. Among the officer corps, there was growing discontent over Chiang’s preferential treatment of his own favorite commanders.67 At the front, local commanders left to

66 SLGB 53:209 (April 10, 1943), 228 (April 14), and 339 (May 3); Everett Drumright to Gauss, October 2, 1943, in FRUS 1943, 1:38–39; Peattie, Drea, and van de Ven, Battle for China, 43, 423–24.

67 White and Jacoby, Thunder out of China, 139–44; Lloyd E. Eastman, “Nationalist China during the Sino-Japanese War, 1937–1945,” in Lloyd E. Eastman, Jerome Chén, Su-
their own devices made opportunistic accommodations with the enemy—
especially as the Japanese front lines were increasingly manned by Chinese
puppet troops. Smuggling across the lines became common, as neglected
advance units sought to support their own men. Some of this smuggling
was certainly detrimental to the war effort, as the Chinese provided tung-
sten vital for Japanese munitions in exchange for gasoline or even luxury
items.\textsuperscript{68}

Through most of the early years of the war, the American press had
been filled with stories of China’s brave resistance to the Japanese invad-
ers. But by 1943, more skeptical views were heard. At Mme. Chiang’s
February 19 press conference in Washington, one hesitant reporter asked
about reports that “the Chinese were not utilizing their manpower to the
full extent” in the war.\textsuperscript{69} Pearl Buck published a widely read article in \textit{Life},
which deftly balanced fervent praise of Mme. Chiang’s visit with pointed
warnings of stasis and corruption in the army and officers “going into
business.”\textsuperscript{70} Most damningly, the \textit{New York Times}’ respected military cor-
respondent Hanson Baldwin published a scathing article, calling any Chi-
inese “victories” (his quotes) “Pyrrhic ones” and declaring bluntly that
“Japan, not China, is winning.”\textsuperscript{71} The official Chinese reaction was intense
and bitter, Chiang calling Baldwin’s article “slanderous rumors” spread by
the British and the Communists.\textsuperscript{72} The U.S. Embassy noted that the vari-
ous critiques had caused “some quiet satisfaction in the more liberal quar-
ters,”\textsuperscript{73} though “deeply ingrained slavishness to considerations of face” had

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{Pepper} zanne Pepper, and Lyman P. van Slyke, \textit{The Nationalist Era in China, 1927–1949} (Cam-
\bibitem{Davies} Davies to Gauss, March 9, 1943, \textit{FRUS} 1943, 27–28; Acheson memorandum, April
7, 1943, \textit{FRUS} 1943, 45; White and Jacoby, \textit{Thunder out of China}, 72; John Hunter Boyle,
\bibitem{Rosenman} “Joint Press Conference with Mme. Chiang Kai-shek,” in Rosenman, \textit{Public Papers
and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt}, vol. 12, 102–3.
A fuller version was published in \textit{Reader’s Digest}, August 1943, under the title “Too Much
Wishful Thinking about China.”
\bibitem{Acheson} Acheson to Secretary of State, August 13, 1943, \textit{FRUS} 1943, 87. One suspects that
\end{thebibliography}
caused “reactionary Chinese leaders” to reject all such criticism and respond with deep resentment.\textsuperscript{74}

The most important fighting in 1943 was along the Yangtze River in western Hubei. The Japanese advance may have been a probe against the defenses of the capital, but more importantly it seems to have been a foraging expedition in the rich central China rice bowl. There were credible reports of looting and rape by Chinese troops after they ordered the residents to withdraw. Most disturbing, it seems that the invading army was composed largely of Chinese and Korean puppet troops under Japanese officers, yet still they inflicted over ten times the casualties that they themselves endured.\textsuperscript{75} Chiang Kai-shek was clearly disheartened to learn that Chinese soldiers were fighting more effectively for Japan than for his cause, and he railed against the premature withdrawals, false reporting, and poor coordination of his own troops.\textsuperscript{76} At the conclusion of the battle, Nationalist propaganda hailed the Japanese retreat to its prior positions as the “great victory of western Hubei” (\textit{Exi dajie}), though Chiang privately attributed the enemy withdrawal to the protection afforded China by the Lord and Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{77}

The strong performance of the Chinese puppet soldiers in the west Hubei battles was a notable and worrisome development. Because Japan lost the war and history is written by the victors, those who collaborated with the Japanese have been demonized as traitors (\textit{Hanjian} in Chinese). In recent years, several studies have explored the complex motives of those who chose collaboration.\textsuperscript{78} In January 1943, disagreements with Great
Britain over the status of Hong Kong delayed the announcement of the new treaties with Britain and the United States. As a result, the Japanese renounced their extraterritorial privileges before the Allies, much to the annoyance of the Generalissimo. In October, Japan signed an alliance with the Nanjing government of Wang Jingwei in which it promised complete withdrawal of all its forces within two years of the end of the war. In November, Wang joined pro-Japanese leaders from India, Burma, and elsewhere in Asia for a grand conference to celebrate the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere. Though the world war at large was certainly moving in the Allies’ favor, in China, there was concrete evidence that “the process of ‘conciliation’ and ‘pacification’ in the occupied areas [was] proceeding steadily.” As Baldwin had warned, “Japan, not China, is winning.”

THE ECONOMY

In the summer of 1943, T.V. Soong met with Roosevelt’s trusted White House aide, Harry Hopkins. Both Soong and Hopkins were keen supporters of Chennault’s air-based strategy in China, and the Chinese foreign minister observed that with “growing American air strength in China, I am no longer much worried about our military situation. It is the economic outlook, inflation, which looks alarming.” The deteriorating economy and its effect on Chinese morale were a common refrain in reporting from China in 1943. In February, the State Department acknowledged that “the economic and psychological situation in China is

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79 *SLGB* 52:224 (January 9, 1943).
82 Hornbeck memorandum, April 3, 1943, *FRUS* 1943, 43.
83 In contrast to this contemporary assessment, Rana Mitter (*Forgotten Ally*, 6) writes that “Chiang won the war, but lost his country.” This seems to me to perpetuate a dangerous myth. The defeat of Japan was accomplished by the United States and the Soviet Union. China was a vital ally, but Chiang did not “win the war.”
84 T.V. Soong memorandum, August 16, 1943, T.V. Soong Papers, Box 59, Folio 22.
already critical and is deteriorating.”85 In May the embassy in Chongqing reported that “economically the deterioration is rapid and is leading toward something that may eventually spell disaster.”86 Chiang Kai-shek would not have disagreed with this gloomy prognosis. Reviewing another week in the same month, he confessed, “My spirits are depressed. … On the economic, diplomatic, party affairs and military fronts, there has been no progress. Dangers lurk everywhere in society, and the people’s will is wavering.”87

Given Free China’s predominantly peasant economy, informed observers agreed that a full economic collapse was unlikely. Unless the harvest failed (as indeed it had in Henan: see chapter 10), most of the population would survive on what they could grow and produce locally. But by 1943, the Japanese blockade, persistent transport bottlenecks, and the lack of raw materials had brought an end to early wartime industrial growth, and manufacturing entered a period of decline. Factories closed, and labor unrest increased. By December, the Generalissimo judged that industry and the economy had registered “the most failures” of the year.88

As discussed in detail in chapter 9, the heart of wartime China’s economic problem was its galloping inflation, which was in turn caused by government revenues lagging expenditures by about 75 percent. That gap was covered by printing money.89 This inflation affected the population unevenly, with salaried employees in China’s small middle class suffering the most and moneyed speculators profiting. Capital was diverted from investment to speculation and hoarding of scarce goods, with predictable effects on national morale and growing cynicism toward the war effort. Most critically, the utter failure of the government’s much-advertised price controls was a major blow to the legitimacy of Chiang’s regime. Needless to say, reports that price controls in the Japanese-occupied areas were more effective only further damaged popular morale.90

86 Atcheson to Secretary of State, May 28, 1943, FRUS 1943, 57.
88 Eastman, “Nationalist China,” 152.
89 Memorandum of the British Foreign Office, July 5, 1943, in FRUS 1943, 71.
Domestic and international politics were intricately intertwined in wartime China, and 1943 provided several examples of this concatenation. The year began on an optimistic note, as the National Government’s prestige was enhanced by the end of the “unequal treaties,” a diplomatic achievement that Chiang Kai-shek hailed as the “greatest ever.” The recovery of Xinjiang was similarly greeted as “the greatest accomplishment since the founding of the National Government.” Both of these successes represented significant steps forward in China’s quest to reclaim full national sovereignty—the first a concession of legal sovereignty by the Western allies, the second a reluctant relinquishment of economic and political influence in China’s northwest periphery by the beleaguered Soviet Union. For a time, the recovery of Xinjiang even promised a new route for military assistance from the outside world, until the Soviets blocked the truck convoys that were to travel from Karachi to Tehran and then through the USSR to Xinjiang (see chapter 3).

On purely domestic matters, the signs were less encouraging. In the poor provinces of Gansu in the northwest and Guizhou in the southwest, there were significant local rebellions provoked by state demands for taxes and conscripts. Resistance dragged on for several months and represented a notable challenge to central authority before a major deployment of troops restored order. Meanwhile, students and intellectuals were becoming increasingly restive over the stifling censorship of news and information and the debilitating effects of inflation. On several occasions,
Chiang’s diaries express concern over the spreading student unrest and attacks on Nationalist Party organizations in the schools.\textsuperscript{95} It was presumably these challenges, as well as the larger threat from the Communists, that induced the Generalissimo to propose a transition to constitutional government (chapter 8).

There was, however, no threat of greater concern to Chiang Kai-shek than the Communists, and 1943 saw dramatic developments on that front. As noted above, the United Front joining the Communists and Nationalists in the fight against Japan had broken down with the New Fourth Army incident of 1941. The Communist armies operated with total autonomy and relative impunity behind Japanese lines, their guerrilla forces avoiding major battles with the better-armed Japanese, but engaging in periodic harassment that helped to keep the enemy contained in urban centers and safely away from the rural population. Despite their minimal contribution to the military struggle against Japan, the Communists were gaining significant support among the peasants of north China. Their programs of rent and interest reduction, highly progressive taxes that exempted many of the poorest peasants, and village elections (even if tightly controlled) appealed to the rural majority. In addition, Communist cadres tended to live simply, and their troops were better disciplined than either the Nationalists or the puppets. For these reasons, the Communist armies found it easier to survive and even prosper as guerrillas behind Japanese lines than did their Nationalist adversaries.\textsuperscript{96}

Through much of 1942–1943, Chiang hoped and expected that relief

\textsuperscript{95} SLGB 53:466 (May 20, 1943), 545 (June 1, 1943).

from the Communist menace would come from a Japanese attack on the Soviet Union. In Chiang’s eyes, the Chinese Communist Party was entirely a creature of the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{97} He disdained the Communist armies as “rabble” (literally, “a flock of crows”—\textit{wuhe zhi zhong}), and was convinced that without Soviet aid, they would crumble before his forces.\textsuperscript{98} Accordingly, the optimal solution to Chiang’s predicament was a Japanese attack to weaken or even (together with Germany’s invasion) destroy the Soviet Union, an attack that would also deflect Japanese forces from their aggression against China. Chiang had been confidently predicting such an attack since 1941, encouraged by the Anti-Comintern Pact that Japan had signed,\textsuperscript{99} but by 1943 there was a renewed urgency to his wishful thinking. When Roosevelt’s speech in February said that Japan could not be defeated from the Pacific alone, that China would also play a role, Chiang complained, “our strategy for the past three years has been almost completely destroyed by [FDR]. The result is that Japan will not dare attack Russia.”\textsuperscript{100} His strategy, it seems, had been to keep the China front quiet so that Japan would be emboldened to attack the Soviets. A few months later, hopes revived with “clear intelligence” of a June attack on Russia.\textsuperscript{101} By June, he was losing sleep worrying about this, calling it “the key to our nation’s survival.”\textsuperscript{102} And when in the end it seemed the Japanese would not attack, he found this unhappy development “the greatest danger to our country.”\textsuperscript{103} Chiang could not, it seems, escape the conception of China as a victim, whose fate lay entirely in the hands of untrustworthy foreign powers.

As prospects faded for Japanese assistance in solving his Communist problem, Chiang was presented with another source of hope, Moscow’s May 1943 announcement that it was disbanding the Communist Interna-
tional. Chiang called it a “historic watershed,” the “only great event of the early twentieth century.” Immediately he started planning to attack the Communist base in northern Shaanxi. “The Communist bandit problem,” he wrote, “can only be resolved by force.” In the area surrounding Yan’an, he ordered airfields prepared, roads and bridges repaired, maps drawn, and extra funds allocated to nearby Nationalist armies. In August, he prepared a major policy document on the Communist problem. Clearly pleased with his product, he called it “one of the great scholarly achievements of my entire revolutionary career.” The plan called for ten armies to attack the Communist base and turn the Reds into roving bandits, who could then be pursued by Chiang’s troops. Timing was essential. Yan’an must be attacked before the defeat of Germany so that Soviet forces could not intervene. American victories in the Pacific were another important consideration. In Chiang’s mind, they reduced the Japanese threat to manageable proportions. As a result, he said, “the problem for the future is entirely internal: how to eradicate the Communist bandits.”

September would bring a critical meeting of the Nationalist Party’s Central Executive Committee. Chiang sent special planes to bring each of the leading northwest warlords to the conclave, and on September 11, a wide range of central and regional leaders met to decide on measures to address the Communist problem. Military plans had been drawn up earlier that day, but in the end, Chiang reversed course, abandoning the military option and choosing instead to treat the Communists’ independent strategy as a matter of disobedience to central authority requiring legal and constitutional remedies. Accordingly, the Central Executive Committee issued a strong condemnation of Communist insubordination, but declared that the issue would be resolved by political, not military, means.

104 SLGB 53:498 (May 25, 1943), 531 (Monthly review, May 1943).
105 SLGB 54:261 (August 9, 1943).
106 SLGB 53:634 (June 17, 1943), 54:122 (Weekly review, July 18), 319-20 (August 17), 341-42 (August 19), 347-48 (August 20), 366, 368 (August 24), 404 (August 29), 415 (August 29); Gong’anbu, Táng Zónɡ ríjí, 365 (June 29, 1943), 374 (August 17), 378 (September 9).
107 SLGB 54:410 (Weekly review, August 29, 1943).
108 Chiang Kai-shek memo on CCP and USSR policy, SLGB 54:378-89.
109 SLGB 54:431 (Monthly review, August 1943).
110 SLGB 54:485 (September 8, 1943), 509-16 (September 11), 55:724-25 (1943 annual review).
Divisions in the Guomindang leadership played a role in this decision, as well as fears that an attack would only unify the Communists. Of greatest concern, however, were American warnings against civil war, though Chiang was convinced that the United States and the White House in particular had been misled by Communist propaganda.¹¹¹ That was one problem that he hoped to clear up at the coming Cairo summit.

A Politics of “Trusting One’s Own”

The sudden cancelation of military action against the Communists was not the only time in 1943 that Chiang changed his mind at the last minute. It would occur again in the context of Chiang’s longstanding conflict with General Stilwell. Although this time it was not foreign pressure that brought the reversal but domestic politics that bore all the hallmarks of a family feud, it also illustrates important characteristics of Chiang’s regime.

As one reads Chiang’s diary or the daily chronology of his activities, the small circle of close associates is notable. Again and again he meets with the same people: his secretaries, especially the talented Chen Bulei; Dai Li, the sinister head of the secret service; He Yingqin, his chief of staff; Chen Lifu, the minister of education and leader of the Nationalist Party’s powerful C.C. Clique; H.H. Kung (Kong Xiangxi), Chiang’s brother-in-law and acting head of the Executive Yuan; his other brother-in-law, the foreign minister T.V. Soong, on the rare occasions when Soong was in Chongqing; and of course his wife, Soong Mayling. This reliance on a close circle of trusted associates was not just a matter of Chiang’s aloof personality but an explicit aspect of his governing philosophy. He believed that effective governance required “trusting one’s own” (xin qi suo si) and giving them authority within their areas of responsibility. If one were to rely on capable people from society, he believed, the result would be discord and obstruction as they formed self-interested bureaucratic

¹¹¹ Atcheson to Secretary of State, July 14 and September 17, 1943, FRUS 1943, 283–84, 340; Gauss to Secretary of State, October 14, 1943, FRUS 1943, 351–60; SLGB 52:480 (February 12, 1943) and 54:276–77 (August 11, 1943); Gong’anbu, Tang Zong riji, 380 (September 12, 1943).
cliques.\textsuperscript{112} Beyond this small circle of trusted associates, Chiang repeatedly complained of his officials’ “incompetence and stupidity.”\textsuperscript{113} In some cases, the problem probably was incompetence, but more commonly it was their failure to correctly discern and carry out Chiang’s wishes. At one point he moaned, “Nobody understands my intentions.”\textsuperscript{114} Most importantly, Chiang demanded loyalty, and nothing was more apt to provoke his anger than signs of independence, which were inevitably interpreted as selfishness and arrogance. In these cases, the only way to regain the favor of the autocrat was to offer an abject apology.\textsuperscript{115}

The problematic consequences of this style of governance based on personal relations, trust, and loyalty were illustrated in a dramatic confrontation in the fall of 1943. As noted above, Chiang Kai-shek had long been frustrated by his troubled relations with the American commander in China, General Joseph Stilwell. The two men openly despised each other, Stilwell describing Chiang as “a vacillating, tricky, undependable old scoundrel, who never keeps his word,”\textsuperscript{116} and Chiang complaining of Stilwell’s “stubbornness, stupidity, and despicable manners.”\textsuperscript{117} In the spring of 1943, Chiang actively pressed for Stilwell’s removal, working through T.V. Soong and Mme. Chiang, who were both in Washington at the time. After Mme. Chiang’s return, T.V. Soong aggressively continued the effort, using all his connections in Washington and eventually receiving Roosevelt’s agreement to replace Stilwell.\textsuperscript{118} Soong returned to Chongqing in

\textsuperscript{112}Chiang Kai-shek diary, August 23, 1943. The \textit{SLGB} version (\textit{SLGB} 54:365–64) changes this term to \textit{qinxin} (亲信), avoiding the unorthodox endorsement of \textit{si} (私). The alert reader will note the contrast to Abraham Lincoln’s approach to governance described in Doris Kearns Goodwin, \textit{Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln} (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012).

\textsuperscript{113}SLGB 53:290 (April 27, 1943); cf. SLGB 52:228 (January 10), 301 (January 12), 54:240 (August 4).

\textsuperscript{114}SLGB 53:430 (May 14, 1943).

\textsuperscript{115}See Chiang’s pleasure at Bai Chongxi’s apology, SLGB 54:256–57 (August 8, 1943); cf. SLGB 53:126 (March 31), 54:345 (August 20), 55:717 (1943 annual review).

\textsuperscript{116}Cited in Chennault, \textit{Way of a Fighter}, 226.

\textsuperscript{117}SLGB 53:686 (June 28, 1943); cf. SLGB 53:639–41 (June 18, 1943, cable to Mme. Chiang).

