*SCM Paine, Wars for Asia, 1911-1949*

[**xi**]

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**…

[**xii**] I have attempted to incorporate the methodology taught in the Strategy & Policy Department [of the U.S. Naval War College, where I work]…. Wars are not all of one type: **insurgencies [such as the GMD-CCP united front against Japan] generally seek regime change within a single country**—so the stakes are high for both sides. Because **insurgencies require little equipment and few forces** to wage, they are hard to eliminate and tend to protract. Victory in **regional and global wars generally involves large conventional battles requiring quantities of military hardware**. In **regional wars**, the stakes vary and the higher their value to both sides, the more likely the conflict will protract. **Global wars contest the nature of the global order. Therefore, they are wars of extraordinarily high stakes, usually of long duration, and usually coalition wars**. Wars protract not only because of the stakes and numbers of parties involved, but also when they threaten third parties, which intervene to shape the outcome. Good strategy [in a regional conventional war] works to prevent hostile third-party intervention.

**I have disaggregated the warfare in China in the twentieth century** to analyze **the long Chinese Civil War** (1911-49), **the Second Sino-Japanese War** (**1931**-45), and **World War II** (1939-45). The first began as a [multilateral and multifaceted] mutiny [against the Qing] and entailed a bitter insurgency [conducted by both CCP and GMD against the Japanese], the second began as a regional war [initially in Manchuria (1931-32), then on the Northern Plains (1932-36) and then later in central and southern China (starting in 1937)], and the third resulted from the escalation into a global war of two regional conflicts, one in Europe [initiated by Germany against Poland, the Western Allies, the Balkan states and the Soviet Union] and the other in China [initiated by Japan, fearful of the consequences of the insurgency in China, among other things]. Each of the three [overlapping] wars was fought for different objectives and with different strategies….

[**3**]

**INTRODUCTION:**

**The Asian Roots of World War II…**

**We in the West treat World War II, the Second Sino-Japanese War, and the Chinese Civil War [which, I argue are all interconnected] as distinct events, and in doing so we misunderstand each one [which, of course includes WWII]. The conventional tale of World War II divides into two fronts, a European theater, opening in 1939, and a Pacific theater, opening in 1941, and the tale ends in 1945 with the fall of Berlin in May and with atomic bombs on Japan in August. Yet Japan’s war [in Asia-Pacific was an escalation of her war in China, which she] began a decade prior in 1931, and that war** [which Japan escalated in 1937 by invading central and southern China] **precipitated its attack on Pearl Harbor, which drew the United States into World War II [in Asia-Pacific, which was then linked to the wars in eastern and western Europe by Hitler’s declaration of war on the United States], and thus precluded a Japanese victory in China. [In short, the road to war in Asia-Pacific and then to global WWII is through the wars in China.]** The conventional tale does little to explain Japan’s curious behavior. An attack on one’s most important trading partner and source of the war matériel necessary to continue the fight in China would seem remarkably counterproductive [unless we take into account the link between Japan’s regional war in China].

**The conventional tale of the Second Sino-Japanese War is equally illogical. The Japanese won every battle, including the 1944 Ichigō** [**4**] Campaign, which was their last, biggest, and best, and **then they suddenly collapsed.** Although **World War II explains this collapse, [Japanese and Chinese—Nationalist and Communist] accounts of the Second Sino-Japanese War routinely gloss over the global war [thus leaving out the preponderant role played by the United States in the Pacific, the help provided by the United States and the role played by the Soviet Union in defeating Japanese forces in Manchuria in 1945].** More importantly, there is no explanation for the Dr. Jekyll-Mr. Hyde transformation [during its conduct of the war in China] of Japan from the model developing country of the nineteenth century to Japan at the forefront of germ warfare, prisoner abuse, civilian massacres, and the murder of its own wounded.

**The conventional tale is no more illuminating for the Chinese Civil War, portrayed as an existential struggle between good and evil and between a longing for change and the weight of corruption. Yet the alleged master of military incompetence, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, fought the Imperial Japanese Army to a stalemate by 1938 and fought it alone from 1937 to 1941. [Tellingly,] Japanese accounts emphasize their fight not against the Communists but against the Nationalists [a point that suggests that it was the GMD that most of the fighting against the Japanese, in contrast to the CCP-inspired narrative of Communist heroism, that is prevalent even in western materials].** During these years, the Imperial Japanese Army sent not its rejects but its best to China. Thereafter, Americans, despite their overwhelming industrial superiority, also found fighting the Japanese bitter indeed. **Again, the facts on the ground do not square with the story told**.

