

## **Unintended Consequences**

### **The impact of foreign intervention in the Chinese Civil War**

Foreign intervention in the Chinese Civil War had a major impact on the outcome. It was decisive in some cases and had marginal effect in others, but in most instances, despite the intentions of the intervenor, favored the Communist insurgents. Overall, intervention had the effect of saving the Chinese Communist Party from destruction. Had the Japanese not invaded China, had General Marshall not negotiated a cease fire between the Nationalists and the Communists, and had the Soviets not invaded Manchuria or simply annexed it, the Kuomintang would likely have ended up in control of mainland China.

President Truman is often charged with losing China to the Communists by failing to intervene adequately on behalf of Chiang Kai-shek. (May, p. 106) The charge would imply that direct intervention or foreign aid that is more substantial would have changed the outcome. An examination of earlier interventions by various parties shows that while it is certainly possible that direct military intervention might have made a difference, it is probable that the intervention would not have achieved the desired outcome and would likely have resulted in unexpected consequences.

Intervention can take two forms: direct intervention or foreign aid. Direct intervention usually takes the form of military involvement, principally actual fighting on one of the sides. Foreign aid can be in the form of supplies (military or humanitarian), economic (grants, loans, or trade), territorial access (sanctuary), or advice (political, military, economic). (Kaufmann, pp. 83-84) Of nine foreign interventions between 1931 and 1948, involving both direct intervention and foreign aid, only one intervention, the Soviets entering Manchuria in August 1945, had the desired result, and that was probably the result of a

secondary decision. Why eight interventions did not work and why the Soviet intervention did work leads to conclusions as to the efficacy and limitations of intervention in ideological civil wars. (See the attached table for a summary of the intervention cases examined.)

**Direct Intervention.** Six interventions were direct in nature: the Japanese invasion of Manchuria (1931), the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1941), the American Volunteer Group (1941-1942), World War II (1941-1945), the Japanese Ichi-go Campaign (1944), and the Soviet invasion of Manchuria (1945). Of those six, only one was designed specifically to support the KMT; the American Volunteer Group, better known as the Flying Tigers. Another was specifically used to support the Communist Party; the Soviet invasion of Manchuria. The remaining four had other motivations, but all resulted in either furthering the cause of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) or having no real impact at all.

The three Japanese interventions were designed to gain control of territory and eliminate armed resistance. The Japanese opposed both the KMT and the CCP. As it turned out, the KMT took the brunt of the Japanese military action and were prevented from attacking the CCP/PLA. As long as the Nationalists could not confront the Communists militarily, the CCP/PLA was able to recoup losses and gain strength.

The Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931 and the subsequent establishment of Manchukuo as a puppet state effectively stopped Chiang Kai-shek's unification efforts with Yen His-shan and Canton-Kwangsi coalition. The KMT was forced to end the campaign against the Kiangsi communists. When the Japanese attacked China in 1937, Chiang Kai-shek had the Chinese Communist Party on the ropes. Mao had led his army on a disastrous

“Long march” during which a force of 100,000 men dwindled to between 6 and 10,000.

Chiang was ready to complete the destruction of the CCP Army, but faced with open Japanese invasion, he diverted his efforts, providing the CCP opportunity to regain strength. The Ichi-go campaign of 1944 was designed by the Japanese to destroy the American B-29 bases in China. Because of where the B-29 bases were located, the attack was principally arrayed against the Nationalist Army. With the KMT weakened, the relative strength of the CCP/PLA was greater.

The United States intervened directly in two instances: 1) The American Volunteer Group (1941-1942), and 2) the American involvement in World War II (1941-1945). Both were directed at assisting China in the war against Japan. Neither intervention was effective, despite some successes militarily. The failure was due principally to the corruption of Chiang and the KMT. Refusal on the part of Chiang and his generals to reform gave the Chinese Communists ammunition in their propaganda war for the “hearts and minds” of the Chinese people.

The American Volunteer Group (1941-1942) and the American involvement in World War II (1941-1945) both provided direct military support to the Nationalist Army. This support, directed at the Japanese, provided no aid in the fight against the Communists. Even when military leaders such as Stillwell and Wedemeyer offered advice to Chiang, they were dismissed brusquely as not understanding Chinese political intricacies.

Chiang and the KMT leadership, by failing to see the need to reform, were feeding the Communist propaganda machine thus losing the “hearts and minds” war. Political aid, military aid, and military advice had no positive impact.

The Soviet invasion of Manchuria in August 1945, was the only example of intervention having the desired and planned impact. While the Soviets initially did not aim to support the CCP (indeed Stalin was certain they would fail and had plans to annex Manchuria), once it became clear that the Communists were not going to collapse, Soviet policy changed. The Soviet actions, while beginning as a direct military intervention, actually had more of the effect of being in the foreign aid category. No direct military assistance was provided to the CCP/PLA. However, by holding the territory, keeping the KMT/Nationalist Army out, and then handing over the surrendered Japanese weapons and equipment to the PLA, the CCP was aided in its struggle against the KMT. Thus, some of the major methods of foreign aid (military aid and sanctuary) were provided without direct confrontation with the opposition force.

The CCP was more skilled at taking advantage of the political situation and using the tools of ideological civil war. Kaufmann lists three principle strategic tools which can be used by the opposing sides in a conflict such as the Chinese Civil War: 1) political, economic, and social reform programs; 2) population control; and 3) military action. (Kaufmann, p. 70) The reforms are the most important, followed by population control. While military action will be required to achieve the aim of destroying the opposition, it is not the principle tool in the early stages of the insurrection.

