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WARS OF THE 20TH CENTURY

Volume 5

Twenty Wars in Asia

DANIEL ORR
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This book brings together 20 wars and conflicts that took place in Asia during the 20th century. Just over half of them were brought about as a result of the Cold War, i.e. the rivalry between the United States and Soviet Union specifically, and the forces of the democratic West and Socialist Bloc generally.

The French Indochina War began as a Vietnamese nationalist struggle for independence, which later turned into a Cold War battleground, and escalated and expanded in the Vietnam War. The Cambodian Civil War and Laotian Civil War were intertwined, and equally devastating, sideshows to the turmoil simultaneously gripping Vietnam. The Cambodian Genocide ensued in the wake of the Khmer Rouge victory in Cambodia.

The international community was both astounded and perplexed at the spectacle of neighboring Asian communist states slugging it out in the interrelated Cambodian-Vietnamese War and Sino-Vietnamese War. Also initially puzzling to the non-communist world was the near war between the Soviet Union and China (Sino-Soviet Border Conflict), two giant communist powers, in 1969, as a result of a long-standing border dispute that served as the flashpoint for a simmering ideological rivalry. In 1962, China also fought a brief war with India (Sino-Indian War) over a disputed border. Preceding the Indochina wars were the Cold War conflicts in the Korean War and Malayan Emergency, and the lesser known Hukbalahap Rebellion in the Philippines.

In near-anarchic China during the first decades of the 20th century, the Boxer Rebellion and Russo-Japanese War took place in its territory. China soon fragmented politically, but later was nominally reunified under the Kuomintang, which struggled to hold the country together (China (1911-1928): Xinhai Revolution, Fragmentation, and the Struggle for Reunification). The easy Japanese Invasion of Manchuria dashed the illusion of Kuomintang reunification.

Two World War II-related wars are also featured: the Anglo-Iraqi War of 1941 and the Anglo-Soviet Invasion of Iran. In the aftermath of World War II, Sukarno and other nationalists led the Indonesian War of Independence. Occurring in the early part of the 20th century was the Moro Rebellion, which was carried out by Muslims in Mindanao in southern Philippines in opposition to American colonial rule.

This book was written using regular, non-technical language with the general readership in mind, and purposed to be used as a casual read and a handy source of historical military information. For convenience only, in some instances, the reader may wish to go through the book using some of the chapter sequences as presented, since some of the wars follow a chronological order. For example, the First Indochina War and Vietnam War, and also the Cambodian Civil War and Cambodian Genocide occurred one after the other. Alternatively, the reader may choose to jump to any topic of his or her interest, as each of the wars was written as a stand-alone article with no prior knowledge assumed.

The author now invites the reader to start exploring the pages of this book.
**FIRST INDOCHINA WAR**

**Background** France’s colonial presence in the region that now forms modern-day Vietnam began in September 1858 when French naval and ground forces attacked and briefly occupied Da Nang in central Vietnam. Then in February 1859, French forces captured and permanently occupied Saigon in southern Vietnam. In the succeeding period that lasted toward the close of the 19th century, the French military gained full control of Vietnam, i.e. Tonkin, Annam, and Cochinchina (*Figure 2*), respectively forming northern, central, and southern Vietnam, and the territory of present-day Cambodia. By October 1893, with the annexation of the territory comprising present-day Laos after the Franco-Siamese War, France established the Indochinese Federation (French: *Union indochinoise*), more commonly known as French Indochina, comprising the territories of modern-day Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos.

Outwardly, France ruled these territories as protectorates, and the monarchs of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos retained limited self-rule. In fact, however, these monarchs were figureheads who had no real authority, as the French held full political, administrative, military, and economic control. In Vietnam, particularly during the early years of French rule, many local uprisings took place, including those by elements that sought to restore the monarch with genuine powers, but all these failed. The French administration in Indochina, led by a Governor-General, ruled on the basis of a “civilizing mission”, i.e. that France would and did introduce its own political ideology, language, culture, and religion (Catholicism) to the native people, who were regarded as primitive and ignorant, and thus “uncivilized”.