**As it turns out, Japan attempted to settle its long war in China with a peripheral strategy targeting U.S. and British interests in Asia in order to compel them to cut off their aid to China**. **This was a peripheral strategy because the theaters were peripheral to the main theater, which for Japan was China**, not the disease-infested jungles and isolated islands where the United States soon fought.[[1]](#footnote-1) **Japan’s prior alliance with Germany then sent the United States into the European theater when Germany interpreted the alliance broadly to declare war. In other words, [MY THESIS IS THAT] a regional war in [China and then] Asia [the roots of which were in the long Chinese civil war (and Japan’s reaction to its evolution)] made another regional war in Europe global when the Japanese and German declarations of war relegated U.S. isolationism to the trash heap of history. [In this way, we can see the “Asian Roots of World War II”.]**

**China’s [long civil] war began even earlier with the demise of the Qing dynasty in 1911 and the escalating civil war to determine the nature of New China. Initially the civil war was multilateral. It did not fully settle into a bilateral Nationalist-Communist fight until 1945 and did not end until the Communist victory in 1949. As the fighting** [between the GMD and various warlords and, later, against the CCP as well, in pursuit of a unified China] **moved northward in the 1920s toward the Japanese sphere of influence** and focus of investments **in Manchuria, Japanese leaders** became increasingly concerned. In the 1930s army leaders and many other Japanese **concluded that only direct military intervention could protect their national security. [5] In other words, the long Chinese civil war precipitated a regional war between China and Japan so that by the time the conflict became global in [December] 1941, the Chinese were fighting a civil war within a regional war [that was conducted, beginning at this moment] within an overarching global war**.

**At different times, the intervening foreign powers—Japan, Russia, and the United States—focused on different layers of this complex war. The conventional tale focuses on the global war, which was the outermost** and least fundamental **layer [from the perspective of someone writing about the nature of the Chinese civil war]. In fact, each layer grew out of the preceding layer, with the civil war at the core. Those who attempted to fight within one layer without consideration of the others courted disaster.** Japan’s operational focus on the regional war produced the opposite of intended outcomes in the civil and global wars. The U.S. attempt to focus exclusively on the global war left postwar U.S. China policy in shambles. **Russia’**s comparatively astute Asia **policy rested on an appreciation of all three layers of warfare: it brokered a truce in the civil war to promote a Sino-Japanese war to save itself from a two-front global war on the correct assumption that Japan would fight either China or Russia, but not both**.

**The conventional tale [of World War II] does not emphasize Russia’s peculiar position among the Allies of World War II**. Russia allied with Britain and the United States against Germany [after Barbarossa commenced] but maintained remarkably cordial relations with Japan [starting with neutrality pact of April 1941] until the last two weeks of the war, when it suddenly deployed 1.5 million men to Manchuria in its most ambitious campaign in the war. **Most histories of World War II omit the Eurasian connection between the European and Pacific theaters [because they fail to show how the Soviet Union was caught in precisely the same strategic situation the Germans were—sandwiched between two potential enemies that could lead to an unwinnable two-front war] to tell separate tales [which are linked by the role of the Soviet Union]. Russians, however, saw clear connections.** German units advanced within eyesight of Moscow, the country’s rail hub, the one the Bolsheviks had leveraged to win the Russian Civil War. **In World War I, Russia had fallen to a one-front war against Germany and would probably not have survived a two-front war against both Germany and Japan. Russian leaders played a deft game of diplomacy to forestall this eventuality [and much of this has to do with its China policy and the ability to support both the Communists and the GMD, at least up till 1941, when it abandoned them by signing neutrality pact with Japan]**.

