
The alternative before him is to prolong the war. In contemplating this he can draw a few moderately reassuring correlations from the situation in North China, where for some weeks now the Japanese troops have been almost entirely inactive on the various fronts. Behind these fronts they appear to have had their hands full with mopping-up operations and with political and economic reorganization of the areas overrun. In this category the tasks before them are formidable, and will not become any less so if the army takes on further territorial commitments, so it must if the war goes on and Japan goes on winning it. After his experience at Nanking General Chiang probably finds it difficult to put his finger on a Verdun in the interior and to say with conviction: "There we shall hold them." But he knows that the Japanese regard with uneasiness the prolongation of hostilities and are reluctant to increase indifferently the responsibilities of conquest. There has been a lull in the North; and now there must be a pause at Nanking while the Japanese clean up the area partially and rapidly covered by their advance on the capital. It is therefore possible to visualize—as perhaps Chiang does—an invasion which will progress by a series of jabs, and in which the puentes between the jabs will grow progressively longer as the fighting drifts deeper into the interior. No one knows better than the Generalissimo and his colleagues how difficult the Chinese are to rule, particularly in areas lately swept by warfare in one form or another.

Every retreat, however humiliating its strategic implications, leaves the conqueror with a legacy of distress and lawlessness, both exacerbated by outraged nationalism. From the Chinese point of view the Japanese front is less important than the Japanese rear. Here, it is true, the invader is not menaced by some grave and possibly decisive danger; but he has a thousand petty problems, military and administrative, to cope with, a thousand expenses—not all of them petty—to incur, Japan can do it; perhaps she can go on doing it as long as she wishes. But there is a chance that she cannot, that the strain will become so severe that a period of fat the least stimulus may ensue, bringing with it an atmosphere in which China could open negotiations without loss of prestige. It is admittedly a slender chance; but perhaps in the Chinese view it is worth a forlorn action.

The indications are that Japan does not know what she wants. China in the near future will be divided into two parts. One will be ruled by the Chinese, the other by the Japanese through Chinese puppets. Both forms of administration offer some perplexities to Japan. Does she want to break Chiang’s power, in which case the provinces outside Japan’s sphere will almost certainly become a political chain with the Communists in the ascendant? Or does she hope for a chastened Central Government, which would give her only a short period of lip-service before once more deciding as the Nanking Administration defended? She will, no doubt, continue to weather the difficulties before her for a time; but her long-term prospects in China are not reassuring.
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Primary Sources

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*At the headquarters of the Nanking Safety Zone Committee. Left to right: Mr. Zial (Russian Tartar); Mr. Hatz (Austrian); Mr. Rabe (German, Chairman of the Safety Zone Committee); Rev. John Magee (American Church Mission); Mr. Cola Podshivaloff (White Russian) December 13, 1937. Source: Yale University Library: Divinity School: The Nanking Massacre Project: Photographs and Films. YDS-RG008-265-002-009*

*Ruins of destroyed buildings after air raid by the Nazi "Condor Legion" unit, Guernica, Spain 1937. Source: Allgemeiner Deutscher Nachrichtendienst - Zentralbild (Bild 183-H25224)*