

TAMING THE RED DRAGON: PEACE OPERATIONS IN NORTH CHINA

A Monograph

by

Major Robert L. Burton

United States Marine Corps



School of Advanced Military Studies
United States Army Command and General Staff College
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

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Name of Candidate: Major Robert L. Burton

Monograph Title: Taming the Red Dragon: Peace Operations in North China

Approved by:

_____, Monograph Director
G. Stephen Lauer, Ph.D.

_____, Seminar Leader
Christopher T. Drew, COL, EN

_____, Director, School of Advanced Military Studies
Henry A. Arnold III, COL, IN

Accepted this 22nd day of May 2014 by:

_____, Director, Graduate Degree Programs
Robert F. Baumann, Ph.D.

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ABSTRACT

TAMING THE RED DRAGON: PEACE OPERATIONS IN NORTH CHINA, by Major Robert L. Burton, USMC, 42 pages.

After the Allies defeated the Japanese in World War II, they directed US Marine forces to land in North China, accept the surrender of a large Japanese force, and supervise their repatriation. Upon completion in 1946, they remained in China to assist General Marshall in his efforts to fulfill the US goal of a unified democratic China encompassing the political rapprochement of the Nationalists and the Communists. These efforts were unsuccessful, and the conflict erupted into civil war. In 1949, the last contingent of Marines withdrew. It is the hypothesis of this monograph that the North China Marines received orders to withdraw when the cost of achieving the political aim exceeded its value. Using a case study methodology for the chronological period 1945-1949, the study reveals the impact and effect of the US political and strategic aims on the operational ways and tactical means employed in an attempt to meet these aims. Tenets derived from the current US Marine Corps doctrinal publication *Campaigning*, and the contemporary *Small Wars Manual*, provide the lens through which to understand the Marine Corps' perspective of the campaign.

This topic is relevant to future peace operations or contingencies. If the United States become engaged in operations similar to Afghanistan or Iraq, understanding previous operations will be critical. These wars of limited aims provide useful lessons for the operational artist.

This monograph concludes that although the Marines withdrew from North China without defeating the Communists, it was not due to their tactical failures. National policy, and the strategic aims derived there from, determined that the cost to achieve a democratic, unified China was not worth the value of securing it.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACRONYMS	vi
ILLUSTRATIONS	vii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
STRATEGY AND CHINA.....	6
Nationalists	7
Communists	9
United States	11
CAMPAIGN DESIGN	17
Supporting the Strategic Aims	18
Entry into North China.....	22
Support of Mediation Efforts	27
Withdrawal.....	34
CONCLUSIONS	35

ACRONYMS

AC	Amphibious Corps
CNA	Chinese Nationalist Army
FMFWesPac	Fleet Marine Forces Western Pacific
MARDIV	Marine Division
MAW	Marine Air Wing

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1. North China Marines Operations Area.24

INTRODUCTION

The U. S. Marines have no part in the establishment of our nation's policy. We are an organization whose traditional duty is to support and uphold that policy and to protect American lives and property in any part of the globe. We are in China to carry out the directives of our State Department or those of General Marshall. This we propose to do.

— Major General Samuel L. Howard, 1946

Following the end of World War II, a blood feud renewed between the Chinese Nationalist Government and the Chinese Communist Party.¹ From 1945 until 1949, the United States assigned Marines to the northern areas of China to stabilize the conflict and maintain a peace. However, the conflict never abated and eventually escalated into a full-scale civil war. Why were the Marines withdrawn from North China before securing the peace? The Marines only engaged the Communists eighteen times and suffered less than fifty casualties when they departed China in May 1949.² This was insignificant when compared against the losses from World War II, and fails to rationalize the withdrawal. The answer to this question poses relevance to future peace operations that the United States engages in. As major operations in Afghanistan wind down, US forces are more likely to be engaged in limited contingency operations with similar aims.

¹Herbert Feis, *The China Tangle: The American Effort in China, from Pearl Harbor to the Marshall Mission* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 81-82. The Chinese Communist Party was once part of the Nationalist government, known as the Kuomintang, in 1923. In 1927, a rift emerged between these two factions, and the Kuomintang expelled the Communists. The Communists fought a rebellion against the Nationalist government until 1936 when the Japanese invaded. During the Japanese occupation, the Communists and Nationalist temporarily united in defense of China.

²Henry I. Shaw, *The United States Marines in North China, 1945-1949* (Washington: Historical Branch, G-3 Division, US Marine Corps, 1968), A1-A2. During these peace operations, the Marine forces in North China underwent several organizational changes due to World War II demobilizations. Initially designated the III Amphibious Corps (AC), they were subsequently designated Marine Force China in June 1946, and Fleet Marine Forces West Pacific (FMFWesPac) in May 1947. To alleviate confusion, all Marine forces operating in North China are referred to as North China Marines.

In *On War*, Prussian war theorist Carl von Clausewitz wrote, “[T]he more modest your own political aim, the less importance you attach to it and the less reluctantly you will abandon it if you must.”³ According to Clausewitz, the value incurred from an intervention shapes the amount of effort applied toward it. As the strategic value is likely to vary through time, policy certainly affects and influences the tactical means throughout the operation.⁴ As the policymakers’ value in the ends evolves, so will the limitations on the means and ways for attaining it. This monograph posits the North China Marines withdrew when the cost for success exceeded its political value. The shifting policy aims directed a change to the strategy. Consequently, the relevance of the campaign objectives and the Marines’ perception of tactical success diminished. At the onset of the North China operations, in 1945, the strategy aimed at removing the Japanese from the Chinese Theater and unifying the government. As the civil war erupted the following year, US policy shifted toward a limited effort focused on enabling a Nationalist victory. Near the end of the crisis, 1947—1949, the United States reduced its support of the Nationalists as the Communists became more successful.

Like Clausewitz, modern United States Marine Corps (USMC) doctrine also declares the prominence policy holds over the tactical ways and means. Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1-2 *Campaigning* states, “Political policy determines the aims of each combatant’s strategy and directs each side’s conduct.”⁵ It further states that strategy “involves the establishment of military strategic objectives, the allocation of resources, the imposition of conditions on the use of force, and the development of war plans.”⁶ However, imposed conditions or limitations create

³Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Peter Paret and Michael Howard (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 81.

⁴*Ibid.*, 87.

⁵United States Marine Corps, Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1-2: *Campaigning* (Quantico, VA: US Government Printing Office, 1997), 4.

⁶*Ibid.*, 5.

operational constraints, which an enemy can easily exploit. The Marine Corps' 1940 *Small Wars Manual* suggests that, "Interventions or occupations are usually peaceful and altruistic. Accordingly, the methods of procedure must rigidly conform to this purpose; but when forced to resort to arms to carry out the object of the intervention, the operation must be pursued energetically and expeditiously in order to overcome the resistance as quickly as possible."⁷ This statement reinforces the consideration of political aims during tactical actions. Peace operations pose even greater risk because of the implied emphasis on restricting violence. Yet, as the *Small Wars Manual* states, violence is sometimes required to achieve peace.

After the Allies defeated the Japanese in World War II, a large contingent of Japanese forces remained in North China. In 1945, the Commander in Chief Pacific Command, Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, directed the USMC's III Amphibious Corps (III AC) to land near Shanghai, accept the Japanese forces surrender on behalf of the Chinese Central Government, and supervise their repatriation.⁸ Known as Operation BELEAGUER, the Marines forces occupied various positions within Shantung and Hopeh provinces. When the Marines completed the Japanese repatriation in 1946, they remained in China to assist General George C. Marshall, President Harry S. Truman's appointed mediator, in establishing peace between the Nationalists and the Communists. However, the Communists were unwilling to yield to the United States or compromise with the Nationalists. As the Chinese civil war grew stronger, the Marine presence diminished. By May 1949, the Communists captured Shanghai and the last company of Marines redeployed from China.⁹

⁷United States Marine Corps, Fleet Marine Force Reference Publication 12-15: *Small Wars Manual*, 1940 reprint (Quantico, VA: US Government Printing Office, 1990), 1-8.

⁸Commander in Chief Pacific Command Staff, "Command Summary of Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, USN, volume 7," *US Naval War College*, 1945, 217-220, http://aws3.digark.us/NWC/DS/001/PDFA/NWC_DS_001_01_v7_WEB.pdf (accessed March 15, 2014).