**Japan’s [Second Sino-Japanese] war had other implications that did not reveal themselves by 1945, when the conventional tale [of WWII] ends, but only in 1949, when the Chinese Communists attained power [and China’s long civil war ended]. Paradoxically, the Communists greatly benefited from Japan’s intervention in the long Chinese civil war because the Japanese focused on annihilating the Nationalist conventional forces, fatally weakening them** in eight years of high-tempo warfare. [**6**] Yet Japan lacked sufficient troops to garrison China’s vast hinterland, where **the Communists used the breathing space from Nationalist persecution to organize the peasantry**. These two factors—**Japanese weakening of the Nationalists and the Communist breathing space to organize—tipped the post-World War internal balance of power in favor of the Communists** [in the long Civil War]….

**Americans often portray international events in terms of what the United States did or did not do. This outlook presumes enormous influence for themselves and discounts the ability of others** to make choices. Such presumptions also obviate the need to understand the motivations and decisions of others. **The conventional tale of World War II focuses on the heroism of American commanders and the brilliance of American leaders and, if generous, gives some credit to the civil and military leaders of Great Britain. It is amazing how many histories ignore the contribution of Russia, where until the end of the war Germany always deployed at least two-thirds and generally four-fifths of its army. The contribution of China to the victory over Japan receives still less attention even though from 1942 until 1945 [admittedly with US aid and not with much success on the battlefield] Japan deployed more forces against China than against the United States for every year except 1944. American soldiers found their German and Japanese counterparts to be lethal foes, and yet Americans too often fail to credit those who fought the preponderance of these forces**.

**There is no shame in leaving the ground fighting to others; rather this is a hallmark of a sound maritime strategy**. As Britain’s great philosopher, scientist, lawyer, and statesman Sir Francis Bacon (1561-1626) [**7**] observed, “[H]e[[2]](#footnote-2) that commands the sea is at great liberty, and may take as much and as little of the war as he will. Whereas those that be strongest by land are many times in great straits.” **The United States** has emulated the **British** maritime strategy of **keeping the seas open to trade so that the home economy can produce uninterrupted by warfare, of relying on its oceanic moat to insulate itself from foreign threats, and of fighting wars far from home, at times and places of its choosing. Land powers possess no such strategic flexibility: fighting often occurs on home territory, which disrupts the economy, while a maritime enemy can cut off their overseas markets and an attacking neighbor can choose the time and place of hostilities**.

Maritime powers, such as the United States [and Great Britain], primarily influence the littoral[[3]](#footnote-3)—the places where they can most easily project military, diplomatic, and economic influence. Continental powers such as China and Russia [and Germany] influence events deep inland along their land borders. **Curiously, although Japan was a maritime power by geography, its leaders conceived of their homeland as a continental power, with the Imperial Japanese Army the dominant military service. This misidentification entangled Japan in wars on the Asian mainland that it need never have fought**.

The conventional tale [of World War II] also misses many of the key turning points. History is the study of choices, not of immutable fate. If Japan had halted its expansion with Manchuria, an area sufficiently large to grant it the comparative economic self-sufficiency its leaders craved, Japan could have awaited either U.S. entry into the brewing war in Europe or the Russian collapse from the Nazi onslaught. Either alternative would probably have left Japan in control of Manchuria. The Japanese decision to extend war to the rest of China was a point of no return that entailed expanded war aims, growing foreign support for the Nationalists, and escalating foreign embargoes on Japanese trade. The decision to escalate in 1937 was just one of many turning points.

The Japanese call these turning points “incidents,” and the Chinese have adopted this nomenclature… The so-called China Incident of 1937 [8] was no minor untoward event but a massive escalation of a regional war that resulted from decisions made by leaders on both sides [Japan and China].Often neither the Chinese nor the Japanese wanted to acknowledge their wars [and so they use such euphemistic terms to] downgrade… their wars [and alter their historical meaning thereby]…. The so-called China Incident of 1937 [8] was no minor untoward event but a massive escalation of a regional war that resulted from decisions made by leaders on both [the Chinese and Japanese] sides….

