

This poster, declaring 'Forget not your brothers in jail!' was issued shortly after the 30 May Incident by the CCP. To whom was the poster intended to appeal?

accepted. The chief beneficiary from this stress on the role of the military was Chiang Kaishek, who shortly before the 30 May Incident had become the leader of the Nationalists. In 1924 he had been appointed commander-in-chief at the Whampoa Military Academy at Guangzhou, the GMD's military headquarters. Chiang then used his leadership of the **National Revolutionary Army (NRA)**, which that position gave him, to overcome his rivals within the GMD in the succession struggle that followed the death of Sun Yatsen in March 1925.

The political effect of Sun Yatsen's death

The death of Sun Yatsen in 1925 was a highly significant moment in Chinese politics. It had the effect of releasing the anti-Communist forces within the GMD which Sun had previously held in check. Chiang Kaishek's success in the GMD power struggle was a victory for the military in the party, the element that had close relations with the Chinese middle class and which was opposed to the social revolutionary policies of the CCP. Chiang had not shared his predecessor's belief that the CCP could be easily absorbed into the GMD and then rendered harmless. Although Chiang, along with nearly all the leading members of the GMD, had received training in Moscow in the early 1920s, he had acquired no love for Marxism. His conviction was that the Communists represented an internal challenge that had to be crushed.

National Revolutionary Army (NRA)
The GMD's military wing.

Key term

Death of Sun Yatsen:
1925

Key date

Key question
In what ways were the relations between China's two main political parties altered by Sun Yatsen's passing?

However, Chiang knew that the Communists were not the only obstacle. Before he and his Nationalists could take full power in China, the warlords, who still controlled large areas of central and northern China, had to be broken. The time was ripe; the 30 May Incident in 1925 had created a mood of national anger that could now be turned against warlordism. Chiang planned to combine his two objectives, the destruction of the warlords and the obliteration of the Communists, into one major campaign. He could not, of course, openly declare his second objective until the first had been achieved. As long as the warlords were undefeated the GMD–CCP United Front had to be preserved; he still needed the CCP as military allies.

Despite the evidence of Chiang's hostility to Communism and the Soviet Union, the Comintern continued to urge the Chinese Communists to work with the GMD in the United Front. The result was the joint planning of a Nationalist–Communist campaign aimed at the annihilation of warlord power. In July 1926, in his southern base in Guangzhou, Chiang Kaishek made a passionate speech calling on all true revolutionaries to join his Nationalists in a national crusade to destroy the warlords. His speech marked the beginning of the 'Northern Expedition'.

The Northern Expedition 1926–8

In campaigning against the warlords, the United Front selected three main targets:

- Wu Peifu, who was master of an area known as the Central Plains, between the Yellow and Yangzi rivers
- Sun Chuanfang, who dominated much of eastern China
- Zhang Zuolin, who controlled northern China between Beijing and Manchuria.

The Front's strategy was to surround the individual warlord armies, cut their **supply lines** and steadily crush them. This often resulted in brutal warfare with heavy casualties. Nevertheless, by the summer of 1927, United Front forces had captured the key cities of Wuhan and Shanghai, effectively ending Wu Peifu's hold over central China.

Sun Chuanfang was more difficult to overcome, since his forces put up a particularly fierce resistance. In 1927 his army of some 100,000 launched a series of counterattacks which badly damaged the Nationalist forces. It was only after Chiang Kaishek had built up an army of 250,000 that he was able, in 1928, to outnumber and overcome Sun Chuanfang's forces.

