

**MAO'S CHINA AND  
THE COLD WAR**



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## CHAPTER 1 THE CHINESE CIVIL WAR AND THE RISE OF THE COLD WAR IN EAST ASIA, 1945–1946

*Jiang Jieshi claims that there never exist two suns in the heaven, and there should never be two masters on the earth. I do not believe him. I am going to make another sun appear in the heaven for him to see.*  
—Mao Zedong (1946)

*The diversification of power did more to shape the course of the Cold War than did the balancing of power.*  
—John Lewis Gaddis

China's "War of Resistance against Japan" ended in August 1945 when Japan surrendered unconditionally to the Allies. Peace, however, did not come to China's war-torn land. Almost immediately after Japan's defeat, in the context of the emerging global confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union, the long-accumulated tensions between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Nationalist Party, or Guomindang (GMD), intensified, bringing the country to the verge of another civil war. From late 1945 to early 1946, the Communists and Nationalists, with the mediation and intervention of the United States and the Soviet Union, conducted a series of negotiations on different levels to solve the problems between them, but they failed to reach an overall agreement that would allow peace to prevail. By mid-1946, a nationwide civil war finally erupted, which resulted in the victory of the Chinese Communist revolution in 1949. From an international perspective, the CCP-GMD confrontation intensified the conflict between the two superpowers, thus contributing to the escalation and, eventually, crystallization of the Cold War in East Asia. An examination of China's transition from the anti-Japanese war to a revolutionary civil war in 1945–46 thus will shed new light on a crucial juncture in the development of the Chinese revolution, as well as offer fresh insights into the connections between China's internal development and the origins of the Cold War. This will be the focus of discussion of this chapter.

### **The Origins of the CCP-GMD Confrontation**

China's movement toward a civil war began in 1945-46, when the profound hostilities between the Communists and the Nationalists that had accumulated during the war years reached a climax. Given the deep historical origins of the tensions between the two parties, indeed, civil war was almost inevitable.

In retrospect, Japan's invasion of China in the 1930s changed decisively the course of China's internal development. From 1927, after the success of the anti-Communist coup in Shanghai led by Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek), to 1936, when the Xi'an incident occurred, the GMD and the CCP were engaged in a bloody civil war. The Communists established revolutionary base areas in the countryside (especially in the South) to wage a "land revolution." While making every effort to suppress the Communist rebellion, Jiang's government encountered a series of difficulties from the outset. In particular, Jiang's leadership role within the GMD needed to be consolidated and the anti-Jiang provincial warlords had to be dealt with. But Jiang's biggest dilemma emerged after September 1931, when Japan occupied China's Northeast (Manchuria) and continued to put pressure on the Chinese government through its intrusion into North China. Jiang had to decide who should be treated as his primary enemy—the Japanese or the CCP. Perceiving that "the Japanese were the disease of the skin and the Communists were the threat to the heart," Jiang risked losing his status as China's national leader to focus his efforts on suppressing the CCP and the Red Army.<sup>1</sup> By 1936, this strategy looked promising: under Jiang's military pressure, the CCP gave up its main base area in Jiangxi province in the South, to endure the "Long March" (during which the Chinese Red Army lost 90 percent of its strength), and was restricted to a small, barren area in northern Shaanxi province in northwestern China.<sup>2</sup> However, Jiang underestimated the impact Japan's continuous aggression in China had on Chinese national consciousness and popular mentality. In December 1936, Zhang Xueliang and Yang Fucheng, two of Jiang's generals who opposed his policy of "putting the suppression of the CCP ahead of the resistance against Japan," kidnapped him in Xi'an. Jiang was forced to stop the civil war against the CCP so that the whole nation would be united to cope with the threat from Japan.<sup>3</sup> With the outbreak of the War of Resistance against Japan the next year, the GMD and the CCP formally established an anti-Japanese "united front."

During China's eight years of the war with Japan, Jiang's gains seemed significant. By serving as China's paramount leader at a time of profound national crisis, he effectively consolidated the legitimacy of the rule of his party and himself in China, which, after 1942 and 1943, was further reinforced by American-British recognition of China under his leadership as one of the

“Big Four.” In the meantime, however, the foundation of Jiang’s government had started to crumble. In fact, in having to focus on dealing with the Japanese invasion, Jiang failed to develop effective plans to cope with the profound social and political problems China had been facing throughout the modern age. Consequently, corruption spread further in Jiang’s government and army during the war years, which significantly damaged his reputation as China’s indisputable national leader.<sup>4</sup>

The most serious potential challenge to Jiang’s government, however, came from the CCP. China’s deepening national crisis in the 1930s, and the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937, saved the CCP and the Chinese Red Army from imminent final destruction. Holding high the banner of resisting Japan during the war years, the CCP sent its military forces into areas behind the Japanese lines to fight a guerrilla war.<sup>5</sup> Although Mao Zedong, the CCP leader, made it clear to his commanders that, rather than engaging in major battles against the Japanese, they should use most of their energy to maintain and develop their own forces,<sup>6</sup> the simple fact that the Communists were fighting in the enemy’s rear had created an image of the CCP as a major contributor to the war against Japan.<sup>7</sup> Throughout the war years, Mao and his fellow CCP leaders were always aware that after the war they would need to compete with the GMD for control of China.

