**The Chinese Civil War**

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**What advantages did the Nationalists hold at the beginning of the civil war?**

The Chinese civil war dates from June 1946, when the always rickety GMD-CCP truce finally broke down and Chiang began a major campaign to recover Manchuria, many parts of which were controlled by the Communists. At the beginning all the advantages seemed to lie with Chiang and the Nationalists. A particular advantage was the support of the USA. Even after it had withdraw its diplomatic mission from China, the USA continued formally to back the GMD. It was a policy that went against the advice of many of its experts on the spot. One reason for this apparent disregard of political realities was that by 1946 the USA had already committed huge resources to shoring up the GMD:

* Under a **lend-lease** scheme *(provision of goods and supplied at no charge or at very low rates of interest)* it had issued millions of dollars worth of military equipment to the Nationalists.
* The USA had provided transport to carry over half a million GMD troops to the zones surrendered by the Japanese, an operation described by General Wedemeyer as the ‘greatest air and sea transportation in history’,
* 55,000 US marines had been sent to the northern part as ‘military advisers’ to the GMD.

The USA judged that, having outlaid so much, it was impossible for it to make a major shift in its Far-Eastern policy. The result was that it continued to finance and support Chiang and the Nationalists, regardless of the fact that the GMD had long since forfeited the support of the majority of the Chinese people.

The Nationalists under Chiang Kaishek entered the civil war with greatly superior troop numbers and greater *materiel* and resources than the Communist. The five million troops of the **NRA** *(The National Revolutionary of the GMD)* outnumbered those of the PLA by over 4 to 1. On that score alone, Chiang should have won the war, but it was largely his mistakes and the poor showing of the GMD militarily, politically and economically that gave eventual victory to his opponents: the Nationalists threw away their initial advantages.

**The character of the war**

**What form did the Chinese civil war take?**

The civil war was often a complicated affair in its detail. This was because the struggle between Nationalists and Communists frequently became confused with local feuds and rivalries. For most peasants, their loyalties were to their locality and they viewed the NRA and the PLA armies as being no different from the marauding gangs who had customarily made their lives a misery. It is true that in some areas Mao won a major propaganda coup by encouraging his troops to conduct themselves as friends of the peasants, but this policy was not applied universally; where the PLA met stubborn resistance from villages they could be as ruthless as the Nationalists in suppressing it. In a number of regions, groups of villages, which had banded together in resistance to the Japanese, maintained their local militia after 1945, ready to fight any intruders, be they the NRA or the PLA. If it increased their security, these local associations were prepared to negotiate cooperative deals with the bandit gangs, remnants of the warlords armies, who still prowled the countryside.

**Main phases of the civil war**

However, allowing for local complications, the main outline of the civil war is relatively easy to understand. It had 3 essential phases:

* The Nationalist armies’ attempt to take the initiative by crushing the main Communist bases in Manchuria and north-eastern China in 1947-8
* The Communists’ successful resistance to these attacks.
* The Communists taking the offensive from 1947 onwards by moving south to take the previously Nationalists-held areas of central and southern China.

Chiang’s main error from which all his later military problems stemmed was his decision to send the GMD’s major forces into Manchuria before he had secured the supply lines necessary to keep his armies fully equipped. This was against the advice of many of his military advisers who were concerned that unless the supply lines were established, the Nationalist forces would be very vulnerable in a region of China where the Communists were at their strongest.

There were 5 major campaigns which determined the outcome of the Chinese Civil War:

1. The struggle for Manchuria 1946-47
2. The ‘strong point offensive’ 1947
3. The Liaoshen campaign, September-November 1948
4. The Huaihai campaign, November 1948-January 1949
5. The Pingjin campaign, November 1948-January 1949

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| Divide the class into 5 groups. Each group choose one campaign to research on.Use any resources available to you to complete your research, one condition though, “THE RISE OF MODERN CHINA” **MUST** be one of them. Any historiography is welcome.  |

1. **The Struggle for Manchuria 1946-47**

**Focus question**: Why was Chiang Kaishek so determined to seize Manchuria?

*Some points to consider*: Communist resistance, Mao’s strategy (style of warfare), the importance of the PLA’s retaining Manchuria (why retaining Manchuria prove so vital?)

1. **The ‘strong point offensive’ 1947**

**Focus question:** What led Chiang to launch the ‘strong point offensive’?

*Some points to consider*: The NRA’s taking of Yanan, the result of the ‘strong point offensive (how did the failure of the Nationalists offensive influence Mao’s approach to the civil war overall?)

1. **The Liaoshen campaign, September-November 1948**

**Focus question:** What was the significance of the Liaoshen campaign?

*Some points to consider*: The campaign itself, the fall of Shenyang, the results of the campaign (why was the outcome of the Liaoshen campaign so significant?).

1. **The Huaihai campaign, November 1948-January 1949**

**Focus question:** What was at stake in the Huaihai campaign?

*Some points to consider*: The struggle for Xuzhou (why were the NRA defeated at Xuzhou?), the results of the Huaihai campaign (what had been won and lost in the campaign?)

1. **The Pingjin campaign, November 1948-January 1949**

**Focus question:** In what sense did the Pingjin campaign mark the end for the Nationalists?

*Some points to consider*: The PLA victories at Xinbaoan, Zhangjiakou and Tianjin, the fall of Beijing (why did the Nationalists not fight to save Beijing?)

**The significance of the 3 major campaigns 1948-9**

**How had the 3 campaigns altered the balance between the Nationalists and Communists?**

The surrender of Beijing by the Nationalist was the climax of an extraordinary sequence of events.

* In barely 4 months the PLA had won 3 great campaign victories.
* The Nationalists had lost control of northern and central China.
* The Communists were on the verge of establishing their dominance over the whole of China.
* Ultimate Communist victory was now only a matter of time.
* In Nanjing, on 21 Jan, Chiang formally handed over authority to Li Zongren, his vice-president.

Yet, although Chiang had formally stepped aside it was a gesture only. In practice he continued as chief authority of the GMD. This was evident from his resignation statement which made it clear that Li Zongren was acting on Chiang’s behalf, rather than by his own authority. Chiang retained the title of **Generalissimo** *(The supreme Commander)* and continued to direct the GMD’s military commanders as their leader.

**The end of the civil war**

**In what sense may the final year of the war be regarded as a mopping-up exercise?**

After the surrender of Beijing to the Communists in January 1949, the final year of the war was a mopping-up exercise for the CCP. It was often a bitter affair and grim atrocities occurred on both sides, but nothing could long delay the seemingly inexorable Communist progress. The crossing of the Yangzi River by the PLA in April 1949 was another great symbolic moment. The river, regarded in Chinese tradition as a great life force that gave geographical definition to China, was not a Communist possession. Nanjing, Shanghai and Guangzhou had all fallen by the time the Chinese People’s Republic was formally declared by Mao’s Zedong at the entrance of the Forbidden City in Beijing on 1 Oct 1949.

In Dec, Chiang left the mainland for the last time and flew to join the remnants of the forces on the Island of Taiwan. There he established a Nationalist stronghold which continued to claim to be the legitimate government of the whole of China. Since the war had no formal close, its end cannot be precisely dated, but the flight of Chiang from the mainland in Dec 1949 is as logical as a date as any.

**The end of the civil war**

In terms of lives lost the civil war was one of the costliest struggles of the 20th century:

* The Nationalists lost approximatively 3 million men.
* The Communists lost 1 million men.
* When civilian death from famine and disruption are included, the total number of death was over 6 million.