French authorities initially created a near monopoly on the distribution of salt, rice alcohol, and opium in order to raise money to defray the colony’s administration costs. In the early 20th century, the French developed the colony’s mining industry and plantation agriculture, and also imposed a number of taxes on the local population. These measures allowed the colonial government to pay for the construction of roads, bridges, ports, communication lines, and the North-South Railway which stretched from Hanoi to Saigon.
Universal public education was non-existent in the colonies, although the French colonial government, as well as the religious missions, set up a number of schools in which children of the native elite, some of whom eventually gained more advanced education in France, were introduced to the Western arts and sciences, as well as to European political ideologies. At the same time, Vietnam’s Chinese-influenced culture, which originated from the Chinese invasions of the past, was upturned by the more powerful French influences. By the early 20th century, influenced by Western ideologies, many clandestine Vietnamese nationalist groups emerged, each wanting to expel the French and establish a form of democratic government. These groups also rejected the return to the pre-colonial feudalistic monarchy.

The Bolshevik victory in the Russian Civil War in 1920 had a profound effect on the Vietnamese nationalist struggle (as it did on other independence movements in colonial Africa and Asia). In the 1920s, a number of secret Vietnamese communist organizations were formed. One such communist movement, the Vietnamese Revolutionary Youth League, was founded in 1925 by Ho Chi Minh (whose birth name was Nguyen Ai Quoc), who later would play the dominant role in Vietnam’s independence war.
In February 1930, three communist movements merged into a unified Vietnamese Communist Party, which in October 1930, was renamed the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) which had as its mission the overthrow of French colonial rule. In Vietnam during the early 1930s, the growing militancy of labor organizations and fears of a general uprising forced French authorities to tighten measures against dissent. As a result, the ICP was suppressed, with thousands of its leaders and members executed, imprisoned, or exiled. Despite these setbacks, the ICP continued to operate secretly.

On September 1, 1939, World War II broke out in Europe. In June 1940, after a six-week lightning campaign, German forces overran France, capturing Paris, and ending the French Third Republic and replacing it with the German-controlled Vichy regime (centered in Vichy, Central France). Thereafter, French Indochina was ruled by Vichy France.

In September 1940, Japanese forces seized control of Tonkin (northern French Indochina) to prevent the flow of Allied war supplies to China (China was engaged in a protracted war with Japan after the latter launched a full-scale invasion of China in July 1937). Subsequently, Japan gained full control of French Indochina, from where the Japanese invaded British Malaya further south during the Asia-Pacific theater of World War II, which began in December 1941. In Indochina, the Japanese military allowed the French administration[1] to continue exercising civilian and policing duties, thereby freeing the Japanese military to continue prosecuting the war in the Asia-Pacific.

In May 1941, after a thirty-year absence from Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh returned and organized in northern Vietnam the “League for the Independence of Vietnam”, more commonly known as Viet Minh (Vietnamese: Liên đoàn Việt Nam Dân tộc Lập Độc), an ICP-led merger of Vietnamese nationalist movements, aimed at ending both French and Japanese rule. Ho became the leader of the Vietnamese independence struggle, a position he would hold permanently until his death in 1969.

During World War II, the Viet Minh and Allied Powers formed a tactical alliance in their shared effort to defeat a common enemy. In particular, Ho’s fledgling small band of fighters liaisoned with the U.S. Office of Strategic Services (OSS), furnishing the Americans with intelligence information on the Japanese, while the U.S. military provided the Vietnamese fighters with training, some weapons, and other military support.

By early 1945, World War II invariably had turned in favor of the Allies, with Germany verging on defeat and Japan becoming increasingly threatened by the Allied island-hopping Pacific campaign. In March 1945, the Japanese military overthrew the French administration in Indochina, because of fears of an Allied invasion of the region following the U.S. recapture of the Philippines (October 1944–April 1945), and also because the Japanese began to distrust French loyalty following the end of Vichy France (November 1942) and the subsequent Allied liberation of France (early 1945). In place of the French administration, on March 11, 1945, Japanese authorities installed a Vietnamese government led by former emperor Bao Dai, and then proclaimed the “independence” of Vietnam, an act that was largely dismissed as spurious by the Vietnamese people.