Not surprisingly, relations between the GMD and the CCP quickly deteriorated as the war against Japan continued. Early in 1941, the Communist-led New Fourth Army, while moving its headquarters from south to north of the Yangzi (Yangtze) River, was attacked and wiped out by GMD troops in Wannan (southern Anhui province).<sup>8</sup> The “Wannan incident” (also known as the New Fourth Army incident) immediately caused a serious crisis in the CCP-GMD wartime alliance. In response to the incident, Mao Zedong even asserted that the CCP should begin a direct confrontation with Jiang and prepare to overthrow his government.<sup>9</sup> And Jiang ordered the use of both military and political means to restrict the CCP’s movements.<sup>10</sup>

Pressure from the United States and the Soviet Union, however, helped prevent the GMD and the CCP from resuming a civil war at this moment. After the New Fourth Army incident, President Franklin D. Roosevelt sent Lauchlin Currie as his special envoy to China to meet Jiang and other Chinese leaders. Currie expressed Washington’s concerns over a renewed civil war between the GMD and the CCP, warning that it would only benefit the Japanese.<sup>11</sup> On 25 January 1941, Georgi M. Dimitrov, the Comintern’s secretary-general, sent an urgent telegram to Mao Zedong, warning the CCP leaders that they should not abandon the party’s cooperation with the GMD lest they “fall into the trap

prepared by the Japanese and the puppets.”<sup>12</sup> Consequently, a CCP-GMD showdown was temporarily avoided.

Neither the CCP nor the GMD, though, would trust the other. In the ensuing four years, until the end of the war against Japan in 1945, both parties put preparing for a showdown between them after the war at the top of their agenda. In 1943, Jiang published a pamphlet titled *China's Destiny*, in which he claimed that the Communists would have no position in postwar China.<sup>13</sup> The CCP angrily criticized Jiang's “plot to establish his own dictatorship by destroying the CCP and other progressive forces in China,” calling for the Chinese people to struggle resolutely against the emergence of a “fascist China.”<sup>14</sup> Both GMD and CCP leaders realized that when the war ended, a life-or-death battle between the two parties was probably inevitable.

### **The CCP's Diplomatic Initiative in Late 1944 and Early 1945**

By the end of 1944 and the beginning of 1945, the balance of strength between the GMD and the CCP had swung further in the latter's favor. The widespread corruption within Jiang's government, the runaway inflation in the Nationalist-controlled areas,<sup>15</sup> and the major military defeats of Nationalist troops in the face of the Japanese Ichi-go campaign<sup>16</sup> combined to weaken significantly Jiang Jieshi's stature as China's wartime national leader. In comparison, the CCP had reached a level of strength and influence unprecedented since its establishment in 1921. By late 1944 and early 1945, the party claimed that it commanded a powerful military force of 900,000 regular troops and 900,000 militiamen, and that party membership had reached over one million.<sup>17</sup> In the meantime, the party had gained valuable administrative experience through the buildup of base areas in central and northern China, and Mao Zedong, through the “Rectification Campaign,” had consolidated his control over the party's strategy and policymaking.<sup>18</sup>

Under these circumstances, Mao and his fellow CCP leaders believed that with the continuous development of the party's strength, it would occupy a stronger position to compete for political power in China at the end of the war against Japan. On several occasions, Mao asserted that “this time, we must take over China.”<sup>19</sup> To this end, the party adopted a series of new strategies in late 1944. In a political maneuver designed to challenge Jiang's claim to a monopoly of political power in China, the CCP formally introduced the idea of replacing Jiang's one-party dictatorship with a new coalition government including the CCP and other democratic parties.<sup>20</sup> On the military side, the CCP leadership decided to dispatch the party's best units to penetrate into the areas south of the Yangzi River, with the task of creating new base areas in south-

ern China. In several inner-party directives, Mao Zedong made it clear that if the CCP could expand its "liberated zones" from the North to the South, the party would occupy a more favorable position in confronting the GMD after the war.<sup>21</sup> But the CCP adopted the most important initiative in the diplomatic field: perceiving that the United States would play an increasingly important role in China and East Asia, the party leadership decided to pursue a closer relationship with Washington.<sup>22</sup>

Since the early days of the war in the Pacific, the CCP had been pursuing an "international united front" with the United States for two main objectives: first, to "improve China's War of Resistance," and second, to enable the CCP to use the United States to check the power of the Guomindang government.<sup>23</sup> Not until late 1944 and early 1945, however, when policymakers in Washington were actively considering using China as a base for landing operations in Japan, did the CCP find a real opportunity to approach the Americans. CCP leaders realized that by offering the party's assistance to American landing operations, it would not only reduce American suspicion of the Chinese Communists but also allow them to use America's influence to check Jiang's power.<sup>24</sup> The CCP thus made every effort to expose the "darkness" of Jiang's government, while taking every opportunity to convince the Americans that the Chinese Communists were nationalists at the core, and that they favored "democratic reforms" in China.<sup>25</sup> In July 1944, the "Dixie Mission," a group of American military observers, arrived in Yan'an, marking the first direct official contact between the U.S. government and the CCP.<sup>26</sup>

