

2. COMINTERN MACHINATIONS

CCP eager for war with Japan

Nearly one million Nationalist government troops surrounded the communists' base in Jiangxi province in their fifth sweep of CCP forces, which began in 1933. In October 1934 the communists resigned themselves to abandoning Ruijin, and the main strength of the 100,000-man Red Army embarked on a westward exodus. They covered 14,000 kilometers until finally finding safety in Yan'an, Shanxi province. Their journey is referred to as the Long March.

As CCP troops fled westward, there was a huge amount of attrition. When they fled into North China, they soon encountered Japanese soldiers, thus setting the stage for the Lugou Bridge Incident. The fact that the Nationalist forces failed to capture the communists at Ruijin would return to haunt them.

A political artifice that aided the fleeing CCP forces was the Comintern's Popular Front strategy. The Comintern's Seventh World Congress was held in Moscow from July 25 to August 20, 1935. At the congress Japan, Germany, and Italy were identified as the most dangerous instigators of war. As a policy intended to protect the Soviet regime from those instigators, the communist parties of all member nations were ordered to form an extensive, united, anti-fascist Popular Front.

Unsurprisingly, the Soviet Union did not appreciate the improvement in Japan-China relations in 1935. As a step toward the communization of Asia, its most fervent hope was a war between Japan and China's Nationalist government, one that would exhaust both combatants.

The thaw in the relationship between Japan and China allowed the GMD to focus on eliminating the communists, and even better, gave the Japanese military the freedom to prepare a defense against the USSR. These eventualities irritated the Soviet Union no end. Therefore, the formation of extensive anti-fascist Popular Fronts by the Seventh Comintern World Congress as its immediate strategy was certainly welcome news to the Chinese communists, then on the Long March after having been ousted from Ruijin.

Here is historian A.B. Ulam's opinion of the situation:

To put it bluntly, the renewal of hostilities between China and Japan was clearly in the Soviet interest. At the Comintern Congress, while the speeches of all other Communist representatives breathed a genuine desire for peace ... the Chinese delegate asserted "the earnest desire of the Chinese people to take up arms against the Japanese oppressors." ... It would be absurd to believe that this desire of the Chinese Communists to renew fighting between China and Japan, much as it was probably an expression of their nationalism and self-interest, did not correspond exactly to Soviet wishes.¹

¹ A. B. Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence: Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-73* (New York: Praeger, 1968), 233-34.

“Trojan horse” strategy

It is widely known that the Popular Front strategy bore fruit in the form of Popular Front governments established in Spain and France in 1936. In China, on August 1, 1933, the Chinese Soviet government’s People’s Committee and the CCP’s Central Committee issued the August 1 Declaration, which bore the official title “A Message to All Our Compatriots To Oppose the Japanese and To Save Our Country.”

The declaration castigated Chiang Kai-shek, Wang Jingwei, Zhang Xueliang, and Zhang Qun, referring to them as traitors and pawns of the Japanese invaders. It also harshly condemned slogans like “First internal pacification, then resistance to external forces,” “Japan-China friendship,” and “Pan-Asianism,” labeling them shameless and deceitful. It urged all political parties and organizations, and military units to put past conflicts behind them:

We must first of all suspend all the internal strifes [sic], rise above all sorts of differences, and concentrate our entire national strength ... upon our fight for the achievement of our holy mission to save our country through opposing the Japanese. The Soviet Government and the Communist Party in China once more declare as follows: The Nationalists must at once stop attacking the Soviet area and all their troops must make preparations for a war against Japan.²

While the declaration attacked Chiang and other Nationalist government leaders, the “Overthrow the Nationalist Government” slogan was absent from its pages. This was, essentially, a sudden tactical shift from the traditional “united front from below,” intended to exploit the lower classes, to a “united front from above” aimed at bringing about the collapse of the upper classes.

In effect, the CCP ostensibly abandoned its previous worker-centered class struggle, instead adopting a new tactic to attract *all* classes — intellectuals, the petty bourgeoisie, workers, peasants, and students — and stretching its red tentacles deep into the enemy’s camp.