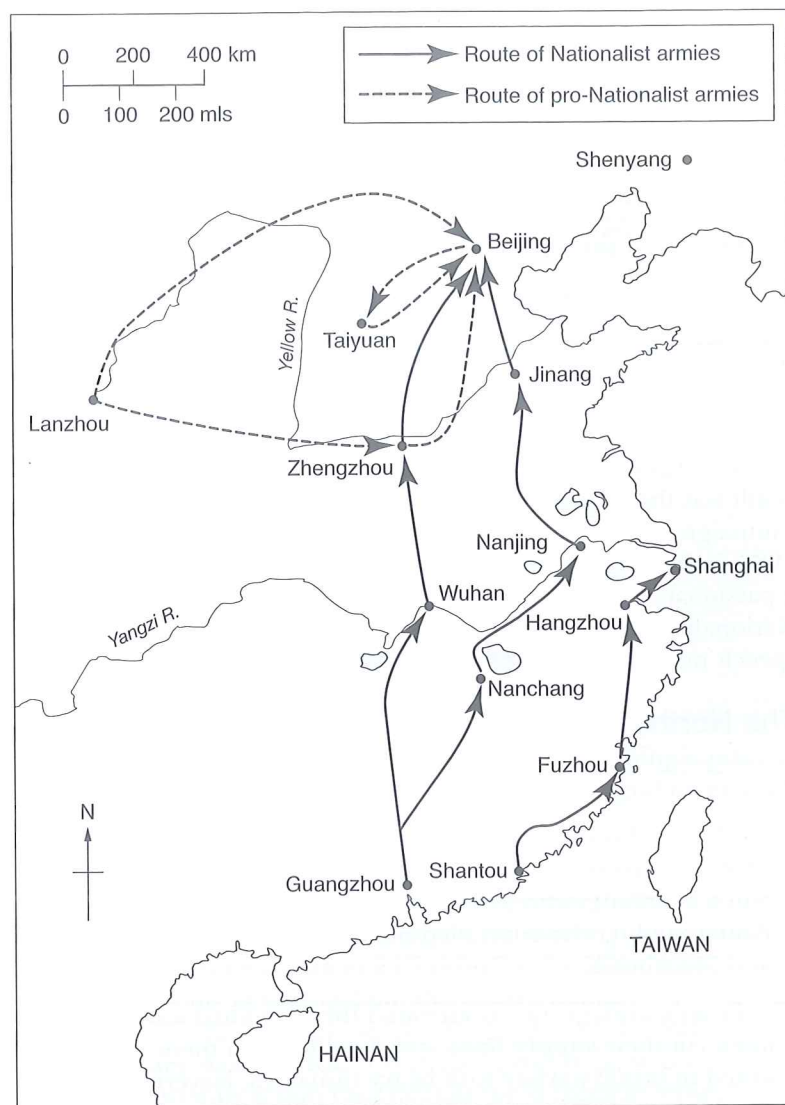
However, although delayed by Sun's spirited defiance, the Alliance was not to be denied. Once Zhang Zuolin, the warlord of the Beijing area, had been finally driven out in 1928, the GMD was in a position to announce that it was now the legitimate government of China and that it would rule from the new capital of Nanjing.

One consistent advantage to the Nationalists during the Northern Expedition was the hatred that most of the people living under the warlords felt towards their oppressors. This made

Key question
How successful was the Northern Expedition?

Key date
Northern Expedition:
1926–8

Key term
Supply lines
The vital links between an army and its ammunition, equipment and food sources.



The Northern Expedition 1926-8.

the local population willing to pass on information to the Front forces and on occasion join them in the struggle. A good example of this was the work of Mao Zedong as a Front organiser in Hunan. His links with the **peasant associations** in the province proved invaluable in enabling the Front's units to drive through Guanxi and Hunan and outflank the warlord armies. In 1926, Mao's endeavours earned him the official accolade 'son of Hunan'.

The Communist contribution to the Front's victory

There was little doubt that the Communists had made a vital contribution to the victories of the GMD-CCP alliance. Apart from contributing troops, Communist workers had caused great trouble for the warlord forces through acts of sabotage and by

Peasant associations
Self-protection organisations formed by local communities in the rural areas.

Key term

A United Front poster of 1926 calling on peasants, merchants, soldiers and students to fight the evil imperialists and warlords who are throttling China. How effectively does the poster make its point?



organising disruptive strikes and boycotts. Mao himself attributed the United Front's successes to the co-operation between the Nationalist and Communist forces: 'there was unity between officers and men and between the army and the people, and the army was filled with a revolutionary militancy'.

Mao's enthusiasm is a reminder of how easily the Chinese Communists had let themselves be fooled by Chiang Kaishek at this juncture. Chiang had launched the Northern Expedition with two aims: the declared one of breaking the warlords, the undeclared one of destroying his allies in the Front, the Communists. Confident by 1927 that the warlords were effectively beaten and that he no longer needed Communist support, Chiang began openly to implement the second of his aims. He had already begun to purge his party of Communist sympathisers. During 1926 he had dismissed a number of CCP officials from their posts in the GMD, arrested several Comintern advisers and removed his closest challenger, **Wang Jingwei** (Wang Ching-wei), from office.