Unfortunately, while the KMT had shown some ability for successful military action and control of the population within the areas under its domination, they consistently failed to install any type of reform. The KMT was seen increasingly as oppressive and corrupt while, over time, the CCP became more appealing to the average Chinese.

The CCP, on the other hand, spent a great deal of time working on reform and the appearance of reform within the areas under its control. Whenever KMT abuses became evident, the propaganda machine would point it out and inflame the already sensitive issue. Marshall, after having gained agreements in 1946 from the KMT for liberal reforms, observed that "...irreconcilable groups within the Kuomintang, interested in the preservation of their own feudal control of China, evidently had no real intention of implementing them." (May, p. 60.) Chiang Kai-shek was his own worst enemy and was unable to take advantage of the assistance provided to him while the CCP were able.

**Foreign Aid.** The United States intervened in China with foreign aid on three occasions: U. S. Military Aid to China (1945-1948), the Marshall Mission (1945-1946), and the China Aid Act (1948). As mentioned above, the real effect of the Soviet Manchurian invasion at the end of World War II was of providing de facto foreign aid to the CCP in the form of sanctuary and arms. The American foreign aid interventions failed while the Soviet intervention succeeded.

American policy in China upon Japan's surrender was to support the Nationalist Chinese in regaining control of northern and eastern China. The Japanese Army was directed to garrison its areas and not to surrender to any forces other than Nationalist Chinese officials. American transportation moved Nationalist Army units to contested areas in an attempt to outrun the Communists. This support almost worked.

Chiang took advantage of the American support to begin an offensive against the Communists in northern China. He had early success, forcing the PLA to retreat from some of its major strongholds. In early 1946, the CCP was on the verge of collapse

While Truman and Marshall had plans for a KMT-CCP coalition government, there is little doubt that the principle goal was to prop up the Nationalist government and leave Chiang in control of China. American involvement, while on the surface neutral, was clearly partisan.

General Marshall, under wide ranging orders from Truman, set out to stop the fighting and arrange a truce under which the KMT and CCP could cooperate. President Truman's goal by sending Marshall to China was to find a way to convince the KMT and CCP to build a coalition government. With both parties in the same government, the two sides could settle differences by negotiation and democratic means. Marshall convinced Chiang Kai-shek to stop his offensive against the PLA long enough to open negotiations. By doing so, the Communist forces were given time to recover from a long series of setbacks and defeats at the hands of the Nationalist Army.

Chiang Kai-shek would never be able to regain the offensive again. (Waldron, p. 379) Marshall (and Truman) believed that the Communists could not possibly win and merely wanted to stop the bloodshed. Worldwide opinion, to include Stalin, was convinced that the CCP was on the verge of collapse. Intervention to achieve the goal of ending the bloodshed and help the Nationalist Chinese actually resulted in their ultimate defeat at the hands Mao's forces.

Marshall returned from the mission pessimistic about the outcome and blamed most of the trouble on Chiang Kai-shek. (May, p. 12.) He observed that "...the greatest obstacle to peace has been the complete, almost overwhelming suspicion with which the Chinese Communist Party and the Kuomintang regard each other." (May, p. 60.)

**Summary and Conclusions.** Intervention in ideological civil wars is at best limited in usefulness and at worst harmful to the outcome. Intervention on the behalf of a corrupt government that has no intention (or ability) to reform will most likely be wasted effort. Even direct military action against the insurgent force is not likely to achieve ultimate success. On the other hand, providing sanctuary can be useful in support of the insurgent force if that force has been successful in winning the “hearts and minds” of the populace in the sanctuary area.

There appears to be limited scope for foreign intervention in ideological civil wars. (Kaufmann, p. 86.) The experience of China shows that major military intervention, such as those of the Japanese, does not serve to end the conflict. In China, it only served to shift the advantage to one side and in most of those cases it was an unintended consequence. The experience of the United States shows that military intervention, no matter how good, is nearly useless if the supported government does not have the will or ability to reform itself. Only the experience of the Soviets, by essentially providing sanctuary and arms to the insurgents, proved successful.

Of the six direct military interventions, only one was successful and that was more in the form of foreign aid. In most cases, the intervention ended up providing advantage to the insurgent forces despite the stated aim. Of the four foreign aid interventions (including the Soviet invasion of Manchuria), only one was successful, that being the aid to the insurgent. Any military intervention that prevented the Nationalist Chinese government from attacking the insurgents had the effect of helping the Communists. Foreign aid to the Nationalist Chinese, while potentially helpful, was short-circuited by a KMT leadership that could not

properly apply the aid due to internal corruption and refusal to enact needed social, economic, and military reforms.

General Marshall correctly summed up the situation in China by recognizing that the KMT was apparently incapable of enacting the necessary reforms that would enable it to take advantage of foreign intervention on its behalf. On the opposing side, Stalin recognized that the combination of KMT intransigence and the Chinese Communist Party's successes with reforms and control of the population would be successful if only provided with some protection and a boost in military aid.

Intervention most often is of unpredictable effect and more often ends up being to the benefit of the insurgent force. At a minimum, intervention with a delusion of evenhandedness or neutrality is more likely to prolong fighting than to end it.