\textsuperscript{118}SLGB 54:418–20 (T.V. Soong August 30 cable on meeting with Roosevelt), 532 (T.V. Soong September 15 cable on meeting with Hopkins), 607 (Soong September 29 cable on meeting with Roosevelt); see also T.V. Soong memoranda of May 10, August 20, and October 13, 1943, in T.V. Soong Papers, Box 60, Folios 3–4; \textit{FRUS 1943}, 135–37.
October to join the meetings with the new commander of the China-Burma-India Theater, the dashing young British Lord Louis Mountbatten. In the meantime, however, Mme. Chiang was having second thoughts about the consequences of Stilwell’s removal. Accordingly, together with her sister, the wife of T.V. Soong’s rival H.H. Kung, minister of finance and acting head of the Executive Yuan, she began maneuvering to save the general’s career.119

In many ways, T.V. Soong was the odd man out in Chiang Kai-shek’s inner circle. Wealthy, intelligent, Harvard-educated, with a firm grasp of economics (he had overseen the modernization of China’s currency and banking system in the 1930s), he was thoroughly Westernized in his man-

119 Tuchman, Stilwell and the American Experience, 388–95; Qi Xisheng, Jianba nuzhang, 386–408; Davies, China Hand, 170–73. T.V. Soong returned on October 11, the day after Chiang’s inauguration, and one wonders if Chiang might have been irritated that Soong had not hurried to arrive in time for the ceremony (SLGB 55:84 [October 11, 1943]).
ners. He wore expensive Western suits, preferred Western food, and typically addressed his Foreign Ministry associates in English. Simplistic American accounts analyzed Chongqing politics as a contest between the “modern” T.V. Soong and the “reactionary” H.H. Kung, the latter condemned as much for his Chinese scholar’s gown as his corruption.120 Soong had been extraordinarily successful in Washington, lobbying for aid for China, gaining support for Chennault in his battles with Stilwell, and now getting Roosevelt’s agreement to replace Stilwell. Kung, by contrast, was wildly unpopular, and stories of his family’s extravagance and his own corruption constantly circulated in both Chongqing and the provinces.121

For reasons that are not clear, relations between Chiang and his wife were not entirely harmonious after her return from the United States. By August, she was staying in the nearby house of her sister, the wife of H.H. Kung, returning only briefly in the evening for dinner with the Generalissimo.122 This made it easier, in September, for the two sisters to work actively against Stilwell’s recall, meeting several times with him and convincing him that “they [were] a pair of fighters.” According to Stilwell, “May [Soong Mayling] let out that she has a hell of a life with Peanut: no one else will tell him the truth so she is constantly at him with disagreeable news.”123 Clearly the two women were playing a desperate game, and there is some evidence that their determination was motivated, in part, by perceived threats to H.H. Kung’s position.124

The whole affair finally came to a head with T.V. Soong’s return to Chongqing in mid-October. There he continued to spearhead the campaign to remove Stilwell, even translating for Chiang Kai-shek in the first

121 Gong’anbu, Tang Zong riji, 252 (January 22, 1942), 327–28 (December 29, 1942); Peck, Two Kinds of Time, 357–60, 556.
123 White, Stilwell Papers, 223–38, quotes from 229, 232.
124 Gong’anbu, Tang Zong riji, 373 (August 15, 1943).
meetings with the American general Brehon Somervell about replacing Stilwell. Suddenly the whole deal fell apart. Chiang's own account is noteworthy:

On the question of whether or not to remove Stilwell, my intent was to follow the analysis of October 15 [to state my clear objections to Stilwell but leave the decision to the United States]. In the first two meetings with Somervell, I proceeded in this way to effect the changes necessary to achieve our objectives. But T.V. insisted on sticking to his own hatred of Stilwell and his personal opinions. So in translating he did not convey my views. In his telling, Stilwell would definitely have to be removed. After Somervell left, I considered carefully and decided to endeavor to save the situation and make a 180 degree turn.

Mme. Chiang was sent to warn Stilwell of his fate unless he offered a sincere apology and promised to reform. This was done, and the next day Chiang met Somervell to announce the reversal. Stilwell had dodged another bullet and would stay on for another year before one final crisis in U.S.-China relations would at last bring about his removal. T.V. Soong was not so lucky. On the morning after Stilwell made his apology, Soong held a stormy meeting with the Generalissimo in which both sides lost their tempers, Chiang smashed teacups, and T.V. ended up in disgrace, banned from attending the Cairo Conference, removed from power, and allowed to return only months later when friends found someone with better Chinese than his own to pen an appropriately contrite apology.

Two points are particularly notable in this incident. First, T.V. Soong's crime had been to adhere to his own position—though in this case, the position was originally Chiang's own. The problem was, in presenting it to

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126 Wu, Huang, and Liu, Wu Guozhen zhuan, 399–406; Alsop with Platt, "I've Seen the Best of It," 223–27; SLGB 55:122 (October 18, 1943) cleans up the diary a little, changing Chiang's order that Song "get the hell out" (gundan) to "leave" (likai); Gong'anbu, Tang Zong ri ji, 386 (October 16, 1943).
the American representative, Soong had spoken more forcefully than Chiang wished: Chiang had long hoped that expressing his dissatisfaction with Stilwell would suffice to persuade Roosevelt to remove him. He was, after all, used to a politics in which subordinates readily discerned his position and adopted it as their own. Soong was wiser to American ways and recognized the need for a more direct statement of Chiang’s wishes. When they had their final fight, Soong protested that his failing was that he had been “too loyal” in carrying out Chiang’s wishes, but this only further enraged the Generalissimo. Chiang compared Soong’s behavior to an obscure incident in 1921 when Sun Yat-sen’s lieutenant Hu Hanmin had deliberately ignored several of Sun’s orders that he deemed unwise. Sun had forgiven Hu and later entrusted him with even more important positions. But Chiang took a dimmer view of the incident, saying that Soong’s conduct in threatened “another catastrophe like 1921.” Soong was “holding his own personal views and treating our party-state’s foreign policy like his personal plaything.” Chiang so identified himself with the Chinese nation that views even slightly different from his own were regarded as self-interested and contrary to the national interest.

Second, the lesson that Chiang drew from his sudden change of mind was that “in deciding and changing policy, success or failure depends completely on the last five minutes.” Although the Allies were certainly glad that Stilwell, a trusted commander for all his faults, would remain in China to direct the Burma campaign, the process that led to this result could hardly have encouraged them. One constant complaint against the Generalissimo was his unpredictability, his indecision, his tendency to vacillate. Now, on the eve of the Cairo Conference, Chiang had not only removed T.V. Soong, his most experienced foreign affairs deputy, he had changed his stance “180 degrees” in successive conversations with Somervell and raised last-minute policy change to the status of an essential governing principle.

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127 SLGB 55:122 (October 18, 1943).
129 SLGB 55:118 (and again, 121) (October 17, 1943); cf. Huang, “Chiang Kai-shek and His Diary,” 105 (diary entry of April 2, 1939).
CAIRO

Hsiao-ting Lin has provided an excellent discussion of Chiang Kai-shek at the Cairo Conference (chapter 13), so it is not necessary to repeat the narrative here. Nonetheless, the conference encapsulated so many of the successes and failings of 1943 that a few words on the issues raised in this prologue are required. Most importantly, one must admit the historic significance of including China among the Great Powers in 1943. From the perspective of the present, it seems obvious that China should be considered a Great Power, but in the early twentieth century, poor, weak, and internally divided China certainly did not look like a Great Power. In this respect, Roosevelt’s insistence that China’s size and the energy of its people made its rise in the postwar world inevitable was an act of considerable foresight. Churchill, of course, resisted, describing China as a “faggot vote” for the United States in the United Nations; and Stalin, understandably given his own nation’s sacrifices, thought China had not fought well enough to deserve such recognition.130

We should not imagine that it was only prescience or altruism that drove Roosevelt to treat China in this way. As FDR told his son after his first meeting with Chiang in Cairo, “The job in China can be boiled down to one essential: China must be kept in the war, tying [sic] up Japanese soldiers.”131 To this end, it was essential to boost Chinese morale. Unable to supply much material assistance over the perilous Hump lifeline, the United States offered symbolic gestures: the termination of the “unequal treaties,” the inclusion of China in the Four Powers, and now the summit in Cairo.132 At Cairo, the Allies could make cost-free promises that would be welcome to China and boost Chiang’s standing—most notably the return of Taiwan and Manchuria. They could pose for the photographs of Roosevelt, Churchill, and Chiang—photos that are perhaps the most en-

131 Elliott Roosevelt, As He Saw It (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1946), 143.
during legacy of the conference. Indeed, in reading the official conference record, one gets the impression that, putting aside the heated debates over the Burma campaign, for Roosevelt the confab was largely about atmospherics and taking the measure of Chiang Kai-shek. In contrast to the Tehran Conference with Stalin that would follow, the Cairo record is incredibly sparse, with no American minutes on Roosevelt’s key conversations with Chiang.133

As for the measure of Chiang, the inescapable conclusion is that he came off poorly. Above all, he was seen as indecisive, vacillating, constantly changing his mind.134 Some have blamed this on Mme. Chiang’s translation,135 but it must be remembered that T.V. Soong was banned from the conference precisely for his failure to properly interpret the Generalissimo’s intentions. Mme. Chiang would not have made the same mistake. The more plausible explanation is that the Americans and British had been meeting in these strategic conferences for almost two years. They knew how to debate and bargain with each other and did so in their native language. The Chinese were outsiders in this club. Chiang was utterly unused to negotiation among equals and felt limited by his poor English.136 In his first summit outing, he was simply not up to the task.137

His stock would fall even further after Churchill and Roosevelt met with Stalin. In contrast to Chiang’s “characteristic myopia” in seeing Burma as the key to the struggle for Asia, Stalin quickly appreciated the conflicting demands of the Burma campaign, the Pacific War, Mediterranean options, and the planned invasion of northern France. Indeed, the British chief of staff found Stalin a better strategic thinker than either Roosevelt or Churchill.138 This judgment was no doubt colored by the fact

133 FRUS Cairo, passim, but esp. 322–23, 334–35. At Tehran, Charles Bohlen from the State Department translated and left detailed minutes and analysis of the meetings with Stalin, but at Cairo, Mme. Chiang translated, and no State Department representative was present. See also Davies, China Hand, 149–51.


135 Taylor, Generalissimo, 248–50.


137 Qi Xisheng, Jianba nuzhang, 412–13; Davies, China Hand, 144–47.

138 Sainsbury, Turning Point, 184, 226.
that Russia and Britain agreed on the low priority of the Burma campaign. More importantly, when Stalin repeated his promise to enter the war against Japan once Germany was defeated, an alternative was provided to a costly campaign through the jungles of Burma.\footnote{Heiferman, \textit{Cairo Conference}, 121–28; Sainsbury, \textit{Turning Point}, 110, 250.} In the run-up to Cairo, Chiang Kai-shek had insisted that he meet Roosevelt before the president met Stalin.\footnote{SLGB 53:594–95 (June 9, 1943), 55:38 (October 7, 1943).} Obviously he wanted to state his case to Roosevelt first, but the unhappy result was that Stalin got the last word on the critical strategic issues of the war.

In September, when Chiang abandoned his plan to solve the Communist problem by force, he resolved to do his utmost to disabuse his American allies of any illusions they had of the CCP as a potential partner in the war against Japan.\footnote{See also Hurley to Roosevelt, November 20, 1943, \textit{FRUS 1943}, 163–66.} The need for this had been brought to him forcefully when, on the first day of the Guomindang Central Executive Committee meetings that would decide policy toward the Communists, Stilwell had presented him a military plan that involved a combined Communist-Nationalist offensive in north China.\footnote{SLGB 54:519 (Weekly review, September 12, 1943). Naturally, Stilwell’s suggestion only confirmed Chiang’s conviction that Stilwell was a “despicable, stupid little man.” See also Stilwell diary, October 5, 1943, Stilwell Papers, Box 39, Folder 10.} In Chiang’s planning for Cairo, relations with the Communists were a matter that he expected the Americans to raise, and there is no question that they came up in the Generalissimo’s private talks with the president. The precise nature of those conversations is not known, but Roosevelt told his son Elliott, who accompanied FDR to Cairo, “Chiang would have us believe that the Chinese Communists were doing nothing against the Japanese. Again, we know differently.”\footnote{Roosevelt, \textit{As He Saw It}, 163.} So Chiang, as he intended, had used the opportunity to press his argument that the Communists were not, in fact, resisting Japan.

Roosevelt, obviously, was not convinced. The predicament that this presented for Chiang was that whether or not the Communists were resisting Japan was a matter of fact that could be investigated. This is precisely what the Americans started requesting soon after the conference in
Cairo: permission to send a mission to Yan’an to better understand the Communist movement. Eventually, in June 1944, Chiang was forced to agree, and the Dixie Mission of U.S. military and foreign service experts was sent to investigate the Communist resistance. Their reports were uniformly favorable to the Communists, and while there has been much subsequent debate on whether the American observers were hoodwinked by their Communist hosts, the undeniable fact is that the Dixie Mission together with simultaneous visits by Chinese and Western newsmen brought back reports of a powerful political and military movement growing in north China and independent of Chiang’s control. Their reports left no doubt that China’s destiny no longer lay exclusively in Chiang Kai-shek’s hands.144

The approval of the Dixie Mission came just as Chiang’s own troops were reeling before Japan’s Ichigo offensive. Stilwell had long argued that if Chennault was successful in his air offensive against Japanese supply lines, Japan would respond by taking the Chinese airfields. Chiang Kai-shek promised that his ground forces could defend the airfields,145 but he was wrong. The Japanese rolled over his forces and opened a land corridor that stretched all the way from Korea and northeast China to Vietnam and Southeast Asia. Chiang lost 750,000 men in the fight, and his prestige suffered a crushing blow.146 In domestic politics, as discussed in chapter 8, his constitutional preparations were overtaken by growing support for the rival Communist call for a coalition government—an idea that Roosevelt had also pressed at Cairo.147 In the famous words of an earlier era, “Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold.”148 And in many respects, the seeds for the collapse were planted in 1943.

145 SLGB 53:312 (April 30, 1943), 331–33 (May 1, 1943).
146 Peattie, Drea, and van de Ven, Battle for China, 392–418. For contemporary accounts, see White and Jacoby, Thunder out of China, 179–98; Peck, Two Kinds of Time, 551–83.
147 Roosevelt, As He Saw It, 164.
October 10, 1943: National Day in the wartime capital of “Free China.” The weather was cloudy but comfortably cool; the stifling heat of Chongqing’s summer had passed. In the seventh year of the War of Resistance against Japan, the enemy air raids that had devastated the city were largely a thing of the past. A great public celebration was now possible, and so, on this October morning, before a solemn crowd of over one thousand, Chiang Kai-shek was inaugurated as president of the Republic of China. Although he had ruled China since 1927, the presidency had been a ceremonious post held by the Nationalist Party elder statesman Lin Sen, who had passed away on August 1. Now Chiang could claim the title of chief of state, further cementing his hold on power as he prepared to meet with Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill in a fall summit. The meticulously planned inauguration went off flawlessly, and Mme. Chiang (Soong Mayling/Song Meiling) assured her nervous husband that

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1 Huang Yanpei, *Huang Yanpei riji* [Huang Yanpei diary] (Beijing: Huawen chubanshe, 2008), vol. 8, 164.

2 With the exception of one August 1943 attack on an arsenal, there had been no bombing since 1941. Acheson to Secretary of State, August 23, 1943, in *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1943, China* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1957), 102 (hereafter cited as *FRUS 1943*).
it was appropriately solemn and dignified. Chiang had now reached the pinnacle of his power, and yet he felt that the audience at the inauguration seemed embarrassed, even humiliated—perhaps because of the absence of the diplomatic corps and the cool international response to his big day. Within a few days, the foreign ministers of Great Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union would meet in Moscow. At the insistence of the United States and over the resistance of Britain and the USSR, the conference would formally include China as one of the postwar Great Powers—a decision that laid the foundation for China’s eventual inclusion in the United Nations Security Council. But on his inauguration day, Chiang felt slighted, and soon he was grumbling over the dispirited, foul, corrupt, and selfish members of his administration.

In many ways, this inauguration day captured the spirit of China in 1943. On the one hand, it was a year of great triumphs. The “unequal treaties” that had shackled China since the Opium War a century earlier had been abolished, and the former “sick man of Asia” was now recognized as one of the Four Great Powers. Mme. Chiang Kai-shek made an impressive tour of the United States, including her historic addresses to both houses of Congress. Chiang himself joined Churchill and Roosevelt for a summit meeting in Cairo that produced the memorable photos of the Chinese leader sitting as an equal with the most powerful men in the world. The year also saw China regain full sovereignty over the resource-rich northwestern province of Xinjiang, which in the previous decade had been transformed into a virtual colony of the Soviet Union. Chiang Kai-

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3 Chiang Kai-shek, weekly reflection (October 1943), in Gao Sulan, ed., Jiang Zhongzheng zongtong dang’an: Shilüe gaoben [Archives of President Chiang Kai-shek: Draft chronology] (Taipei: Guoshiguan, 2011), vol. 55, 81 (hereafter cited as SLGB). This source, compiled in the 1950s, contains major sections of Chiang’s diaries, as well as other official papers and a record of his activities for each day. I have used this source rather than the less accessible diary copies now held in the Hoover Institution Archives, unless the language of the original diary is significantly different. No foreign diplomats or newsmen were invited to the inauguration (Gauss to Secretary of State, October 19, 1943, in FRUS 1943, 361–62). Was the audience perhaps unaware of this, regarding their absence as a snub?


5 SLGB 55:81 (weekly reflection, October 1943).
shek had celebrated these accomplishments in his book *China's Destiny*, where he proudly proclaimed his vision of China’s past and future.

On the other hand, 1943 witnessed critical setbacks and disappointments for Chiang’s Nationalist regime. There was the devastating famine in Henan Province, and the embarrassing fact that foreign journalists had spread the news to the world. In the capital and throughout China, inflation raged unchecked despite well-publicized government efforts to control prices. Local rebellions mobilized tens of thousands of disaffected peasants to resist military conscription and state grain requisitions in Gansu and Guizhou provinces. Most importantly, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was spreading its political and military infrastructure throughout north China, displacing local elites loosely linked to the Nationalist regime in the areas behind Japanese lines. Chiang Kai-shek contemplated using the opportunity presented by the Soviet Union’s disbandment of the Communist International (Comintern) to launch a military assault on the Communist base and rid China of the Red menace once and for all. He abandoned the planned assault at the last minute, and Communist power continued to grow.

These and other developments are examined in the following chapters as we look at a single year in China’s modern history from a variety of perspectives in an effort to uncover the determinants of the nation’s trajectory. By focusing on a single year, we hope to capture some of the diversity and contingency of history, without losing sight of the larger forces working inexorably in the background.

**The War**

In 1943, China was a nation at war. Japan’s invasion of China began in 1931, when its army units in Manchuria sabotaged a Japanese-owned railroad and used the incident as an excuse to occupy northeast China, then set up the puppet state of Manchukuo headed by the last emperor of the deposed Qing dynasty. The loss of Manchuria deprived China of its key heavy industrial base, with major coal mines, steel mills, and its largest arsenal, whose output had surpassed that of all other Chinese arsenals
From Manchuria, the Japanese slowly encroached on adjacent regions in Inner Mongolia and north China until a clash with Chinese forces near Beijing (then called Beiping) provoked sharp resistance and full-scale war in July 1937. Chiang Kai-shek’s armies put up a determined fight for the nation’s commercial and industrial center in Shanghai, but the Japanese responded with a devastating counterattack, which included an innovation in modern warfare: the sustained use of aerial bombing against civilian targets. By the end of the year, the Japanese had broken through the Chinese lines and then wreaked their revenge on the nation’s capital in the Nanjing Massacre.

The Japanese strategy in China anticipated Hitler’s blitzkrieg tactics in Europe. Overwhelming firepower from the air and land- and sea-based artillery were concentrated in an effort to break through Chinese defenses, allowing infantry to advance rapidly along rail and river transport lines to achieve a quick victory. After their initial valiant but costly attempt to blunt the Japanese assault in Shanghai, Chiang’s armies resorted to the more conservative approach of “trading space for time,” using China’s overwhelming advantage in geographic size and human population to counter Japan’s superior firepower in a protracted war. The brutality of the Japanese assault, from the Rape of Nanjing to ritual executions of prisoners and the use of poison gas during their advance up the Yangzi (Yangtze) River,
inspired a new sense of national purpose as Chinese rallied to resist the invaders. The government and patriotic businessmen cooperated in a massive effort to move industry and skilled manpower to the interior. Millions of workers, businessmen, technicians, civil servants, intellectuals, students, journalists, and ordinary citizens withdrew up the Yangtze to the new capital in Chongqing and other inland cities to continue the resistance. It was indeed “one of the greatest mass migrations in human history.”

In little more than a year, the Japanese had driven Chinese forces from all the major coastal cities and the central China metropolis of Wuhan, where the Chinese had hoped, but in the end failed, to hold the line. Instead Chiang’s forces hunkered down for a protracted war of attrition from the relative safety of their bastion in the fertile fields of Sichuan, above the treacherous gorges on the Yangtze River. In the spring of 1939, the Japanese launched murderous air raids that destroyed much of the wartime capital in Chongqing, but soon an effective network of air raid shelters and an efficient warning system relying on spotters near the Japanese airfields and along their flight paths cut Chinese casualties to a minimum. As elsewhere in the history of modern warfare, the bombing of civilian targets served mainly to strengthen national resolve to resist.

December 1941 brought the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and a fundamental reshaping of the global strategic picture. After fighting pretty much on its own for four long years (ten years, if one counts from Japan’s Manchurian incursion), China gained a crucial ally in the United States. Unfortunately, despite widespread American sentiment for immediate revenge on Japan, the Roosevelt administration gave priority to the rescue of Britain and the defeat of Hitler in a “Europe first” strategy. Even more sobering for the Chinese was the dismal showing of British forces in Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaya, and Burma and the quick defeat of the

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12 Peattie, Drea, and van de Ven, Battle for China, 248–49, 256–82; White and Jacoby, Thunder out of China, 11–16.
Americans in the Philippines and the Dutch in Indonesia. In the battle for Shanghai, the Chinese had put up a much more determined fight and inflicted more Japanese casualties than the proud Europeans, but now China stood alone as the European colonial empires in Southeast Asia crumbled before the Japanese assault. To add insult to injury, the British initially declined Chinese military assistance in the battle to keep open the supply line to China through their Burmese colony. In the words of the U.S. State Department, the British stance was motivated by their “reluctance to accept assistance from Orientals as derogatory to British prestige in Asia.” When Burma fell, China lost its last land link to the outside world, and soon despaired of receiving any substantial aid from the Allies.