On August 14, 1945, Japan announced its acceptance of the terms of the Potsdam Declaration, marking the end of the Asia-Pacific theatre of World War II (the European theater of World War II had ended earlier, on May 8, 1945). The sudden Japanese capitulation left a power vacuum that was quickly filled by the Viet Minh, which in the preceding months, had secretly organized so-called “People’s Revolutionary Committees” throughout much of the colony. These “People’s Revolutionary Committees” now seized power and organized local administrations in many towns and cities, more
particularly in the northern and central regions, including the capital Hanoi. This seizure of power, historically called the August Revolution, led to the abdication of ex-emperor Bao Dai and the collapse of his Japanese-sponsored government.

The August Revolution succeeded largely because the Viet Minh had gained much popular support following a severe famine that hit northern Vietnam in the summer of 1944 to 1945 (which caused some 400,000 to 2 million deaths). During the famine, the Viet Minh raided several Japanese and private grain warehouses. On September 2, 1945 (the same day Japan surrendered to the Allies), Ho proclaimed the country’s independence as the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), taking the position of President of a provisional government.

At this point, Ho sought U.S. diplomatic support for Vietnam’s independence, and incorporated part of the 1776 U.S. Declaration of Independence in his own proclamation of Vietnamese independence. Ho also wrote several letters to U.S. President Harry Truman (which were unanswered), and met with U.S. State Department and OSS officials in Hanoi. However, during the war-time Potsdam Conference (July 17 – August 2, 1945), the Allied Powers (including the Soviet Union) decided to allow France to restore colonial rule in Indochina, but that in the meantime that France was yet preparing to return, Vietnam was to be partitioned into two zones north and south of the 16th parallel, with Chinese Nationalist forces tasked to occupy the northern zone, and British forces (with some French units) tasked to enter the southern zone.

By mid-September 1945, Chinese and British forces had occupied their respective zones. They then completed their assigned tasks of accepting the surrender of, as well as disarming and repatriating the Japanese forces within their zones. In Saigon, British forces disbanded the Vietnamese revolutionary government that had taken over the administration of the city. This Vietnamese government in Saigon, called the “Provisional Executive Committee”, was a coalition of many organizations, including the religious groups Cao Dai and Hoa Hao, the organized crime syndicate Binh Xuyen, the communists, and nationalist organizations. In Cochinchina and parts of Annam, unlike in Tonkin, the Viet Minh had only established partial authority because of the presence of these many rival ideological movements. But believing that nationalism was more important than ideology to achieve Vietnam’s independence, the Viet Minh was willing to work with other groups to form a united front to oppose the return of French rule.

As a result of the British military actions in the southern zone, on September 17, 1945, the DRV in Hanoi launched a general strike in Saigon. British authorities responded to the strikes by declaring martial law. The British also released and armed some 1,400 French former prisoners of war; the latter then launched attacks on the Viet Minh, and seized key government infrastructures in the south. On September 24, 1945, elements of the Binh Xuyen crime syndicate attacked and killed some 150 French nationalists, which provoked retaliatory actions by the French that led to increased fighting. British and French forces soon dispersed the Viet Minh from Saigon. The latter responded by sabotaging ports, power plants, communication systems, and other government facilities.

By the third week of September 1945, much of southern Vietnam was controlled by the French, and the British ceded administration of the region to them. In late October 1945, another British-led operation broke the remaining Viet Minh resistance in the south, and the Vietnamese revolutionaries retreated to the countryside where they engaged in guerilla warfare. Also in October, some 35,000 French troops arrived in Saigon. In March 1946, British forces departed from Indochina, ending their involvement in the region.