Long ago Confucius admonished the educated to choose their words carefully lest they misidentify phenomena: “if the names are not rectified, then words are not appropriate. If words are not appropriate, then deeds are not accomplished.”[[4]](#footnote-4) **Even a modest attempt at multiculturalism [to help distance oneself from the America-centered conventional tale of World War II] would reveal a surprisingly complicated nomenclature for World War II [in Asia-Pacific], the generic title for the conventional tale. Imperial Japanese leaders called the war against the United States, the British Commonwealth and the Netherlands the War of Greater East Asia (**[大東亜戦争](http://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E5%A4%A7%E6%9D%B1%E4%BA%9C%E6%88%A6%E4%BA%89)**) and defined all prior sound and fury emanating from Manchuria and China as mere “incidents”—the 1931 Manchuria Incident and the 1937 China Incident. This reflected a practical consideration: before Pearl Harbor, a declaration of war on China would have triggered the U.S. Neutrality Act and embargoes of war materiel against both sides [and the desire among conservative Japanese historians to downplay the scale and destructiveness of these “incidents”].**

**Postwar Japanese historians divide into two groups: one highlights the Fifteen Year War (十五年戦争) from 1931 to 1945, and the other distinguishes a Japanese-Chinese War (日中戦争) from 1937 to 1945 from a Pacific Ocean War (太平洋戦争) from 1941 to 1945. Those who begin the war in China in 1937, not 1931,** consider the invasion of Manchuria to have been an “incident” and focus on Japan’s fight against the Nationalists [as opposed to armies of other “denominations,” such as this or that warlord], which did not begin until 1937. **This version of events ignores the fact that the Nationalists never controlled much of North China, let alone Manchuria, and so discounts all the northern Chinese who fought Japan from 1931 to 1937. As it turns out, whatever the euphemism, Japan conducted uninterrupted conventional and counterinsurgent military operations on the internationally recognized territory of China from 1931 to 1945.**

**The Chinese and the Taiwanese focus on their War of Resistance against Japan (抗日戰爭) from 1937 to 1945 [like the Japanese but for different reasons] with minimal reference to the United States let alone, in the case of the Communists, to the Nationalist contribution to Japan’s defeat.** [[5]](#footnote-5) **This tale emphasizes the [9] heroic fight of the Communists or the Nationalists, opinions dividing along the Taiwan Strait**. Communist dating follows their division of the long Chinese civil war into the First Revolutionary Civil War from 1924 to 1927 (the years of the First Nationalist-Communist United Front), the Second Revolutionary Civil War from 1927 to 1937 (the years of Nationalist encirclement campaigns against the Communists), and the Third Revolutionary Civil War from 1945 to 1949 (the showdown phase of the long civil war).

In fact, from 1931 to 1934, the Communists could not fight the Japanese because repeated Nationalist encirclement campaigns sent them on a Long March to desolate Yan’an. **Even after 1937, Nationalist, and not Communist, forces did virtually all of the conventional fighting by Chinese. In the end, [however,] the U.S. naval offensive homing in on Japan, the U.S. air campaign over Japan, and the Russian pincer from mainland Asia account for the Japanese capitulation. Yet the U.S. offensive on Japan could not have occurred without China’s pinning the bulk of the Imperial Japanese Army far from the U.S. invasion route.**

In other words, each country has its own conventional tale [that inflates the contribution of that country and reduces or marginalizes the role of others to greater or lesser extents]….

The tale told here is one of **nested wars** set off by fears and ambitions against a backdrop of lethal national dilemmas The choices made by national leaders reflected not only the ambitions for empire of Japan, China, and Russia, but also deep fears and dilemmas with no obvious solutions….

[10] … **Fears and ambitions animated both the Communists and Nationalists, who dreamed of a reunified Qing empire and the restoration of China as the greatest power in Asia if not the world. Meanwhile, the Japanese feared the expansion of Soviet influence in Asia and the Western protectionist response to the Great Depression. Their fears and ambitions for empire met in Manchuria. Fears and ambitions also drove the Russians, who envisioned their country in the vanguard of a new international order replacing the discredited liberal democratic status quo. Yet everywhere the Chinese, the Japanese, and the Russians faced danger, hostile neighbors, and internal foes. Meanwhile, the Americans dreamed away the 1920s, ignoring the need to contain Germany and the many interconnections of the global economy**. Desperation did not reach American shores until the stock market crash in 1929. Soon desperate decisions around the globe reflected the desperate times.

**In the 1930s, China, Japan, Russia, and the United States all tried to go their separate ways. But the long Chinese civil war fed into a regional war that escalated into a global war, demonstrating the inescapable connections of living on a shared planet. Eventually, the separate ways converged into a global war, which determined the outcome of the regional war, and the outcome of the global and regional wars then strongly influenced that of the long Chinese civil war—a war whose ramifications preoccupy policy makers still**….