⁹Benis M. Frank, Henry I. Shaw, Jr., and United States Marine Corps, *Victory and Occupation*, (Washington, DC: Historical Branch, G-3 Division, US Marine Corps, 1967), 661.

Throughout the period of occupation, the Marines and Communists never fought a sustained battle over a few hours in length. The Marines were battle-tested and well prepared, at least initially, to eliminate any threat to their mission. Communist General Chou En-lai warned the III AC Chief of Staff, Brigadier General William A. Worton, to stay out of Peiping while he was conducting advance party preparations in 1945.¹⁰ General Worton replied, “III Corps was combat experienced and ready, that it would have overwhelming aerial support, and that it was quite capable of driving straight on through any force that the Communists mustered in its path.”¹¹ The Marines prepared for and anticipated combat during Operation BELEAGUER.

Campaigning states that, “Strategy guides operations in three basic ways: it establishes aims, allocates resources, and imposes restraints and constraints on military action.”¹² It also states, “Strategy translates policy objectives into military terms by establishing the military strategic aim.”¹³ *Small Wars Manual* states that policy is “of course binding upon the forces of intervention, and in the absence of more specific instructions, the commander in the field looks to them for guidance.”¹⁴ As a chronological case study, this monograph illustrates the shift in US strategic aims from 1945—1949, and the corresponding effect it had on the ways and the tactical means employed to achieve those aims. This study filters its analysis through tenets derived from modern and contemporary doctrine in order to understand the Marine Corps perspective of the campaign. In examination of the strategic aims, this monograph considers the political objectives, military objectives, and their compatibility to one another.

¹⁰General Chou En-lai would later become the first Premier of the People’s Republic of China in 1949.

¹¹Frank and Shaw, 548.

¹²United States Marine Corps, *Campaigning*, 10.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴United States Marine Corps, *Small Wars Manual*, 1-6.

Marine Corps doctrine also utilizes the concept of “art of campaigning” to express how commanders arrange tactical actions and forces to achieve strategy objectives.¹⁵ In describing how imposed limitations affect a campaign design, *Small Wars Manual* says, “The political authorities do not relinquish active participation in the negotiations [*sic*] and they ordinarily continue to exert considerable influence on the military campaign. The military leader in such operations thus finds himself limited to certain lines of action as to the strategy and even as to the tactics of the campaign.”¹⁶ Modern Marine Corps doctrine is more descriptive of these influences. *Campaigning* states that, “in the conduct as well as the design of a campaign, the overriding consideration is an unwavering focus on the goals of our strategy. The aims, resources, and conditions established by strategy are the filter through which we must view all our actions.”¹⁷ Those same filters are applied to examine the North China campaign design.

This monograph utilizes several forms of source material to study the North China operations. It reviews the national guidance related to China from Congressional hearings, as well as notes from General George C. Marshall’s mediation efforts.¹⁸ These personal documents and memoirs of Marshall offer insight into the strategic context of the China-United States relationship during this time. They also assist in understanding the North China Marines’ operational constraints and restraints. Secondary sources, such as George Moorad’s *Lost Peace in China* and Edward L. Dreyer’s *China at War, 1901-1949*, present the Chinese Communist

¹⁵United States Marine Corps, *Campaigning*, 64.

¹⁶United States Marine Corps, *Small Wars Manual*, 1-7.

¹⁷United States Marine Corps, *Campaigning*, 64.

¹⁸General Marshall testified in 110 sessions of the United States Congress on multiple bills throughout his career. The testimonies of particular interest to this monograph are the ones provided in his role as the President’s Special Representative to China (1945-1947) and as the US Secretary of State (1947-1949).

perspective of the period and provide a more coherent context to the strategic situation.¹⁹

Additionally, relevant operational documents and Marine Corps unit chronologies aid in the determination of the tactical actions conducted and allows an assessment of their operational and strategic relevance. Articles and documents written by individual participants in the North China operations, such as retired Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Palmer and former 1st Marine Division (MARDIV) G-3, Colonel Henry Aplington, also provide greater comprehension of the tactical challenges.

This monograph analyzes the North China campaign through the lens of the strategic, operational, and tactical levels using the tenets described above, relative to the Marine Corps' understanding developed in *Campaigning and Small Wars Manual*, to find a comprehensive perception of the interactions between these levels. The organization of the monograph is in two sections: the first section examines the strategic aims of the Nationalists, Communists, and the United States at 1945 and how they evolved through 1949. The second section evaluates the campaign design's congruence with the strategic aims from 1945-1949. These sections are followed by conclusions drawn from the case study that provide considerations for future peace operations or limited contingency operations. With the end of the Second World War, establishing peace on US terms became of paramount importance, nowhere more important to US interests than in its interactions with the largest nation on earth—China.

STRATEGY AND CHINA

The context of the situation and the strategic aims of the various players in China were integral to any evaluation of the conditions placed upon peace operation there and the evolution of strategy. In North China, the interests and interactions of the United States, Nationalists, and

¹⁹Edward L. Dreyer, *China at War, 1901-1949* (New York: Longman, 1995); George Moorad, *Lost Peace in China* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1949).

Communists are key to understanding the nature of the problem. The political objectives derived from this understanding were critical for establishing the military objectives.

Campaigning clearly reflects the subordinate and complementary nature of military objectives to the political goals. It states, “We must always remember that the political end state envisioned by policy makers determines the strategic goals of all military actions.”²⁰ The North China campaign demonstrates the consequences shifting political aims have on military objectives.

The initial understanding of the problem was integral to Operation BELEAGUER’s objectives and neutrally oriented policies in 1945. However, by 1946, US policy presented a more supportive stance of the Nationalists’ efforts, and the military mission subsequently adapted. After 1946, the United States began losing faith in the Nationalists’ potential for success, and military efforts scaled back significantly.

Nationalists

When World War II ended in 1945, the Chinese Nationalist Army (CNA) was largely intact, but the Nationalist government was economically and administratively weak and had very little influence on the North China region. Although there was a perception that the Nationalists actively resisted Japanese occupation, they largely preserved the CNA by avoiding confrontation. The government of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, the Nationalist and US recognized leader of China, was an ineffective regime and established policies that devastated the Chinese economy.²¹ Additionally, the Nationalists’ lack of presence in North China at the conclusion of World War II

²⁰United States Marine Corps, *Campaigning*, 10.

²¹Albert C. Wedemeyer, *Wedemeyer Reports* (New York: Holt, 1958), 468-471.

made their assertion of control more difficult.²²

In 1931 Japan invaded and occupied Manchuria, interrupting a four-year civil war between the Nationalists and Communists.²³ While the Nationalists resisted initially, by 1941 resistance waned and many joined the Japanese puppet armies to fight the Communists.²⁴ Many Chinese believed the Japanese would eventually leave, but the Nationalist-Communist tension would persist. In 1941, Generalissimo Chiang said, “You think it is important that I have kept the Japanese from expanding during these years...I tell you it is more important that I have kept the Communists from spreading. The Japanese are a disease of the skin; the Communists are a disease of the heart.”²⁵ During World War II, the Nationalists remained passive to the Japanese occupation, rebuilt their forces, and focused its efforts to counter Communist expansion. They viewed themselves as weakened from fighting the Japanese prior to 1941, and believed it was the United States’ obligation to complete the Japanese defeat. Although the United States provided weapons and supplies to the Chinese for resistance against Japan, the Nationalists stockpiled much of it for the anticipated civil war with the Communists.²⁶

Economically, Nationalist controlled areas suffered tremendously from currency inflation, whereas the Communist controlled areas were relatively stable. In *Anvil of Victory*, a history of the Chinese civil war, political scientist Stevin I. Levine wrote, “Notwithstanding the numerous problems it encountered in the realm of economic work the Communist leadership succeeded in the difficult task of supplying grain, industrial goods, and services to the armies in

²²United States Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945, The Far East, China*, vol. 7 (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1969), 552-553, <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1945v07> (accessed April 1, 2014).

²³Dreyer, 170.

²⁴Ibid., 291.

²⁵Moorad, 33.