Meanwhile in the northern zone, some 200,000 Chinese occupation forces, led by the warlord General Lu Han, allowed Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh to continue exercising power in the north, on
the condition that Ho include non-communists in the Viet Minh government. To downplay his communist ties, in November 1945, Ho dissolved the ICP and called for Vietnamese nationalist unity. In late 1945, a provisional coalition government was formed in the northern zone, comprising the Viet Minh and other nationalist organizations. In January 1946, elections to the National Assembly were held in northern and central Vietnam, where the coalition parties agreed to a pre-set division of electoral seats.

The Chinese occupation forces were disinclined to relinquish control of northern Vietnam to the French. Chinese officers also enriched themselves by looting properties, engaging in the opium trade in Vietnam and Laos, and running black market operations in Hanoi and Haiphong. However, the Chinese commander also was aware of the explosive nature of the hostile French and Vietnamese relations, while the French and Vietnamese suspected the Chinese of harboring territorial ambitions in northern Vietnam.

But the Chinese Army, which held the real power, also opened negotiations with the French government, which in February 1946, led to an agreement where the Chinese would withdraw from Vietnam in exchange for France renouncing its extraterritorial privileges in China and granting economic concessions to the ethnic Chinese in Vietnam.

In March 1946, Major Jean Sainteny, a French government representative, signed an agreement with Ho, where France would recognize Vietnam as a “free state having its own government, its own parliament, its own army, and its own finances, forming a part of the Indo-china Federation and the French Union”. In exchange, the Viet Minh would allow some 15,000 French troops to occupy northern Vietnam for a period of five years. The agreement also stipulated that the political future of Vietnam, including whether Cochinchina would form part of Vietnam or remain as a French possession, was to be determined through a plebiscite. Soon thereafter, French forces arrived in Hanoi and northern Vietnam. In June 1946, Chinese forces withdrew from Vietnam.

Throughout the summer of 1946 in Dalat (in Vietnam) and Fontainebleau (in France), Ho Chi Minh held talks with French government officials regarding Vietnam’s future. The two sides were so far apart that essentially nothing was accomplished, save for a temporary agreement (a modus vivendi), signed in September 1946, which called for further negotiations. Meanwhile in Saigon, Georges Thierry d’Argenlieu, the French High Commissioner for Indochina, refused to acknowledge that the Ho-Sainteny agreement included Cochinchina. In June 1946, without consulting the French national government, he established the “Autonomous Republic of Cochinchina”, which seriously undermined the ongoing talks in France.

In the summer of 1946, the Viet Minh purged non-communists from its party ranks, effectively restoring the DRV into a fully communist entity. By September 1946, tensions had risen between French and Viet Minh forces, which led to armed threats and provocations. In November 1946, fighting broke out in Haiphong when French port authorities seized a Chinese junk, but were in turn fired upon by the Viet Minh. The French first demanded that the Viet Minh yield control of Haiphong, and then bombarded the city using naval and ground artillery, and air strikes. The French gained control of Haiphong, expelling the Viet Minh, with 6,000 civilians killed in the fighting.

War When French authorities demanded that the DRV government relinquish control of Hanoi, on December 19, 1946, some 30,000 Viet Minh fighters attacked the French, and attempted to block access to the main French garrison in the city. French authorities, who were informed of the plan, foiled the Viet Minh. But the latter detonated explosives that shut down Hanoi’s power plant, cutting off electricity and plunging the city into darkness.
In the ensuing two-month long Battle of Hanoi, French and Viet Minh forces engaged in intense house-to-house fighting, but French military superiority, especially the use of heavy artillery and air firepower, forced Viet Minh forces to evacuate the city and retreat to their traditional strongholds in the Viet Bac region in the far north. French forces then gained control of Hanoi. By late 1946, the Viet Minh still controlled the areas around Haiphong, Hue, and Nam Dinh, but in March 1947, French operations cleared the roads to these major urban areas.

Early in the war, the Viet Minh suffered from a serious lack of weapons, and thus resorted to guerilla warfare. But they took advantage of Vietnam’s thickly covered jungle mountains for refuge and concealment. Jungles and mountains comprised 40% of Vietnam’s territory, an invaluable asset for the Viet Minh, but also a formidable obstacle which French forces were unable to overcome in the war. Throughout the war, while the French controlled the major urban areas, Viet Minh forces operated in much of the hinterland regions, where they established their influence, and gained the support of the residents in remote villages and settlements.