At first, the CCP's new diplomatic strategy appeared to be working well. In June 1944, Roosevelt sent his vice president, Henry Wallace, to visit China to press Jiang toward conducting democratic reforms.<sup>27</sup> In September 1944, a controversy erupted between Jiang and Joseph Stilwell, Jiang's American chief of staff, leading President Roosevelt to request that Jiang turn over "unrestricted command" of China's military forces to Stilwell. Thus a crisis developed in the relationship between Chongqing, Jiang's wartime capital, and Washington.<sup>28</sup>

The CCP's "diplomatic victory," however, was short-lived. Realizing that his controversy with General Stilwell threatened the very foundation of his authority and power, Jiang rebuffed President Roosevelt's request, and, consequently, General Stilwell was recalled in October. In the meantime, in order to prevent the CCP-GMD friction from compromising China's war effort against Japan, President Roosevelt sent Patrick Hurley to China to help mediate the problems between the two parties. In early November, Hurley reached a five-point draft agreement with the CCP leaders in Yan'an that favored the establish-

ment of a coalition government.<sup>29</sup> But when Hurley learned that Jiang firmly rejected the five-point agreement, especially the part concerning the coalition government, he agreed to a three-point plan proposed by Jiang. According to the plan, the CCP would need to earn its legal status by turning over control of its military forces to the GMD government.<sup>30</sup>

CCP leaders were genuinely offended by Hurley's "deceptive abandonment" of the five-point agreement. They rejected the three-point plan and angrily denounced Hurley as untrustworthy.<sup>31</sup> Early in 1945, Mao personally directed a CCP propaganda campaign to criticize Washington's policy toward China. In April 1945, Hurley announced in Washington that the U.S. government fully supported the GMD and would not cooperate with the CCP. In an inner-party directive issued on 7 July 1945, the CCP leadership made it clear that the party would adopt a position of "opposing the mistaken U.S. China policy (a policy of supporting Jiang, opposing the Communists, and guarding against the Soviet Union)" and "challenging those imperialists within the U.S. government (such as Hurley)."<sup>32</sup>

Underlying the CCP's harsh attitude toward the United States was a profound belief that the international situation was turning increasingly in the party's favor. With the Soviet Red Army's rapid advance in Europe early in 1945, Mao and his fellow CCP leaders believed that the Soviet Union would soon become a central actor in East Asian politics. Early in February 1945, Stalin informed Mao of the convening of the Yalta Conference, which convinced the CCP chairman that "the possibility of the Soviet Union's voice in determining important Eastern affairs has increased." Mao thus judged that "under such circumstances, both the United States and Jiang would try to reach political compromises with us."<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, Mao and his comrades believed that the Americans still needed the CCP's help, both logistical and operational, in conducting the counteroffensive against Japan from northern China.<sup>34</sup> As a result, CCP leaders felt that the party was in a position to challenge America's pro-Jiang policy.

### **In the Vortex of Big-Power Politics**

Big-power politics, however, were much more complicated than Mao and his comrades perceived them to be. At the Yalta Conference, Stalin gained Roosevelt's promise that all former Russian rights and privileges lost to Japan during the 1904 Russo-Japanese War, including those in Manchuria, would be restored to the Soviet Union, and, in return, Stalin agreed to enter the war in Asia within two to three months of Germany's defeat. As part of the Yalta compromises, Stalin also promised Roosevelt that he would not support the

CCP in China's internal conflict.<sup>35</sup> Roosevelt informed Jiang of the main contents of the Yalta agreement after the meeting,<sup>36</sup> but Stalin did not brief the CCP leaders on the deal he had made with Roosevelt. For the Russian dictator, the strategic interests of the Soviet Union were more important than those of his Chinese Communist comrades.

Since CCP leaders did not know the details of the Yalta agreement, they continued to base their strategies for preparing for a showdown with the GMD on the assumption that the Soviets' entry into the anti-Japanese war would enhance the party's position in China. On 18 April 1945, two weeks after Moscow announced the abrogation of the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Treaty, Mao signed an important inner-party directive. The document pointed out that since the date of Soviet entry into the anti-Japanese war was approaching, the international situation in the Far East was undergoing fundamental changes. The main task of the CCP military forces would soon be to cooperate with the military operations of the Soviet Red Army.<sup>37</sup> From 23 April to 11 June 1945, the CCP convened its Seventh Congress in Yan'an. In his speech to the congress, titled "On the Coalition Government," Mao argued that only the Soviet Union's direct entry into the anti-Japanese war would bring about "the final and thorough solution of the Pacific problem." He warned the British and American governments "not to follow a China policy that violated the Chinese people's will." Reviewing the CCP's development in political influence and military strength during the war years, Mao announced that the CCP "had already become the center of the Chinese people's cause of liberation."<sup>38</sup> In his concluding remarks to the congress, Mao further emphasized that the international aid (the Soviet aid) to the Chinese revolution would come, and he even joked that "if it fails to come, I will let you have my head."<sup>39</sup>