At the Comintern’s Seventh World Congress, held in Moscow, CCP representative Chen Shaoyu (aka Wang Ming) offered reasons for adopting the August 1 Declaration: (1) the Red Army alone cannot defeat Japan, and (2) the obstacles preventing the CCP’s becoming the leader of all the people must be removed. This can be interpreted as an admission on the part of the CCP that the enfeebling of the party’s military strength and leadership at that time was the motivation for the issuance of the August 1 Declaration. Georgi Dimitrov, general secretary of the Comintern, aptly described the Popular Front as the “Trojan horse” strategy.³ This anti-Japanese united-front

² “A Message to All Our Compatriots to Oppose the Japanese and to Save Our Country, Issued by the Chinese Communists, August 1, 1935.” Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, Far Eastern and Pacific Branch, ca. 1945–46. Declassified OSS document. National Diet Library Digital Collections (Japan), ID 11922110. https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/fc/NDL11922110_Def._Doc._No._980D-_A_message_to_all_our_compartments_to_oppose_the_Japanese_and_to_save_our_country_issued_by_the_Chinese_Communist_1_Aug._1935.pdf.

³ “The United Front and the Fascist Mass Organizations,” speech delivered by Georgi Dimitrov at the Seventh World Congress of the Comintern on 02 August 1935. https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/dimitrov/works/1935/08_02.htm.

proposition was a very timely recovery strategy adopted by the CCP, now on the verge of collapse after Chiang's punishing campaigns, which were designed to annihilate it.

Communist troops infiltrate Shanxi province

It was early November by the time Mao Zedong's Red Army arrived in Yan'an. The Long March, a westward journey that had lasted for more than a year and covered more than 10,000 kilometers, was finally over. Only 6,000 of the 100,000 who had begun the journey remained. On November 1, the Nationalist government established its Northwest Bandit Suppression Headquarters in Xi'an, the capital of Shanxi province. It was there Zhang Xueliang, deputy commander in chief, began the final sweep of the communists, and that the Xi'an Incident would take place. At the beginning of 1936 Red Army forces in northern Shanxi province numbered approximately 30,000 men, including about 20,000 led by Peng Dehuai, Lin Biao, and Liu Zhidan.

Zhang Xueliang's Northeastern Army had been charged with eradicating the communist forces, but had no interest in fighting them. In February 1936, the 20,000-plus communist army advanced eastward into Shanxi province without engaging in combat with the Northeastern Army. Shanxi province had been under the control of Yan Xishan since 1911, and with the exploitation of its abundant coal and iron ore resources, industrialization had proceeded steadily; it was now ideal prey for the hungry communists. The 50,000-man Shanxi forces lost battle after battle against the communist army of 20,000; after one month of fighting, one-third of the province had fallen into the hands of the communists. These events worsened tension in North China and created a need for reinforcements of Japan's China Garrison Army.

Responding to communist infiltration into Shanxi, Chiang deployed a large part of his Central Army to Shanxi, and commenced a massive assault on communist forces in early March. Realizing that they were at a disadvantage, the communists began withdrawing from Shanxi in late March; their evacuation was completed in early May. Within the same time frame, on May 5, faced with ruin and annihilation, the CCP issued a telegram appealing for a cease-fire, peace talks, and joint resistance against Japan. The appeal called for an end to civil warfare, i.e., cessation of campaigns against the communists and unity in the fight against Japan. This plea for a united anti-Japanese front had an immense impact on the Northeastern Army, and eventually led to the Xi'an Incident.

Why the China Garrison Army required reinforcements

As already stated, the communists' ingress into Shanxi became a major concern for the Japanese military. In mid-March, Japanese Army authorities instructed the Shanxi provincial authorities, in cooperation with the Hebei-Chahar government, to conduct a sweep of the communists, instructing them to ask for Japanese military assistance, if necessary. Such assistance would be contingent upon the augmentation of the China Garrison Army. There was another reason why reinforcements were needed: the painful awareness on the part of the Japanese that there were not sufficient troops to protect the growing Japanese civilian population.