Fortunately for the Chinese, the Japanese had also suffered chastening

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losses in the fight for Wuhan; their forces were now fighting major battles in Southeast Asia; and soon much of their air force and many first-line army units were diverted to the campaign in the Pacific.\textsuperscript{15} As a result, the bombing raids on Chongqing halted and the city was rebuilt; Japanese offensives were largely limited to local foraging operations; and the front lines hardened into a prolonged stalemate. Fighting alone, China became the “forgotten ally.”\textsuperscript{16} After suffering enormous casualties in the first years of the war, the Chinese now hunkered down, hoping to hold out until others could defeat Japan on their behalf.\textsuperscript{17}

**THE GENERALISSIMO**

No individual was more central to the fate of wartime China than Chiang Kai-shek. The son of a Zhejiang salt merchant and favorite of a doting mother, he received a solid Confucian education in the final years of the Qing dynasty. Imbued with the nationalist fervor of an era that aroused revolutionary sentiments and military aspirations, Chiang enrolled in a Japanese military academy and then China’s premier officers’ training school in Baoding. When the 1911 Revolution toppled the Qing dynasty and established the Republic of China, Chiang became a loyal follower of Sun Yat-sen, leader of what would soon become the Nationalist Party (Guomindang/Kuomintang). In the 1920s, Sun appointed him head of the Whampoa Military Academy to train officers for the party’s National Revolutionary Army. Sun also sent Chiang to the Soviet Union, then the chief financial and military backer of the Nationalist Party, to learn the secrets of the Red Army’s success—but Chiang returned with an abiding suspicion of Soviet intentions in China. After Sun’s death in 1925, Chiang led the Northern Expedition that unified the country, defeating or absorbing the warlord armies that had fractured the country since the early years of the republic. At a crucial juncture in 1927, Chiang turned on the N-

\textsuperscript{15} MacKinnon, *Wuhan*, 2; Peattie, Drea, and van de Ven, *Battle for China*, 250–51.
\textsuperscript{16} Mitter, *Forgotten Ally*.
nationalists’ Soviet sponsors, sending the Soviet advisers back to Russia and massacring thousands of their Communist Party and leftist protégées. The old capital in Beijing was abandoned, and Chiang presided over a relatively cohesive regime from a new capital in Nanjing.\footnote{The best biography of Chiang is Jay Taylor, \textit{The Generalissimo: Chiang Kai-shek and the Struggle for Modern China} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); a more critical assessment is Jonathan Fenby, \textit{Chiang Kai-shek: China’s Generalissimo and the Nation He Lost} (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2004); a useful account of Chiang’s early years is Pichon P.Y. Loh, \textit{The Early Chiang Kai-shek: A Study of His Personality and Politics, 1887–1924} (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971).}

Chiang’s National Government (Guomin zhengfu) in Nanjing was founded on a commitment to complete the national revolutionary mission of Sun Yat-sen. One of the government’s first acts was to erect an immense mausoleum on the outskirts of the new capital and stage an elaborate procession in which Sun’s body was brought by train from Beijing to be reburied in this new ceremonial center. Chiang himself played a central role in the ritual process and further cemented his ties to Sun’s legacy by marrying Soong Mayling, the sister of Sun Yat-sen’s widow.\footnote{Liping Wang, “Creating a National Symbol: The Sun Yatsen Memorial in Nanjing,” \textit{Republican China} 21, no. 2 (April 1996): 23–64; Henrietta Harrison, \textit{The Making of a Republican Citizen: Political Ceremonies and Symbols in China, 1911–1929} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 207–39.} The new Mme. Chiang was “cosmopolitan, articulate, intelligent, and wealthy,”\footnote{Taylor, \textit{Generalissimo}, 74.} and as an American-educated Christian, she provided an attractive face for the regime’s Western allies. As a condition for the marriage, Chiang had converted to Christianity and regularly read the Bible, said his prayers, and thanked God for his good fortune. But the ideological foundation of his regime was the commitment to Sun Yat-sen’s legacy, and every Monday in schools, government institutions, factories, and military units, Chinese gathered to recite Sun Yat-sen’s political testament and listen to inspirational appeals to dedicate themselves to completing his nation-building mission.\footnote{Henrietta Harrison, \textit{China (Inventing the Nation)} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 195–200.} By portraying himself as Sun Yat-sen’s most loyal disciple and linking Sun’s Nationalist Party to the nation’s modern rise, Chiang sought to link his own authority to the national destiny.

Throughout his adult life, Chiang Kai-shek kept a meticulous diary, whose daily entries provide greater insight into his private thoughts and
psychology than we have for any other Chinese ruler past or present. In these entries we see a man of intense self-discipline, his tightly wrought manner often interpreted as a psychological overcorrection for an admittedly dissolute life as a young man in Shanghai. But his rigid demeanor also came from his military training, and Chiang’s genuine respect for the martial culture of both Japan and Germany was linked to the value he placed on discipline, order, and respect for authority. By the wartime period, Chiang’s discipline was less soldierly than Confucian and Christian, as he maintained a daily routine that began with morning prayers, silent meditation, and calisthenics, and ended with more prayers and meditation. He summarized his accomplishments and failings in regular weekly, monthly, and annual self-reflections (fanxing). When his determined self-composure broke down in occasional explosions of anger, he would congratulate himself if he was able to conduct his next meeting with equanimity. He admitted to being unsociable, disliking public ceremonies, and seemed happiest when alone with his family or silently meditating in some quiet pavilion. As a “Bible-reading Confucian,” he spent long hours in reading Confucian commentaries and Liang Qichao’s writings on Chinese intellectual history. During one air raid, he was forced to seek refuge in a roadside shelter and took out a book on Confucian philosophers, later commenting that “the profit from reading is greater than any riches or honor.” These studies were not just for pleasure or self-cultivation; he also sought to shape the nation’s intellectual agenda, issuing orders to establish a Society for the Study of Tang Culture to combat the effete Confucianism of the Song and Ming dynasties.

From these multiple sources—Japanese and German military culture, 

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22 Loh, Early Chiang Kai-shek, esp. 64–65.
23 Taylor, Generalissimo, 77, 101.
24 SLGB 52:151 (1942 annual review). This entry notes that he had maintained his regime of daily meditation for over twenty years.
25 SLGB 53:579 (June 7, 1943).
27 Mitter, Forgotten Ally, 33.
29 SLGB 54:361 (August 23, 1943).
Christian faith, Confucian philosophy, and loyalty to Sun Yat-sen’s legacy—came an increasingly authoritarian personality. Convinced of his own correctness, he railed against the stupidity, laxity, and selfishness of his subordinates. Surrounded by presumed incompetents, he was unable to delegate authority, once complaining, “I have to do everything myself.”

This inability to delegate, plus his remarkable attention to detail, made him the ultimate micromanager, scolding a vice minister of foreign affairs for the poor quality of paper used for a diplomatic note, complaining when he saw a copy of the national flag in which the points of the star were not precisely aligned in the vertical axis, and stipulating appropriate

31 SLGB 52:498 (February 16, 1943). Ray Huang makes the useful point that scarce resources made it difficult for subordinates to make crucial decisions on allocations. As a result, everything was referred to Chiang. Ray Huang, “Chiang Kai-shek and His Diary as a Historical Source,” Chinese Studies in History 28, no. 1–2 (Fall–Winter 1995–1996), 45.


33 SLGB 53:80–81 (March 24, 1943).
dress for formal party meetings after observing with dismay a session in which the four people on the dais were all wearing different types of clothing. Perhaps most difficult for those who sought to serve Chiang and interpret his intentions was his capacity, in the words of one U.S. Foreign Service officer, to be “alternately impassive and overwrought, obstinate and vacillating.” Mme. Chiang, who was presumably accustomed to this behavior, was to experience it when confronted with an invitation to visit Great Britain after her much-acclaimed visit to the United States. Her husband, angered and insulted by a Churchill speech that omitted China from the list of Great Powers, flip-flopped back and forth as he shot off one telegram after another advising on whether or not she should accept.

Chiang’s reaction to Churchill’s speech was indicative of the guiding principle for his political behavior. Chiang was the supreme nationalist, committed to the same slogan—the revival of the Chinese nation (Zhonghua minzu fuxing)—proclaimed by the leaders of the People’s Republic of China today. Every challenge to China’s interests was interpreted as a slight, an insult, a tendency of the Western powers to look down on the Chinese. The British and Churchill, the ultimate modern imperialist, were particular targets of Chiang’s ire, and not without reason. In 1943, the British refusal to consider any concessions on the status of their Hong Kong colony during the negotiations to abolish the “unequal treaties” was particularly galling (see chapter 5). At times, British imperial meddling even provoked sympathy for the Axis Powers and Japan’s anti-Western pan-Asian agenda. After receiving news of British interference in Tibetan affairs and Roosevelt’s failure to end Churchill’s waffling on the commitment to reopen the Burma Road, Chiang would write, “How did we get

34 SLGB 54:552, 559–60 (September 18, 1943).
36 SLGB 52:586 (February 26, 1943), 587 (February 27); SLGB 53:36–37 (March 14), 77–78 (March 24), 101–2 (March 26), 143 (April 1), 380–81 (May 7), 433 (May 15). On the Chinese reaction to Churchill’s speech, see also Vincent to Secretary of State, April 8, 1943, FRUS 1943, 47.
37 See Chiang’s speech to the leaders of the New Life Movement in SLGB 52:528 (February 19, 1943).
stuck with this sort of dishonest and untrustworthy politician? You can see why Japan and Germany would wish to dispel their hatred and fearlessly embark on aggression.”

Chiang realized, in word if not in deed, that to gain real Great Power stature in the international community, China would have to strengthen itself. “Of the four countries in the United Nations, we are the weakest; and the treatment of the weak is like cripples or vagrants at the hands of local bullies. We must realize that if a person does not strengthen himself, no one can help. If a nation does not endeavor to strengthen itself, then friend and foe alike will treat it like meat on a chopping block. Beware!”

To Chiang and the Nationalist Party, the key to strengthening China was real national unity—overcoming the legacy of warlordism and political fragmentation that had plagued the Republic of China. This had been the purpose of Sun Yat-sen’s revolution in the 1920s, and Chiang realized that his armies had achieved victory as much by absorbing rival warlord forces as by conquering them. The residual power of local warlords posed a constant challenge to the Nationalist regime, and on several occasions in the 1930s they rose in open revolt to Chiang’s central government.

The War of Resistance against Japan rallied the country behind Chiang as never before, but it also seemed to increase his authoritarian tendencies. Theodore White and Annalee Jacoby compiled an incomplete list of the posts that Chiang held during the war. They included “chief executive of the Kuomintang; president of the National Government; chairman of the National Military Council, commander-in-chief of land, naval, and air forces; supreme commander, China theater; president of the State Council; chairman of the Supreme National Defense Council; director general of the Central Planning Board; chairman of the Party and Political Work Evaluation Committee; director of the New Life Movement Association; chairman of the Commission for Inauguration of Constitutional Government; president of the Central Training Corps; president of the School for Descendants of Revolutionary Martyrs; and president of the National

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39 SLGB 52:593 (February 28, 1943); cf. SLGB 54:622 (September 1943 monthly review).
Glider Association.” With so much power concentrated in his hands, Chiang had a distinct tendency to view himself as the embodiment of the nation’s will. Signs of independence or resistance to his wishes were regarded as putting one’s own selfish interests before those of the nation. Such behavior was most likely to provoke Chiang’s ire, with the predictable result that he found himself surrounded largely by yes-men unwilling to bring unwelcome news. Jiang Menglin, the loyal Nationalist intellectual who headed Peking University, reportedly complained, “No one tells him the truth, no one. I used to speak frankly to him, but I stopped doing so—it was no use. No one else would and he could not believe me. He will not listen to anything unpleasant, so nobody tells him anything but pleasant things. It is impossible to reason with him. … He flies into a rage if anyone argues against with [sic] him.”

THE COMMUNIST CHALLENGE

Of all the challenges to Chiang Kai-shek’s authority, none was more vexing than the CCP. Soon after its founding by a small group of intellectuals in Shanghai in 1921, the CCP, under strong pressure from the Communist International, had entered an alliance with Sun Yat-sen’s Nationalist Party. While Sun was alive, the United Front worked relatively smoothly, for the Soviet Union provided critical support for both parties. After Chiang engineered the brutal massacre of Communist activists in 1927, however, the two parties became mortal enemies. The remnants of the CCP fled to the hills, built their own Red Army, and transformed their movement into a peasant-based revolution. In 1934–1935, Chiang Kai-shek’s armies drove the Communists from their bases in the highlands of central China, and they embarked on the Long March that carried them

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40 White and Jacoby, *Thunder out of China*, 124. A footnote adds thirty-six additional posts, many of them president of various schools that Chiang periodically visited to exhort the students.


42 “The Peanut. Thoughts by Ch.M.L.,” Stilwell Papers, Box 41, Folder 2, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, California.
to the barren hills of northern Shaanxi. The Long March was both a heroic escape and a devastating military defeat in which the Red Army lost 90 percent of its forces, but in the end the movement survived with a dedicated band of hardened revolutionaries under the leadership of Mao Zedong.43

From the mid-1930s, as Japanese aggression posed a growing threat to Chinese sovereignty, the Communists reoriented much of their propaganda to appeals for a unified national resistance to Japan. They were encouraged in this by the Soviet Union—itself threatened by both Nazi Germany and the virulently anti-Soviet Japanese army—which encouraged Communist parties around the world to enter antifascist united fronts. From the press, liberal intellectuals, and campuses throughout China came appeals and demonstrations urging Chiang Kai-shek to halt his campaign against the Communists and enter into a united front against Japan. The culmination of this process came in December 1936 when Chiang was kidnapped and held hostage by two of his own generals in Xi’an. With Stalin urging moderation from afar and the CCP leader Zhou Enlai joining the negotiations in Xi’an, an agreement was reached to end the long civil war and prepare to cooperate in resisting Japan.44

When full-scale war broke out the following summer, Chiang’s National Government became the focal point of national resistance. Communists, leftists, and progressive intellectuals joined the Nationalists in a grand coalition to arouse their compatriots to resist the aggressors. As the universities moved to the interior, students joined propaganda corps to stage patriotic dramas, paint anti-Japanese slogans on walls, draw cartoons, print leaflets, and urge on the young soldiers at the front. During the battle for Wuhan, there was a real sense of unified resistance, and in a

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few key battles in the north, Communist and Nationalist troops fought together to confront the Japanese advance.\textsuperscript{45}

In addition to the domestic pressure for Nationalist-Communist cooperation, there was a diplomatic incentive for Chiang to work with his erstwhile enemies. After his German military advisers withdrew at the beginning of the war, Chiang’s principal source of foreign military aid was the Soviet Union. The Soviets were fully aware of Japan’s hostility to their regime: Japan had occupied Vladivostok in the early years of the USSR; it had joined Germany and Italy in the Anti-Comintern Pact in 1936; and until the decision to attack Pearl Harbor and the European colonies of Southeast Asia, many in the Japanese Army command still preferred an attack on the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{46} Accordingly, from the first months of the conflict in China, the Soviet Union became the primary source of financial and military support for the Nationalist regime, supplying military advisers, arms, tanks, artillery, and volunteers to fly hundreds of combat aircraft.\textsuperscript{47} This aid provided a key incentive for Chiang Kai-shek to maintain cordial relations with the Chinese Communists.

Under the terms of the United Front, the National Government recognized the Communist armies, the Eighth Route Army and the New Fourth Army, as integral parts of the nation’s armed forces and provided them with arms and provisions, as well as a subsidy for the Communist regional government based in Yan’an. The presumption was that, although the Communist armies would keep their own commanders, those officers would be subject to the unified command of Chiang’s general staff. But from the very beginning of Mao Zedong’s rise to power, he had recognized that for his revolution to succeed, it would need its own army. Mao


was not about to surrender control of his armies to Chiang. So from the outset, the United Front was bedeviled by conflicts over the independence of the Eighth Route and New Fourth armies. In Chiang’s eyes, these independent forces were a fundamental threat to national unity, and by the time he wrote *China’s Destiny* he would refer to them as “disguised war-lords and new feudalists.”

Any effective cooperation between Communist and Nationalist forces came to an end with the New Fourth Army incident of January 1941. Chiang had ordered the New Fourth Army to move north of the Yangtze River by the end of 1940, but the Communists feared a trap and hesitated. In the end, they moved by a circuitous route and were attacked by the Nationalist armies, which decimated the Communist headquarters battalion and took thousands of prisoners. It was a devastating military loss for the Communists, but an even greater propaganda defeat for the Nationalists, who were broadly accused of attacking a patriotic army in the midst of the struggle for national survival. From that time forward, the United Front existed in name only. The Nationalists cut off their subsidy to the Communist armies and regional government, and established a tight blockade of the area around Yan’an. The Communists expanded their bases behind Japanese lines, often displacing Nationalist forces, whom they accused of collaborating with the enemy. The Soviet Union, for its part, began preparing for the expected invasion from Nazi Germany, withdrew its pilots, terminated most of its aid for China, and secured its eastern front by signing a neutrality pact with Japan in April 1941.

**The United States and China**

Few relationships were so fraught with tension and misperceptions as China’s wartime relations with the United States. The Allies needed each

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other. China needed U.S. military and financial assistance; the United States needed China to tie down Japanese troops and resources on the Asian mainland so that they were not diverted to confront the American advance across the Pacific. Neither side truly trusted or understood the other. Chiang and his regime were painfully aware of China’s weakness and hypersensitive to any slight from their stronger ally; the United States was frustrated by China’s passivity and defensive stance, giving little heed to the enormous losses China had suffered during the four long years that it had fought alone.50

Even before Pearl Harbor, there was considerable American sympathy for China’s plight. Polls showed that among the public, 74 percent favored China, against only 2 percent for Japan. This sentiment was fueled by the strong pro-China stance of China-born Henry Luce and his influential chain of magazines: *Time* proclaimed Chiang Kai-shek and his wife “Man and Wife of the Year” in 1937.51 The U.S. government, alarmed by Japan’s expanding power in East Asia, also tilted toward China. In the summer of 1941, Roosevelt announced an oil embargo on Japan, which left the Japanese with only a few months’ supply to fuel its aggression. In the negotiations with Japan that followed, the United States insisted that Japan abandon all territories seized from China as a condition for resumed trade. At that point, “confronted with military strangulation by oil embargoes and the choice of admitting defeat in China,” the emperor gave final approval to the plan to knock out the U.S. Navy at Pearl Harbor and simultane-


ously attack southward to capture the European and American colonies in Southeast Asia, including the Dutch oil fields in Indonesia.\textsuperscript{52}

The Japanese attack and declaration of war against the United States and Great Britain gave China two powerful allies, but, as noted above, the initial results were discouraging. The British fought poorly to defend their Asian colonies, and soon Burma was lost and with it China's last lifeline to the outside world. For the next three years, the main route for military supplies to China was the Hump, the air route from India over the Himalayan foothills to Kunming in southwest China. Described as “the most dangerous, terrifying, barbarous aerial transport run in the world,” the route took planes well above their designed altitudes, in treacherous weather, with only visual navigation, so that many planes and airmen were lost. Tonnage was necessarily limited and further constrained by the poorly maintained railway that served the Indian airfields in Assam.\textsuperscript{53} As a result, between 1941 and 1944, China received only a tiny fraction of the aid that the United States offered to the Allied Powers: less than 1 percent of the Lend-Lease total.\textsuperscript{54}

Given the minimal aid China received from abroad, it mattered greatly who was to be the recipient. Here, from the beginning, Chiang’s regime became embroiled in a conflict between two proud and determined American competitors. On one side was General Joseph W. Stilwell, an acerbic infantry commander with considerable prior experience in China as a military attaché, who was the choice of U.S. Chief of Staff George Marshall to command U.S. operations in China. His rival was Claire Lee Chennault, an early advocate for air power in modern warfare, accomplished pilot, and brilliant aerial tactician who had left the Army Air Corps to organize the American Volunteer Group (more commonly known as the Flying Tigers) to assist China’s war effort. After the United States joined the war, Chennault was given command of the U.S. Army’s Fourteenth Air Force in China. The story of the conflict between Stilwell and Chennault has been much told. Suffice to say, Stilwell’s disdain for the


Generalissimo (whom he called “Peanut” in his diary) was widely known, and his brusque and intemperate manner made him a most inappropriate choice as the ranking U.S. officer in China. Chennault, by contrast, got on well with the Generalissimo, in part because he promised to defeat the Japanese from the air, a strategy that required little contribution from the Chinese side.55

When Stilwell was ordered to China in January 1942, he went as commanding general of U.S. forces in China and chief of staff to the supreme commander of the China Theater, who was Chiang Kai-shek. In the latter capacity, Stilwell was to discharge his primary duty: keeping open the Burma Road in “command [of] such Chinese forces as may be assigned to him.”56 The 1942 campaign in Burma was a disaster. The British defense was inept and feeble, and they scarcely disguised their disinterest in Chinese assistance. Stilwell urged more aggressive tactics, but in the process put Chinese troops in danger in ways that were repugnant to the Generalissimo. In the end, with his army in retreat to India (where they would be retrained and rearmed to reopen the Burma Road later in the war), Stilwell led a ragtag band of American officers, Chinese guards, and assorted British, Burmese, and Indians in a month-long retreat through the jungle. Chiang Kai-shek understandably thought the lonely trek a dereliction of Stilwell’s command responsibilities, and by the summer of 1942 voices in both Chongqing and Washington were already calling for Stilwell’s recall.57

THE WORLD AT WAR, 1943

In the global struggle against the Axis Powers, 1943 was unquestionably the year in which the tide of battle turned in the Allies’ favor. The North
African campaign ended with a convincing Anglo-American victory, which was quickly followed by the invasion of Sicily and then the Italian mainland, bringing the surrender of Italy and its fleet and Allied control of the Mediterranean. Though the Germans quickly occupied northern Italy and hard fighting remained on that front, as many as forty Axis divisions were diverted from the eastern front, considerably easing pressure on the Russians. By the summer of 1943, submarine warfare in the Atlantic was basically concluded in the Allies’ favor, allowing the Americans to send ceaseless convoys of war material to Britain and the Soviet Union. The year also saw the development of the long-range B-29 bomber and the strategic bombing of German industry—an effort now known to have had limited impact but at the time a major boost to British and Russian morale after the pounding they had received early in the war.