[**11**] Adding and connecting the missing links not included in the conventional tale [of the World War II] shed light on the critical events that helped make the Chinese and Japanese who they are today. **The missing connections, which primarily concern non-Western protagonists, are necessary to understand current Asian relations, whose fulcrum is not bilateral U.S. relations with any one power, but remains the nexus of Chinese, Japanese, and Russian relations that the conventional tale skips. The tale told here begins with [the] three protagonists: Japan, China, and Russia**.

[271]

CONCLUSION

Civil War as the Prologue and Epilogue

to Regional and Global Wars

**Japan, the United States, and Russia all intervened in the long Chinese civil war but none achieved their desired long-term goals**. **Japan** sought a productive extension of its empire. The **United States** envisioned a unified, democratic, and capitalistic China. **Russia** planned for a dependent and dependable client. Instead, [Concerning the effect of Japan’s regional war in China on the outcome of the long Chinese civil war,] **Japanese military strategy produced the very outcome it was designed to prevent. By destroying the Nationalists’ conventional forces while the Chinese Communists cultivated rural support behind Japanese lines, the strategy positioned the Communists to win the final chapter of the long Chinese civil war to produce a unified, Communist, and viscerally anti-Japanese China**. [Illustrating the inability of both the US and Japan to prevent expansion of regional war into Asia-Pacific portion of global war] **U.S. diplomacy in the 1930s instead of deterring, accelerated Japanese expansion to transform a regional war in China into a two-front global war for the United States. Likewise, Japanese attempts to deter the United States from intervening in Asia produced U.S. intervention on an unprecedented scale [as it defeated Japan in the Asia-Pacific portion of the global war]**. [Illustrating impact of US intervention in long Chinese civil war,] Meanwhile, **U.S. aid to the Nationalists caused long-term Chinese Communist antipathy without any compensating Nationalist loyalty**. [Illustrating a Soviet success in intervention in long Chinese civil war that affected Japan’s regional war in Japan in a way that prevented a global war situation the Soviets couldn’t win—a two front war against both Germany and Japan,] **In the short term, Russia alone achieved its intermediary goal to set up China in 1936 to fight Japan in 1937 so that Japan and Germany would not combine against Russia in a fatal two-front war. Brokering the Communist-Nationalist Second United Front was Stalin’s greatest diplomatic achievement because it saved communism in Russia [by preventing the two-front nightmare of war against both Germany and Japan]. [However, long-term failure of Soviet intervention in China’s long Civil War,] In the long term, however, Chinese animosity toward Russia built as Chinese [Communist] leaders slowly realized that Russia’s China policy was designed to meet Russian not Chinese goals and that these goals, despite their shared faith in communism, often sharply diverged [and the tensions created perhaps are the root of the Sino-Soviet split of the post-Civil War period].**

FEAR, AMBITION, DILEMMAS, NESTED WARS,

AND PIVOTAL DECISIONS

Leaders in Japan, China, and Russia were all motivated by powerful ambitions [in getting involved in the Chinese Civil War] and deep-seated fears, which produced intractable dilemmas. Within living memory [at that time] **Japanese leaders** had transformed a traditional society into a great power. They were intent upon retaining Japan’s place among the powers [a place it had achieved by the First World War] and carving out a role in international relations commensurate with its economic and political achievements at home. **With the Great Depression they feared for Japan’s economic well-being in a world of escalating tariffs and spreading communism among the world’s unemployed. In particular, they feared Russian expansion in China and attempts to take advantage of the debilitating civil war that had broken out upon the fall of the Qing dynasty**. [Thus illustrating the causal relation between the long Chinese civil war and Japan’s regional war in China.] **Japanese leaders had compelling reasons to intervene in China. Capitalism was down for the count. Communism was anathema. Diplomacy was ineffective. Playing by the rules established by the Western powers promised economic disaster, while disregarding the rules risked war and isolation. Uninvited, the Imperial Japanese Army stepped in to the rescue.**