The French military in Indochina was organized as the French Far-East Expeditionary Corps (CEFEO; French: Corps Expéditionnaire Français en Extrême-Orient). At its peak, CEFEO had a total strength of 200,000 troops, and consisted mostly of pro-French Vietnamese soldiers. Small contingents also were brought in from French territories in Africa, as well as from the French Foreign Legion. Early on, CEFEO suffered from inadequate or obsolete weapons, which nonetheless had more firepower than those used by the Viet Minh.

In October 1947, French authorities launched Operation Lea in Bac Can Province (located near the Chinese border) with three major aims: to stop the flow of weapons from China to the Viet Minh, destroy the Viet Minh organization, and capture the Viet Minh leadership. Some 1,000 French commandos were air-dropped in Viet Minh-held territory, while 15,000 ground troops were tasked to block Viet Minh escape routes. The offensive inflicted some 9,000 Viet Minh casualties, but the French also suffered 1,000 killed and 3,000 wounded; large quantities of Viet Minh stores and equipment also were seized. But Ho Chi Minh and his commanders, as well as the bulk of the Viet Minh, slipped past the French cordon.

A second French offensive (Operation Ceinture) in November 1947 near Thai Nguyen and Tuyen Quang failed to battle the Viet Minh, which again escaped. The Viet Minh implemented the policy of carrying out guerilla attacks in scattered areas in order to over-extend French forces and defeat the French in a protected war of attrition. The French soon experienced dwindling military resources and were unable to launch more large-scale attacks, while the Viet Minh, by late 1947, had grown to some 250,000 fighters, and occupied areas that the French had abandoned.

By 1948, France realized that it could not anymore restore colonial rule in Indochina. French authorities therefore opened talks with former Vietnamese emperor Bao Dai regarding establishing a pro-French Vietnamese state, which would accomplish the political objective of undermining the Viet Minh and its DRV government. Negotiations were successful, with the French government and Bao Dai signing two agreements: the First Hai Long Bay Agreement (December 1947), which stipulated Vietnam’s “independence within the French Union”, and the Second Hai Long Bay Agreement (June 1948), which provided for a clearer stipulation of Vietnam’s independence. In both agreements, France would continue to administer Vietnam’s foreign policy decisions and external security functions. As a result of the two agreements, Bao Dai formed a new government in Saigon. However, within a short period, he abdicated and left Vietnam for Europe in frustration at not being granted genuine political power.
The French renegotiated with Bao Dai, which led to the signing in March 1949 of the Elysee Agreement, which stipulated the formation of the State of Vietnam comprising Tonkin, Annam, and Cochinchina. However, the agreement also allowed France to continue to control Vietnam’s foreign policy and external security functions. Bao Dai then returned to Vietnam and formed a new government. Under French oversight, in July 1949, the “independent” Vietnamese state formed its own armed forces (the Vietnamese National Army), which thereafter fought alongside CEFEO.

During the first years of the war, the major world powers saw the conflict merely as an internal (i.e. colonial) matter of the French, or an independence struggle of the Vietnamese people. In March 1947, U.S. President Truman delivered a speech, which eventually came to be known as the Truman Doctrine, where he vowed to “contain” what he saw was the Soviet Union’s expansionist ambitions in Greece and Turkey. This new American policy marked the start of the Cold War.

During World War II and in the immediate aftermath, the U.S. government appeared opposed to restoring French rule in Indochina, for a number of reasons: Ho Chi Minh had been a U.S. ally in the war; pre-war French colonial rule had been repressive; and the United States was averse to colonialism. But with the restoration of French rule, the United States kept a hands-off policy in Indochina.