At almost the same time that the CCP was holding its Seventh Congress, the GMD was convening its Sixth National Congress from 5 to 21 May in Chongqing. Jiang asserted at the congress that "Japan is our enemy abroad, and the CCP is our enemy at home" and that "our central problem today is how to destroy the CCP."<sup>40</sup> In order to cope with the CCP's increasing military strength and political influence, Jiang planned to convene a national affairs conference and a national assembly to confound the CCP's plans for a coalition government.<sup>41</sup> In the meantime, he ordered GMD forces to strengthen the blockade of the CCP's "liberated areas."<sup>42</sup> Anticipating that the Soviet Union would soon enter the war in the Far East, Jiang made great efforts to reach agreements with Stalin. Early in July, Jiang sent T. V. Soong, his brother-in-law, to Moscow to meet Stalin. Stalin agreed to support Jiang as China's only leader and not to aid the CCP, but he also asked for several vital concessions from the GMD

government, including the recognition of the independence of Outer Mongolia and Soviet privileges in Manchuria. Jiang had sincerely hoped to reach an agreement with Stalin, but he now found the price too high. The meeting adjourned in mid-July since Stalin had to attend the Potsdam Conference.<sup>43</sup>

Even at this late stage of the war, neither the CCP nor the GMD foresaw that the war against Japan would end soon. In a telegram dated 15 June 1945, Mao and the CCP Central Committee predicted that “the War of Resistance against Japan will not reach its final stage this year, and dramatic changes are likely the next year.”<sup>44</sup> As late as 4 August, the CCP leadership still claimed in an inner-party directive that “our estimate is that the Japanese bandits will be defeated by the winter of 1946.” Accordingly, the CCP leaders believed that the party “would have about one year’s time to make preparations” for an “inevitable civil war” after Japan’s defeat.<sup>45</sup>

### **Japan’s Surrender and Stalin’s “Betrayal” of the CCP**

On 6 and 9 August, the Americans dropped two atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. On 8 August, the Soviet Red Army entered the war in the East, and on 10 August, Japan first offered to surrender to the Allies. It was apparent that China’s war against Japan had come to its conclusion, and the CCP leadership acted immediately to deal with this new situation. On 9 August, one day after the Soviet Union declared war on Japan, Mao Zedong ordered the Communist forces to go all out to “cooperate with the Soviet Red Army” in the final battle to liberate China’s lost territory from Japanese occupation.<sup>46</sup> Two days later, Zhu De, commander-in-chief of the CCP’s military forces, ordered CCP troops to occupy important cities and transportation links in central and northern China and, particularly, in the Northeast.<sup>47</sup>

In an inner-party directive dated 11 August, Mao emphasized that the end of the war against Japan would most probably be followed by a civil war with the Nationalists. He anticipated that after destroying the Japanese and puppet troops, “the GMD would start an overall offensive against our party and our troops,” and that the outcome of the civil war would be determined by the extent to which the CCP had prepared for it. He therefore instructed CCP cadres and military commanders to abandon any illusion of peace between the CCP and the GMD and to “gather our forces in order to prepare for the civil war.”<sup>48</sup>

Mao and his fellow CCP leaders believed that the Soviet Union’s entry into the war had created favorable conditions for the CCP to fight a renewed civil war. Although they knew that representatives from the GMD and the Soviet Union were conducting negotiations in Moscow, and that the negotiations might lead to a treaty between the GMD and Soviet governments, they tended

to believe that "(1) the Soviet Union would not allow the emergence of an American-backed fascist China in the East after the end of the war, and (2) Stalin, as a Marxist, would not sign a treaty with the GMD government that would restrict the development of the Chinese revolution."<sup>49</sup> In ordering the CCP troops to take aggressive actions in northern China and the Northeast, Mao's fundamental estimation was that the Soviet Red Army might not offer direct support to CCP forces but would adopt a cooperative attitude toward the CCP's military maneuvers.<sup>50</sup> Further, Mao and his fellow CCP leaders believed that the Soviet entry into the war would restrict the aggressiveness of U.S. policy toward China, forcing "the United States not to support [Jiang] in China's civil war."<sup>51</sup> Although the CCP chairman, following his longtime revolutionary experience, suggested that the CCP and its forces should never give up "self-reliance" as a guiding principle, he did regard the international situation created by the Soviet entry into the war in the East and support from the Soviet Red Army as two decisive conditions for the party to win a showdown with the GMD.<sup>52</sup>

Jiang fully understood that he could ill afford to lose the competition with the CCP over the lost territory, as he, too, anticipated a civil war would come sooner or later. On 12 August, Jiang used his authority as the leader of China's legal government to order the CCP forces to stay where they were and not to accept the surrender of the Japanese and puppet troops, a directive the CCP rejected angrily.<sup>53</sup> Jiang knew that since most of his troops were still in the remote "Great Rear,"<sup>54</sup> he needed to take extraordinary steps to win the competition with the Communists. He thus authorized T. V. Soong to sign the "Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Mutual Assistance," in which Jiang acknowledged the independence of Outer Mongolia, the Soviet military occupation of Lüshun (Port Arthur), and Soviet privileges regarding the Chinese Changchun Railroad. In return, the Soviet Union agreed to respect Jiang's position as the leader of China's legal government and acknowledged that Jiang's troops had the right to take over China's lost territory, especially that in the Northeast.<sup>55</sup> On 14 August, the same day that the Sino-Soviet treaty was signed, Jiang telegraphed Mao to invite him to come to Chongqing to "discuss questions related to reestablishing peace in China."<sup>56</sup>