²⁶Dreyer, 290.

the field and providing for the needs of the urban population without engendering the economic chaos that plagued the Nationalist territories.”²⁷ Once the Nationalists took control of North China after the Japanese surrender, Chiang’s government established extremely high exchange rates for the Nationalist currency, which further damaged the economy.²⁸

As the Japanese forces prepared to surrender in 1945, Chiang feared that the Communists would gain control and authority over the occupied areas. He wanted the Japanese forces to surrender only to loyal commanders; however, Chiang did not have any commanders or forces positioned near North China to accept the Japanese surrender. On August 12, 1945, he ordered the Japanese to maintain their positions until he could move forces into the region. With U.S. assistance, Nationalist forces were able to occupy key locations within North China and begin transition from Japanese control. Unfortunately, the Nationalist forces quickly marginalized themselves by oppressing the North Chinese populace, who they viewed as Japanese sympathizers.²⁹

Communists

During the years preceding Operation BELEAGUER, the Communists gained a greater advantage in North China than the Nationalists did. Although Japan was a common enemy to both the Nationalists and Communists, the Communists focused on surviving and building a political base.³⁰ By limiting military engagements, the Communists maintained much of their combat power but also reinforced a perception of resistance. This perception, as well as more effective leadership, gave the Communists creditability in North China.

²⁷Steven I. Levine, *Anvil of Victory: The Communist Revolution in Manchuria, 1945-1948* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 195-196.

²⁸Dreyer, 314.

²⁹Ibid., 313-314.

³⁰Ibid, 307.

Under Mao Tse-tung's leadership, the Communists chose a protracted campaign against the Japanese occupiers in North China. In a series of 1938 lectures, Mao emphasized a focus of irregular warfare and building a base of support in order to defeat the Japanese.³¹ The little military effort expended, though, was aimed at both Nationalist forces and the Japanese occupiers. The Japanese often retaliated against the limited Communist raids with punitive action against the North Chinese populace. For example, in 1941, the new Japanese commander of the North China Area Army, General Okamura Yasuji, implemented the "Three All" campaign, which punished or destroyed Communist sympathizers and their base areas.³² However, these retaliatory measures only galvanized North Chinese support against the Japanese occupiers and their puppet armies. The Communists' irregular warfare was effective at keeping pressure on their enemies and building local support without risking annihilation.³³

During World War II, the Chinese Communists were effective at mobilizing rural support by leveraging the Japanese anti-Communist propaganda and instituting policies that appealed to the peasants.³⁴ In North China, the Communists posed the greater threat to the Japanese. The Japanese often released anti-Communist propaganda, which only elevated the Communists' prestige in the rural areas. The peasants perceived the Japanese fear of the Communists as an indication of their effectiveness.³⁵ The Communists also exploited the Nationalists' land policies to engage rural support. They installed peasant associations, formed village militias, and seized

³¹Mao Tse-tung, "On Protracted War," *Marxist Internet Archive*, last modified 2004, http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_09.htm (accessed December 20, 2013).

³²Dreyer, 253. "Three All" represented a campaign intended to "kill all, burn all, and destroy all."

³³*Ibid.*, 238-240.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 250.

³⁵*Ibid.*

land from landlords, which they returned to the peasants.³⁶ Through these efforts, the Communists appeared as the best representative of the rural population's interests

Another advantage the Communists held in North China was the success of their economic policies and administrative capabilities. In 1944, the American Yen-an Observer Group, also known as the "Dixie Mission," began assessing the Communists in order to coordinate efforts against the Japanese.³⁷ They reported that the Communist regions were thriving economically due to emphasis on production of cotton and other crops.³⁸ A State Department representative on the Dixie Mission, John S. Service, commented on the high competence of the Communist leaders in his reports. In a September 1944 dispatch to the American Ambassador, he reported, "The general impression one gets of the Chinese Communist leaders is that they are a unified group of vigorous, mature, and practical men, unselfishly devoted to high principles, and having great ability and strong qualities of leadership."³⁹ With such leadership and successful policies, the Communists easily maintained a grip on North China.

United States

President Harry S. Truman appointed General George C. Marshall, U.S. Army, as an envoy to resolve the Chinese conflict in 1945.⁴⁰ In a personal letter to General Marshall, President Truman stated he was "anxious that the unification of China by peaceful, democratic methods be

³⁶Wesley M. Bagby, *The Eagle-Dragon Alliance: America's Relations with China in World War II* (London: University of Delaware Press, 1992), 106.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 112.

³⁸United States Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1944, China*, vol. 6, (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1967), 525, <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1944v06> (accessed April 1, 2014).

³⁹*Ibid.*, 556.

⁴⁰Levine, 53.

achieved as soon as possible.”⁴¹ Additionally, the “U.S. Policy toward China,” the Department of State’s official position on China at the time, acknowledged that China’s single party government hindered peace and advocated that the Chinese government be “broadened to include other political elements in the country.”⁴² President Truman and the State Department’s rhetoric reflect the notion that the political conflict could be resolved peacefully through diplomacy. Thus, the United States’ strategy at the beginning of Operation BELEAGUER hinged on a policy of neutrality and Japanese repatriation.

The most urgent objective was the rapid repatriation of the surrendered Japanese forces. The secondary objective of supporting the Nationalist government’s control and lack of Nationalist forces required an alternative force to maintain security along the lines of communication within North China. Reluctance to use the US Marines in these positions, because of the perceived danger, forced the United States to maintain Japanese forces in certain areas.⁴³ Nationalist forces, numbering 56,000, arrived in Peiping and Tientsin on October 29, 1945. They were expected to assume responsibility for the repatriation efforts. However, they focused on recruitment efforts, leaving the Japanese to secure the railroads.⁴⁴ At the end of 1945, the III AC only repatriated 33,500 Japanese.⁴⁵ By the conclusion of the repatriation efforts in July 1946, over 540,000 Japanese returned home from North China.⁴⁶

Another US political objective in 1945 was to bolster the Nationalist government’s

⁴¹“President Truman’s Letter of Instructions for General Marshall,” in *George C. Marshall’s Mediation Mission to China: December 1945-January 1947*, ed. Larry I. Bland, Roger B. Jeans, and Mark F. Wilkinson (Lexington, VA: George C. Marshall Foundation, 1998), 550.

⁴²“US Policy toward China,” in *George C. Marshall’s Mediation Mission to China: December 1945-January 1947*, ed. Larry I. Bland, Roger B. Jeans, and Mark F. Wilkinson (Lexington, VA: George C. Marshall Foundation, 1998), 553.

⁴³Frank and Shaw, 568.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid., 580.

⁴⁶Ibid., 607.

capability, but not appear unduly favorable. Enhancing the Nationalist government would create a viable economic and international partner while diminishing the Communists' influence. In August 1945, the commander of US Forces China Theater issued a directive "to make every effort 'to avoid participation in any fratricidal conflict in China.'"⁴⁷ The US State Department's "U.S. Policy toward China," issued in December 1945, also stated, "U.S. support will not extend to U.S. military intervention to influence the course of any Chinese internal strife."⁴⁸ The State Department also declared, "The U.S. recognizes and will continue to recognize the National Government of China and cooperate with it in international affairs."⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the United States sought a neutral posture while mediating between the parties. The United States wanted the Nationalist government to defeat the Communists, but would not support their efforts with material aid or military forces. This impartiality failed to strengthen the Nationalist government's internal credibility. Instead, it enhanced the Communists' ability to build their military and popular support within North China.⁵⁰

A final US objective was to support the deployment of Nationalist troops into North China and reestablish government control.⁵¹ The United States sought to relieve the Marines' and Japanese positions to facilitate the repatriation efforts, minimize US presence, and bolster the Nationalist government's legitimacy. Within the first post-war year, the United States lifted over 360,000 Nationalist troops to North China.⁵² However, the Nationalists recognized that extending the US presence was advantageous and preserved combat power to apply against the Communists directly. The Nationalist forces were concerned with confronting Communists forces in

⁴⁷Frank and Shaw, 533.

⁴⁸"US Policy toward China," 553.

⁴⁹Ibid., 553.

⁵⁰Frank and Shaw, 569-570.

⁵¹"US Policy toward China," 552.

⁵²Robert A. Churley, "The North China Operation," *Marine Corps Gazette*, October 1947, 12.

Manchuria and did not want to commit forces to security details in North China. General Marshall, on the other hand, felt that the Marines' presence in North China impeded his peace negotiations with the Communists.⁵³

In 1946, the United States increased its efforts to bolster the Nationalist government and placed greater emphasis on security.⁵⁴ This had a twofold effect. First, security of China's coal shipments contributed to the region's stability by filling humanitarian and industrial needs. Secondly, this filled a critical security gap and gave the Nationalists more flexibility to combat the Communists in Manchuria.