Two events changed U.S. policy toward Indochina and Asia. First, in October 1949, Chinese communists, emerging victorious after a long civil war in China, established the People’s Republic of China (PRC), a communist state. Second, in June 1950, North Korea, backed by the Soviet Union and the PRC, invaded U.S.-allied South Korea, triggering the Korean War. President Truman became convinced that not only did the Soviet Union have expansionist ambitions in Europe, but that Soviet leader Josef Stalin and Chinese leader Mao Zedong also were determined to spread communism in Asia. The next U.S. President, Dwight D. Eisenhower, would introduce the Domino Principle, which stated that if the communists prevailed in Korea and Vietnam, the rest of the countries of Southeast Asia would be next to fall to communism, akin to a row of dominoes falling one after the other.

As a result, the United States strengthened its military presence in East Asia, reversing its post-World War II policy of withdrawing American forces from the region. In February 1950, the U.S. government recognized the French-backed State of Vietnam, which was led by Bao Dai. In July 1950, the first shipments of U.S. war supplies arrived. Three months later (September 1950), after French and American military officials held talks in Washington, D.C., the United States established the Military Assistance and Advisory Group (MAAG), tasked with serving as the liaison agency that would provide weapons, as well as military advice and training. U.S. military support to the French would dramatically increase over the following years to a total of $3 billion. By 1954, the United States would be supplying 80% of the total weapons used by French forces in Vietnam. A total of 1,400 tanks, 340 planes, 240,000 small firearms, and 150 million bullets were sent.

Meanwhile in Paris, the fractious French political climate was undermining the war effort in Indochina. The ruling French Fourth Republic, a parliamentary system established in 1946, suffered from a weak executive branch and the absence of political direction and consensus among its ideologically diverse political parties. In its 12-year existence (1946-1958), 21 governments formed and fell. Furthermore, the French government’s lack of a firm, one-track policy on Vietnam would weight heavily on the outcome of the war.
In January 1950, the PRC and Soviet Union recognized Ho’s DRV. Thereafter, large amounts of Chinese and Soviet military support, including heavy weapons such as artillery and anti-aircraft guns, and equipment such as trucks, were delivered, which allowed the Viet Minh to reorganize and expand into a conventional army capable of fielding many thousands of soldiers in open combat. With Britain and Australia recognizing the French-backed State of Vietnam, the war became a Cold War conflict (apart from its anti-colonial/nationalist dimension), with Ho’s DRV associated with the communist bloc, and Bao Dao’s regime aligned with the Western democracies.

In 1950, the Viet Minh launched several offensives near the Vietnamese-Chinese border to clear routes for the flow of military supplies from China. In February 1950, Viet Minh forces overran the French garrison at Lai Khe. Then later that year, a series of powerful Viet Minh offensives captured the French forts at Dong Khe (on September 15, 1950), Cao Bang (on October 3, 1950), and Lang Son (October 17, 1950). At Cao Bang, French casualties were 4,000 soldiers. At this point, the Viet Minh appeared to have taken the initiative in the war, as the French military suffered from low morale, poor strategy, and over-reliance on fixed defenses.

But in December 1950, French and allied forces came under the command of General Jean de Lattre de Tassigny, a highly respected veteran officer of World War II, whose arrival greatly raised troop morale. To defend Hanoi, Haiphong, and the Red River Delta, he constructed an extensive network of fortifications (called the De Lattre Line, Figure 3) that covered 3,200 kilometers from the northern coast to the Chinese border and consisted of about 1,200 concrete fortifications, each armed with and supported by artillery, armored, and air units.

In 1951, the Viet Minh, believing that the French military was verging on defeat, launched several offensives on the De Lattre Line. The first attack occurred in January 1951 at Vinh Yen, where 20,000 Viet Minh troops advanced using human-wave assaults. After initially gaining ground, the attack was repulsed after four days of fighting by heavy French artillery bombardments and air strikes. Then in March 1951, Viet Minh forces attacked lightly defended Mao Khe town in preparation to advancing toward Haiphong. The Viet Minh succeeded in entering the town, where it engaged the small French garrison there in some intense street fighting. But the French soon counter-attacked, and repulsed the Viet Minh after four days of fighting. In May-June 1951, in fighting at Ninh Binh, Nam Dinh, Phu Ly, and Phat Diem, collectively known as the Battle of the Day River, French superior firepower beat back the numerically superior Viet Minh, the latter suffering 9,000 soldiers killed or wounded, and 1,000 captured.