Developments on the East European front were even more encouraging, as the relentless German advance was blunted and turned back. Hitler had publicly proclaimed Stalingrad a major objective, but in the bitter winter of 1942–1943 his forces were surrounded and besieged. In the end, after losing some 250,000 German soldiers in the effort, the last men surrendered in February. At the same time, the siege of Leningrad was broken, and during the course of 1943, the Germans were steadily driven back across the killing fields of Eastern Europe. By this time the Soviets were outproducing the Germans in both planes and tanks, and the outcome of the war was no longer in doubt. 58

Meanwhile in the Pacific came progress of great import to the Chinese. The American-led offensive was beginning to show costly signs of progress in the Solomon Islands and New Guinea as MacArthur’s forces moved north from Australia. American casualties in the bitter battles for Guadalcanal and Bougainville were greater than any other battles in the war, but they forced the Japanese to cancel a planned attack on Chongqing and to transfer several elite divisions and most of their aircraft to the war in the Pacific. 59 This naturally concerned the Americans, who pressed the Chinese to do more on their front. When Roosevelt made a speech stressing the importance of the China theater as well as the Pacific, Chiang

Kai-shek was furious, complaining in his diary that FDR was “treating China like a sacrificial offering.” But gradually over the course of the year, the great air, sea, and land battles of the island-hopping campaign were turned by the overwhelming power of the American forces. By the end of the year, preparations were underway for the attack on the Gilberts and then the Marshall Islands, including Guam and Saipan, which would bring the Japanese homeland within range of the new American B-29s—the same long-range bombers that would eventually carry the atom bombs that brought the war to its conclusion.

The China Theater, 1943

In contrast to the major Allied victories elsewhere in the world, the China front was largely static. In January, when Chiang Kai-shek listed his priorities for the year, he stressed national unity and economic stabilization and made no mention of the war. The consensus of foreign observers, even Chiang’s supporters, was that Chiang’s regime was not ready for any offensive but was instead “conserving its strength for … postwar internal supremacy.” There were widespread reports of apathy and venality in the army, and Chiang himself complained of the poor discipline, inept administration, and low morale of his forces. With most Chinese forces uninterested in offensive action, the Japanese were able to deploy their

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60 SLGB 52:544 (February 21, 1943); cf. SLGB 52:445–46 (February 6), 52:491 (February 14). The offending words in Roosevelt’s speech were the statement, “Great and decisive actions against the Japanese will be taken to drive the invader from the soil of China.” Address to the White House Correspondents’ Association, February 12, 1943, in Samuel I. Rosenman, ed., The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt, vol. 12: The Tide Turns (New York: Russell and Russell, 1950), 79.

61 Weinberg, World at Arms, 642–56.

62 SLGB 52:204 (January 6, 1943).


64 Davies memoranda, March 9 and March 15, 1943, FRUS 1943, 27, 35. Corruption, war weariness, and official venality are major themes in Graham Peck’s account of his experiences in these years, Two Kinds of Time, 357–550.

65 SLGB 55:723 (1943 annual review).
elite units to the Pacific front, pulling their forces in China back to defend only major transport hubs, and leaving the task of peacekeeping in the occupied territories to Chinese, Manchukuo, and Korean puppet troops. 66

By this stage of the war, Chiang was using his best troops to maintain the blockade against the Communists and prepare the offensive in Burma. The front lines were often held by the armies of former warlords. Some of these forces fought bravely and well, but the soldiers were ill fed, diseased, mistreated, and understandably prone to desertion. Among the officer corps, there was growing discontent over Chiang’s preferential treatment of his own favorite commanders. 67 At the front, local commanders left to

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66 SLGB 53:209 (April 10, 1943), 228 (April 14), and 339 (May 3); Everett Drumright to Gauss, October 2, 1943, in FRUS 1943, 138–39; Peattie, Drea, and van de Ven, Battle for China, 43, 423–24.

their own devices made opportunistic accommodations with the enemy—especially as the Japanese front lines were increasingly manned by Chinese puppet troops. Smuggling across the lines became common, as neglected advance units sought to support their own men. Some of this smuggling was certainly detrimental to the war effort, as the Chinese provided tungsten vital for Japanese munitions in exchange for gasoline or even luxury items. 68

Through most of the early years of the war, the American press had been filled with stories of China’s brave resistance to the Japanese invaders. But by 1943, more skeptical views were heard. At Mme. Chiang’s February 19 press conference in Washington, one hesitant reporter asked about reports that “the Chinese were not utilizing their manpower to the full extent” in the war. 69 Pearl Buck published a widely read article in Life, which deftly balanced fervent praise of Mme. Chiang’s visit with pointed warnings of stasis and corruption in the army and officers “going into business.” 70 Most damningly, the New York Times’ respected military correspondent Hanson Baldwin published a scathing article, calling any Chinese “victories” (his quotes) “Pyrrhic ones” and declaring bluntly that “Japan, not China, is winning.” 71 The official Chinese reaction was intense and bitter, Chiang calling Baldwin’s article “slanderous rumors” spread by the British and the Communists. 72 The U.S. Embassy noted that the various critiques had caused “some quiet satisfaction in the more liberal quarters,” 73 though “deeply ingrained slavishness to considerations of face” had

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72 SLGB 54:186 (July 30, 1943).

73 Acheson to Secretary of State, August 13, 1943, FRUS 1943, 87. One suspects that
caused “reactionary Chinese leaders” to reject all such criticism and respond with deep resentment.\footnote{\textit{Acheson to Secretary of State, August 26, 1943, \textit{FRUS 1943}, 106–7.}}

The most important fighting in 1943 was along the Yangtze River in western Hubei. The Japanese advance may have been a probe against the defenses of the capital, but more importantly it seems to have been a foraging expedition in the rich central China rice bowl. There were credible reports of looting and rape by Chinese troops after they ordered the residents to withdraw. Most disturbing, it seems that the invading army was composed largely of Chinese and Korean puppet troops under Japanese officers, yet still they inflicted over ten times the casualties that they themselves endured.\footnote{\textit{SLGB 53:511} (May 27, 1943), 54:21–24 (July 3, 1943).} Chiang Kai-shek was clearly disheartened to learn that Chinese soldiers were fighting more effectively for Japan than for his cause, and he railed against the premature withdrawals, false reporting, and poor coordination of his own troops.\footnote{\textit{SLGB 53:525} (May 31, 1943), 563 (June 3). The “great victory of western Hubei” remains a staple of Chinese historiography of the war. See Wang Jianlang and Zeng Jingzhong, \textit{Zhongguo jindai tongshi}, vol. 9: \textit{Kang-Ri zhanzheng (1937–1945)} [History of modern China: vol. 9: The War of Resistance, 1937–45] (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 2007), 581–83. Thanks to Xiao Chen for this reference.} At the conclusion of the battle, Nationalist propaganda hailed the Japanese retreat to its prior positions as the “great victory of western Hubei” (\textit{Exi dajie}), though Chiang privately attributed the enemy withdrawal to the protection afforded China by the Lord and Jesus Christ.\footnote{\textit{SLGB 53:525} (May 31, 1943), 563 (June 3). The “great victory of western Hubei” remains a staple of Chinese historiography of the war. See Wang Jianlang and Zeng Jingzhong, \textit{Zhongguo jindai tongshi}, vol. 9: \textit{Kang-Ri zhanzheng (1937–1945)} [History of modern China: vol. 9: The War of Resistance, 1937–45] (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 2007), 581–83. Thanks to Xiao Chen for this reference.}

The strong performance of the Chinese puppet soldiers in the west Hubei battles was a notable and worrisome development. Because Japan lost the war and history is written by the victors, those who collaborated with the Japanese have been demonized as traitors (\textit{Hanjian} in Chinese). In recent years, several studies have explored the complex motives of those who chose collaboration.\footnote{\textit{Timothy Brook, \textit{Collaboration: Japanese Agents and Local Elites in Wartime China}}} In January 1943, disagreements with Great
Britain over the status of Hong Kong delayed the announcement of the new treaties with Britain and the United States. As a result, the Japanese renounced their extraterritorial privileges before the Allies, much to the annoyance of the Generalissimo. In October, Japan signed an alliance with the Nanjing government of Wang Jingwei in which it promised complete withdrawal of all its forces within two years of the end of the war. In November, Wang joined pro-Japanese leaders from India, Burma, and elsewhere in Asia for a grand conference to celebrate the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere. Though the world war at large was certainly moving in the Allies’ favor, in China, there was concrete evidence that “the process of ‘conciliation’ and ‘pacification’ in the occupied areas [was] proceeding steadily.” As Baldwin had warned, “Japan, not China, is winning.”

**THE ECONOMY**

In the summer of 1943, T.V. Soong met with Roosevelt’s trusted White House aide, Harry Hopkins. Both Soong and Hopkins were keen supporters of Chennault’s air-based strategy in China, and the Chinese foreign minister observed that with “growing American air strength in China, I am no longer much worried about our military situation. It is the economic outlook, inflation, which looks alarming.” The deteriorating economy and its effect on Chinese morale were a common refrain in reporting from China in 1943. In February, the State Department acknowledged that “the economic and psychological situation in China is

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79 SLGB 52:224 (January 9, 1943).


82 Hornbeck memorandum, April 3, 1943, *FRUS 1943*, 43.

83 In contrast to this contemporary assessment, Rana Mitter (*Forgotten Ally*, 6) writes that “Chiang won the war, but lost his country.” This seems to me to perpetuate a dangerous myth. The defeat of Japan was accomplished by the United States and the Soviet Union. China was a vital ally, but Chiang did not “win the war.”

84 T.V. Soong memorandum, August 16, 1943, T.V. Soong Papers, Box 59, Folio 22.
already critical and is deteriorating.” In May the embassy in Chongqing reported that “economically the deterioration is rapid and is leading toward something that may eventually spell disaster.” Chiang Kai-shek would not have disagreed with this gloomy prognosis. Reviewing another week in the same month, he confessed, “My spirits are depressed. … On the economic, diplomatic, party affairs and military fronts, there has been no progress. Dangers lurk everywhere in society, and the people’s will is wavering.”

Given Free China’s predominantly peasant economy, informed observers agreed that a full economic collapse was unlikely. Unless the harvest failed (as indeed it had in Henan: see chapter 10), most of the population would survive on what they could grow and produce locally. But by 1943, the Japanese blockade, persistent transport bottlenecks, and the lack of raw materials had brought an end to early wartime industrial growth, and manufacturing entered a period of decline. Factories closed, and labor unrest increased. By December, the Generalissimo judged that industry and the economy had registered “the most failures” of the year.

As discussed in detail in chapter 9, the heart of wartime China’s economic problem was its galloping inflation, which was in turn caused by government revenues lagging expenditures by about 75 percent. That gap was covered by printing money. This inflation affected the population unevenly, with salaried employees in China’s small middle class suffering the most and moneyed speculators profiting. Capital was diverted from investment to speculation and hoarding of scarce goods, with predictable effects on national morale and growing cynicism toward the war effort. Most critically, the utter failure of the government’s much-advertised price controls was a major blow to the legitimacy of Chiang’s regime. Needless to say, reports that price controls in the Japanese-occupied areas were more effective only further damaged popular morale.

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86 Atcheson to Secretary of State, May 28, 1943, FRUS 1943, 57.
87 SLGB 53:392 (Weekly review, May 9, 1943).
89 Eastman, “Nationalist China,” 152.
90 Memorandum of the British Foreign Office, July 5, 1943, in FRUS 1943, 71.
Domestic and international politics were intricately intertwined in war-time China, and 1943 provided several examples of this concatenation. The year began on an optimistic note, as the National Government’s prestige was enhanced by the end of the “unequal treaties,” a diplomatic achievement that Chiang Kai-shek hailed as the “greatest ever.”\textsuperscript{91} The recovery of Xinjiang was similarly greeted as “the greatest accomplishment since the founding of the National Government.”\textsuperscript{92} Both of these successes represented significant steps forward in China’s quest to reclaim full national sovereignty—the first a concession of legal sovereignty by the Western allies, the second a reluctant relinquishment of economic and political influence in China’s northwest periphery by the beleaguered Soviet Union. For a time, the recovery of Xinjiang even promised a new route for military assistance from the outside world, until the Soviets blocked the truck convoys that were to travel from Karachi to Tehran and then through the USSR to Xinjiang (see chapter 3).\textsuperscript{93}

On purely domestic matters, the signs were less encouraging. In the poor provinces of Gansu in the northwest and Guizhou in the southwest, there were significant local rebellions provoked by state demands for taxes and conscripts. Resistance dragged on for several months and represented a notable challenge to central authority before a major deployment of troops restored order.\textsuperscript{94} Meanwhile, students and intellectuals were becoming increasingly restive over the stifling censorship of news and information and the debilitating effects of inflation. On several occasions,

\textsuperscript{91} SLGB 52:153 (1942 annual review).

\textsuperscript{92} SLGB 52:157.

\textsuperscript{93} On the proposed route to Xinjiang through the USSR, see \textit{FRUS 1942}, 591–600; \textit{FRUS 1943}, 590–613. When the Chinese request for supplies over this route included 1,100 tons of ammunition for Hu Zongnan, the American Lend-Lease administrator commented, “It is perhaps significant that in the eyes of the Chinese the most important item to be shipped in on the very first lot of supplies transported over this route was a consignment of over a thousand tons of ammunition to the general detailed by Chungking to hem in and watch the Chinese Communists.” Stanton memorandum, July 12, 1943, \textit{FRUS 1943}, 606.

Chiang’s diaries express concern over the spreading student unrest and attacks on Nationalist Party organizations in the schools. It was presumably these challenges, as well as the larger threat from the Communists, that induced the Generalissimo to propose a transition to constitutional government (chapter 8).

There was, however, no threat of greater concern to Chiang Kai-shek than the Communists, and 1943 saw dramatic developments on that front. As noted above, the United Front joining the Communists and Nationalists in the fight against Japan had broken down with the New Fourth Army incident of 1941. The Communist armies operated with total autonomy and relative impunity behind Japanese lines, their guerrilla forces avoiding major battles with the better-armed Japanese, but engaging in periodic harassment that helped to keep the enemy contained in urban centers and safely away from the rural population. Despite their minimal contribution to the military struggle against Japan, the Communists were gaining significant support among the peasants of north China. Their programs of rent and interest reduction, highly progressive taxes that exempted many of the poorest peasants, and village elections (even if tightly controlled) appealed to the rural majority. In addition, Communist cadres tended to live simply, and their troops were better disciplined than either the Nationalists or the puppets. For these reasons, the Communist armies found it easier to survive and even prosper as guerrillas behind Japanese lines than did their Nationalist adversaries.

Through much of 1942–1943, Chiang hoped and expected that relief

95 SLGB 53:466 (May 20, 1943), 545 (June 1, 1943).
from the Communist menace would come from a Japanese attack on the Soviet Union. In Chiang’s eyes, the Chinese Communist Party was entirely a creature of the Soviet Union. He disdained the Communist armies as “rabble” (literally, “a flock of crows”—wuhe zhi zhong), and was convinced that without Soviet aid, they would crumble before his forces. Accordingly, the optimal solution to Chiang’s predicament was a Japanese attack to weaken or even (together with Germany’s invasion) destroy the Soviet Union, an attack that would also deflect Japanese forces from their aggression against China. Chiang had been confidently predicting such an attack since 1941, encouraged by the Anti-Comintern Pact that Japan had signed, but by 1943 there was a renewed urgency to his wishful thinking. When Roosevelt’s speech in February said that Japan could not be defeated from the Pacific alone, that China would also play a role, Chiang complained, “our strategy for the past three years has been almost completely destroyed by [FDR]. The result is that Japan will not dare attack Russia.” His strategy, it seems, had been to keep the China front quiet so that Japan would be emboldened to attack the Soviets. A few months later, hopes revived with “clear intelligence” of a June attack on Russia. By June, he was losing sleep worrying about this, calling it “the key to our nation’s survival.” And when in the end it seemed the Japanese would not attack, he found this unhappy development “the greatest danger to our country.” Chiang could not, it seems, escape the conception of China as a victim, whose fate lay entirely in the hands of untrustworthy foreign powers.

As prospects faded for Japanese assistance in solving his Communist problem, Chiang was presented with another source of hope, Moscow’s May 1943 announcement that it was disbanding the Communist Interna-
tional. Chiang called it a “historic watershed,” the “only great event of the early twentieth century.” Immediately he started planning to attack the Communist base in northern Shaanxi. “The Communist bandit problem,” he wrote, “can only be resolved by force.” In the area surrounding Yan’an, he ordered airfields prepared, roads and bridges repaired, maps drawn, and extra funds allocated to nearby Nationalist armies. In August, he prepared a major policy document on the Communist problem. Clearly pleased with his product, he called it “one of the great scholarly achievements of my entire revolutionary career.” The plan called for ten armies to attack the Communist base and turn the Reds into roving bandits, who could then be pursued by Chiang’s troops. Timing was essential. Yan’an must be attacked before the defeat of Germany so that Soviet forces could not intervene. American victories in the Pacific were another important consideration. In Chiang’s mind, they reduced the Japanese threat to manageable proportions. As a result, he said, “the problem for the future is entirely internal: how to eradicate the Communist bandits.”

September would bring a critical meeting of the Nationalist Party’s Central Executive Committee. Chiang sent special planes to bring each of the leading northwest warlords to the conclave, and on September 11, a wide range of central and regional leaders met to decide on measures to address the Communist problem. Military plans had been drawn up earlier that day, but in the end, Chiang reversed course, abandoning the military option and choosing instead to treat the Communists’ independent strategy as a matter of disobedience to central authority requiring legal and constitutional remedies. Accordingly, the Central Executive Committee issued a strong condemnation of Communist insubordination, but declared that the issue would be resolved by political, not military, means.

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104 SLGB 53:498 (May 25, 1943), 531 (Monthly review, May 1943).
105 SLGB 54:261 (August 9, 1943).
106 SLGB 53:634 (June 17, 1943), 54:122 (Weekly review, July 18), 319–20 (August 17), 341–42 (August 19), 347-48 (August 20), 366, 368 (August 24), 404 (August 29), 415 (August 29); Gong’anbu, Tong Zong riji, 365 (June 29, 1943), 374 (August 17), 378 (September 9).
107 SLGB 54:410 (Weekly review, August 29, 1943).
108 Chiang Kai-shek memo on CCP and USSR policy, SLGB 54:378–89.
109 SLGB 54:431 (Monthly review, August 1943).
110 SLGB 54:485 (September 8, 1943), 509-16 (September 11), 55:724–25 (1943 annual review).
Divisions in the Guomindang leadership played a role in this decision, as well as fears that an attack would only unify the Communists. Of greatest concern, however, were American warnings against civil war, though Chiang was convinced that the United States and the White House in particular had been misled by Communist propaganda.\(^\text{111}\) That was one problem that he hoped to clear up at the coming Cairo summit.

**A Politics of “Trusting One’s Own”**

The sudden cancelation of military action against the Communists was not the only time in 1943 that Chiang changed his mind at the last minute. It would occur again in the context of Chiang’s longstanding conflict with General Stilwell. Although this time it was not foreign pressure that brought the reversal but domestic politics that bore all the hallmarks of a family feud, it also illustrates important characteristics of Chiang’s regime.