Until late 1946, the III AC was responsible for securing the coalmines and railways. Freedom of movement for the coal shipments was crucial to the industrial areas, and provided both humanitarian and economic benefits.⁵⁵ In response to the Nationalist reluctance to assume security responsibilities from the III AC, the China Theater Commander, U.S. Army General Albert C. Wedemeyer, assigned the Marines the mission. In a directed dated December 6, 1945, he stated, "It is desired that you take the necessary action to protect the port of Chinwangtao and the rail line and rail traffic to Chinwangtao to the extent necessary to permit the movement to and outloading from Chinwangtao of at least 100,000 tons of coal per month destined for Shanghai."⁵⁶ This activity, however, exposed the Marines to danger, created greater tension with the Communists, and made the Nationalist government appear weak.

Between the years of 1947—1949, US interest in Nationalist success began to diminish.

⁵³Frank and Shaw, 604.

⁵⁴Allan Reed Millett, *Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marine Corps* (New York: Macmillan, 1991), 451.

⁵⁵*Hearing before the Committee on International Relations*, S 2202, Foreign Assistance Act of 1948, 80th Cong., 2d sess., February 20, 1948, 5, <http://24.248.93.98/gsd1274//collect/congress/index/assoc/HASH0112.dir/doc.pdf>, accessed August 14, 2013.

⁵⁶Frank and Shaw, 575.

United States' policy makers during this time came to believe that Communist regimes in the Soviet Union, and potentially a Communist China, might aggressively expand their reach throughout both Europe and Asia. Although keen to curb Communist expansion in Asia, the United States did not want to compromise these efforts at the expense of similar ones in Europe. During George C. Marshall's congressional testimony in 1948, Representative Walter H. Judd (R-MN) commented that Congress had no problems sending \$590 million of aid to Europe, but strongly opposed sending \$18 million to China.⁵⁷ During the same testimony, Secretary Marshall also commented on the dilemma of prioritizing the counter-Communist efforts:

Furthermore, on the side of American interests, we cannot afford, economically or militarily, to take over the continued failures of the present Chinese Government to the dissipation of our strength in more vital regions where we now have a reasonable opportunity of successfully meeting or thwarting the Communist threat—that is, in the vital industrial area of Western Europe with its traditions of free institutions.⁵⁸

Although aware of the strengthening of the Communist movement in China, the United States was unwilling to accept risk to its efforts in Europe, thus demonstrating that the value of the strategy and tactical effort in China was less than elsewhere.

The Chinese economy was one of the key contributors of instability in China, but the United States declined to provide the level of assistance required to alleviate it. Even earlier, in 1945, the United States knew it could not afford to prop up China's economy. The 1945 "U.S. Policy toward China" said, "It must be clearly recognized that the attainment of the objectives herein will call for an expenditure of resources by the U.S. and the maintenance for the time being of United States military and naval forces in China. These expenditures, however, will be minute in comparison to those which this nation has already been compelled to make in the

⁵⁷S 2202, *Hearing*, 24. George C. Marshall was appointed Secretary of State in 1947 and served in that position until 1949.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 9.

restoration of the peace which was broken by German and Japanese aggression.”⁵⁹ In 1948, Secretary Marshall testified that the Chinese Communists would likely succeed unless the United States was willing to “underwrite the Chinese military effort on a wide and probably increasing scale, as well as the Chinese economy.”⁶⁰ The failing Chinese economy only reinforced popular support for the Communists’ policies and ideals.⁶¹

The changing balance of power within China were the first signs of irresolvable conflict, because the Communists developed a greater degree of popular support in North China, and the Japanese surrender contributed to a power vacuum. Additionally, the United States did not appreciate the political ends that the Nationalists and Communists sought. The United States perceived the dynamic as resolvable political differences; however, it was apparent that each side actively prepared for and anticipated the subsequent civil war during World War II. Japanese operations in China during World War II were only a temporary respite from the ongoing struggle between the Chiang led Nationalists and Mao led Communists. Instead of unifying the Chinese against the Japanese aggressors, the two parties conserved their efforts and focused on strengthening their post-war positions to conduct civil war.⁶²

The shifting strategy from 1945—1949 reflected the low prioritization of China. The United States initially believed that the Nationalist-Communist conflict was amenable to a political solution through peaceful means and adopted a deliberately neutral stance. However, this facilitated the success of the Communist forces, and their refusal to accept a political solution and allowed the Nationalist government to demonstrate its political and military weakness and unwillingness to negotiate such a political endstate. By 1946, the failure of the US approach was

⁵⁹“US Policy toward China,” 554.

⁶⁰S 2202, *Hearing*, 8.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 4.

⁶²Dreyer, 290.

apparent. The United States attempted to support Nationalist efforts by supplanting their security responsibilities and maintaining a neutral rhetoric. As Communist successes mounted, the United States distanced itself from the Nationalists by drawing down economic and military support. The disjointedness of US strategy had ominous consequences for the military campaign.

CAMPAIGN DESIGN

The incongruence between political and military objectives as well as the neutrality mandate contributed to a flawed campaign design of Operation BELEAGUER, especially when viewed as a method for linking tactical actions to strategic aims.⁶³ The campaign did not reflect an appropriate approach for pursuing limited objectives or a vision for conflict termination. In addition, due to the neutrality mandate, the Marines were unable to direct any offensive effort against the Chinese Communist armed forces that attacked the Marines and sought to deny them freedom of movement. Handicapped by the national strategy, the Marines were unable to design a measured, planned approach to support the changing strategic aims. Initially, US policy sought the unification of China.⁶⁴ The corresponding operational objectives pursued by the Marines were the removal of Japanese forces as well as limited support of the Nationalists' security efforts.⁶⁵ By mid-1946, the US strategic aim centered solely on the unification of the Communists and Nationalists into a Nationalist-led government. The Marines, in turn, continued to secure the lines of communication, which reinforced the Nationalist attempts to consolidate power militarily. Thus, it appeared to be in conflict with the strategic aim of unification through the appearance of supporting only the Nationalist military objective. By 1947, the strategic aims indicated an

⁶³United States Marine Corps, *Campaigning*, 16.

⁶⁴Michael Parkyn, "Operation BELEAGUER: The Marine III Amphibious Corps in North China, 1945-49," *Marine Corps Gazette*, April 2001, 33.

⁶⁵Colin Colbourn, "Caught in the Crossfire: Marines in North China, 1945-49," *Leatherneck*, April 2008, 44.

acceptance that the Communist-Nationalist conflict was irresolvable. Consequently, the Marines' operational objectives adapted to protection of American personnel and property, a change that was more closely aligned to US strategic and policy goals.

Supporting the Strategic Aims

The key obstacle that interfered with the Marines' operational objectives was the Communist forces, specifically the 8th Route Army. Examined through the lens of both current and contemporary doctrine, actions against the Communists were critical for the Marines' campaign. However, these actions were not in consonance with the initial strategic aim of a unified democratic China. The *Small Wars Manual* and *Campaigning* indicate that the Marines' operational approach faced significant challenges linking tactical tasks to the strategic aims.

The *Small Wars Manual*, published in 1940, was a manual that encapsulated the Marine Corps' experiences fighting small-scale contingencies in the Caribbean. The manual defined small wars as "operations undertaken under executive authority, wherein military force was combined with diplomatic pressure in the internal or external affairs of another state whose government is unstable, inadequate, or unsatisfactory for the preservation of life and of such interests as are determined by the foreign policy of our Nation."⁶⁶ Published only five years prior to Operation BELEAGUER, this doctrine was relatively current. Additionally, its definition of small wars correlated well to the situation in North China at the time. In the context of small wars, the manual stated, "The purpose should always be to restore normal government or give the people a better government than they had before, and to establish peace, order, and security on a permanent basis as practicable."⁶⁷ The greatest threat to a stable and secure North China, that was susceptible to military action, was the Communist 8th Route Army. Yet, the lack of offensives

⁶⁶United States Marine Corps, *Small Wars Manual*, 1-1.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 1-17.

against the 8th Route Army demonstrated that the Marines did not envision an end state without them, thus supporting by their tactical actions the strategic aim of a unified democratic China.