The Jiang-Stalin compromise undermined the optimism that had dominated the CCP leaders' strategic thinking, which was further diminished when the Soviet dictator directly pressured his Chinese Communist comrades to negotiate with Jiang. On 20 and 22 August, respectively, Stalin sent two urgent telegrams to the CCP leaders, advising them that with the surrender of Japan, the CCP should enter discussions with the GMD about the restoration of peace

and the reconstruction of the country. "If a civil war were to break out," warned Stalin, "the Chinese nation would face self-destruction."<sup>57</sup>

Stalin's attitude reflected his understanding of how Soviet interests in China would best be served. He not only lacked confidence in the CCP's ability to win a civil war against the GMD, but he also was extremely reluctant to commit the strength of the Soviet Union to supporting his Chinese comrades by risking a direct conflict with the Americans, who were then planning large-scale landing operations in northern China. He had gained much through signing a treaty with the Chinese GMD government and was eager to retain those advancements. However, for Mao and his fellow CCP leaders, Stalin's policy was a cruel betrayal.<sup>58</sup> It had shaken the very foundation of the party's strategy to pursue the Chinese revolution's victory through a head-to-head confrontation with the GMD.<sup>59</sup>

Under these circumstances, the CCP leadership made fundamental adjustments to the party's aggressive strategy vis-à-vis the GMD. On 23 August, the CCP politburo met to discuss the party's response to Stalin's telegrams. Mao made a long speech at the meeting, telling the participants that the Soviet Union had signed a treaty with the GMD government allowing the GMD to take over the Northeast. "Confined by the need to maintain international peace, as well as by the Sino-Soviet treaty," Mao told his comrades, "the Soviet Union is not in a position to act freely to support us . . . because if the Soviet Union were to assist us, the United States would certainly support Jiang, and, as a result, the cause of international peace would suffer and a world war might follow." Mao believed that the CCP had to adjust its strategies in accordance with this situation and "acknowledge that Jiang Jieshi has the legitimate right to accept Japan's surrender" and "to occupy the big cities." The party, Mao suggested, should adopt "peace, democracy, and unity" as the central slogan. Accordingly, Mao believed that he should accept Jiang's invitation to visit Chongqing to discuss how to maintain peace in China. Most of the participants agreed,<sup>60</sup> and on 26 August, the CCP politburo formally authorized Mao to meet with Jiang in Chongqing.<sup>61</sup> In an inner-party circular, the CCP Central Committee made it clear that the main reason for Mao's meeting with Jiang was that "neither the Soviet Union nor the United States favors a civil war in China," and that "the party therefore has to make major concessions" in order to achieve a "new scenario of democracy and peace in China."<sup>62</sup>

On 28 August, Mao Zedong, accompanied by Zhou Enlai and Wang Ruofei, two top CCP leaders, arrived in Chongqing. In the following forty days, Mao and Jiang discussed how to democratize China's politics and nationalize the GMD's and CCP's troops. However, the negotiations proved extremely dif-

difficult. The central issue was whether the CCP would be allowed to maintain an independent army. While Jiang insisted that the CCP should place its military forces under the command of the government, Mao was willing only to cut the size of the Communist troops and would do so only on the condition that the GMD would also reduce its forces. The two sides also failed to reach an agreement on how China's government and politics would be "democratized." On 10 October, Jiang and Mao issued a communiqué asserting that they had agreed on convening a political consultative conference as the first step toward constructing peace and democracy in China, but the Jiang-Mao meetings as a whole failed to produce an agreement that would allow peace to prevail.<sup>63</sup>

The lack of concrete results from the negotiations in Chongqing was by no means surprising given that neither the GMD nor the CCP had any confidence in reaching peace through compromise. Indeed, the only reason either party entered the negotiations at all was to demonstrate publicly its own desire for peace. At the same time that Jiang and Mao were meeting in Chongqing, military clashes between GMD and CCP troops escalated in northern and northeastern China. The Americans helped transport large numbers of GMD troops from the "Great Rear" to northern China, and the forces immediately entered into competition with the Communists to recover the "lost territory." In some areas of Shandong, Shanxi, Hebei, and Suiyuan provinces, several major battles took place between GMD and CCP forces. It appeared that the better equipped and more numerous GMD forces generally held the upper hand overall, especially in northern China.

#### **How Manchuria Became the CCP's Revolutionary Base**

Under great pressure from the GMD forces, the CCP leaders were determined to adopt a tit-for-tat strategy. However, they had to find the best geographic location to carry out their plans. Their vision quickly focused on the Northeast. As discussed earlier, after Soviet entry into the war, the CCP leadership decided to control the Northeast with the support of the Soviet forces there. Stalin's cautious attitude and the Sino-Soviet treaty made it difficult for the CCP to carry out this decision as originally intended.<sup>64</sup> But the CCP did not give up the plan. Late in August and early in September, the party leadership received several reports from the commanders of CCP military units in the Northeast that the Soviet army was willing to accept the CCP's cooperation.<sup>65</sup> In the meantime, the party also noted that Moscow sharply criticized "China's reactionary forces" for their attempt to drag China backward.<sup>66</sup> The party leadership realized that there was room for maneuver in pursuit of its own objectives in the Northeast within the framework of the Sino-Soviet treaty. On