Chiang Kaishek turns against the CCP

Despite the growing evidence of Chiang's active antagonism towards them, the Chinese Communists were slow to react. This was largely because the majority of them were still in thrall to the Comintern, whose continuing line was that the United Front must be maintained at whatever cost. It remained Stalin's belief that the GMD was a truly revolutionary force in China and that the

Key figure

Wang Jingwei (1883-1944)
Leader of the Left GMD, who later betrayed his country by becoming head of a Japanese puppet regime in Nanjing in 1940.

Chinese Communists were incapable on their own of achieving revolution. As Stalin saw it, the most fitting role the CCP could play at this stage of history was that of martyrs for the cause of international Communism. He had no qualms about obliging the CCP to follow a policy that was soon to bring it to the verge of destruction.

Official accounts written later by the CCP maintained that Mao Zedong had not been hoodwinked at this time and that he had always suspected Chiang Kaishek of evil intent. However, the available evidence suggests that, although he certainly reacted swiftly once he grasped the full extent of Chiang's betrayal of the United Front, Mao had been among those leading Communists who had initially fully backed the formation of the Front and the Northern Expedition.

The results of the Northern Expedition

In July 1928, Chiang Kaishek officially declared that, since it had achieved its main purpose of defeating the warlords and reuniting China, the Northern Expedition could now be regarded as completed. Equally important for him was that the expedition had given him the means and opportunity to embark on a programme for the extirpation of his chief enemy, the Communists. However, subsequent events were to undermine his claim of victory over the warlords. The defeat of warlords was only partial:

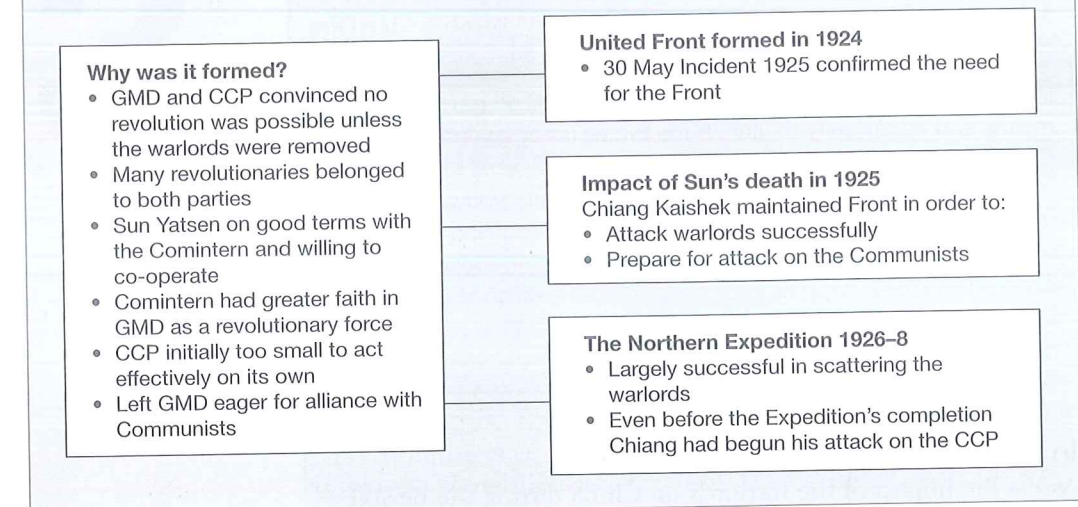
- Not all the warlords had been crushed.
- A number of them agreed to accept the GMD's authority only on condition that they were allowed to keep their private armies.
- Others were won over by being offered positions in the GMD Party or government.

The warlords remained a significant factor in Chinese politics. It is arguable, therefore, that the Nationalists did not so much conquer the warlords as come to terms with them. This was the constant assertion made by the CCP in its propaganda against the Nationalists. Indeed, it was often said by the opponents of Chiang Kaishek that he was no more than a warlord himself and that the only difference between him and the others was that he was more successful. The assertion was that Chiang had used his military base in Guangzhou to make a grab for power by launching a challenge against the legitimate Republican government in Beijing. The relative weakness of Chiang's position had two main results:

- It prevented him from ever fully controlling China.
- It intensified his determination to destroy the Communists, whom he regarded as the main obstacle to his exercising complete power.