Campaigning delineates two types of operational approaches: annihilation and erosion.⁶⁸ Annihilation approaches seek to deprive the enemy of the ability to resist; whereas, an erosion one is aimed at his will to resist.⁶⁹ Furthermore, annihilation campaigns seek unlimited military objectives while erosion campaigns typically seek limited ones.⁷⁰ Marine Corps doctrine also describes limited political objectives as ones in which it may be acceptable for the enemy leadership to survive and remain in power.⁷¹

The limited political objectives in North China also narrowed the Marines' options for compelling Communist cooperation with the peace efforts. The United States hoped that the Communists and Nationalists would establish a democratic government composed of multiple parties. Therefore, the survival of the Communist party was acceptable and the political objectives were limited. Appropriately, the military objectives were also limited. When both military and political objectives are limited, current Marine Corps doctrine prescribes an erosion approach.⁷² Active measures to erode the enemy, however, may have been contradictory to US strategic aims at the initiation of the campaign. Although prescribed by current doctrine, the Marines' campaign design made no effort to erode the Communist military's capabilities and make them accept peace. The United States sought a peaceful resolution between the Nationalists and Communists, without defining how the military power injected into North China supported the strategic aim of peace through unification in a democratic China. Without a specified and

⁶⁸United States Marine Corps, *Campaigning*, 36.

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Ibid., 38.

desired end state for military actions, it was impractical to develop a campaign concept that actively pursued such success.

The neutrality mandate, dictated by US policy, restrained the Marines' efforts against the enemy's center of gravity. In the terms of current doctrine, *Campaigning*, it was the military element that most endangered the North China Marines' mission accomplishment. That element was the Communist 8th Route Army.⁷³ This army, composed of an estimated 200,000 soldiers in 1945, conducted large-scale raids and ambushes against the Marines, attacked the railroad networks, and fought the CNA for control of Manchuria in the northeast.⁷⁴ Collectively, these actions presented the Marines with the greatest obstacles for establishing peace in North China. Between October 1945 and January 1948, the Marines suffered 54 casualties – 12 killed and 42 wounded – from clashes with the 8th Route Army.⁷⁵ Although the 8th Route Army posed the greatest threat to the peacekeeping operations, the III AC's limited its activities to defensive measures due to explicit guidance to remain neutral, which was directly supportive of the US strategic aim. In an interview conducted several years later, General Rockey commented he “felt that it was ‘difficult but essential’ to comply with the directive not to get involved in the Chinese civil strife and that it accurately reflected majority American opinion at the time.”⁷⁶

Campaigning suggests that the targeting of an adversary's critical vulnerabilities is integral to an enemy's defeat. A central component of this idea is to avoid the enemy's strengths while attacking his weakness or vulnerabilities. If these vulnerabilities undermine a key strength, then they are critical.⁷⁷

⁷³United States Marine Corps, *Campaigning*, 42.

⁷⁴Churley, 12.

⁷⁵Shaw, A-1 – A-2.

⁷⁶Frank and Shaw, 570.

⁷⁷United States Marine Corps, *Campaigning*, 43.

Using this logic, the key to success for the North China Marines was not to confront the 8th Route Army directly, but identify and attack its critical vulnerability. For the 8th Route Army, this was the loyalty and sympathy of the North Chinese villagers. The Japanese managed to suppress Communist activity through intimidation and retaliation, an option neither desirable nor acceptable to the United States.⁷⁸ Possibly, the vulnerabilities had yet to emerge. *Campaigning* suggests vulnerabilities may require exposure through “a progressive sequence of actions.”⁷⁹ The Marines possessed a superior advantage in weapons, mobility assets, and aviation platforms, and the application of these advantages might have conceivably revealed or created vulnerabilities for attack. But such actions may have further strengthened the loyalty of the villages in and around which the Marine forces operated in North China.

Both contemporary and modern doctrines demonstrate that actions against the 8th Route Army were imperative for campaign success. Unfortunately, the constraints emplaced on the Marines’ use of force indicated that policymakers failed to appreciate the military actions required to achieve the political objectives. While current and even contemporary Marine doctrine emphasized taking the fight to the enemy, this operational approach was incompatible with the limited objectives of the United States in North China. The inability to direct any offensive effort to compromise the enemy’s center of gravity hampered the development of a Marine campaign that met Marine doctrinal understanding, and was another indicator of the campaign’s flaws. Considering the disconnect between the limited US political and strategic aims and the doctrinal prerequisites of an erosion approach, the III AC lacked the luxury of pursuing a doctrinally coherent campaign. The impacts of these challenges were more apparent in the tactical

⁷⁸Aplington, 55.

⁷⁹United States Marine Corps, *Campaigning*, 43.

actions conducted during the campaign.⁸⁰

Entry into North China

As the Marines prepared to enter North China in 1945, US policy aimed for a unified, democratic China.⁸¹ The operational objectives assigned by General Wedemeyer to the Marines included repatriation of the Japanese forces as well as assistance to the Nationalists in their efforts to assert control over the area.⁸² After accepting the Japanese surrender, the Marines rapidly filled the power vacuum as the CNA redeployed to North China. While attempting to legitimize the Nationalist government, the Marines pressed for an expedient relief by the CNA. However, the CNA took advantage of the Marines' presence and focused on securing Manchuria.⁸³ Consequently, the Marines continued securing the railroads, key urban areas, and ammunition depots and exposed themselves to numerous Communists attacks. The Marines performed their defensive duties, suffered casualties, but never mounted an attack on the Communists due to policy restraints. Though these tactical actions were successful, they limited the Marines' options and failed to militarily support the ultimate political goal of a democratically unified China.

From 1945—1946, the primary operational requirement for the North China Marines was removing the Japanese from the conflict area, and thus narrowing the conflict to two belligerents. The Marines had to accomplish three key tactical actions. First, the Marines were to accept the Japanese surrender. There was risk in this step because many feared that the Japanese would be noncompliant. Next, the Marines moved to fill the power vacuum until the Nationalists could consolidate power over North China. Finally, the Marines had the mission to make the actual arrangements to repatriate the Japanese to their homeland.

⁸⁰Parkyn, 32.

⁸¹Ibid.,33.

⁸²Colbourn, 44.

⁸³Levine, 40.

Initially, the North China Marines' task organization under the III Amphibious Corps comprised of two divisions and one air wing.⁸⁴ At its peak, III AC was comprised of approximately 50,000 Marines and Sailors.⁸⁵ One of the fundamental requirements for concluding World War II was the formal surrender of Japanese forces. In North China, the Japanese forces' surrender carried additional importance because of the internal conflict of the Nationalists and Communists. The Marines of III AC hoped for a peaceful surrender, but expected a contested one. In reference to this period, a former intelligence officer of III AC later wrote, "It was hoped, but by no means certain, that Hirohito's acceptance of the surrender terms would mean the docile submission of the thousands upon thousands of Nipponese troops in China."⁸⁶ The Japanese North China Area Army numbered over 200,000 and operated largely independent of the rest of the Japanese forces.⁸⁷ In support of the strategic aims of repatriating the Japanese, the Marines received the task to accept the Japanese surrender.⁸⁸ The III AC conducted an amphibious landing in North China with the 1st MARDIV, 6th MARDIV, and 1st Marine Air Wing (MAW). By September 30, 1945, III AC landed its entire force. The 1st MARDIV had its operational responsibilities in Hopeh province, with the 6th MARDIV in Shantung province, and elements of the 1st MAW based at airfields in both provinces.⁸⁹

⁸⁴Palmer, 24.

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶Churley, 11.

⁸⁷Ibid., 12.

⁸⁸Levine, 38.

⁸⁹Shaw, 1-7.