**The Nationalist leaders of China** [dealing with internal Chinese conditions and a growing Japanese presence in the country] also nursed powerful ambitions and deep-seated fears. **Chiang Kai-shek** had just achieved the impossible by reunifying China through military force and astute coalition building during the Northern Expedition. **His generation of Nationalist leaders dreamed of creating the modern institutions to restore China to its traditional place of greatness in all fields of human endeavor. Yet lethal dilemmas dogged their steps: Essential land and tax reforms threated to return outraged warlords to the field of battle; the restoration of Chinese sovereignty threatened foreign interests—particularly those of Japan, which had repeatedly shown a willingness to intervene militarily; unified military command risked defections [of warlords incorporated into Chiang’s coalition]. Chiang played the careful balancer of competing factions, dividing in order to rule. Consistent policy would have been antithetical to the requirements for political survival in an environment lacking strong institutions. The Nationalists needed foreign aid, but only the Germans and the Russians were forthcoming, and the latter exacted a dangerous [273] price: protection of the Chinese Communist Party, whose ultimate objective was the overthrow of the Nationalist Party and of the social structure of China.**

**To become strong enough to withstand these many threats, the Nationalists required decades of peace to create, build, and reform, but the tone-deaf Japanese orchestration of events stirred public demands in China for retaliation**. Retaliation, however self-satisfying in the mind’s eye, led to a war that derailed any hopes of reform. Yet unrelenting Japanese territorial expansion finally left Chiang little choice—the government was dead either way, so better to go down fighting. As he said, “It is better to fight to the death than surrender to death.”

**The Chinese Communists** [in dealing with the conflict with the GMD and the massive arrival of the Japanese beginning in 1937] **also faced lethal dilemmas. They aimed high at regime change but had few resources at their disposal**. At the beginning they openly worked within Nationalist civil and military organizations during the First United Front as they slowly acquired administrative and military expertise, but with the White Terror they barely survived their early education. They then applied their learning in scattered base areas, where they put their governmental skills into practice. Again they barely survived their continuing education after a succession of Nationalist annihilation campaigns culminated in the Long March. **They sought protection from Nationalist predations through a Second United Front, in the hope that Nationalist attentions would turn from them to the Japanese and that, when Japan intervened, Japanese attentions would focus on the Nationalists not the Communists. The Communists required foreign aid to fight conventionally, but the powers capable of providing the aid demanded a high price: Manchuria’s industrial base (for Russia) or democracy (for the United States)**.

**Russia’s leaders** had also aspired to the impossible. They had reunited the tsarist empire and implemented a political, social, and economic revolution, wiping out entire social classes to become the world’s first communist nation and to live the dream of Karl Marx. **They envisioned world revolution and communism for all, but external events were not encouraging. Communist revolutions failed in Europe, leaving the least industrialized and therefore least likely environments for proletarian revolution. The great powers reacted viscerally to Russia’s social and economic revolution, which promised to overturn their own social and economic structures as well. They united to isolate Russia diplomatically. Russia also needed peace to rebuild after a world war and a civil [274] war but feared foreign invasion. For many years, its leaders did not believe their system could survive without sister revolutions abroad. So they sought friends where they could and found many in China, where intellectuals saw Russia’s recent experience as a model to restore their own shattered land. Russian ideological expansion then threatened the great powers, particularly Japan, which paid the most careful attention to events in China**.

**The Western powers get underserved [sic] credit for their supposed influence over the course of modern Chinese history. They operated in highly visible treaty ports, where the Western historians of China congregated…. In the tragic story of the long Chinese civil war, China, Japan, and Russia were the main protagonists. Only at the very end did the United States play a very visible but highly ineffective role. The other Western powers played even smaller supporting roles. They simply tried to ride out the civil war, whichever way it went, and focused on the treaty ports, where they hoped to maintain commerce as usual**.