The De Lattre Line, however, was not secure in all places, as Viet Minh infiltration teams entered through gaps between fortifications. Some 30,000 Viet Minh cadres, including communist agitators, soon established Viet Minh influence in 5,000 of the 7,000 villages in the Red River Delta area. In November 1951, General de Lattre went on the offensive, air-dropping commandos in Hoa Binh town, deep inside Viet Minh territory. The town was taken, but large numbers of Viet Minh forces laid siege to the French commandos, cutting off the approaches to Hoa Binh through the Black River and along Route Coloniale 6. In late February 1952, French forces were forced to evacuate the town.

In the midst of the Hoa Binh battle, General Raoul Salan succeeded as commander of the French Far East Expeditionary Corps. Throughout 1952, he launched many operations in Viet Minh-held territory, which generally were unsuccessful as the Viet Minh, suffering many defeats in set-piece battles the previous year, refused to be drawn into conventional warfare and returned to conducting guerilla warfare.
In October 1952, the Viet Minh took control of much of the Black River Valley in northwest Vietnam, putting pressure on the French garrisons at Nghia Lo and Lai Chau. The Viet Minh hoped to draw out the French from the De Lattre Line. Instead, in late October 1952, General Salan launched Operation Lorraine at the Viet Bac region to relieve pressure on the beleaguered French garrisons in northern Tonkin. At Viet Bac, some 30,000 French troops and their allies took Phu Thu (November 5, 1952), Phu Doan (November 9, 1952), and Phu Yen (November 13, 1952), and also captured large Viet Minh supply bases. But the Viet Minh refused to be lured to defend Viet Bac, and continued to exert pressure on the French outposts in the Black River Valley. As a result, General Salan called off Operation Lorraine, and French forces returned behind the De Lattre Line.

The only bright spot for the French military during the Black River battles was its solid defenses at Na San, where French commanders adopted the “hedgehog” defense-in-depth strategy to throw back repeated attacks by the Viet Minh. In early December 1952, after incurring some 3,000 dead and wounded in two weeks of fighting, the Viet Minh withdrew from the area. The success of the “hedgehog” defense encouraged the French high command to adopt this strategy as a way to lure the Viet Minh to launch an attack, whereupon French superior firepower would be brought to bear to repulse the attack and annihilate the enemy. Ultimately, the French decision to use the “hedgehog” defense would decide the outcome of the war.

In 1953, the Viet Minh launched attacks into Laos, in the northwest to force the French to overextend their manpower and supply lines. Also that year, French forces, now led by General Henri Navarre, launched many offensives, with mixed results. First, in July 1953, French commandos who were airdropped in Lang Son (in northern Vietnam) captured Viet Minh weapons caches, which they destroyed. In July-August, 10,000 French troops sent to Annam to clear the vital Route One of the Viet Minh failed to locate and destroy the enemy. Then after French forces withdrew from Route One, the Viet Minh returned to continue carrying out ambushes on French military convoys passing through the highway.

In August-October 1953, under Operation Brochet, French forces swept through Viet Minh-controlled areas in the Red River Delta, but failed to clear the region of revolutionary influence. French forces had greater success in a three-week campaign (Operation Mouette in October-November 1953) in Phu Nho Quan, south of the Red River Delta, inflicting 3,000 Viet Minh casualties and capturing large amounts of enemy weapons and supplies. Then in January-March 1954, General Navarre launched Operation Atlante, where 25,000 French troops were deployed in Da Nang and Nha Trang to search and engage 30,000 Viet Minh soldiers. The offensive ended in failure, as the Viet Minh again refused to be drawn into open battle, and instead used guerilla tactics against the French.