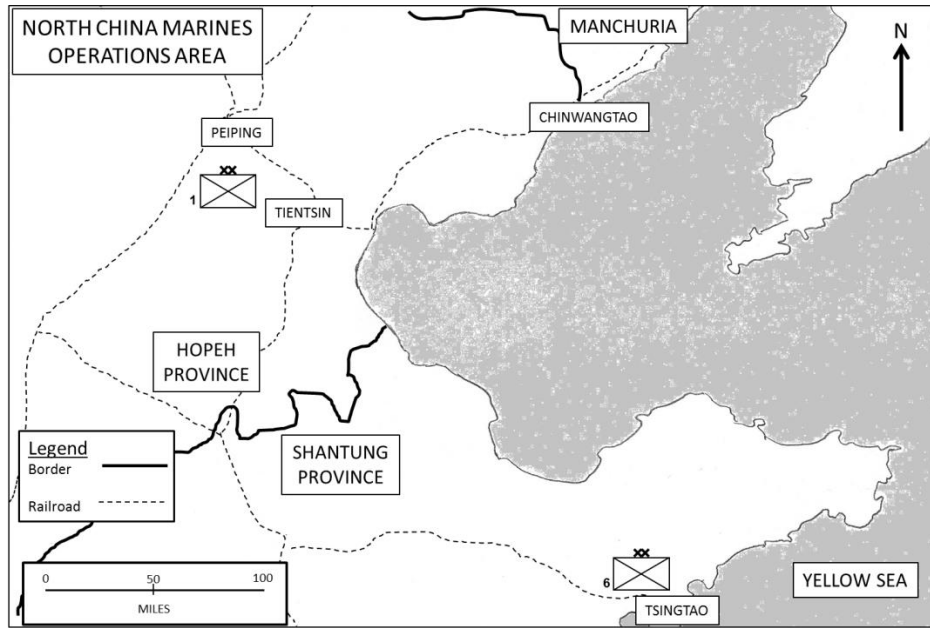


Figure 1. North China Marines Operations Area.

Source: Created by author.

The United States realized that the Communists had a geographical advantage over the CNA in terms of the surrendering Japanese. The CNA needed to outmaneuver the Communists to preserve a claim on legitimate authority. The Communists felt entitled to its control and declared their intent to enter the Japanese-controlled areas and accept the Japanese surrender. Chiang, in return, ordered the Japanese to surrender only to Nationalist forces. However, the Nationalist forces were hundreds of miles away from North China and lacked the mobility to move there. The redeployment of these forces would still take time, which made the III AC's landings more urgent.⁹⁰

Following the Marines' landing in their respective areas of operations, the North China Area Army fully cooperated with and surrendered to the Marines and representatives of the

⁹⁰Thomas A. Palmer, "The First Confrontation US Marines in North China 1945-1947," *Marine Corps Gazette*, April 1970, 24.

Nationalist government by the end of October 1945. Some elements of the Japanese forces were puppet troops and transferred their loyalties to either the Nationalists or the Communists. Other elements of the North China Area Army occupied outposts outside of the major garrisons. Chiang directed these forces to maintain their positions until relieved by either the Marines or Nationalists.⁹¹ The swift and effective landings of the III AC were critical components to achieving the peaceful surrender of the Japanese.

The railroads and bridges in North China were important for the Nationalist regime because they facilitated the movement of coal from the North Chinese mines to Shanghai as well as the movement of CNA troops to Manchuria. Conversely, Communist attacks on these lines of communication undermined the Nationalist efforts for economic recovery and complicated their offensive efforts. At the beginning of Operation BELEAGUER, Japanese forces guarded the railroads; however, the United States faced the dual task of relieving the Japanese for repatriation and assuming the control of the railroads.⁹² In November, the United States agreed to guard the railroad bridges to free up Nationalist troops for clearing Communist forces that threatened the railroads.⁹³ These actions intended to maintain the policy of neutrality by avoiding direct confrontation with the Communists.

The Peiping-Mukden Line was the primary railroad in North China and provided the principle land route between Manchuria and North China. It also transported coal from mines in Tang Shan and Linsi to Peiping.⁹⁴ Coal was crucial for revitalizing China's economy and averting a humanitarian crisis. On December 6, 1945, General Wedemeyer stated coal shipments were a "military necessity that at least 100,000 tons of coal reach Shanghai every month," and ordered

⁹¹Shaw, 1-7.

⁹²Frank and Shaw, 584.

⁹³Ibid., 586.

⁹⁴James D. Hittle, "On the Peiping-Mukden Line," *Marine Corps Gazette*, June 1947, 18.

the Marines to protect these shipments.⁹⁵ The protection of the coal shipments was a new operational objective, which was still in line with the strategic aim of a unified China, but contradicted the mandate to remain neutral. Chinese Communist attacks on the Peiping-Mukden line presented the opportunity to deny these shipments to the Nationalists and effectively blockade the major cities of North China.⁹⁶ The Marines secured the Peiping-Mukden Line through numerous outposts and air patrols.⁹⁷ Although these railroad and bridge outposts intended to defend against Communist aggression, they received only a few heavy machine guns and mortars.⁹⁸

The Peiping-Mukden Line also provided the most secure and only overland route for the Nationalist's operations in Manchuria. Due to Soviet and Chinese Communist opposition, the Nationalists could not enter Manchuria via its ports. U.S. Navy policy prevented the sealift of Nationalist troops if potential existed for resistance. Consequently, Peiping-Mukden Line became the principle line of communication for the Nationalists.⁹⁹ The Communists knew that this was the CNA's critical vulnerability. In November 1945, the US Embassy in China reported, "The principle weapon of the Communists in their efforts to prevent the Central Government from occupying areas dominated by them is the effectiveness of Communist troops against the railroads in those areas."¹⁰⁰ Between October 1945 and August 1946, Communist units attacked the Marine guards on the Peiping-Mukden Line at least eight times. These attacks wounded only

⁹⁵Albert C. Wedemeyer, *IIIAC War Diary* (December 1945), quoted in Henry I. Shaw, *The United States Marines in North China, 1945-1949* (Washington: Historical Branch, G-3 Division, US Marine Corps, 1968), 11.

⁹⁶Churley, 14.

⁹⁷Frank and Shaw, 588.

⁹⁸Hittle, 18-20.

⁹⁹Frank and Shaw, 569-570.

¹⁰⁰United States, *United States Relations with China, with Special Reference to the Period 1944-1949* (St. Clair Shores, MI: Scholarly Press, 1971), 110.

a single Marine, killing at least 11 Communists.¹⁰¹ Despite the Communists' apparent reluctance to attack the Marines guarding the railroads with large forces, they demonstrated a clear threat to the Marines' mission.

Due to the Japanese North China Area Army's cooperation, the Marines landed unopposed and established security in their area of operations in North China until the CNA arrived in significant numbers. As the Nationalist troops flowed into the region, the Marines turned their focus to their original objective of repatriation. From the time of surrender until August 1946, over a half million Japanese, both military and civilian, were returned to Japan.¹⁰² Using Japanese merchant ships and ships donated by the United States, the Marines utilized two primary ports for processing. In Hopeh province, 1st MARDIV shipped the Japanese citizens through the port at Tangku. The 6th MARDIV processed repatriates at the Tsingtao port in Shantung.¹⁰³ Although the Marines initiated the repatriation process, they were able to turn over the primary responsibilities to the CNA in February 1946. General Wedemeyer knew that the CNA was eager to acquire the Japanese weapons and munitions that the Marines secured, and would not release it until the Nationalist assumed the repatriation mission.¹⁰⁴ The Marines, however, maintained oversight and assistance until the mission concluded six months later.¹⁰⁵ In less than a year, the Marines successfully removed one of the major obstacles to stability in North China.

Support of Mediation Efforts

In November 1945, President Truman appointed General Marshall to head mediation

¹⁰¹Shaw, A1-A2.

¹⁰²Churley, 12.

¹⁰³Ibid.

¹⁰⁴Shaw, 13.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 13-14.

efforts between the Nationalists and Communists. Due to the success of the Japanese surrender operations, the United States turned its focus to its other aim of unifying China.¹⁰⁶ United States viewed the Nationalists as the legitimate authority and wanted them to extend their authority over North China without assistance. However, the Nationalists were not prepared to do so. The Marines instead provided the initial foothold on the area. Although the Marines expected this to be a temporary task, it lengthened due to the CNA's reluctance to conduct a relief in place and their focus on Manchuria. The longer the Marines held the key areas, the more freedom the CNA troops had for offensives against the Communists, particularly in Manchuria.¹⁰⁷

With the support of the surrendered Japanese forces, the Marines provided interim security in North China, a campaign derived task, while the Nationalist forces moved into the region.¹⁰⁸ However, the CNA was more interested in securing Manchuria before the Communists.¹⁰⁹ The longer the Marines maintained their positions, the more Nationalist forces were available for the Manchurian operations. The first two Nationalist armies, the 92d and 94th, finally airlifted into the key areas of Hopeh province by October 29, 1945.¹¹⁰ Under the presumption that these forces, numbering approximately 56,000, would immediately relieve the Marines, the US China Theater headquarters requested that the III AC begin withdrawing from China by November 15.¹¹¹ Major General Keller E. Rockey, the III AC commander, suspected his view was overly optimistic due to the Soviets lingering in Manchuria.¹¹²

General Wedemeyer, who filled the role of Chiang's chief of staff in addition to his

¹⁰⁶Levine, 52-53.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., 40.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., 38.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 48.