**China’s civil war was not a simple war, but rather a complex nested war. It was a multigeneration civil war within a protracted regional war with Japan, within a multiyear global war involving all the great powers. The intervening powers each focused on their layer of the conflict, the regional war for Japan and then the global war after it attacked U.S., British, and Dutch interests across the Pacific. The United States focused exclusively on the global war and never understood why the civil war had to remain the focus for the Chinese. The Chinese knew full well that once the global war ended and the United States left, the civil war would resume full throttle, so they fought the global war always with an eye to its impact on the civil war and expected the global war to determine the outcome of the regional war. The Russians also focused on the global war and played China to their best advantage in the territorial results of that war. Unlike the Americans, the Russians also paid careful attention to both the regional and civil wars because these events took place on their borders. The outcome of all three layers of conflict had direct national security implications for Russia, whereas wide oceans insulated the Western powers.**

[275] The long Chinese civil war was a two-generation national calamity. For thirty-eight years there was no unitary state. In Max Weber’s measure for effective governance, the state did not have a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence. Those in command of armies used violence against whomever they pleased. Chiang had more armies owing him personal loyalty than anyone else… [However,] The command structure of the Nationalist military reflected the coalitional nature of the army and government. Warlords joined the Nationalists in a yin-and-yang pattern. When Chiang’s star was rising during the Northern Expedition and Nanjing decade, they joined. When they saw his star falling in Manchuria, they defected en masse.

China’s problems multiplied with the outbreak of regional war when Japanese leaders could no longer tolerate the escalating chaos in their most important neighbor. The Japanese military envisioned a quick decisive victory… Events did not play out as anticipated. When the Nationalists refused to recognize Japanese dominance of Manchuria, the Japanese ratcheted up the military pressure and the area of military operations in order to bring China to terms…. [B]ut the military strategy chosen to achieve success produced economic exhaustion instead, requiring ever greater winnings to justify the escalating costs. But greater demands and escalating cruelty made the Chinese less, not more likely to reach an accommodation.

**Desperation among Japanese leaders took a suicidal turn with the decision to expand the war across the Pacific to cut U.S. and British supplies to the Nationalist government and to seize Dutch oil interests to overcome the Western oil embargo. On 7-8 December 1941, Japan expanded its list of active adversaries from one (China) to five with the addition of the United States, Britain, Australia, and New Zealand. Japanese overseas resource dependence in combination with U.S. maritime dominance spelled disaster for the Japanese empire. The United States intervened massively but influenced events primarily on the littoral, not in China. It forced the Japanese back to the home islands… [276] Russian influence over China, as the bordering land power, was far more significant than that of the distant maritime powers. In the final weeks of the [linked regional and global] war, Russia deployed 1.5 million men to occupy Manchuria and influence the unfolding final chapter to the long Chinese civil war**.

**The global war in combination with the regional war altered the outcome of the long Chinese civil war. Japan uprooted the social structure, binding people to the land in rural China. The gentry lost its hold and many fled, opening the way to Communist guerilla forces. The Japanese gutted the Nationalists’ armies and discredited Chiang’s military and economic leadership, while inadvertently allowing the Communists to cultivate a mass following in North China. Together Japan and the United States removed the most effective bastions against the spread of communism in Asia: Japan gravely weakened the Nationalists in the regional war; while the United States overthrew Japan in the global war. Russian leaders took swift steps to help the Chinese Communist Party fill the political vacuum**.

[**YET] Foreign intervention in other people’s civil war has unpredictable results. Although the Russians successfully set up the Chinese to fight Japan in World War II, the Chinese Communists subsequently ignored repeated admonitions to halt their offensive at the Yangzi River. Stalin wanted a divided China, like the reconfigured Poland, Germany, Azerbaijan, and Korea, whose division kept these neighbors weak. Mao ignored the advice and pressed on. Instead of a weak China, Russia faced a resurgent and increasingly hostile power, whose rise portended long-term foreign-policy complications [for the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia].**

**Japanese intervention in the Chinese civil war produced the opposite of the intended outcome. The Japanese failed to perceive the strategic consequences of their military operations. They did not adequately examine their own rationale for going to war against the United States, let alone their tragically misguided military strategy in China, which strengthened rather than weakened their [Communist] foes They then botched their diplomacy inside and outside China: they could have settled with the Nationalists to keep Manchuria de fact if not de jure. Under anything but the most extreme circumstances, the United States was not positioned to intervene aggressively in Asian affairs, let alone in Japanese domestic affairs. Japanese attacks throughout the Pacific produced the extreme circumstances. In the 1920s, Japan and the United States still [277] shared an interest in a stable, non-Communist China. Going to war with each other had the disastrous implications for the future of China, opened the way to communism, and took the lives of a generation of young men, lives that could have been more productively spent in virtually any other pursuit than in killing each other….**

**[281] Thus, the fall of the Qing dynasty, the Northern Expedition, the Second United Front, the outbreak of the war of the Pacific, the decision to contest Manchuria, and the Communist victory in the Chinese civil war were all pivotal events altering the course of Asian history**.