*Soviet Red Army soldiers with Chinese Communist soldiers in Manchuria, August 1945.  
Xinhua News Agency.*

29 August, in an inner-party directive, the CCP Central Committee stated that while the Soviet Red Army, restricted by the Sino-Soviet treaty, would not offer direct support to the CCP forces in the Northeast, it was also true that the Soviet Union still supported China's "cause of progressive democracy." Therefore, so long as the CCP's actions in the Northeast did not force the Soviets to violate their obligations under the Sino-Soviet treaty, the Soviets would allow the CCP to develop its influence and strength in the Northeast.<sup>67</sup>

In the next three weeks, CCP troops entered the Northeast in large numbers, and they found that the Soviet Red Army's attitude was generally cooperative. On 14 September, Lieutenant Colonel Belunosov, a representative of Marshal Rodion Malinovskii, commander of the Soviet forces in the Far East, arrived at Yan'an. The meetings between him and the top CCP leaders resulted in a series of agreements: While the CCP troops in the Northeast would not enter big cities there, the Soviets would allow them to occupy the countryside and some small and midsize cities. When the Soviet troops had withdrawn from the Northeast, they would not automatically hand over areas under their occupation to the GMD, but would "let the Chinese solve the matter by themselves."<sup>68</sup> Under these circumstances, on 19 September, the CCP

leadership formally adopted a grand strategy of "maintaining a defensive posture in the south while waging an offensive in the north" in the confrontation with the GMD.<sup>69</sup>

Jiang Jieshi and the GMD high command also understood the Northeast's strategic importance and decided to send the GMD's best units there. With the help of the Americans, large numbers of GMD troops were transported by air or sea to several Northeast ports. Late in September, U.S. Marines began large-scale landing operations in Tianjin and several other northern ports. Their role, as the CCP perceived it, was essentially to check the movements of CCP troops and to support the actions of the GMD forces.<sup>70</sup>

The cooperative nature of American-GMD military actions in northern China and the Northeast sent a warning signal to Moscow, producing further conflict between American and Soviet policies in East Asia. Almost at the same time that the CCP-GMD conflict over control of the Northeast was escalating, the foreign ministers from the United States, the Soviet Union, Britain, France, and China met in London to discuss important Far Eastern issues, especially the question of military control of Japan. When the Americans made it clear that they would exercise exclusive control of the occupation of Japan, the Soviets immediately decided to harden their policy toward the United States in East Asia and the GMD in China.<sup>71</sup>

The Soviets were now willing to break their obligation under the Sino-Soviet treaty. Beginning in early October their attitude toward the Northeast issue changed further in the CCP's favor. The Soviet Red Army began to create barriers against the GMD troops' movement into the Northeast, claiming that until an overall solution of the Northeast issue had been worked out, they would not allow GMD troops to enter the areas they occupied.<sup>72</sup> In the meantime, the Soviets increased their support for the CCP. On 4 October, the Soviets advised the CCP Northeast Bureau that the Chinese Communists should move as many as 300,000 troops into the Northeast in one month's time, and that the Soviets would provide them with large numbers of weapons.<sup>73</sup> On 19 October, the CCP leadership decided to "go all out to control the entire Northeast."<sup>74</sup>

The new Soviet policy toward the Northeast resulted in a serious crisis between the Soviet Union and the GMD government. When the Soviets refused to observe the Sino-Soviet treaty, the GMD government took dramatic action. It informed the Soviet Union on 15 November that because the GMD's takeover of the Northeast had been hindered by the Soviet forces there, the GMD's Northeast administration headquarters would move out of the Northeast on 17 November.<sup>75</sup> At the same time, Jiang Jieshi telegraphed President

Harry Truman, informing him that as the result of the Soviet Union's violation of the Sino-Soviet treaty in the Northeast, "there has emerged a serious threat to peace and order in East Asia." He asked the United States to offer "active mediation, so that the continuous deterioration of the situation could be avoided."<sup>76</sup> Meanwhile, the GMD accelerated the transportation of troops into the Northeast. Starting on 3 November, the GMD forces began to attack the Communist-controlled Shanhaiguan Pass, a strategically important link between northern China and the Northeast. In the meantime, American naval vessels repeatedly appeared off Soviet-controlled Port Arthur, which the Soviets interpreted as a demonstration of America's military strength.<sup>77</sup> The danger of a nationwide CCP-GMD civil war, as well as a Soviet-American military showdown, increased dramatically.

Under these circumstances, the Soviets found that, in order to avoid a direct confrontation with the GMD government as well as with the United States, they had to make some concessions. On 17 November, Appolon Petrov, the Soviet ambassador to China, informed the GMD government that the Soviet Red Army had not provided CCP troops with any substantial support, and that it was not the purpose of the Soviets to hinder the GMD's takeover of the Northeast.<sup>78</sup> Three days later, the Soviet military command in the Northeast formally requested that CCP troops withdraw from areas along the Chinese Changchun Railroad. The CCP leadership agreed.<sup>79</sup> The Soviet command still allowed CCP troops to control areas 20 kilometers from the Changchun Railroad, however, and Soviet troops continued to deliver military equipment and ammunition to the CCP.<sup>80</sup> With the changing Soviet attitude, the CCP leadership now realized that to control the entire Northeast was too aggressive an objective. Late in November 1945, the CCP again adjusted its Northeast strategy, adopting a policy focusing on occupying the countryside and small and midsize cities.<sup>81</sup>