However, there was another motivation for the augmentation, which remained unrevealed. By promoting the commander of the China Garrison Army to the same rank as his counterpart in the

Guandong Army by imperial order, the China Garrison Army hoped to forestall future interference in North China affairs from the Guandong Army. Accordingly, in May 1936, the China Garrison Army (commonly known as the Tianjin Army) had its commander, Tashiro Kan'ichirō, elevated by imperial appointment to the same level as the commander of the Guandong Army. Additionally, the size of the China Garrison Army was increased from 2,000 to 5,000 men.

Furthermore, in connection with the deployment of the reinforced Tianjin Army, there was one instance in which well-intentioned policies resulted in tragedy. With a view to dominating North China, the General Staff had planned to station part of the augmented Tianjin Army in Tongzhou, thereby establishing defense readiness for East Hebei. However, Army Vice-Minister Umezu Yoshijirō was strongly opposed to this plan. His argument was that in accordance with the spirit of the Boxer Protocol, which sanctioned the stationing of foreign troops in North China, it was unacceptable to station a garrison in Tongzhou, far from the Beijing-Tianjin Railway. Ultimately “political opinion overpowered military opinion,” to quote Ishiwara Kanji. The decision was made to station part of the garrison (one battalion) in Fengtai, four kilometers southwest of Beijing, instead of in Tongzhou. Vice-Minister Umezu objected to the posting of troops in Tongzhou out of respect for an international treaty. But we must be mindful that (1) it was the units stationed in Fengtai that were caught up in the Lugou Bridge incident in the following year, and that (2) the Tongzhou Incident, in which many Japanese residents were massacred, was contrived to take advantage of the absence of Japanese troops there. I make mention of this irony because it is an illustrative case — one that demonstrates the irony and brutality of history — in which good intentions had terrible repercussions.

Communist plot masquerading as national salvation

The August 1 Declaration sparked the emergence of a rash of anti-Japanese organizations. Momentum toward the formation of an anti-Japanese national united front grew with each passing day. December 1935 saw the establishment of the Shanghai Women's Association for National Salvation, at the heels of which other anti-Japanese organizations with “national salvation association” in their names cropped up in many regions and sectors of society.

Chiang Kai-shek's reaction was to issue a warning to the effect that there was still hope of recovering lost power through diplomacy, and that the “national salvation” slogans were tools being used by the CCP to regain power. But the anti-Japanese movement had reached such a fever pitch that it was beyond the control of the Nationalist government. In February 1936, heartened by increasing anti-Japanese sentiment, the CCP issued a telegram carrying the title “Convocation of a National Congress for Resisting Japan and Saving Our Nation.” It strongly advocated recognition of the CCP's freedom of action, resistance to Japan instead of civil war, and an immediate declaration of war against Japan. Suddenly, pro-Japanese sentiment all but disappeared, and the focus of debates was now when war against Japan should begin.

On May 31, 1936 representatives of more than 60 National Salvation associations and 18 cities met in Shanghai, where they established the United Association for National Salvation Encompassing All Sectors of Society. It was there that all anti-Japanese forces coalesced. Resisting the Japanese and saving the nation was essentially a communist movement — the Chinese version

of the Popular Front concept. It was a clever façade, a maneuver that temporarily abandoned the class struggle so as to encourage cooperation between pro-communist elements and the GMD.

Persistent acts of anti-Japanese terrorism

As hostility toward the Japanese increased, a wave of indiscriminate acts of terrorism struck. Brief descriptions of some of these anti-Japanese incidents perpetrated at the close of 1935 and during 1936 follow; not a few of them were outright massacres.