Pivotal events often occur in pairs because events usually occur not by the decision of one side but in combination with the reaction of the other. Western protectionism in combination with strident Japanese nationalism precipitated the Japanese invasion of Manchuria. **Russian brokering of the Second United Front at Xi’an in combination with the Japanese knee-jerk reaction to the Nationalists’ alliance with the Communists produced the lethal escalation of the Second Sino-Japanese [282] War in 1937. The Japanese decision to expand the war throughout the Pacific and the visceral U.S. reaction to the attack on Pearl Harbor produced the march on Japan. The combined decisions of the Nationalists and Communists to focus on the Manchurian theater shaped the outcome of the Chinese civil war**….

1. But what about the Indies, Malaya and Singapore, the Philippines etc. and the notion of GEACPS as a Japan dominated economic zone. Paine seems to be discounting this and portraying the “southern strategy” as nothing more than closing GMD supply lines to and from the Western powers. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Bracket is Paine’s emendation. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Areas close to shores of river, lake or ocean. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. P. 314, FN 6: “Confucius, *The Analects*, trans. Raymond Dawson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), book 13, paragraph 3.” [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. On p. 123-124, Paine clarifies this puzzling situation with Chinese (Nationalist and Communist) using the same periodization (though different nomenclature: *kangri zhanzheng* vs. *RiZhong zhanzheng*) as the Japanese:

   [**123**] **Historical convention** in both East and West dates the Second Sino-Japanese War as beginning in **1937**. From the **Chinese Communist Party point of view**, this dating emphasizes that the **Nationalist armed resistance to Japan began only in 1937—contemptibly late in the game**. From **the Nationalist Party point of view**, the dating emphasizes the **Japanese campaign to occupy its capital and the bitter fighting between its conventional forces against those of Japan**. From the **Japanese point of view**, the conventional dating implies that **Manchuria was not a part of China**, and therefore the hostilities emanating from Manchuria were separate from the war between Japan and China, so Japan was not so bad after all because Manchuria was up for grabs. **Yet both the nationalists and Communists agree that Manchuria was and is an integral part of China, and, since World War II, Japan has also recognized this fact. If so, then basic logic reveals a war that began in 1931, not 1937**.

   In 1931 Japan invaded Manchuria and fought against local resistance that it did not largely suppress until 1933. While Japanese and Chinese historians referred to these events as the Manchurian Incident, the facts on the ground fit the narrowest definition of a war even if the parties involved were too polite to call it such. Although Nationalist troops did none of the fighting, other Chinese did, mainly Manchurians, most of whom were ethnic Han Chinese, not Manchus. The occupation of Manchuria did not sate the Japanese, who continued to expand their zone of occupation in North China from 1933 to 1936, what [**124**] I impoliticly call the North China Campaign. Again, although the Nationalist armies did not fight the Japanese, North Chinese did. So again even under the narrowest definition of warfare, war continued between Japanese main forces and Chinese insurgents from 1933 and 1935, and the battlefields was located on Chinese territory.

   **Although the Japanese were not always fighting the Nationalists from 1931 to 1945, they were always fighting Chinese forces of one denomination or another, hence the term “Sino-Japanese War” (not Nationalist-Japanese War or Communist-Japanese War) and hence the dating of 1931 to 1945…. Different sides took up arms against Japan at different times, but… they were all Chinese**, so Sino-Japanese War is the accurate designation. It was the second such war between China and Japan. The First Sino-Japanese War had occurred between 1894 and 1895. So the Second Sino-Japanese War is the accurate terminology. Confucius might approve of a name rectified at last….

   **Accurate periodization emphasizes that warfare continued in China from 1931 onward, so 1937 constituted an escalation, not a beginning**. Using 1937 as the starting date sanitizes Japanese activities. Japan… armies killed insurgents and civilians, torched villages, and took over the economic assets of the occupied areas [throughout the entire 15 year period of its war in China]. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)