### **The Failure of the Marshall Mission and the Outbreak of the Civil War**

The escalation of the CCP-GMD confrontation presented a deepening dilemma to the Americans. On the one hand, both for checking the expansion of Soviet influences in East Asia and for maintaining stable order in China, it was necessary for the United States to provide aid to the GMD government (although many Americans disliked Jiang and his regime) and to help promote China's political democratization. On the other hand, America's intervention (especially military intervention) could, in the worst-case scenario, result in its involvement in China's civil war, risking a direct confrontation with the Soviet Union. From October to December 1945, General Albert Weydemeyer, who

had replaced Stilwell as commander in chief of U.S. forces in China, repeatedly outlined this dilemma in reports to top policymakers in Washington.<sup>82</sup> After weighing the pros and cons, President Truman made a crucial decision, announcing on 15 December that the United States would continue to support the GMD government but would avoid using American military forces to intervene in China's internal affairs.<sup>83</sup> He also decided to send General George Marshall to China to mediate the conflict between the two Chinese adversaries.<sup>84</sup>

The Marshall mission proved extremely difficult from the outset because of the fundamental differences existing between the CCP and the GMD. In postwar China, the achievement of a peaceful solution to the CCP-GMD conflict would have required both parties to cooperate and share power in a way neither could have accepted. The CCP, as mentioned earlier, had created a powerful military force during the war against Japan. The political influence of the CCP had also grown enormously during and after the war. Compared to the GMD, the CCP appeared full of vitality, and the party thus refused to surrender its hard-won advantages, especially the control over its military forces, for the dubious prospects of a recognized position in the GMD government.<sup>85</sup> Indeed, the first thing that the CCP had noticed about Truman's 15 December 1945 statement was that the United States "had decided not to participate directly in China's civil war on Jiang's side." The CCP leadership decided that they would "take this favorable opportunity to further develop our own strength" in the Northeast while "treating American personnel in China cordially" in order to influence American policy toward China.<sup>86</sup>

Jiang and the GMD were unwilling to compromise with the Communists, believing that any substantial concession to the CCP on the GMD's part would weaken its rule in China. Jiang, a nationalist and an authoritarian ruler, would allow no one, least of all the Communists, to share his political power. Thus Jiang also used Marshall's mediation more as an opportunity to deploy the GMD's military forces for an inevitable military showdown with the Communists than as a preliminary step toward a permanent peace in China.<sup>87</sup>

Marshall sincerely hoped to find a solution acceptable to both sides, and he acted impartially. In the initial stage of his mission, he seemed to have made some progress. The CCP and the GMD agreed to an armistice on 10 January 1946. The same day, representatives from the GMD, the CCP, and other political parties in China convened the Political Consultative Conference to discuss problems concerning the establishment of a coalition government in China. Nevertheless, when Marshall's mediation touched upon the most sensitive problem—the distribution of military and political power in China—he

encountered an insurmountable obstacle. Jiang clearly expressed his position that unless the CCP submitted its military forces to the "unified leadership" of his government, he would not allow the Communists to share any of his power. Confident of his own military superiority, Jiang was determined to adopt a policy of force.<sup>88</sup> The CCP, on the other hand, argued that the "democratization" of Jiang's regime should come before the nationalization of China's armed forces. The Communists were ready for a head-to-head confrontation with Jiang.<sup>89</sup> Neither the GMD nor the CCP was willing to make substantial concessions.

Marshall's prospects of success were further weakened by the intensifying confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union in the world in general and in East Asia and China in particular. In order to reduce Soviet influence in East Asia, early in February 1946, Washington expressed strong opposition to the Soviet-GMD negotiations on economic cooperation in the Northeast.<sup>90</sup> Meanwhile, the United States intentionally publicized the contents of the secret agreements on China between Roosevelt and Stalin at the Yalta Conference, which triggered a tide of anti-Soviet protest among the Chinese people. The Soviets decided to strike back. Late in February, Marshal Malinovskii and other Soviet representatives asserted on several occasions that the Soviet Union would not allow the Americans to control the Northeast.<sup>91</sup> In early March 1946, the Soviet Union suddenly announced that its forces would withdraw from the Northeast. At the same time, the Soviet commanders in the Northeast suggested that the CCP send its troops there to control all large and midsize cities and important transportation lines between Harbin and Shenyang.<sup>92</sup> In other words, the Soviets were now ready to hand the areas in the Northeast under their control to the CCP.

This development greatly encouraged the CCP leaders, who decided immediately that CCP forces "would occupy the areas north of Shenyang as soon as possible."<sup>93</sup> On 24 March, the CCP Central Committee summarized the party's new strategy in a telegram to the party's Northeast Bureau: "Our party's policy is to go all out to control Changchun and Harbin, and the entire Changchun Railroad. We should prevent Jiang's troops from advancing there at any price."<sup>94</sup>

Jiang fully realized that if the Communist forces were allowed to control areas north of Shenyang, the CCP would occupy an extremely favorable position in the forthcoming civil war. He therefore ordered the GMD troops to start a large-scale offensive aimed at occupying Changchun. In early April, a fierce battle began between CCP and GMD troops at Siping, a strategically important small city in southern Manchuria. This battle, as it turned out, became the

prelude to an overall CCP-GMD civil war, which finally broke out in June 1946. Although Marshall would not leave China until August, his mission had failed long before the date of his departure.