¹¹⁰Frank and Shaw, 568.

¹¹¹Ibid., 569.

¹¹²Ibid.

responsibilities as the American commander of the China Theater, provided his assessment of the China situation to the U.S. Department of War on November 20, 1945. In it, he emphasized Chiang's focus on delaying the relief of the Marines and stated, "The Generalissimo is determined to retain in their present areas the Marines in North China. As a matter of fact he desires the Marines to expose long lines of communications in their occupational area."¹¹³ The longer the Marines had responsibility for maintaining security and stability, the more difficult it became for the United States to maintain impartiality and the Nationalists to extend their legitimacy.

Due to the proximity and influence of the Soviet Union, the Chinese Communists held the advantage in Manchuria. The Nationalists recognized this and made Manchuria a priority for asserting control. This did not diminish the significance of North China, but the Marines' presence offered an economy of force solution for the Nationalists. The longer the Marines had the primary mission for these security operations, the more Nationalists were available in Manchuria.

Although the Soviets agreed to recognize the Nationalists' sovereignty over Manchuria, they instead bolstered the Communist armies by supplying them with captured Japanese munitions and weapons. Due to the Soviets' lack of cooperation and anticipated Communist resistance, a successful landing in Manchuria might prove problematic.¹¹⁴ General Wedemeyer recognized the importance of Manchuria, both economically and psychologically, but cautioned the Nationalists against the effort. When Chiang requested assistance in airlifting two armies into Manchuria, General Wedemeyer pointed out the inability of the CNA to support the extended logistical lines. Instead, he recommended the CNA focus on North China, requiring many months

¹¹³Wedemeyer, 452.

¹¹⁴Frank and Shaw, 569-571.

to stabilize.¹¹⁵

The Nationalists' efforts to secure Manchuria directly inhibited their efforts to relieve the Marines and assume responsibility for North China. In his November 20, 1945, assessment, General Wedemeyer also wrote, "The Gimo (Generalissimo) would like to concentrate plans based on conducting a campaign against the Chinese Communists instead of repatriating the Japanese."¹¹⁶ The Nationalists' focus on Manchuria compromised their ability to establish legitimate domain over North China. As one Marine Corps historian aptly wrote, "The Nationalists' premature Manchuria operation contained within it the seeds of Nationalist destruction, and they ripened in a few short and bloody years into total defeat."¹¹⁷

To facilitate his negotiations with the Communists, General Marshall ordered a twenty percent cut to the North China Marines' forces in January 1946.¹¹⁸ As a result, the 6th MARDIV reduced to a brigade, with 4th Marine Regiment as the core unit. III Amphibious Corps strength, consisting of 1st MARDIV, 1st MAW, and 3rd Marine Brigade, fell to approximately 38,000 troops in April. The US China Theater Command also deactivated and became U.S. Army Forces in China, while operational control of III AC passed to the US Navy 7th Fleet, further complicating missions and command and control.¹¹⁹

As the repatriation efforts ended, the Marines' concentrated more heavily on supporting General Marshall's mediation efforts. The strategic aim at this point centered more clearly on unifying China. On June 10, 1946, III AC deactivated, along with elements of 1st MAW. With a total force of approximately 25,000, the remaining units reorganized as Marine Forces China. The

¹¹⁵Wedemeyer, 450.

¹¹⁶Ibid., 452.

¹¹⁷Shaw, 9.

¹¹⁸Frank and Shaw, 597.

¹¹⁹Shaw, 13-14.

operational objectives pursued by Marine Forces China in support of the strategic aims were to protect American personnel and installations, including requisite port facilities, as well as internal lines of communication.¹²⁰

Restricted from attacking the Communists, the Marines conducted routine security patrols, resupplies, and reconnaissance throughout their areas of responsibility. Despite the US policy of neutrality, the Communists perceived the Marines' presence and activities as actively belligerent and fully in support of the Nationalists. Consequently, the Communists attempted to challenge the Marines and lure them into a fight that US policymakers did not want. The Communists conducted numerous harassing attacks on Marine patrols and guard posts. On July 13, 1946, the Communists had their most significant success, capturing seven Marines near Liu-Shou Ying, Hopeh province.¹²¹ A subsequent six-day patrol was unsuccessful in locating the missing Marines, but a negotiation team eventually recovered them days later.¹²² That same month, one of the most violent clashes occurred between the Marines and Communists. On the 29th of July an estimated 300 Communists ambushed a 23-vehicle supply convoy near Anping.¹²³ The Marines dispatched a quick reaction force, as well as attack aircraft of 1st MAW, but the Communists escaped.¹²⁴ The Communists' escalations in attacks reflected their desire to exploit the Marines' defensive posture and erode US political will.

The Marines' defensive orientation while protecting lines of communication forfeited the initiative to the Communists. The *Small Wars Manual* acknowledged that in interventions, the

¹²⁰Frank and Shaw, 617-618.

¹²¹Aplington, 47.

¹²²Ibid., 54.

¹²³Frank and Shaw, 612-613.

¹²⁴The Marines lost 4 killed and 11 wounded, while the Communists lost at least 12 killed and an unknown number wounded. Shaw, A2.

political efforts usually have primacy over military efforts.¹²⁵ However, it also asserts that removing the threat to peace provides the political solution an opportunity to succeed. “If there is an organized hostile force opposing the intervention, the primary objective in small wars, as in a major war, is its early destruction.”¹²⁶ The *Small Wars Manual* also acknowledged the imperative to retaining the initiative over the enemy in these circumstances. “Even though operating under a strategic defensive campaign plan, regular combatants in contact with hostile forces will emphasize the principle of the offensive to gain psychological supremacy.”¹²⁷ While securing the lines of communication was integral to the strategic aims of a democratic unification, they also diverted the Marines’ ability to gain the initiative against the Communists, illuminating the Marines’ challenge in linking their tactical actions to the strategic aims, especially in light of a reducing force.

Following the Anping attack in July, Marine Forces China further reduced and consolidated their units into three primary locations – Chinwangtao, Tientsin, and Peiping. They also maintained a battalion in Tsingtao to protect the port facilities for the 7th Fleet.¹²⁸ The operational objectives— protection of American installations, personnel, and internal lines of communication- remained unchanged. Upon assuming command of Marine Forces China in August 1946, Major General Samuel L. Howard related his view of the strategic aims. He stated, “The U. S. Government's announced policy is the promotion of peace and harmony in China. General George C. Marshall and the members of his Executive Headquarters are working toward

¹²⁵United States Marine Corps, *Small Wars Manual*, 1-8 – 1-9.

¹²⁶*Ibid.*, 2-2.

¹²⁷*Ibid.*, 2-8.

¹²⁸Shaw, 16-19.

that end.”¹²⁹In regards to the role of his Marines in support of this policy, he said, “The U. S. Marines have no part in the establishment of our nation's policy. We are an organization whose traditional duty is to support and uphold that policy and to protect American lives and property in any part of the globe. We are in China to carry out the directives of our State Department or those of General Marshall.”¹³⁰

Security of the Japanese ammunition supply points became one of the Marines’ tactical objectives in support of Marshall’s efforts. Following the repatriation of the Japanese, the Marines had to secure their leftover weapons and ammunition stores to keep them out of any belligerents’ hands. Provision of these weapons to the Communists was obviously not in the US government’s interest, and arming the Nationalists with them would have compromised the mediation efforts.

One the most significant ammunition supply points was that located in Hsin ho, a few miles west of Tangku, Hopeh province. On October 3, 1946, the Communists made their first attempt to secure the weapons and ordnance under the Marines’ guard, attacking during the night with a force of approximately one hundred men; the Marines repelled them.¹³¹ Although a limited skirmish, the Communists were determined to capture the Hsin ho supply point. A few months later, the Communists made a second attempt. On April 4, 1947, a 350-man element from the 8th Route Army attacked again. Once the attack commenced, reinforcements from Tangku quickly reinforced. However, the Communists anticipated this, and successfully ambushed the Marines en route. This battle proved to be the Marines’ bloodiest encounter with the Communists, suffering 5 dead and 16 wounded. The Communists evacuated most of their dead and wounded, leaving only

¹²⁹Samuel L. Howard , public statement (September 1946), quoted in Benis M. Frank, Henry I. Shaw, Jr., and United States Marine Corps, *Victory and Occupation* (Washington, DC: Historical Branch, G-3 Division, US Marine Corps, 1967), 618.