As one reads Chiang’s diary or the daily chronology of his activities, the small circle of close associates is notable. Again and again he meets with the same people: his secretaries, especially the talented Chen Bulei; Dai Li, the sinister head of the secret service; He Yingqin, his chief of staff; Chen Lifu, the minister of education and leader of the Nationalist Party’s powerful C.C. Clique; H.H. Kung (Kong Xiangxi), Chiang’s brother-in-law and acting head of the Executive Yuan; his other brother-in-law, the foreign minister T.V. Soong, on the rare occasions when Soong was in Chongqing; and of course his wife, Soong Mayling. This reliance on a close circle of trusted associates was not just a matter of Chiang’s aloof personality but an explicit aspect of his governing philosophy. He believed that effective governance required “trusting one’s own” (xin qi suo si) and giving them authority within their areas of responsibility. If one were to rely on capable people from society, he believed, the result would be discord and obstruction as they formed self-interested bureaucratic

\(^{111}\) Atcheson to Secretary of State, July 14 and September 17, 1943, *FRUS 1943*, 283–84, 340; Gauss to Secretary of State, October 14, 1943, *FRUS 1943*, 351–60; SLGB 52:480 (February 12, 1943) and 54:276–77 (August 11, 1943); Gong’anbu, *Tang Zong riji*, 380 (September 12, 1943).
cliques.112 Beyond this small circle of trusted associates, Chiang repeatedly complained of his officials’ “incompetence and stupidity.”113 In some cases, the problem probably was incompetence, but more commonly it was their failure to correctly discern and carry out Chiang’s wishes. At one point he moaned, “Nobody understands my intentions.”114 Most importantly, Chiang demanded loyalty, and nothing was more apt to provoke his anger than signs of independence, which were inevitably interpreted as selfishness and arrogance. In these cases, the only way to regain the favor of the autocrat was to offer an abject apology.115

The problematic consequences of this style of governance based on personal relations, trust, and loyalty were illustrated in a dramatic confrontation in the fall of 1943. As noted above, Chiang Kai-shek had long been frustrated by his troubled relations with the American commander in China, General Joseph Stilwell. The two men openly despised each other, Stilwell describing Chiang as “a vacillating, tricky, undependable old scoundrel, who never keeps his word,”116 and Chiang complaining of Stilwell’s “stubbornness, stupidity, and despicable manners.”117 In the spring of 1943, Chiang actively pressed for Stilwell’s removal, working through T.V. Soong and Mme. Chiang, who were both in Washington at the time. After Mme. Chiang’s return, T.V. Soong aggressively continued the effort, using all his connections in Washington and eventually receiving Roosevelt’s agreement to replace Stilwell.118 Soong returned to Chongqing in

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112 Chiang Kai-shek diary, August 23, 1943. The SLGB version (34:363–64) changes this term to qinxin (亲信), avoiding the unorthodox endorsement of si (私). The alert reader will note the contrast to Abraham Lincoln’s approach to governance described in Doris Kearns Goodwin, Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012).

113 SLGB 53:290 (April 27, 1943); cf. SLGB 52:228 (January 10), 301 (January 12), 54:240 (August 4).

114 SLGB 53:430 (May 14, 1943).

115 See Chiang’s pleasure at Bai Chongxi’s apology, SLGB 54:256–57 (August 8, 1943); cf. SLGB 53:126 (March 31), 54:345 (August 20), 55:717 (1943 annual review).

116 Cited in Chennault, Way of a Fighter, 226.


118 SLGB 54:418–20 (T.V. Soong August 30 cable on meeting with Roosevelt), 532 (T.V. Soong September 15 cable on meeting with Hopkins), 607 (Soong September 29 cable on meeting with Roosevelt); see also T.V. Soong memoranda of May 10, August 20, and October 13, 1943, in T.V. Soong Papers, Box 60, Folios 3–4; FRUS 1943, 135–37.
October to join the meetings with the new commander of the China-Burma-India Theater, the dashing young British Lord Louis Mountbatten. In the meantime, however, Mme. Chiang was having second thoughts about the consequences of Stilwell’s removal. Accordingly, together with her sister, the wife of T.V. Soong’s rival H.H. Kung, minister of finance and acting head of the Executive Yuan, she began maneuvering to save the general’s career.¹¹⁹

In many ways, T.V. Soong was the odd man out in Chiang Kai-shek’s inner circle. Wealthy, intelligent, Harvard-educated, with a firm grasp of economics (he had overseen the modernization of China’s currency and banking system in the 1930s), he was thoroughly Westernized in his man-

¹¹⁹ Tuchman, *Stilwell and the American Experience*, 388–95; Qi Xisheng, *Jianba nuzhang*, 386–408; Davies, *China Hand*, 170–73. T.V. Soong returned on October 11, the day after Chiang’s inauguration, and one wonders if Chiang might have been irritated that Soong had not hurried to arrive in time for the ceremony (*SLGB* 55:84 [October 11, 1943]).
ners. He wore expensive Western suits, preferred Western food, and typically addressed his Foreign Ministry associates in English. Simplistic American accounts analyzed Chongqing politics as a contest between the “modern” T.V. Soong and the “reactionary” H.H. Kung, the latter condemned as much for his Chinese scholar’s gown as his corruption. Soong had been extraordinarily successful in Washington, lobbying for aid for China, gaining support for Chennault in his battles with Stilwell, and now getting Roosevelt’s agreement to replace Stilwell. Kung, by contrast, was wildly unpopular, and stories of his family’s extravagance and his own corruption constantly circulated in both Chongqing and the provinces.

For reasons that are not clear, relations between Chiang and his wife were not entirely harmonious after her return from the United States. By August, she was staying in the nearby house of her sister, the wife of H.H. Kung, returning only briefly in the evening for dinner with the Generalissimo. This made it easier, in September, for the two sisters to work actively against Stilwell’s recall, meeting several times with him and convincing him that “they [were] a pair of fighters.” According to Stilwell, “May [Soong Mayling] let out that she has a hell of a life with Peanut: no one else will tell him the truth so she is constantly at him with disagreeable news.” Clearly the two women were playing a desperate game, and there is some evidence that their determination was motivated, in part, by perceived threats to H.H. Kung’s position.

The whole affair finally came to a head with T.V. Soong’s return to Chongqing in mid-October. There he continued to spearhead the campaign to remove Stilwell, even translating for Chiang Kai-shek in the first

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meetings with the American general Brehon Somervell about replacing Stilwell. Suddenly the whole deal fell apart. Chiang’s own account is noteworthy:

On the question of whether or not to remove Stilwell, my intent was to follow the analysis of October 15 [to state my clear objections to Stilwell but leave the decision to the United States]. In the first two meetings with Somervell, I proceeded in this way to effect the changes necessary to achieve our objectives. But T.V. insisted on sticking to his own hatred of Stilwell and his personal opinions. So in translating he did not convey my views. In his telling, Stilwell would definitely have to be removed. After Somervell left, I considered carefully and decided to endeavor to save the situation and make a 180 degree turn.

Mme. Chiang was sent to warn Stilwell of his fate unless he offered a sincere apology and promised to reform. This was done, and the next day Chiang met Somervell to announce the reversal. Stilwell had dodged another bullet and would stay on for another year before one final crisis in U.S.-China relations would at last bring about his removal. T.V. Soong was not so lucky. On the morning after Stilwell made his apology, Soong held a stormy meeting with the Generalissimo in which both sides lost their tempers, Chiang smashed teacups, and T.V. ended up in disgrace, banned from attending the Cairo Conference, removed from power, and allowed to return only months later when friends found someone with better Chinese than his own to pen an appropriately contrite apology.

Two points are particularly notable in this incident. First, T.V. Soong’s crime had been to adhere to his own position—though in this case, the position was originally Chiang’s own. The problem was, in presenting it to...
the American representative, Soong had spoken more forcefully than Chiang wished: Chiang had long hoped that expressing his dissatisfaction with Stilwell would suffice to persuade Roosevelt to remove him. He was, after all, used to a politics in which subordinates readily discerned his position and adopted it as their own. Soong was wiser to American ways and recognized the need for a more direct statement of Chiang’s wishes. When they had their final fight, Soong protested that his failing was that he had been “too loyal” in carrying out Chiang’s wishes, but this only further enraged the Generalissimo. Chiang compared Soong’s behavior to an obscure incident in 1921 when Sun Yat-sen’s lieutenant Hu Hanmin had deliberately ignored several of Sun’s orders that he deemed unwise. Sun had forgiven Hu and later entrusted him with even more important positions. But Chiang took a dimmer view of the incident, saying that Soong’s conduct in 1943 threatened “another catastrophe like 1921.” Soong was “holding his own personal views and treating our party-state’s foreign policy like his personal plaything.” Chiang so identified himself with the Chinese nation that views even slightly different from his own were regarded as self-interested and contrary to the national interest.

Second, the lesson that Chiang drew from his sudden change of mind was that “in deciding and changing policy, success or failure depends completely on the last five minutes.” Although the Allies were certainly glad that Stilwell, a trusted commander for all his faults, would remain in China to direct the Burma campaign, the process that led to this result could hardly have encouraged them. One constant complaint against the Generalissimo was his unpredictability, his indecision, his tendency to vacillate. Now, on the eve of the Cairo Conference, Chiang had not only removed T.V. Soong, his most experienced foreign affairs deputy, he had changed his stance “180 degrees” in successive conversations with Somervell and raised last-minute policy change to the status of an essential governing principle.

127 *SLGB* 55:122 (October 18, 1943).
128 *SLGB* 55:119–20, 122 (October 17, 18, 1943).
129 *SLGB* 55:118 (and again, 121) (October 17, 1943); cf. Huang, “Chiang Kai-shek and His Diary,” 105 (diary entry of April 2, 1939).
Hsiao-ting Lin has provided an excellent discussion of Chiang Kai-shek at the Cairo Conference (chapter 13), so it is not necessary to repeat the narrative here. Nonetheless, the conference encapsulated so many of the successes and failings of 1943 that a few words on the issues raised in this prologue are required. Most importantly, one must admit the historic significance of including China among the Great Powers in 1943. From the perspective of the present, it seems obvious that China should be considered a Great Power, but in the early twentieth century, poor, weak, and internally divided China certainly did not look like a Great Power. In this respect, Roosevelt’s insistence that China’s size and the energy of its people made its rise in the postwar world inevitable was an act of considerable foresight. Churchill, of course, resisted, describing China as a “faggot vote” for the United States in the United Nations; and Stalin, understandably given his own nation’s sacrifices, thought China had not fought well enough to deserve such recognition.  

We should not imagine that it was only prescience or altruism that drove Roosevelt to treat China in this way. As FDR told his son after his first meeting with Chiang in Cairo, “The job in China can be boiled down to one essential: China must be kept in the war, tieing [sic] up Japanese soldiers.” To this end, it was essential to boost Chinese morale. Unable to supply much material assistance over the perilous Hump lifeline, the United States offered symbolic gestures: the termination of the “unequal treaties,” the inclusion of China in the Four Powers, and now the summit in Cairo. At Cairo, the Allies could make cost-free promises that would be welcome to China and boost Chiang’s standing—most notably the return of Taiwan and Manchuria. They could pose for the photographs of Roosevelt, Churchill, and Chiang—photos that are perhaps the most en-
during legacy of the conference. Indeed, in reading the official conference record, one gets the impression that, putting aside the heated debates over the Burma campaign, for Roosevelt the confab was largely about atmospherics and taking the measure of Chiang Kai-shek. In contrast to the Tehran Conference with Stalin that would follow, the Cairo record is incredibly sparse, with no American minutes on Roosevelt’s key conversations with Chiang.133

As for the measure of Chiang, the inescapable conclusion is that he came off poorly. Above all, he was seen as indecisive, vacillating, constantly changing his mind.134 Some have blamed this on Mme. Chiang’s translation,135 but it must be remembered that T.V. Soong was banned from the conference precisely for his failure to properly interpret the Generalissimo’s intentions. Mme. Chiang would not have made the same mistake. The more plausible explanation is that the Americans and British had been meeting in these strategic conferences for almost two years. They knew how to debate and bargain with each other and did so in their native language. The Chinese were outsiders in this club. Chiang was utterly unused to negotiation among equals and felt limited by his poor English.136 In his first summit outing, he was simply not up to the task.137

His stock would fall even further after Churchill and Roosevelt met with Stalin. In contrast to Chiang’s “characteristic myopia” in seeing Burma as the key to the struggle for Asia, Stalin quickly appreciated the conflicting demands of the Burma campaign, the Pacific War, Mediterranean options, and the planned invasion of northern France. Indeed, the British chief of staff found Stalin a better strategic thinker than either Roosevelt or Churchill.138 This judgment was no doubt colored by the fact

133 FRUS Cairo, passim, but esp. 322–23, 334–35. At Tehran, Charles Bohlen from the State Department translated and left detailed minutes and analysis of the meetings with Stalin, but at Cairo, Mme. Chiang translated, and no State Department representative was present. See also Davies, China Hand, 149–51.
135 Taylor, Generalissimo, 248–50.
137 Qi Xisheng, Jianba nuzhang, 412–13; Davies, China Hand, 144–47.
138 Sainsbury, Turning Point, 184, 226.
that Russia and Britain agreed on the low priority of the Burma campaign. More importantly, when Stalin repeated his promise to enter the war against Japan once Germany was defeated, an alternative was provided to a costly campaign through the jungles of Burma.\textsuperscript{139} In the run-up to Cairo, Chiang Kai-shek had insisted that he meet Roosevelt before the president met Stalin.\textsuperscript{140} Obviously he wanted to state his case to Roosevelt first, but the unhappy result was that Stalin got the last word on the critical strategic issues of the war.

In September, when Chiang abandoned his plan to solve the Communist problem by force, he resolved to do his utmost to disabuse his American allies of any illusions they had of the CCP as a potential partner in the war against Japan.\textsuperscript{141} The need for this had been brought to him forcefully when, on the first day of the Guomindang Central Executive Committee meetings that would decide policy toward the Communists, Stilwell had presented him a military plan that involved a combined Communist-Nationalist offensive in north China.\textsuperscript{142} In Chiang’s planning for Cairo, relations with the Communists were a matter that he expected the Americans to raise, and there is no question that they came up in the Generalissimo’s private talks with the president. The precise nature of those conversations is not known, but Roosevelt told his son Elliott, who accompanied FDR to Cairo, “Chiang would have us believe that the Chinese Communists were doing nothing against the Japanese. Again, we know differently.”\textsuperscript{143} So Chiang, as he intended, had used the opportunity to press his argument that the Communists were not, in fact, resisting Japan.

Roosevelt, obviously, was not convinced. The predicament that this presented for Chiang was that whether or not the Communists were resisting Japan was a matter of fact that could be investigated. This is precisely what the Americans started requesting soon after the conference in

\textsuperscript{139} Heiferman, \textit{Cairo Conference}, 121–28; Sainsbury, \textit{Turning Point}, 110, 250.

\textsuperscript{140} \textit{SLGB} 53:594–95 (June 9, 1943), 55:38 (October 7, 1943).

\textsuperscript{141} See also Hurley to Roosevelt, November 20, 1943, \textit{FRUS 1943}, 163–66.

\textsuperscript{142} \textit{SLGB} 54:519 (Weekly review, September 12, 1943). Naturally, Stilwell’s suggestion only confirmed Chiang’s conviction that Stilwell was a “despicable, stupid little man.” See also Stilwell diary, October 5, 1943, Stilwell Papers, Box 39, Folder 10.

\textsuperscript{143} Roosevelt, \textit{As He Saw It}, 163.
Cairo: permission to send a mission to Yan’an to better understand the Communist movement. Eventually, in June 1944, Chiang was forced to agree, and the Dixie Mission of U.S. military and foreign service experts was sent to investigate the Communist resistance. Their reports were uniformly favorable to the Communists, and while there has been much subsequent debate on whether the American observers were hoodwinked by their Communist hosts, the undeniable fact is that the Dixie Mission together with simultaneous visits by Chinese and Western newsmen brought back reports of a powerful political and military movement growing in north China and independent of Chiang’s control. Their reports left no doubt that China’s destiny no longer lay exclusively in Chiang Kai-shek’s hands.144

The approval of the Dixie Mission came just as Chiang’s own troops were reeling before Japan’s Ichigo offensive. Stilwell had long argued that if Chennault was successful in his air offensive against Japanese supply lines, Japan would respond by taking the Chinese airfields. Chiang Kai-shek promised that his ground forces could defend the airfields,145 but he was wrong. The Japanese rolled over his forces and opened a land corridor that stretched all the way from Korea and northeast China to Vietnam and Southeast Asia. Chiang lost 750,000 men in the fight, and his prestige suffered a crushing blow.146 In domestic politics, as discussed in chapter 8, his constitutional preparations were overtaken by growing support for the rival Communist call for a coalition government—an idea that Roosevelt had also pressed at Cairo.147 In the famous words of an earlier era, “Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold.”148 And in many respects, the seeds for the collapse were planted in 1943.

145 SLGB 53:312 (April 30, 1943), 331–32 (May 1, 1943).
146 Peattie, Drea, and van de Ven, Battle for China, 392–418. For contemporary accounts, see White and Jacoby, Thunder out of China, 179–98; Peck, Two Kinds of Time, 551–83.
147 Roosevelt, As He Saw It, 164.
it was appropriately solemn and dignified. Chiang had now reached the pinnacle of his power, and yet he felt that the audience at the inauguration seemed embarrassed, even humiliated—perhaps because of the absence of the diplomatic corps and the cool international response to his big day.\(^3\) Within a few days, the foreign ministers of Great Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union would meet in Moscow. At the insistence of the United States and over the resistance of Britain and the USSR, the conference would formally include China as one of the postwar Great Powers—a decision that laid the foundation for China’s eventual inclusion in the United Nations Security Council.\(^4\) But on his inauguration day, Chiang felt slighted, and soon he was grumbling over the dispirited, foul, corrupt, and selfish members of his administration.\(^5\)

In many ways, this inauguration day captured the spirit of China in 1943. On the one hand, it was a year of great triumphs. The “unequal treaties” that had shackled China since the Opium War a century earlier had been abolished, and the former “sick man of Asia” was now recognized as one of the Four Great Powers. Mme. Chiang Kai-shek made an impressive tour of the United States, including her historic addresses to both houses of Congress. Chiang himself joined Churchill and Roosevelt for a summit meeting in Cairo that produced the memorable photos of the Chinese leader sitting as an equal with the most powerful men in the world. The year also saw China regain full sovereignty over the resource-rich northwestern province of Xinjiang, which in the previous decade had been transformed into a virtual colony of the Soviet Union. Chiang Kai-

\(^{3}\) Chiang Kai-shek, weekly reflection (October 1943), in Gao Sulan, ed., Jiang Zhongzheng zongtong dang’an: Shilüe gaoben [Archives of President Chiang Kai-shek: Draft chronology] (Taipei: Guoshiguan, 2011), vol. 55, 81 (hereafter cited as SLGB). This source, compiled in the 1950s, contains major sections of Chiang’s diaries, as well as other official papers and a record of his activities for each day. I have used this source rather than the less accessible diary copies now held in the Hoover Institution Archives, unless the language of the original diary is significantly different. No foreign diplomats or newsmen were invited to the inauguration (Gauss to Secretary of State, October 19, 1943, in FRUS 1943, 361–62). Was the audience perhaps unaware of this, regarding their absence as a snub?


\(^{5}\) SLGB 55:81 (weekly reflection, October 1943).
shek had celebrated these accomplishments in his book *China's Destiny*, where he proudly proclaimed his vision of China’s past and future.

On the other hand, 1943 witnessed critical setbacks and disappointments for Chiang’s Nationalist regime. There was the devastating famine in Henan Province, and the embarrassing fact that foreign journalists had spread the news to the world. In the capital and throughout China, inflation raged unchecked despite well-publicized government efforts to control prices. Local rebellions mobilized tens of thousands of disaffected peasants to resist military conscription and state grain requisitions in Gansu and Guizhou provinces. Most importantly, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was spreading its political and military infrastructure throughout north China, displacing local elites loosely linked to the Nationalist regime in the areas behind Japanese lines. Chiang Kai-shek contemplated using the opportunity presented by the Soviet Union’s disbandment of the Communist International (Comintern) to launch a military assault on the Communist base and rid China of the Red menace once and for all. He abandoned the planned assault at the last minute, and Communist power continued to grow.

These and other developments are examined in the following chapters as we look at a single year in China’s modern history from a variety of perspectives in an effort to uncover the determinants of the nation’s trajectory. By focusing on a single year, we hope to capture some of the diversity and contingency of history, without losing sight of the larger forces working inexorably in the background.