### Conclusion

The period from late 1944 to early 1946 represented a time of grand transition in China's modern history, as well as in the history of East Asian international relations. An outstanding feature of the transition was that during this period the CCP not only survived serious challenges brought about by the complex domestic and international situations at the end of World War II, but also, and more importantly, gathered strength and momentum through both military and diplomatic maneuvers in preparing to wage a revolutionary war that would finally enable the party to seize China. As a result, in the late 1940s, Communist China emerged as a revolutionary power in East Asia, adopting a series of ambitious state and societal transformation programs at home and challenging the Western-dominated international order both in East Asia and in the world. Indeed, as Chinese scholar Niu Jun puts it, this period served as a key juncture in the CCP's "march from Yan'an to the world."<sup>95</sup>

From a larger historical perspective, the CCP's tremendous gains during this transitional period have to be understood in the context of the extreme tensions that had developed in China's state and society during the previous decades. China's modern history, as viewed from a Chinese perspective, is characterized by the humiliation caused by Western incursions. The repeated failure on the part of the Chinese to deal with Western and, after the end of the nineteenth century, Japanese challenges, or indeed to reform China's pre-modern political, military, and economic institutions, left the Chinese people frustrated and angry. This frustration was further intensified by the unsuccessful outcome of the 1911 revolution, which destroyed an empire but failed to establish a true republic. The desire for rapid and radical changes thus gained tremendous momentum among the Chinese people. In the wake of the Russian Bolshevik revolution, the CCP emerged as the force of radical and revolutionary change in China, embodying defiance of the relatively conservative reign of the GMD, now increasingly perceived by many Chinese, especially radical intellectuals, as a force representing the status quo.

The war against Japan forced the Chinese people to concentrate on "saving China from destructive crises," delaying their efforts to cope with the nation's political, social, and cultural problems. But the momentum for fundamental changes remained. The CCP's dramatic development during the war years can be interpreted in terms of the changing balance of power between the CCP

and the GMD—for the first time in the CCP-GMD confrontation the former had possessed the strength to challenge the latter nationwide. However, it is also important to note that on a deeper level, the CCP, as the most radical political force in China, found at the end of the war a highly favorable environment in Chinese society because China's victory "suddenly" released the long-accumulated popular momentum for revolutionary internal changes. For the CCP this was the ideal situation in which to compete for China's political power.

But it would have been more difficult for Mao and his comrades to cope with the tremendous challenges facing the CCP at the end of the war against Japan if Moscow had not provided the party with military and other support (although the support was always short of the CCP's expectations). Indeed, China's gradual movement toward a civil war in 1945–46 occurred in the context of the escalating conflicts between the Soviet Union and the United States. As already argued, the orientation of the CCP's strategies and policies had been strongly influenced by the changes in Soviet and American policies toward East Asia and China. It was because of Stalin's interference that late in August 1945 the CCP leadership made the decision to negotiate with the GMD. Then, however, in September–October 1945 and March 1946, as its confrontation with the United States intensified, Moscow twice changed its policy in the Northeast and became more willing to support the Chinese Communists. The Soviet Red Army's covert and overt support to the Chinese Communist military operations in the Northeast made it feasible for the CCP to confront the GMD nationwide. On the other side, Jiang Jieshi also counted on American support from the beginning, and it was with the assistance of the Americans that the GMD transported large numbers of military forces and equipment to northern and northeastern China. With the escalation of the Cold War, policymakers in Washington found themselves with no other choice but to back Jiang in China's civil war. It is apparent that big-power politics, especially the Soviet-American confrontation, had a profound effect on China's internal development. Therefore, we must regard the conflict between the CCP and the GMD as an integral part of the emerging Cold War in East Asia and in the world; or, as historian Odd Arne Westad puts it, "[T]he civil war in China (1946–1949) originated with the emergence of the Cold War."<sup>96</sup>

Developments in China in 1945–46 were by no means merely negative responses to the international environment or the intensifying Soviet-American confrontation, however. Not only had the policies and strategies of the two superpowers influenced the process and consequences of political change in China, but also, and more relevant from an East Asian perspective, China's political development had influenced and, in a sense, defined the particular

confrontation the former had

shape of the Soviet-American rivalry. Indeed, the most important impact of the intensifying conflict between the CCP and the GMD is that it virtually nullified the Soviet-American Yalta agreement on China and East Asia. While Moscow found in the CCP's struggle against the GMD an instrument to counter American influence in East Asia (especially after the Americans had demonstrated the desire to monopolize the control over Japan), the Americans also used the GMD to counterbalance the impact of the perceived Soviet challenge. During this process, a "CCP-Moscow versus GMD-Washington" alignment along ideological lines—as historian Michael M. Sheng puts it<sup>97</sup>—increasingly became a reality. Consequently, the escalation of the CCP-GMD confrontation exacerbated the conflict between the two superpowers, thus formalizing a Cold War environment in East Asia, as well as in the world.