¹³⁰Ibid.

¹³¹Shaw, A2.

six behind.¹³² The official Marine Corps history sums up the situation well:

The unsatisfactory ending of the second Hsin Ho attack was a grim reminder of the handicaps under which the Marines operated in North China. The initiative rested with the Communists, who attacked when and where they pleased, secure in the knowledge that once they struck and ran they were safe from effective reprisal hidden among the thousands of villagers within a short distance of any Marine post.¹³³

Withdrawal

In January 1947, General Marshall's mediation mission ended in failure. The following month, the Marine forces received the mission to provide support for the evacuation of all US forces from Peiping.¹³⁴ This operational objective reflects the abandonment and failure of the strategic aim of unifying China. Shortly after the April 1947 attack on Hsin Ho, the Marines turned over the remainder of the ammunition to the Nationalists. The final significant restructuring occurred in May 1947 when a majority of 1st MARDIV redeployed, leaving a regiment-sized force designated as Fleet Marine Force Western Pacific (FMFWesPac) in Tsingtao.¹³⁵

Once consolidated in Tsingtao, FMFWesPac, the remaining Marine command in China, focused on protecting the port and preparing to evacuate US nationals, if directed. In November 1948, the Communist successes prompted the US Department of State to order evacuation of US nationals. After supporting the evacuation, most of FMFWesPac redeployed leaving a single battalion in support of 7th Fleet. By June 1949, the last of the Marines departed China.¹³⁶

The repatriation of the Japanese, support of the CNA's redeployment, and various security responsibilities, were key operational objectives and aligned with the mediation and

¹³²R.R. Keene, "Shootout at Hsin ho," *Leatherneck*, November 1995, 33.

¹³³Frank and Shaw, 627.

¹³⁴*Ibid.*, 621.

¹³⁵Shaw, 22.

¹³⁶*Ibid.*, 21-25.

unification efforts. After accepting the Japanese surrender, the Marines rapidly filled the power vacuum while the CNA redeployed to North China. The Marines continued their efforts to isolate the conflict by facilitating the Japanese movement back to their homeland. While attempting to legitimize the Nationalist government, the Marines pressed for an expedient relief by the CNA. However, the CNA took advantage of the Marines' presence and focused on securing Manchuria. Consequently, the Marines continued securing the railroads, key urban areas, and ammunition depots and exposed themselves to numerous Communists attacks. The Marines performed their defensive duties, suffering some casualties, but never mounted an attack on the Communists due to policy constraints. Though successful, the options available to the Marines to do what they doctrinally perceived necessary, were in support of the limited aims articulated throughout the period of the deployment of the Marines to North China.

CONCLUSIONS

As the Nation's preeminent crisis response force, the Marine Corps is often employed with vague political direction; however, its successes tend to overshadow this shortcoming. The North China operation provides an insightful case study for understanding the impact that political guidance can have on future crisis response or limited contingency operations. Additionally, it presents key considerations for future operations. Operation BELEAGUER was a campaign of limited aims with limited means, which led to limited ways to achieve a victory. Although the Marines withdrew from North China without defeating the Communists, it was not due to their tactical failures. National policy determined that the value of a unified China was no longer worth the costs to secure it. In *On War*, Clausewitz declared, "To discover how much of our resources must be mobilized for war, we must first examine our own political aim and that of

the enemy.”¹³⁷ The United States miscalculated both its and the Communists’ value of victory, which affected the means applied toward it.

A poor political assessment and shifting aims were key characteristics of the US strategy for China. Consequently, the strategy imposed limiting conditions upon the Marines and did not resource the effort appropriately from the perspective of Marine Corps doctrine. This denied them the flexibility they believed necessary to achieve campaign goals that supported the aims. Instead, they achieved what they could with what they had. As Clausewitz wrote in *On War*, “No other possibility exists, then, than to subordinate the military point of view to the political.”¹³⁸ However, *Campaigning* suggests, “When conditions imposed by strategy are so severe as to prevent the attainment of the established aim, the commander must request relaxation of either the aims or the limitations.”¹³⁹ This option appeared unavailable for the commanders of the Marines in North China.

The United States’ first misstep in developing its China strategy was its political assessment. The potential for stability and the belligerents’ desired ends were misjudged and contributed to the assessment’s flaws. *Small Wars Manual* states, “In general, revolutionary forces are new levies, poorly trained, organized, and equipped. Yet they can often be imbued with an ardent enthusiasm and are capable of heroism to the extent of giving their lives unhesitatingly in support of their beliefs.”¹⁴⁰ The US misjudged the prospects for stability because it did not acknowledge the extent of Communist popular support. Furthermore, the Communists possessed a superior economic and administrative system. Reliance on the weaker Nationalist institutions for governance in North China during peace operations created a power vacuum that also

¹³⁷Clausewitz, 585-596.

¹³⁸Clausewitz, 607.

¹³⁹United States Marine Corps, *Campaigning*, 12.

¹⁴⁰United States Marine Corps, *Small Wars Manual*, 1-13.

contributed to the instability. The other flaw of the strategic assessment was miscalculation of the political ends of both the Nationalists and Communists. From 1941—1945, neither the Nationalists nor the Communists posed much resistance to Japan. Instead, each side appeared content to let the United States and Allies fight the Japanese while they concentrated on their domestic positions.¹⁴¹ They did not posture only for political advantages, they were preparing for a civil war. The disparate levels of popular support and institutional capabilities in North China indicated an imminent crisis. Additionally, the extent of civil war preparation by each side demonstrated the political ends each sought.

Another flaw in the US strategy for China was the incompatibility of the military objectives with the political ones. The military objectives were to repatriate the Japanese forces, facilitate the Nationalist Army's occupation of North China, and protect the lines of communication. The latter two objectives, however, were contradictory to the neutrality policy and mediation efforts because they exposed the Marines to conflict with the Communists. This misalignment of objectives impeded the success of the national strategy. General Marshall remarked on these challenges in 1947. In a statement, which precipitated his personal withdrawal from China, he said, "I must comment here on the superb courage of the officers of our Army and Marines in struggling against almost insurmountable and maddening obstacles to bring some measure of peace to China."¹⁴²

The key weakness of the flawed military strategy was an inability to line up limited military means with the limited aims of US policy. The political conditions imposed upon the North China Marines denied them the flexibility to compel compliance by the Communists. Therefore, they were unable to eliminate the threat posed by the 8th Route Army. Without

¹⁴¹Dreyer, 266.

¹⁴²Larry I. Bland, Roger B. Jeans, Mark F. Wilkinson, *George C. Marshall's Mediation Mission to China, December 1945-January 1947* (Lexington, VA: George C. Marshall Foundation, 1998), 556.

authority to attack this source of instability, the Marines could not effectively contribute to the unification efforts, as their doctrine determined the neutralization of this force to be critical to their perception of military necessity. Whether this action supported the neutrality mandate and the goal of a unified and democratic China was open to question.

The lessons of Operation BELEAGUER, which may be applied to future contingency operations, include the disadvantages of a disconnect between the perceptions of the military and policymakers in wars of limited objectives, the conflict between legitimacy and neutrality, and the military's doctrinal imperative of rapidly defeating enemy resistance. As demonstrated in this monograph, the political objectives and policy constraints severely limited the military objectives to the point of incongruence. In order to obtain peaceful settlement between two or more belligerents, political consideration of the military component of strategy and the need to retain enough flexibility to enforce the peace, in line with policy objectives, remains critical to successful integration of diplomatic and military aims.

As the North China Marines' experiences reveal, peace operations require a concerted effort from all elements of national power. If diplomacy requires the military's strength to compel the cooperation of the belligerents, restriction of military flexibility must be carefully examined. *Small Wars Manual* says, "Diplomatic agencies usually conduct negotiations with a view to arriving at a peaceful solution of the problem on a basis compatible with both national honor and treaty stipulations. Although the outcome of such negotiations often results in a friendly settlement, the military forces should be prepared for the possibility of an unfavorable termination of the proceedings."¹⁴³ Prospects for similar contingency operations, especially for the Marine Corps, will unlikely diminish. Without these considerations, peace will remain elusive and effort will be in vain.

¹⁴³United States Marine Corps, *Small Wars Manual*, 1-7.

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