**THE WAR**

In 1943, China was a nation at war. Japan’s invasion of China began in 1931, when its army units in Manchuria sabotaged a Japanese-owned railroad and used the incident as an excuse to occupy northeast China, then set up the puppet state of Manchukuo headed by the last emperor of the deposed Qing dynasty. The loss of Manchuria deprived China of its key heavy industrial base, with major coal mines, steel mills, and its largest arsenal, whose output had surpassed that of all other Chinese arsenals
combined. From Manchuria, the Japanese slowly encroached on adjacent regions in Inner Mongolia and north China until a clash with Chinese forces near Beijing (then called Beiping) provoked sharp resistance and full-scale war in July 1937. Chiang Kai-shek’s armies put up a determined fight for the nation’s commercial and industrial center in Shanghai, but the Japanese responded with a devastating counterattack, which included an innovation in modern warfare: the sustained use of aerial bombing against civilian targets. By the end of the year, the Japanese had broken through the Chinese lines and then wreaked their revenge on the nation’s capital in the Nanjing Massacre.

The Japanese strategy in China anticipated Hitler’s blitzkrieg tactics in Europe. Overwhelming firepower from the air and land- and sea-based artillery were concentrated in an effort to break through Chinese defenses, allowing infantry to advance rapidly along rail and river transport lines to achieve a quick victory. After their initial valiant but costly attempt to blunt the Japanese assault in Shanghai, Chiang’s armies resorted to the more conservative approach of “trading space for time,” using China’s overwhelming advantage in geographic size and human population to counter Japan’s superior firepower in a protracted war. The brutality of the Japanese assault, from the Rape of Nanjing to ritual executions of prisoners and the use of poison gas during their advance up the Yangzi (Yangtze) River,

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inspired a new sense of national purpose as Chinese rallied to resist the invaders. The government and patriotic businessmen cooperated in a massive effort to move industry and skilled manpower to the interior. Millions of workers, businessmen, technicians, civil servants, intellectuals, students, journalists, and ordinary citizens withdrew up the Yangtze to the new capital in Chongqing and other inland cities to continue the resistance. It was indeed “one of the greatest mass migrations in human history.”

In little more than a year, the Japanese had driven Chinese forces from all the major coastal cities and the central China metropolis of Wuhan, where the Chinese had hoped, but in the end failed, to hold the line. Instead Chiang’s forces hunkered down for a protracted war of attrition from the relative safety of their bastion in the fertile fields of Sichuan, above the treacherous gorges on the Yangtze River. In the spring of 1939, the Japanese launched murderous air raids that destroyed much of the wartime capital in Chongqing, but soon an effective network of air raid shelters and an efficient warning system relying on spotters near the Japanese airfields and along their flight paths cut Chinese casualties to a minimum. As elsewhere in the history of modern warfare, the bombing of civilian targets served mainly to strengthen national resolve to resist.

December 1941 brought the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and a fundamental reshaping of the global strategic picture. After fighting pretty much on its own for four long years (ten years, if one counts from Japan’s Manchurian incursion), China gained a crucial ally in the United States. Unfortunately, despite widespread American sentiment for immediate revenge on Japan, the Roosevelt administration gave priority to the rescue of Britain and the defeat of Hitler in a “Europe first” strategy. Even more sobering for the Chinese was the dismal showing of British forces in Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaya, and Burma and the quick defeat of the

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Americans in the Philippines and the Dutch in Indonesia. In the battle for Shanghai, the Chinese had put up a much more determined fight and inflicted more Japanese casualties than the proud Europeans, but now China stood alone as the European colonial empires in Southeast Asia crumbled before the Japanese assault. To add insult to injury, the British initially declined Chinese military assistance in the battle to keep open the supply line to China through their Burmese colony. In the words of the U.S. State Department, the British stance was motivated by their “reluctance to accept assistance from Orientals as derogatory to British prestige in Asia.” When Burma fell, China lost its last land link to the outside world, and soon despaired of receiving any substantial aid from the Allies.

Fortunately for the Chinese, the Japanese had also suffered chastening

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losses in the fight for Wuhan; their forces were now fighting major battles in Southeast Asia; and soon much of their air force and many first-line army units were diverted to the campaign in the Pacific. As a result, the bombing raids on Chongqing halted and the city was rebuilt; Japanese offensives were largely limited to local foraging operations; and the front lines hardened into a prolonged stalemate. Fighting alone, China became the “forgotten ally.” After suffering enormous casualties in the first years of the war, the Chinese now hunkered down, hoping to hold out until others could defeat Japan on their behalf.

**THE GENERALISSIMO**

No individual was more central to the fate of wartime China than Chiang Kai-shek. The son of a Zhejiang salt merchant and favorite of a doting mother, he received a solid Confucian education in the final years of the Qing dynasty. Imbued with the nationalist fervor of an era that aroused revolutionary sentiments and military aspirations, Chiang enrolled in a Japanese military academy and then China’s premier officers’ training school in Baoding. When the 1911 Revolution toppled the Qing dynasty and established the Republic of China, Chiang became a loyal follower of Sun Yat-sen, leader of what would soon become the Nationalist Party (Guomindang/Kuomintang). In the 1920s, Sun appointed him head of the Whampoa Military Academy to train officers for the party’s National Revolutionary Army. Sun also sent Chiang to the Soviet Union, then the chief financial and military backer of the Nationalist Party, to learn the secrets of the Red Army’s success—but Chiang returned with an abiding suspicion of Soviet intentions in China. After Sun’s death in 1925, Chiang led the Northern Expedition that unified the country, defeating or absorbing the warlord armies that had fractured the country since the early years of the republic. At a crucial juncture in 1927, Chiang turned on the Na-

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16 Mitter, *Forgotten Ally*.
nalists' Soviet sponsors, sending the Soviet advisers back to Russia and massacring thousands of their Communist Party and leftist protégées. The old capital in Beijing was abandoned, and Chiang presided over a relatively cohesive regime from a new capital in Nanjing.\(^{18}\)

Chiang's National Government (Guomin zhengfu) in Nanjing was founded on a commitment to complete the national revolutionary mission of Sun Yat-sen. One of the government's first acts was to erect an immense mausoleum on the outskirts of the new capital and stage an elaborate procession in which Sun's body was brought by train from Beijing to be reburied in this new ceremonial center. Chiang himself played a central role in the ritual process and further cemented his ties to Sun's legacy by marrying Soong Mayling, the sister of Sun Yat-sen's widow.\(^{19}\) The new Mme. Chiang was "cosmopolitan, articulate, intelligent, and wealthy,"\(^{20}\) and as an American-educated Christian, she provided an attractive face for the regime's Western allies. As a condition for the marriage, Chiang had converted to Christianity and regularly read the Bible, said his prayers, and thanked God for his good fortune. But the ideological foundation of his regime was the commitment to Sun Yat-sen's legacy, and every Monday in schools, government institutions, factories, and military units, Chinese gathered to recite Sun Yat-sen's political testament and listen to inspirational appeals to dedicate themselves to completing his nation-building mission.\(^{21}\) By portraying himself as Sun Yat-sen's most loyal disciple and linking Sun's Nationalist Party to the nation's modern rise, Chiang sought to link his own authority to the national destiny.

Throughout his adult life, Chiang Kai-shek kept a meticulous diary, whose daily entries provide greater insight into his private thoughts and

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\(^{20}\) Taylor, *Generalissimo*, 74.

psychology than we have for any other Chinese ruler past or present. In these entries we see a man of intense self-discipline, his tightly wrought manner often interpreted as a psychological overcorrection for an admittedly dissolute life as a young man in Shanghai. But his rigid demeanor also came from his military training, and Chiang’s genuine respect for the martial culture of both Japan and Germany was linked to the value he placed on discipline, order, and respect for authority. By the wartime period, Chiang’s discipline was less soldierly than Confucian and Christian, as he maintained a daily routine that began with morning prayers, silent meditation, and calisthenics, and ended with more prayers and meditation. He summarized his accomplishments and failings in regular weekly, monthly, and annual self-reflections (fanxing). When his determined self-composure broke down in occasional explosions of anger, he would congratulate himself if he was able to conduct his next meeting with equanimity. He admitted to being unsociable, disliking public ceremonies, and seemed happiest when alone with his family or silently meditating in some quiet pavilion. As a “Bible-reading Confucian,” he spent long hours in reading Confucian commentaries and Liang Qichao’s writings on Chinese intellectual history. During one air raid, he was forced to seek refuge in a roadside shelter and took out a book on Confucian philosophers, later commenting that “the profit from reading is greater than any riches or honor.” These studies were not just for pleasure or self-cultivation; he also sought to shape the nation’s intellectual agenda, issuing orders to establish a Society for the Study of Tang Culture to combat the effete Confucianism of the Song and Ming dynasties.

From these multiple sources—Japanese and German military culture,
Christian faith, Confucian philosophy, and loyalty to Sun Yat-sen’s legacy—came an increasingly authoritarian personality. Convinced of his own correctness, he railed against the stupidity, laxity, and selfishness of his subordinates. Surrounded by presumed incompetents, he was unable to delegate authority, once complaining, “I have to do everything myself.”

This inability to delegate, plus his remarkable attention to detail, made him the ultimate micromanager, scolding a vice minister of foreign affairs for the poor quality of paper used for a diplomatic note, complaining when he saw a copy of the national flag in which the points of the star were not precisely aligned in the vertical axis, and stipulating appropriate

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31 *SLGB* 52:498 (February 16, 1943). Ray Huang makes the useful point that scarce resources made it difficult for subordinates to make crucial decisions on allocations. As a result, everything was referred to Chiang. Ray Huang, “Chiang Kai-shek and His Diary as a Historical Source,” *Chinese Studies in History* 28, no. 1–2 (Fall–Winter 1995–1996), 45.


33 *SLGB* 53:80–81 (March 24, 1943).
dress for formal party meetings after observing with dismay a session in which the four people on the dais were all wearing different types of clothing.\(^{34}\) Perhaps most difficult for those who sought to serve Chiang and interpret his intentions was his capacity, in the words of one U.S. Foreign Service officer, to be “alternately impassive and overwrought, obstinate and vacillating.”\(^{35}\) Mme. Chiang, who was presumably accustomed to this behavior, was to experience it when confronted with an invitation to visit Great Britain after her much-acclaimed visit to the United States. Her husband, angered and insulted by a Churchill speech that omitted China from the list of Great Powers, flip-flopped back and forth as he shot off one telegram after another advising on whether or not she should accept.\(^{36}\)

Chiang’s reaction to Churchill’s speech was indicative of the guiding principle for his political behavior. Chiang was the supreme nationalist, committed to the same slogan—the revival of the Chinese nation (\textit{Zhong-hua minzu fuxing})—proclaimed by the leaders of the People’s Republic of China today.\(^{37}\) Every challenge to China’s interests was interpreted as a slight, an insult, a tendency of the Western powers to look down on the Chinese. The British and Churchill, the ultimate modern imperialist, were particular targets of Chiang’s ire, and not without reason. In 1943, the British refusal to consider any concessions on the status of their Hong Kong colony during the negotiations to abolish the “unequal treaties” was particularly galling (see chapter 5). At times, British imperial meddling even provoked sympathy for the Axis Powers and Japan’s anti-Western pan-Asian agenda. After receiving news of British interference in Tibetan affairs and Roosevelt’s failure to end Churchill’s waffling on the commitment to reopen the Burma Road, Chiang would write, “How did we get

\(^{34}\) \textit{SLGB} 54:552, 559–60 (September 18, 1943).


\(^{36}\) \textit{SLGB} 52:586 (February 26, 1943), 587 (February 27); \textit{SLGB} 53:36–37 (March 14), 77–78 (March 24), 101–2 (March 26), 143 (April 1), 380–81 (May 7), 433 (May 15). On the Chinese reaction to Churchill’s speech, see also Vincent to Secretary of State, April 8, 1943, \textit{FRUS 1943}, 47.

\(^{37}\) See Chiang’s speech to the leaders of the New Life Movement in \textit{SLGB} 52:528 (February 19, 1943).
stuck with this sort of dishonest and untrustworthy politician? You can see why Japan and Germany would wish to dispel their hatred and fearlessly embark on aggression.”

Chiang realized, in word if not in deed, that to gain real Great Power stature in the international community, China would have to strengthen itself. “Of the four countries in the United Nations, we are the weakest; and the treatment of the weak is like cripples or vagrants at the hands of local bullies. We must realize that if a person does not strengthen himself, no one can help. If a nation does not endeavor to strengthen itself, then friend and foe alike will treat it like meat on a chopping block. Beware!”

To Chiang and the Nationalist Party, the key to strengthening China was real national unity—overcoming the legacy of warlordism and political fragmentation that had plagued the Republic of China. This had been the purpose of Sun Yat-sen’s revolution in the 1920s, and Chiang realized that his armies had achieved victory as much by absorbing rival warlord forces as by conquering them. The residual power of local warlords posed a constant challenge to the Nationalist regime, and on several occasions in the 1930s they rose in open revolt to Chiang’s central government.

The War of Resistance against Japan rallied the country behind Chiang as never before, but it also seemed to increase his authoritarian tendencies. Theodore White and Annalee Jacoby compiled an incomplete list of the posts that Chiang held during the war. They included “chief executive of the Kuomintang; president of the National Government; chairman of the National Military Council, commander-in-chief of land, naval, and air forces; supreme commander, China theater; president of the State Council; chairman of the Supreme National Defense Council; director general of the Central Planning Board; chairman of the Party and Political Work Evaluation Committee; director of the New Life Movement Association; chairman of the Commission for Inauguration of Constitutional Government; president of the Central Training Corps; president of the School for Descendants of Revolutionary Martyrs; and president of the National

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39 SLGB 52:593 (February 28, 1943); cf. SLGB 54:622 (September 1943 monthly review).
Glider Association.” 40 With so much power concentrated in his hands, Chiang had a distinct tendency to view himself as the embodiment of the nation’s will. Signs of independence or resistance to his wishes were regarded as putting one’s own selfish interests before those of the nation. Such behavior was most likely to provoke Chiang’s ire, with the predictable result that he found himself surrounded largely by yes-men unwilling to bring unwelcome news. 41 Jiang Menglin, the loyal Nationalist intellectual who headed Peking University, reportedly complained, “No one tells him the truth, no one. I used to speak frankly to him, but I stopped doing so—it was no use. No one else would and he could not believe me. He will not listen to anything unpleasant, so nobody tells him anything but pleasant things. It is impossible to reason with him. … He flies into a rage if anyone argues against with [sic] him.” 42

THE COMMUNIST CHALLENGE

Of all the challenges to Chiang Kai-shek’s authority, none was more vexing than the CCP. Soon after its founding by a small group of intellectuals in Shanghai in 1921, the CCP, under strong pressure from the Communist International, had entered an alliance with Sun Yat-sen’s Nationalist Party. While Sun was alive, the United Front worked relatively smoothly, for the Soviet Union provided critical support for both parties. After Chiang engineered the brutal massacre of Communist activists in 1927, however, the two parties became mortal enemies. The remnants of the CCP fled to the hills, built their own Red Army, and transformed their movement into a peasant-based revolution. In 1934–1935, Chiang Kai-shek’s armies drove the Communists from their bases in the highlands of central China, and they embarked on the Long March that carried them

40 White and Jacoby, Thunder out of China, 124. A footnote adds thirty-six additional posts, many of them president of various schools that Chiang periodically visited to exhort the students.

41 SLGB 54:524 (September 13, 1943), 55:717 (1943 annual review); White and Jacoby, Thunder out of China, 126–31.

42 “The Peanut. Thoughts by Ch.M.L.,” Stilwell Papers, Box 41, Folder 2, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, California.
to the barren hills of northern Shaanxi. The Long March was both a heroic escape and a devastating military defeat in which the Red Army lost 90 percent of its forces, but in the end the movement survived with a dedicated band of hardened revolutionaries under the leadership of Mao Zedong.  

From the mid-1930s, as Japanese aggression posed a growing threat to Chinese sovereignty, the Communists reoriented much of their propaganda to appeals for a unified national resistance to Japan. They were encouraged in this by the Soviet Union—itself threatened by both Nazi Germany and the virulently anti-Soviet Japanese army—which encouraged Communist parties around the world to enter antifascist united fronts. From the press, liberal intellectuals, and campuses throughout China came appeals and demonstrations urging Chiang Kai-shek to halt his campaign against the Communists and enter into a united front against Japan. The culmination of this process came in December 1936 when Chiang was kidnapped and held hostage by two of his own generals in Xi’an. With Stalin urging moderation from afar and the CCP leader Zhou Enlai joining the negotiations in Xi’an, an agreement was reached to end the long civil war and prepare to cooperate in resisting Japan.

When full-scale war broke out the following summer, Chiang’s National Government became the focal point of national resistance. Communists, leftists, and progressive intellectuals joined the Nationalists in a grand coalition to arouse their compatriots to resist the aggressors. As the universities moved to the interior, students joined propaganda corps to stage patriotic dramas, paint anti-Japanese slogans on walls, draw cartoons, print leaflets, and urge on the young soldiers at the front. During the battle for Wuhan, there was a real sense of unified resistance, and in a

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43 For an excellent account of the early history of the party and the rise of Mao, see Alexander V. Pantsov, with Steven I. Levine, Mao: The Real Story (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012), 1–288.

few key battles in the north, Communist and Nationalist troops fought together to confront the Japanese advance.  

In addition to the domestic pressure for Nationalist-Communist cooperation, there was a diplomatic incentive for Chiang to work with his erstwhile enemies. After his German military advisers withdrew at the beginning of the war, Chiang’s principal source of foreign military aid was the Soviet Union. The Soviets were fully aware of Japan’s hostility to their regime: Japan had occupied Vladivostok in the early years of the USSR; it had joined Germany and Italy in the Anti-Comintern Pact in 1936; and until the decision to attack Pearl Harbor and the European colonies of Southeast Asia, many in the Japanese Army command still preferred an attack on the Soviet Union. Accordingly, from the first months of the conflict in China, the Soviet Union became the primary source of financial and military support for the Nationalist regime, supplying military advisers, arms, tanks, artillery, and volunteers to fly hundreds of combat aircraft. This aid provided a key incentive for Chiang Kai-shek to maintain cordial relations with the Chinese Communists.

Under the terms of the United Front, the National Government recognized the Communist armies, the Eighth Route Army and the New Fourth Army, as integral parts of the nation’s armed forces and provided them with arms and provisions, as well as a subsidy for the Communist regional government based in Yan’an. The presumption was that, although the Communist armies would keep their own commanders, those officers would be subject to the unified command of Chiang’s general staff. But from the very beginning of Mao Zedong’s rise to power, he had recognized that for his revolution to succeed, it would need its own army. Mao

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was not about to surrender control of his armies to Chiang. So from the outset, the United Front was bedeviled by conflicts over the independence of the Eighth Route and New Fourth armies. In Chiang’s eyes, these independent forces were a fundamental threat to national unity, and by the time he wrote *China’s Destiny* he would refer to them as “disguised war-lords and new feudalists.”

Any effective cooperation between Communist and Nationalist forces came to an end with the New Fourth Army incident of January 1941. Chiang had ordered the New Fourth Army to move north of the Yangtze River by the end of 1940, but the Communists feared a trap and hesitated. In the end, they moved by a circuitous route and were attacked by the Nationalist armies, which decimated the Communist headquarters battalion and took thousands of prisoners. It was a devastating military loss for the Communists, but an even greater propaganda defeat for the Nationalists, who were broadly accused of attacking a patriotic army in the midst of the struggle for national survival. From that time forward, the United Front existed in name only. The Nationalists cut off their subsidy to the Communist armies and regional government, and established a tight blockade of the area around Yan’an. The Communists expanded their bases behind Japanese lines, often displacing Nationalist forces, whom they accused of collaborating with the enemy. The Soviet Union, for its part, began preparing for the expected invasion from Nazi Germany, withdrew its pilots, terminated most of its aid for China, and secured its eastern front by signing a neutrality pact with Japan in April 1941.