Date	Incident	Description
11/09/1935	Murder of Seaman Nakayama	Chinese terrorists ambush and shoot Seaman 1 st Class Nakayama, member of Shanghai Naval Landing Force, who dies from his injuries
11/11/1935	Hibino Trading Co. Incident	Gang of 10 or more Chinese attacks Japanese ceramics business on Nanjing Road in Shanghai, throwing rocks, paint cans, etc., shattering display window and causing significant damage to premises; offenders litter crime scene with anti-Japanese leaflets
01/21/1936	Swatow Incident	Chinese terrorists ambush and shoot Tsunoda Susumu, a member of the Japanese consular police force in Swatow (Shantou), who dies from his injuries
07/10/1936	Kayō Incident	Chinese terrorists ambush and shoot businessman Kayō Kōsaku while he walks near his home with his three children; he dies from his injuries
08/20/1936	Changsha Incident	Chinese agitators bomb the Shōnan Inn in Changsha, injuring one Japanese national
08/24/1936	Chengdu Incident	Chinese mob viciously beats Watanabe Kōsaburō and three other members of the Japanese press in Chengdu; Watanabe dies from his injuries and two of his colleagues are seriously injured
09/03/1936	Beihai Incident	Chinese mob invades pharmacy and murders proprietor Nakano Junzō, in Beihai, Guandong province
09/19/1936	Hankou Incident	Chinese thugs ambush and assault consular police officer Yoshioka Teijirō, killing him instantly
09/23/1936	Shanghai Incident (Taminato Incident)	Chinese terrorists hiding in a bus ambush and shoot Seaman 2 nd Class Taminato Tomomitsu, one of four Japanese sailors enjoying an evening stroll, killing Taminato and seriously wounding two other seamen

11/11/1936	Takase Incident (second fatal shooting of Japanese national in Shanghai)	Chinese assailant shoots Takase Yasuji, a sailor from the <i>Kasagi Maru</i> , as he explores the city at night, killing him instantly
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The Chengdu Incident was a particularly horrific crime, the culmination of a series of anti-Japanese terrorist attacks. It intensified negative public opinion in Japan and prompted the military to adopt an uncompromising stance, which it communicated to the Japanese Foreign Ministry. However, given the precarious state of the Japan-China relationship at the time, the Foreign Ministry wished to avoid exacerbating relations between the two countries by presenting harsh demands. Instead, it decided to use this opportunity to promote an overall adjustment of Japan-China diplomatic relations. Army and Navy authorities accepted that decision.

In September 1936 negotiations intended to arrive at a resolution of the Chengdu Incident were held between Ambassador to China Kawagoe Shigeru and Foreign Minister Zhang Qun. Zhang said that to dispel anti-Japanese sentiment, Japan would need to respect Chinese sovereignty and administrative unity, and mentioned that the CCP was attempting to provoke an international war, and Japan should take care not to succumb to its machinations. He then expressed his hopes in connection with the adjustment of diplomatic relations between the two nations in the form of five items: (1) abrogation of the Tanggu and Shanghai ceasefire agreements, (2) dissolution of the East Hebei government, (3) a ban on Japanese flights over North China, (4) an end to smuggling, and (5) dissolution of the spurious Mongolian armies in East Chahar and northern Suiyuan. (The Chinese had made these very same demands in negotiations over the three principles held the previous year). Japanese negotiators were infuriated by those demands, and the negotiations reached a dead end. The Japanese were particularly enraged by Chiang Kai-shek's absence from Nanjing (he was on an extended sojourn in Lushan), which they interpreted as unwillingness to meet with them. They decided to issue an ultimatum, insisting that Chiang return to Nanjing. Chiang finally returned to Nanjing in early October. He met with Ambassador Kawagoe, but did little more than express his wish for the Japanese to continue negotiating diplomatic matters with Zhang.

However, November saw the outbreak of the Suiyuan Incident, in which Inner Mongolian and Chinese troops collided. The Chinese announced that the negotiations would not continue, meaning that all efforts made thus far had come to naught. They had gotten the idea into their heads that the defeated Mongolian forces were Guandong Army troops wearing uniforms with Mongolian insignias, and proceeded to broadcast their suspicions. They were mistaken. Only four Japanese soldiers participated in the battle, and the Mongolian forces were ... Mongolians. Still, the misunderstanding that the Chinese had actually defeated the Japanese resulted in misguidedly amplified confidence in their Chinese military prowess and hatred for Japan. The result was empty, uncompromising rhetoric vilifying Japan, which escalated into the Lugou Bridge Incident.