Key question
How successful was the Northern Expedition?

Summary diagram: The GMD–CCP United Front 1924–7



Study Guide: AS Questions

In the style of Edexcel

To what extent did Soviet support contribute to Chiang Kaishek's increasing control of China in the period 1925 to April 1928?

Exam tips

The cross-references are designed to take you straight to the material that will help you to answer the question.

This question gives you one factor that contributed to GMD success in reducing warlord power and becoming the governing power in China and asks you for an assessment of the importance of that factor. You will need also to explore other factors which contributed to Chiang's successes in order to assess the importance of Soviet support.

You could show that Soviet support, as well as contributing directly to the strength of the GMD with funds and equipment, underpinned several key factors which interacted to bring about Chiang's increasing control:

- Stalin was prepared to sacrifice the interests of the Chinese Communists to those of the GMD in advocating a united front (page 56).
- The Comintern's support for the United Front made the CCP slow to react to the threat posed to it by Chiang (page 55).

The CCP made a vital contribution to the successes of the Northern Expedition against the warlords. The support of the Chinese communists:

- added to the numbers of soldiers and to the revolutionary fervour of the army (page 54)

- weakened warlord forces through acts of sabotage and the organisation of disruptive strikes and boycotts (page 55)
- forged links with peasant associations in Hunan which enabled the Front's units to outflank warlord armies (page 54).

In turn, Chiang's success in the Northern Expedition gave him the means and opportunity to launch the White Terror against the Communists (page 60).

In the process of reaching an overall judgement, you could explore the significance of Chiang's leadership and ruthlessness and the vital role of the CCP itself in the campaign against the warlords. Your conclusion should express your view of the significance of the role Soviet support played directly and indirectly in Chiang's increasing power in the period.

In the style of OCR A

Assess the impact of the warlords on China during the period 1916–27.

Exam tips

The cross-references are designed to take you straight to the material that will help you to answer the question.

The key words and phrases here are 'Assess' and 'impact ... on'. Note the question sets a start and end date, so do not discuss the periods before 1916 or after 1927. The immediate answer might seem easy: the warlords were bad for China. They put their own interests first, not China's. They kept the country weak and divided. They corrupted the republic, preventing the strong central government that could lead China forward.

On the other hand, you might point out that there were only warlords in the first place because the republic was weak. In the early years, the warlords were symptoms of China's weakness, not the causes of it. However, over time, as they became even stronger, they weakened China further and prevented its recovery. You could also show that the quality of rule by the warlords, while generally one of terror, varied from the vile Zhang Zongzhang (page 34) to the efficient government of Feng Yuxiang (page 34), but you should also stress that Feng was atypical.

Your essay ought to stress the economic reforms of Zhang Zuolin and Yan Xishan (page 36). And do not forget the one positive reaction that was generated by the warlord era: a growing determination to unite China under a proper government. While your assessment of warlord impact will, quite rightly, emphasise the negative aspects, be sure to present a rounded assessment. A two-dimensional picture will not score well.

3

Nationalist Triumph and Communist Survival 1927–36

POINTS TO CONSIDER

Having overcome the warlords, Chiang Kaishek turned on his Communist allies in the United Front and set out to destroy them in the White Terror. He came close to achieving this. The Communists survived only by fleeing to the mountains of Jiangxi, where they created the first Chinese soviet. However, over a period of six years, in a series of encirclement campaigns, Chiang's forces surrounded the Jiangxi base and the Communists were again forced to flee. By a stupendous effort, known as the Long March, they evaded the Nationalist armies and in 1935, after a year's journey, reached Yanan in the north where, under Mao Zedong's leadership, they began to build a new Communist soviet. The Communists' preoccupation between 1927 and 1936 with the sheer struggle to survive gave Chiang and the Nationalists the chance to impose their authority on China. How they used that authority is one of the following themes covered in this chapter:

- The White Terror 1927
- Nationalist China 1928–37
- The Jiangxi Soviet 1928–34
- The Long March 1934–5

Key dates

1927	White Terror unleashed Autumn Harvest Rising
1928	Nationalist government established in new Chinese capital, Nanjing
1928–34	Jiangxi Soviet
1929–34	GMD's encirclement campaigns
1930	Futian Incident
1931	Japanese occupation of Manchuria
1934–5	The Long March
1935	Zunyi meeting