**The United States and China**

Few relationships were so fraught with tension and misperceptions as China’s wartime relations with the United States. The Allies needed each

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48 Chiang Kai-shek, *China’s Destiny and Chinese Economic Theory* (New York: Roy, 1947), 225. Chiang was particularly proud of this formulation, and regarded the angry Communist response as proof of their separatist intentions. SLGB 54:387 (Memo on Communist Policy, August 25, 1943).

other. China needed U.S. military and financial assistance; the United States needed China to tie down Japanese troops and resources on the Asian mainland so that they were not diverted to confront the American advance across the Pacific. Neither side truly trusted or understood the other. Chiang and his regime were painfully aware of China’s weakness and hypersensitive to any slight from their stronger ally; the United States was frustrated by China’s passivity and defensive stance, giving little heed to the enormous losses China had suffered during the four long years that it had fought alone.50

Even before Pearl Harbor, there was considerable American sympathy for China’s plight. Polls showed that among the public, 74 percent favored China, against only 2 percent for Japan. This sentiment was fueled by the strong pro-China stance of China-born Henry Luce and his influential chain of magazines: *Time* proclaimed Chiang Kai-shek and his wife “Man and Wife of the Year” in 1937.51 The U.S. government, alarmed by Japan’s expanding power in East Asia, also tilted toward China. In the summer of 1941, Roosevelt announced an oil embargo on Japan, which left the Japanese with only a few months’ supply to fuel its aggression. In the negotiations with Japan that followed, the United States insisted that Japan abandon all territories seized from China as a condition for resumed trade. At that point, “confronted with military strangulation by oil embargoes and the choice of admitting defeat in China,” the emperor gave final approval to the plan to knock out the U.S. Navy at Pearl Harbor and simultane-

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ously attack southward to capture the European and American colonies in Southeast Asia, including the Dutch oil fields in Indonesia.\textsuperscript{52}

The Japanese attack and declaration of war against the United States and Great Britain gave China two powerful allies, but, as noted above, the initial results were discouraging. The British fought poorly to defend their Asian colonies, and soon Burma was lost and with it China’s last lifeline to the outside world. For the next three years, the main route for military supplies to China was the Hump, the air route from India over the Himalayan foothills to Kunming in southwest China. Described as “the most dangerous, terrifying, barbarous aerial transport run in the world,” the route took planes well above their designed altitudes, in treacherous weather, with only visual navigation, so that many planes and airmen were lost. Tonnage was necessarily limited and further constrained by the poorly maintained railway that served the Indian airfields in Assam.\textsuperscript{53} As a result, between 1941 and 1944, China received only a tiny fraction of the aid that the United States offered to the Allied Powers: less than 1 percent of the Lend-Lease total.\textsuperscript{54}

Given the minimal aid China received from abroad, it mattered greatly who was to be the recipient. Here, from the beginning, Chiang’s regime became embroiled in a conflict between two proud and determined American competitors. On one side was General Joseph W. Stilwell, an acerbic infantry commander with considerable prior experience in China as a military attaché, who was the choice of U.S. Chief of Staff George Marshall to command U.S. operations in China. His rival was Claire Lee Chennault, an early advocate for air power in modern warfare, accomplished pilot, and brilliant aerial tactician who had left the Army Air Corps to organize the American Volunteer Group (more commonly known as the Flying Tigers) to assist China’s war effort. After the United States joined the war, Chennault was given command of the U.S. Army’s Fourteenth Air Force in China. The story of the conflict between Stilwell and Chennault has been much told. Suffice to say, Stilwell’s disdain for the


Generalissimo (whom he called “Peanut” in his diary) was widely known, and his brusque and intemperate manner made him a most inappropriate choice as the ranking U.S. officer in China. Chennault, by contrast, got on well with the Generalissimo, in part because he promised to defeat the Japanese from the air, a strategy that required little contribution from the Chinese side.\footnote{Tuchman, \textit{Stilwell and the American Experience}, 307–74; see also the protagonists’ own accounts: Theodore White, ed., \textit{The Stilwell Papers} (New York: Sloane, 1948); Claire Lee Chennault, \textit{Way of a Fighter} (New York: Putnam, 1949).}

When Stilwell was ordered to China in January 1942, he went as commanding general of U.S. forces in China and chief of staff to the supreme commander of the China Theater, who was Chiang Kai-shek. In the latter capacity, Stilwell was to discharge his primary duty: keeping open the Burma Road in “command [of] such Chinese forces as may be assigned to him.”\footnote{Tuchman, \textit{Stilwell and the American Experience}, 246.} The 1942 campaign in Burma was a disaster. The British defense was inept and feeble, and they scarcely disguised their disinterest in Chinese assistance. Stilwell urged more aggressive tactics, but in the process put Chinese troops in danger in ways that were repugnant to the Generalissimo. In the end, with his army in retreat to India (where they would be retrained and rearmed to reopen the Burma Road later in the war), Stilwell led a ragtag band of American officers, Chinese guards, and assorted British, Burmese, and Indians in a month-long retreat through the jungle. Chiang Kai-shek understandably thought the lonely trek a dereliction of Stilwell’s command responsibilities, and by the summer of 1942 voices in both Chongqing and Washington were already calling for Stilwell’s recall.\footnote{Ibid., 266–325; Marshall to Roosevelt, October 6, 1942, \textit{FRUS} 1942, 159; Taylor, \textit{Generalissimo}, 194–216; Qi Xisheng, \textit{Jianba nuzhang}, 101–296; memo of conversation with Stilwell, Chiang Kai-shek and Mme. Chiang, March 10, 1943, T.V. Soong papers, Box 60, Folio 1, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, California. For a searing critique of Stilwell in China, see van de Ven, \textit{War and Nationalism}, 19–63.}

\textbf{TWO \textit{WORLD AT WAR}, 1943}

In the global struggle against the Axis Powers, 1943 was unquestionably the year in which the tide of battle turned in the Allies’ favor. The North
African campaign ended with a convincing Anglo-American victory, which was quickly followed by the invasion of Sicily and then the Italian mainland, bringing the surrender of Italy and its fleet and Allied control of the Mediterranean. Though the Germans quickly occupied northern Italy and hard fighting remained on that front, as many as forty Axis divisions were diverted from the eastern front, considerably easing pressure on the Russians. By the summer of 1943, submarine warfare in the Atlantic was basically concluded in the Allies’ favor, allowing the Americans to send ceaseless convoys of war material to Britain and the Soviet Union. The year also saw the development of the long-range B-29 bomber and the strategic bombing of German industry—an effort now known to have had limited impact but at the time a major boost to British and Russian morale after the pounding they had received early in the war.

Developments on the East European front were even more encouraging, as the relentless German advance was blunted and turned back. Hitler had publicly proclaimed Stalingrad a major objective, but in the bitter winter of 1942–1943 his forces were surrounded and besieged. In the end, after losing some 250,000 German soldiers in the effort, the last men surrendered in February. At the same time, the siege of Leningrad was broken, and during the course of 1943, the Germans were steadily driven back across the killing fields of Eastern Europe. By this time the Soviets were outproducing the Germans in both planes and tanks, and the outcome of the war was no longer in doubt.  

Meanwhile in the Pacific came progress of great import to the Chinese. The American-led offensive was beginning to show costly signs of progress in the Solomon Islands and New Guinea as MacArthur’s forces moved north from Australia. American casualties in the bitter battles for Guadalcanal and Bougainville were greater than any other battles in the war, but they forced the Japanese to cancel a planned attack on Chongqing and to transfer several elite divisions and most of their aircraft to the war in the Pacific. This naturally concerned the Americans, who pressed the Chinese to do more on their front. When Roosevelt made a speech stressing the importance of the China theater as well as the Pacific, Chiang

Kai-shek was furious, complaining in his diary that FDR was “treating China like a sacrificial offering.” But gradually over the course of the year, the great air, sea, and land battles of the island-hopping campaign were turned by the overwhelming power of the American forces. By the end of the year, preparations were underway for the attack on the Gilberts and then the Marshall Islands, including Guam and Saipan, which would bring the Japanese homeland within range of the new American B-29s—the same long-range bombers that would eventually carry the atom bombs that brought the war to its conclusion.

**The China Theater, 1943**

In contrast to the major Allied victories elsewhere in the world, the China front was largely static. In January, when Chiang Kai-shek listed his priorities for the year, he stressed national unity and economic stabilization and made no mention of the war. The consensus of foreign observers, even Chiang’s supporters, was that Chiang’s regime was not ready for any offensive but was instead “conserving its strength for … postwar internal supremacy.” There were widespread reports of apathy and venality in the army, and Chiang himself complained of the poor discipline, inept administration, and low morale of his forces. With most Chinese forces uninterested in offensive action, the Japanese were able to deploy their

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60 SLGB 52:544 (February 21, 1943); cf. SLGB 52:445–46 (February 6), 52:491 (February 14). The offending words in Roosevelt’s speech were the statement, “Great and decisive actions against the Japanese will be taken to drive the invader from the soil of China.” Address to the White House Correspondents’ Association, February 12, 1943, in Samuel I. Rosenman, ed., *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt*, vol. 12: *The Tide Turns* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1950), 79.


62 SLGB 52:204 (January 6, 1943).


64 Davies memoranda, March 9 and March 15, 1943, *FRUS 1943*, 27, 35. Corruption, war weariness, and official venality are major themes in Graham Peck’s account of his experiences in these years, *Two Kinds of Time*, 357–550.

65 SLGB 55:723 (1943 annual review).
elite units to the Pacific front, pulling their forces in China back to defend only major transport hubs, and leaving the task of peacekeeping in the occupied territories to Chinese, Manchukuo, and Korean puppet troops.\footnote{SLGB 53:209 (April 10, 1943), 228 (April 14), and 339 (May 3); Everett Drumright to Gauss, October 2, 1943, in FRUS 1943, 1:38–39; Peattie, Drea, and van de Ven, Battle for China, 43, 423–24.}

By this stage of the war, Chiang was using his best troops to maintain the blockade against the Communists and prepare the offensive in Burma. The front lines were often held by the armies of former warlords. Some of these forces fought bravely and well, but the soldiers were ill fed, diseased, mistreated, and understandably prone to desertion. Among the officer corps, there was growing discontent over Chiang’s preferential treatment of his own favorite commanders.\footnote{White and Jacoby, Thunder out of China, 129–44; Lloyd E. Eastman, “Nationalist China during the Sino-Japanese War, 1937–1945,” in Lloyd E. Eastman, Jerome Chên, Su-}

At the front, local commanders left to...
their own devices made opportunistic accommodations with the enemy—especially as the Japanese front lines were increasingly manned by Chinese puppet troops. Smuggling across the lines became common, as neglected advance units sought to support their own men. Some of this smuggling was certainly detrimental to the war effort, as the Chinese provided tungsten vital for Japanese munitions in exchange for gasoline or even luxury items.⁶⁸

Through most of the early years of the war, the American press had been filled with stories of China’s brave resistance to the Japanese invaders. But by 1943, more skeptical views were heard. At Mme. Chiang’s February 19 press conference in Washington, one hesitant reporter asked about reports that “the Chinese were not utilizing their manpower to the full extent” in the war.⁶⁹ Pearl Buck published a widely read article in Life, which deftly balanced fervent praise of Mme. Chiang’s visit with pointed warnings of stasis and corruption in the army and officers “going into business.”⁷⁰ Most dammingly, the New York Times’ respected military correspondent Hanson Baldwin published a scathing article, calling any Chinese “victories” (his quotes) “Pyrrhic ones” and declaring bluntly that “Japan, not China, is winning.”⁷¹ The official Chinese reaction was intense and bitter, Chiang calling Baldwin’s article “slanderous rumors” spread by the British and the Communists.⁷² The U.S. Embassy noted that the various critiques had caused “some quiet satisfaction in the more liberal quarters,”⁷³ though “deeply ingrained slavishness to considerations of face” had

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⁷² SLGB 54:186 (July 30, 1943).

⁷³ Acheson to Secretary of State, August 13, 1943, FRUS 1943, 87. One suspects that
caused “reactionary Chinese leaders” to reject all such criticism and respond with deep resentment.\textsuperscript{74}

The most important fighting in 1943 was along the Yangtze River in western Hubei. The Japanese advance may have been a probe against the defenses of the capital, but more importantly it seems to have been a foraging expedition in the rich central China rice bowl. There were credible reports of looting and rape by Chinese troops after they ordered the residents to withdraw. Most disturbing, it seems that the invading army was composed largely of Chinese and Korean puppet troops under Japanese officers, yet still they inflicted over ten times the casualties that they themselves endured.\textsuperscript{75} Chiang Kai-shek was clearly disheartened to learn that Chinese soldiers were fighting more effectively for Japan than for his cause, and he railed against the premature withdrawals, false reporting, and poor coordination of his own troops.\textsuperscript{76} At the conclusion of the battle, Nationalist propaganda hailed the Japanese retreat to its prior positions as the “great victory of western Hubei” (\textit{Exi dajie}), though Chiang privately attributed the enemy withdrawal to the protection afforded China by the Lord and Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{77}

The strong performance of the Chinese puppet soldiers in the west Hubei battles was a notable and worrisome development. Because Japan lost the war and history is written by the victors, those who collaborated with the Japanese have been demonized as traitors (\textit{Hanjian} in Chinese). In recent years, several studies have explored the complex motives of those who chose collaboration.\textsuperscript{78} In January 1943, disagreements with Great
Britain over the status of Hong Kong delayed the announcement of the new treaties with Britain and the United States. As a result, the Japanese renounced their extraterritorial privileges before the Allies, much to the annoyance of the Generalissimo. In October, Japan signed an alliance with the Nanjing government of Wang Jingwei in which it promised complete withdrawal of all its forces within two years of the end of the war. In November, Wang joined pro-Japanese leaders from India, Burma, and elsewhere in Asia for a grand conference to celebrate the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere. Though the world war at large was certainly moving in the Allies’ favor, in China, there was concrete evidence that “the process of ‘conciliation’ and ‘pacification’ in the occupied areas [was] proceeding steadily.” As Baldwin had warned, “Japan, not China, is winning.”

THE ECONOMY

In the summer of 1943, T.V. Soong met with Roosevelt’s trusted White House aide, Harry Hopkins. Both Soong and Hopkins were keen supporters of Chennault’s air-based strategy in China, and the Chinese foreign minister observed that with “growing American air strength in China, I am no longer much worried about our military situation. It is the economic outlook, inflation, which looks alarming.” The deteriorating economy and its effect on Chinese morale were a common refrain in reporting from China in 1943. In February, the State Department acknowledged that “the economic and psychological situation in China is


79 SLGB 52:224 (January 9, 1943).
80 Memo by Division of Far Eastern Affairs, November 3, 1943, FRUS 1943, 157–58.
82 Hornbeck memorandum, April 3, 1943, FRUS 1943, 43.
83 In contrast to this contemporary assessment, Rana Mitter (Forgotten Ally, 6) writes that “Chiang won the war, but lost his country.” This seems to me to perpetuate a dangerous myth. The defeat of Japan was accomplished by the United States and the Soviet Union. China was a vital ally, but Chiang did not “win the war.”
84 T.V. Soong memorandum, August 16, 1943, T.V. Soong Papers, Box 59, Folio 22.
already critical and is deteriorating." In May the embassy in Chongqing reported that “economically the deterioration is rapid and is leading toward something that may eventually spell disaster.” Chiang Kai-shek would not have disagreed with this gloomy prognosis. Reviewing another week in the same month, he confessed, “My spirits are depressed. ... On the economic, diplomatic, party affairs and military fronts, there has been no progress. Dangers lurk everywhere in society, and the people’s will is wavering.”

Given Free China’s predominantly peasant economy, informed observers agreed that a full economic collapse was unlikely. Unless the harvest failed (as indeed it had in Henan: see chapter 10), most of the population would survive on what they could grow and produce locally. But by 1943, the Japanese blockade, persistent transport bottlenecks, and the lack of raw materials had brought an end to early wartime industrial growth, and manufacturing entered a period of decline. Factories closed, and labor unrest increased. By December, the Generalissimo judged that industry and the economy had registered “the most failures” of the year.

As discussed in detail in chapter 9, the heart of wartime China’s economic problem was its galloping inflation, which was in turn caused by government revenues lagging expenditures by about 75 percent. That gap was covered by printing money. This inflation affected the population unevenly, with salaried employees in China’s small middle class suffering the most and moneyed speculators profiting. Capital was diverted from investment to speculation and hoarding of scarce goods, with predictable effects on national morale and growing cynicism toward the war effort. Most critically, the utter failure of the government’s much-advertised price controls was a major blow to the legitimacy of Chiang’s regime. Needless to say, reports that price controls in the Japanese-occupied areas were more effective only further damaged popular morale.

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86 Atcheson to Secretary of State, May 28, 1943, FRUS 1943, 57.
87 SLGB 53:392 (Weekly review, May 9, 1943).
89 Eastman, “Nationalist China,” 152.
90 Memorandum of the British Foreign Office, July 5, 1943, in FRUS 1943, 71.
POLITICS

Domestic and international politics were intricately intertwined in wartime China, and 1943 provided several examples of this concatenation. The year began on an optimistic note, as the National Government’s prestige was enhanced by the end of the “unequal treaties,” a diplomatic achievement that Chiang Kai-shek hailed as the “greatest ever.”\(^{91}\) The recovery of Xinjiang was similarly greeted as “the greatest accomplishment since the founding of the National Government.”\(^{92}\) Both of these successes represented significant steps forward in China’s quest to reclaim full national sovereignty—the first a concession of legal sovereignty by the Western allies, the second a reluctant relinquishment of economic and political influence in China’s northwest periphery by the beleaguered Soviet Union. For a time, the recovery of Xinjiang even promised a new route for military assistance from the outside world, until the Soviets blocked the truck convoys that were to travel from Karachi to Tehran and then through the USSR to Xinjiang (see chapter 3).\(^{93}\)

On purely domestic matters, the signs were less encouraging. In the poor provinces of Gansu in the northwest and Guizhou in the southwest, there were significant local rebellions provoked by state demands for taxes and conscripts. Resistance dragged on for several months and represented a notable challenge to central authority before a major deployment of troops restored order.\(^{94}\) Meanwhile, students and intellectuals were becoming increasingly restive over the stifling censorship of news and information and the debilitating effects of inflation. On several occasions,

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91 SLGB 52:153 (1942 annual review).
92 SLGB 52:157.
93 On the proposed route to Xinjiang through the USSR, see FRUS 1942, 591-600; FRUS 1943, 590-613. When the Chinese request for supplies over this route included 1,100 tons of ammunition for Hu Zongnan, the American Lend-Lease administrator commented, “It is perhaps significant that in the eyes of the Chinese the most important item to be shipped in on the very first lot of supplies transported over this route was a consignment of over a thousand tons of ammunition to the general detailed by Chungking to hem in and watch the Chinese Communists.” Stanton memorandum, July 12, 1943, FRUS 1943, 606.
Chiang’s diaries express concern over the spreading student unrest and attacks on Nationalist Party organizations in the schools.\textsuperscript{95} It was presumably these challenges, as well as the larger threat from the Communists, that induced the Generalissimo to propose a transition to constitutional government (chapter 8).

There was, however, no threat of greater concern to Chiang Kai-shek than the Communists, and 1943 saw dramatic developments on that front. As noted above, the United Front joining the Communists and Nationalists in the fight against Japan had broken down with the New Fourth Army incident of 1941. The Communist armies operated with total autonomy and relative impunity behind Japanese lines, their guerrilla forces avoiding major battles with the better-armed Japanese, but engaging in periodic harassment that helped to keep the enemy contained in urban centers and safely away from the rural population. Despite their minimal contribution to the military struggle against Japan, the Communists were gaining significant support among the peasants of north China. Their programs of rent and interest reduction, highly progressive taxes that exempted many of the poorest peasants, and village elections (even if tightly controlled) appealed to the rural majority. In addition, Communist cadres tended to live simply, and their troops were better disciplined than either the Nationalists or the puppets. For these reasons, the Communist armies found it easier to survive and even prosper as guerrillas behind Japanese lines than did their Nationalist adversaries.\textsuperscript{96}

Through much of 1942–1943, Chiang hoped and expected that relief

\textsuperscript{95} SLGB 53:466 (May 20, 1943), 545 (June 1, 1943).

from the Communist menace would come from a Japanese attack on the Soviet Union. In Chiang’s eyes, the Chinese Communist Party was entirely a creature of the Soviet Union. He disdained the Communist armies as “rabble” (literally, “a flock of crows”—wuhe zhi zhong), and was convinced that without Soviet aid, they would crumble before his forces. Accordingly, the optimal solution to Chiang’s predicament was a Japanese attack to weaken or even (together with Germany’s invasion) destroy the Soviet Union, an attack that would also deflect Japanese forces from their aggression against China. Chiang had been confidently predicting such an attack since 1941, encouraged by the Anti-Comintern Pact that Japan had signed, but by 1943 there was a renewed urgency to his wishful thinking. When Roosevelt’s speech in February said that Japan could not be defeated from the Pacific alone, that China would also play a role, Chiang complained, “our strategy for the past three years has been almost completely destroyed by [FDR]. The result is that Japan will not dare attack Russia.” His strategy, it seems, had been to keep the China front quiet so that Japan would be emboldened to attack the Soviets. A few months later, hopes revived with “clear intelligence” of a June attack on Russia. By June, he was losing sleep worrying about this, calling it “the key to our nation’s survival.” And when in the end it seemed the Japanese would not attack, he found this unhappy development “the greatest danger to our country.” Chiang could not, it seems, escape the conception of China as a victim, whose fate lay entirely in the hands of untrustworthy foreign powers.

As prospects faded for Japanese assistance in solving his Communist problem, Chiang was presented with another source of hope, Moscow’s May 1943 announcement that it was disbanding the Communist Interna-
Chiang called it a “historic watershed,” the “only great event of the early twentieth century.” Immediately he started planning to attack the Communist base in northern Shaanxi. “The Communist bandit problem,” he wrote, “can only be resolved by force.” In the area surrounding Yan’an, he ordered airfields prepared, roads and bridges repaired, maps drawn, and extra funds allocated to nearby Nationalist armies. In August, he prepared a major policy document on the Communist problem. Clearly pleased with his product, he called it “one of the great scholarly achievements of my entire revolutionary career.” The plan called for ten armies to attack the Communist base and turn the Reds into roving bandits, who could then be pursued by Chiang’s troops. Timing was essential. Yan’an must be attacked before the defeat of Germany so that Soviet forces could not intervene. American victories in the Pacific were another important consideration. In Chiang’s mind, they reduced the Japanese threat to manageable proportions. As a result, he said, “the problem for the future is entirely internal: how to eradicate the Communist bandits.” September would bring a critical meeting of the Nationalist Party’s Central Executive Committee. Chiang sent special planes to bring each of the leading northwest warlords to the conclave, and on September 11, a wide range of central and regional leaders met to decide on measures to address the Communist problem. Military plans had been drawn up earlier that day, but in the end, Chiang reversed course, abandoning the military option and choosing instead to treat the Communists’ independent strategy as a matter of disobedience to central authority requiring legal and constitutional remedies. Accordingly, the Central Executive Committee issued a strong condemnation of Communist insubordination, but declared that the issue would be resolved by political, not military, means.

104 SLGB 53:498 (May 25, 1943), 531 (Monthly review, May 1943).
105 SLGB 54:261 (August 9, 1943).
106 SLGB 53:654 (June 17, 1943), 54:122 (Weekly review, July 18), 319–20 (August 17), 341–42 (August 19), 347–48 (August 20), 366, 368 (August 24), 404 (August 29), 415 (August 29); Gong’anbu, Tāng Zōng riji, 365 (June 29, 1943), 374 (August 17), 378 (September 9).
107 SLGB 54:410 (Weekly review, August 29, 1943).
108 Chiang Kai-shek memo on CCP and USSR policy, SLGB 54:378–89.
109 SLGB 54:431 (Monthly review, August 1943).
110 SLGB 54:485 (September 8, 1943), 509–16 (September 11), 55:724–25 (1943 annual review).
Divisions in the Guomindang leadership played a role in this decision, as well as fears that an attack would only unify the Communists. Of greatest concern, however, were American warnings against civil war, though Chiang was convinced that the United States and the White House in particular had been misled by Communist propaganda. That was one problem that he hoped to clear up at the coming Cairo summit.

A Politics of “Trusting One’s Own”

The sudden cancelation of military action against the Communists was not the only time in 1943 that Chiang changed his mind at the last minute. It would occur again in the context of Chiang’s longstanding conflict with General Stilwell. Although this time it was not foreign pressure that brought the reversal but domestic politics that bore all the hallmarks of a family feud, it also illustrates important characteristics of Chiang’s regime.

As one reads Chiang’s diary or the daily chronology of his activities, the small circle of close associates is notable. Again and again he meets with the same people: his secretaries, especially the talented Chen Bulei; Dai Li, the sinister head of the secret service; He Yingqin, his chief of staff; Chen Lifu, the minister of education and leader of the Nationalist Party’s powerful C.C. Clique; H.H. Kung (Kong Xiangxi), Chiang’s brother-in-law and acting head of the Executive Yuan; his other brother-in-law, the foreign minister T.V. Soong, on the rare occasions when Soong was in Chongqing; and of course his wife, Soong Mayling. This reliance on a close circle of trusted associates was not just a matter of Chiang’s aloof personality but an explicit aspect of his governing philosophy. He believed that effective governance required “trusting one’s own” (xin qi suo si) and giving them authority within their areas of responsibility. If one were to rely on capable people from society, he believed, the result would be discord and obstruction as they formed self-interested bureaucratic

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111 Atcheson to Secretary of State, July 14 and September 17, 1943, FRUS 1943, 283–84, 340; Gauss to Secretary of State, October 14, 1943, FRUS 1943, 351–60; SLGB 52:480 (February 12, 1943) and 54:276–77 (August 11, 1943); Gong’anbu, Tāng Zōng rìjì, 380 (September 12, 1943).
cliques.\textsuperscript{112} Beyond this small circle of trusted associates, Chiang repeatedly complained of his officials’ “incompetence and stupidity.”\textsuperscript{113} In some cases, the problem probably was incompetence, but more commonly it was their failure to correctly discern and carry out Chiang’s wishes. At one point he moaned, “Nobody understands my intentions.”\textsuperscript{114} Most importantly, Chiang demanded loyalty, and nothing was more apt to provoke his anger than signs of independence, which were inevitably interpreted as selfishness and arrogance. In these cases, the only way to regain the favor of the autocrat was to offer an abject apology.\textsuperscript{115}

The problematic consequences of this style of governance based on personal relations, trust, and loyalty were illustrated in a dramatic confrontation in the fall of 1943. As noted above, Chiang Kai-shek had long been frustrated by his troubled relations with the American commander in China, General Joseph Stilwell. The two men openly despised each other, Stilwell describing Chiang as “a vacillating, tricky, undependable old scoundrel, who never keeps his word,”\textsuperscript{116} and Chiang complaining of Stilwell’s “stubbornness, stupidity, and despicable manners.”\textsuperscript{117} In the spring of 1943, Chiang actively pressed for Stilwell’s removal, working through T.V. Soong and Mme. Chiang, who were both in Washington at the time. After Mme. Chiang’s return, T.V. Soong aggressively continued the effort, using all his connections in Washington and eventually receiving Roosevelt’s agreement to replace Stilwell.\textsuperscript{118} Soong returned to Chongqing in

\textsuperscript{112} Chiang Kai-shek diary, August 23, 1943. The SLGB version (54:363–64) changes this term to qinxin (亲信), avoiding the unorthodox endorsement of si (私). The alert reader will note the contrast to Abraham Lincoln’s approach to governance described in Doris Kearns Goodwin, Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012).

\textsuperscript{113} SLGB 53:290 (April 27, 1943); cf. SLGB 52:228 (January 10), 301 (January 12), 54:240 (August 4).

\textsuperscript{114} SLGB 53:430 (May 14, 1943).

\textsuperscript{115} See Chiang’s pleasure at Bai Chongxi’s apology, SLGB 54:256–57 (August 8, 1943); cf. SLGB 53:126 (March 31), 54:345 (August 20), 55:717 (1943 annual review).

\textsuperscript{116} Cited in Chennault, Way of a Fighter, 226.

\textsuperscript{117} SLGB 53:686 (June 28, 1943); cf. SLGB 53:639–41 (June 18, 1943, cable to Mme. Chiang).

\textsuperscript{118} SLGB 54:418–20 (T.V. Soong August 30 cable on meeting with Roosevelt), 532 (T.V. Soong September 15 cable on meeting with Hopkins), 607 (Soong September 29 cable on meeting with Roosevelt); see also T.V. Soong memoranda of May 10, August 20, and October 13, 1943, in T.V. Soong Papers, Box 60, Folios 3–4; FRUS 1943, 135–37.
October to join the meetings with the new commander of the China-Burma-India Theater, the dashing young British Lord Louis Mountbatten. In the meantime, however, Mme. Chiang was having second thoughts about the consequences of Stilwell’s removal. Accordingly, together with her sister, the wife of T.V. Soong’s rival H.H. Kung, minister of finance and acting head of the Executive Yuan, she began maneuvering to save the general’s career.  

In many ways, T.V. Soong was the odd man out in Chiang Kai-shek’s inner circle. Wealthy, intelligent, Harvard-educated, with a firm grasp of economics (he had overseen the modernization of China’s currency and banking system in the 1930s), he was thoroughly Westernized in his man-

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119 Tuchman, *Stilwell and the American Experience*, 388–95; Qi Xisheng, *Jianb nu zhang*, 386–408; Davies, *China Hand*, 170–73. T.V. Soong returned on October 11, the day after Chiang’s inauguration, and one wonders if Chiang might have been irritated that Soong had not hurried to arrive in time for the ceremony (SLGB 55:84 [October 11, 1943]).
ners. He wore expensive Western suits, preferred Western food, and typically addressed his Foreign Ministry associates in English. Simplistic American accounts analyzed Chongqing politics as a contest between the “modern” T.V. Soong and the “reactionary” H.H. Kung, the latter condemned as much for his Chinese scholar’s gown as his corruption. Soong had been extraordinarily successful in Washington, lobbying for aid for China, gaining support for Chennault in his battles with Stilwell, and now getting Roosevelt’s agreement to replace Stilwell. Kung, by contrast, was wildly unpopular, and stories of his family’s extravagance and his own corruption constantly circulated in both Chongqing and the provinces.

For reasons that are not clear, relations between Chiang and his wife were not entirely harmonious after her return from the United States. By August, she was staying in the nearby house of her sister, the wife of H.H. Kung, returning only briefly in the evening for dinner with the Generalissimo. This made it easier, in September, for the two sisters to work actively against Stilwell’s recall, meeting several times with him and convincing him that “they [were] a pair of fighters.” According to Stilwell, “May [Soong Mayling] let out that she has a hell of a life with Peanut: no one else will tell him the truth so she is constantly at him with disagreeable news.” Clearly the two women were playing a desperate game, and there is some evidence that their determination was motivated, in part, by perceived threats to H.H. Kung’s position.

The whole affair finally came to a head with T.V. Soong’s return to Chongqing in mid-October. There he continued to spearhead the campaign to remove Stilwell, even translating for Chiang Kai-shek in the first

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meetings with the American general Brehon Somervell about replacing Stilwell. Suddenly the whole deal fell apart. Chiang's own account is noteworthy:

On the question of whether or not to remove Stilwell, my intent was to follow the analysis of October 15 [to state my clear objections to Stilwell but leave the decision to the United States]. In the first two meetings with Somervell, I proceeded in this way to effect the changes necessary to achieve our objectives. But T.V. insisted on sticking to his own hatred of Stilwell and his personal opinions. So in translating he did not convey my views. In his telling, Stilwell would definitely have to be removed. After Somervell left, I considered carefully and decided to endeavor to save the situation and make a 180 degree turn.

Mme. Chiang was sent to warn Stilwell of his fate unless he offered a sincere apology and promised to reform. This was done, and the next day Chiang met Somervell to announce the reversal. Stilwell had dodged another bullet and would stay on for another year before one final crisis in U.S.-China relations would at last bring about his removal. T.V. Soong was not so lucky. On the morning after Stilwell made his apology, Soong held a stormy meeting with the Generalissimo in which both sides lost their tempers, Chiang smashed teacups, and T.V. ended up in disgrace, banned from attending the Cairo Conference, removed from power, and allowed to return only months later when friends found someone with better Chinese than his own to pen an appropriately contrite apology.

Two points are particularly notable in this incident. First, T.V. Soong’s crime had been to adhere to his own position—though in this case, the position was originally Chiang’s own. The problem was, in presenting it to

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126 Wu, Huang, and Liu, Wu Guozhen zhuan, 399–406; Alsop with Platt, “I’ve Seen the Best of It,” 223–27; SLGB 55:122 (October 18, 1943) cleans up the diary a little, changing Chiang’s order that Song “get the hell out” (gundan) to “leave” (likai); Gong’anbu, Tang Zong riji, 386 (October 16, 1943).
the American representative, Soong had spoken more forcefully than
Chiang wished: Chiang had long hoped that expressing his dissatisfaction
with Stilwell would suffice to persuade Roosevelt to remove him. He was,
after all, used to a politics in which subordinates readily discerned his
position and adopted it as their own. Soong was wiser to American ways
and recognized the need for a more direct statement of Chiang’s wishes.
When they had their final fight, Soong protested that his failing was that
he had been “too loyal” in carrying out Chiang’s wishes, but this only fur-
ther enraged the Generalissimo. Chiang compared Soong’s behavior to
an obscure incident in 1921 when Sun Yat-sen’s lieutenant Hu Hanmin
had deliberately ignored several of Sun’s orders that he deemed unwise.
Sun had forgiven Hu and later entrusted him with even more important
positions. But Chiang took a dimmer view of the incident, saying that
Soong’s conduct in 1943 threatened “another catastrophe like 1921.”
Soong was “holding his own personal views and treating our party-state’s
foreign policy like his personal plaything.” Chiang so identified himself
with the Chinese nation that views even slightly different from his own
were regarded as self-interested and contrary to the national interest.

Second, the lesson that Chiang drew from his sudden change of mind
was that “in deciding and changing policy, success or failure depends com-
pletely on the last five minutes.” Although the Allies were certainly glad
that Stilwell, a trusted commander for all his faults, would remain in
China to direct the Burma campaign, the process that led to this result
could hardly have encouraged them. One constant complaint against the
Generalissimo was his unpredictability, his indecision, his tendency to
vacillate. Now, on the eve of the Cairo Conference, Chiang had not only
removed T.V. Soong, his most experienced foreign affairs deputy, he had
changed his stance “180 degrees” in successive conversations with Somer-
vell and raised last-minute policy change to the status of an essential gov-
erning principle.

127 SLGB 55:122 (October 18, 1943).
129 SLGB 55:118 (and again, 121) (October 17, 1943); cf. Huang, “Chiang Kai-shek and
His Diary,” 105 (diary entry of April 2, 1939).
Hsiao-ting Lin has provided an excellent discussion of Chiang Kai-shek at the Cairo Conference (chapter 13), so it is not necessary to repeat the narrative here. Nonetheless, the conference encapsulated so many of the successes and failings of 1943 that a few words on the issues raised in this prologue are required. Most importantly, one must admit the historic significance of including China among the Great Powers in 1943. From the perspective of the present, it seems obvious that China should be considered a Great Power, but in the early twentieth century, poor, weak, and internally divided China certainly did not look like a Great Power. In this respect, Roosevelt’s insistence that China’s size and the energy of its people made its rise in the postwar world inevitable was an act of considerable foresight. Churchill, of course, resisted, describing China as a “faggot vote” for the United States in the United Nations; and Stalin, understandably given his own nation’s sacrifices, thought China had not fought well enough to deserve such recognition.  

We should not imagine that it was only prescience or altruism that drove Roosevelt to treat China in this way. As FDR told his son after his first meeting with Chiang in Cairo, “The job in China can be boiled down to one essential: China must be kept in the war, tying [sic] up Japanese soldiers.” To this end, it was essential to boost Chinese morale. Unable to supply much material assistance over the perilous Hump lifeline, the United States offered symbolic gestures: the termination of the “unequal treaties,” the inclusion of China in the Four Powers, and now the summit in Cairo. At Cairo, the Allies could make cost-free promises that would be welcome to China and boost Chiang’s standing—most notably the return of Taiwan and Manchuria. They could pose for the photographs of Roosevelt, Churchill, and Chiang—photos that are perhaps the most en-

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131 Elliott Roosevelt, As He Saw It (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1946), 143.

during legacy of the conference. Indeed, in reading the official conference record, one gets the impression that, putting aside the heated debates over the Burma campaign, for Roosevelt the confab was largely about atmospherics and taking the measure of Chiang Kai-shek. In contrast to the Tehran Conference with Stalin that would follow, the Cairo record is incredibly sparse, with no American minutes on Roosevelt’s key conversations with Chiang.\(^\text{133}\)

As for the measure of Chiang, the inescapable conclusion is that he came off poorly. Above all, he was seen as indecisive, vacillating, constantly changing his mind.\(^\text{134}\) Some have blamed this on Mme. Chiang’s translation,\(^\text{135}\) but it must be remembered that T.V. Soong was banned from the conference precisely for his failure to properly interpret the Generalissimo’s intentions. Mme. Chiang would not have made the same mistake. The more plausible explanation is that the Americans and British had been meeting in these strategic conferences for almost two years. They knew how to debate and bargain with each other and did so in their native language. The Chinese were outsiders in this club. Chiang was utterly unused to negotiation among equals and felt limited by his poor English.\(^\text{136}\) In his first summit outing, he was simply not up to the task.\(^\text{137}\)

His stock would fall even further after Churchill and Roosevelt met with Stalin. In contrast to Chiang’s “characteristic myopia” in seeing Burma as the key to the struggle for Asia, Stalin quickly appreciated the conflicting demands of the Burma campaign, the Pacific War, Mediterranean options, and the planned invasion of northern France. Indeed, the British chief of staff found Stalin a better strategic thinker than either Roosevelt or Churchill.\(^\text{138}\) This judgment was no doubt colored by the fact

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\(^{133}\) FRUS Cairo, passim, but esp. 322–23, 334–35. At Tehran, Charles Bohlen from the State Department translated and left detailed minutes and analysis of the meetings with Stalin, but at Cairo, Mme. Chiang translated, and no State Department representative was present. See also Davies, China Hand, 149–51.


\(^{135}\) Taylor, Generalissimo, 248–50.

\(^{136}\) SLGB 55:470 (November 23, 1943).

\(^{137}\) Qi Xisheng, Jianba nuzhang, 412–13; Davies, China Hand, 144–47.

\(^{138}\) Sainsbury, Turning Point, 184, 226.
that Russia and Britain agreed on the low priority of the Burma campaign. More importantly, when Stalin repeated his promise to enter the war against Japan once Germany was defeated, an alternative was provided to a costly campaign through the jungles of Burma. In the run-up to Cairo, Chiang Kai-shek had insisted that he meet Roosevelt before the president met Stalin. Obviously he wanted to state his case to Roosevelt first, but the unhappy result was that Stalin got the last word on the critical strategic issues of the war.

In September, when Chiang abandoned his plan to solve the Communist problem by force, he resolved to do his utmost to disabuse his American allies of any illusions they had of the CCP as a potential partner in the war against Japan. The need for this had been brought to him forcefully when, on the first day of the Guomindang Central Executive Committee meetings that would decide policy toward the Communists, Stilwell had presented him a military plan that involved a combined Communist-Nationalist offensive in north China. In Chiang’s planning for Cairo, relations with the Communists were a matter that he expected the Americans to raise, and there is no question that they came up in the Generalissimo’s private talks with the president. The precise nature of those conversations is not known, but Roosevelt told his son Elliott, who accompanied FDR to Cairo, “Chiang would have us believe that the Chinese Communists were doing nothing against the Japanese. Again, we know differently.” So Chiang, as he intended, had used the opportunity to press his argument that the Communists were not, in fact, resisting Japan.

Roosevelt, obviously, was not convinced. The predicament that this presented for Chiang was that whether or not the Communists were resisting Japan was a matter of fact that could be investigated. This is precisely what the Americans started requesting soon after the conference in

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139 Heiferman, Cairo Conference, 121–28; Sainsbury, Turning Point, 110, 250.
140 SLGB 53:594–95 (June 9, 1943), 55:38 (October 7, 1943).
141 See also Hurley to Roosevelt, November 20, 1943, FRUS 1943, 163–66.
142 SLGB 54:519 (Weekly review, September 12, 1943). Naturally, Stilwell’s suggestion only confirmed Chiang’s conviction that Stilwell was a “despicable, stupid little man.” See also Stilwell diary, October 5, 1943, Stilwell Papers, Box 39, Folder 10.
143 Roosevelt, As He Saw It, 163.
Cairo: permission to send a mission to Yan’an to better understand the Communist movement. Eventually, in June 1944, Chiang was forced to agree, and the Dixie Mission of U.S. military and foreign service experts was sent to investigate the Communist resistance. Their reports were uniformly favorable to the Communists, and while there has been much subsequent debate on whether the American observers were hoodwinked by their Communist hosts, the undeniable fact is that the Dixie Mission together with simultaneous visits by Chinese and Western newsmen brought back reports of a powerful political and military movement growing in north China and independent of Chiang’s control. Their reports left no doubt that China’s destiny no longer lay exclusively in Chiang Kai-shek’s hands.144

The approval of the Dixie Mission came just as Chiang’s own troops were reeling before Japan’s Ichigo offensive. Stilwell had long argued that if Chennault was successful in his air offensive against Japanese supply lines, Japan would respond by taking the Chinese airfields. Chiang Kai-shek promised that his ground forces could defend the airfields,145 but he was wrong. The Japanese rolled over his forces and opened a land corridor that stretched all the way from Korea and northeast China to Vietnam and Southeast Asia. Chiang lost 750,000 men in the fight, and his prestige suffered a crushing blow.146 In domestic politics, as discussed in chapter 8, his constitutional preparations were overtaken by growing support for the rival Communist call for a coalition government—an idea that Roosevelt had also pressed at Cairo.147 In the famous words of an earlier era, “Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold.”148 And in many respects, the seeds for the collapse were planted in 1943.


145 SLGB 53:312 (April 30, 1943), 331–32 (May 1, 1943).


147 Roosevelt, *As He Saw It*, 164.