In November 1953, General Navarre decided to confront the Viet Minh offensive in Laos by massing French and allied forces at Dien Bien Phu (Figure 3), located in northwest Vietnam, close to the Laotian border. Dien Bien Phu ran along the Viet Minh logistical line to Laos, thus its control would cut off the Viet Minh, and force it to withdraw. Dien Bien Phu also was the site of an old airfield, located on a valley floor 12 miles long and 8 mile wide, and surrounded by thickly wooded hills. French officers expressed concern about the feasibility of defending Dien Bien Phu from attack, but General Navarre, placing his trust on recent intelligence information, believed that the site posed no major risk to French forces. General Navarre envisioned Dien Bien Phu as a repetition of Na San one year earlier, where the use of a hedgehog defense would deal another major defeat on the Viet Minh.

On November 20, 1953, 9,000 French paratroopers were airdropped at Dien Bien Phu; they easily overcame the resistance of the small Viet Minh garrison there, and seized the airfield and the valley. In December 1953, more French and allied forces arrived, and established a “hedgehog” defense of
fortified positions with artillery pieces, supported by armor and air cover, an array which the French high command deemed was impregnable to attack. A total of 14,000 French and allied troops would participate in the coming battle.

General Vo Nguyen Giap, top commander of the Viet Minh, correctly saw the vulnerable French position at the Dien Bien Phu valley floor. He deployed 50,000 Viet Minh troops (outnumbering the French by a 4:1 ratio), including large quantities of weapons and heavy equipment, apparently ready to battle the French in open warfare. More crucially in the coming battle, the Viet Minh was able to haul 200 artillery and anti-aircraft guns, including some Soviet-made multiple rocket launchers, onto the hills surrounding the French positions. The French were able to detect this movement of heavy artillery, but were unaware of the extent of the numbers; by the start of the battle, they were numerically outgunned by a ratio of 4:1. The Viet Minh used 50,000 laborers to carry the artillery pieces across miles of difficult terrain and up steep slopes.

The Viet Minh started some artillery shelling of French positions in late January 1954, but full-scale bombardment and the start of the Battle of Dien Bien Phu began on March 13, 1954. Immediately, the French airstrip was hit and rendered inoperative for the rest of the battle. Henceforth, reinforcements and supplies had to be dropped by air. Viet Minh artillery and anti-aircraft guns were securely emplaced and hidden from view, frustrating French gunners from targeting them, which became a crucial factor in the outcome of the battle.

The Viet Minh then launched repeated frontal human-wave assaults, which were repulsed with heavy losses to the attackers. The Viet Minh then abandoned frontal attacks, and instead built a network of trenches that was extended ever closer to the French positions. As the French also relied extensively on trenches, the battle took on similarities to World War I trench warfare.

French warplanes also attacked enemy positions, but the Viet Minh artillery pieces were not hit and continued to rain down shells on the French lines. Viet Minh anti-aircraft guns also took their toll on the French planes, including those aircraft that air-dropped reinforcements and supplies to Dien Bien Phu. By April 1954, the French perimeter around Dien Bien Phu had shrunk considerably. In early May 1954, the Viet Minh launched its final assault, overwhelming the last French resistance by May 7. The Battle of Dien Bien Phu was over, with the Viet Minh dealing a stunning defeat on the French Army.

Battle casualties on both sides were high. The Viet Minh suffered 15,000-20,000 killed, wounded, or missing, while the French incurred 2,000 killed and 6,000 missing. Some 12,000 French soldiers were captured and led away by foot 500 miles away to imprisonment; about 8,300 died during the march or in captivity. About 150 French soldiers managed to escape and were later rescued by French commandos who had infiltrated the Viet Minh area during the battle.

Shortly after the start of the Battle of Dien Bien Phu began, upon the request of France for military assistance, the United States considered a number of options to relieve the trapped French forces. These included launching a massive aerial attack at the Viet Minh using 60 B-29 bombers and 150 fighter planes from the U.S. Seventh Fleet in the Philippines; becoming directly involved in the war by sending American troops; or even intervening with nuclear weapons. However, the United States announced that its becoming involved in the war was contingent on the support of its other allies, particularly Britain. But as this was not forthcoming, U.S. President Eisenhower decided not to intervene.

In the period after Dien Bien Phu, French and Viet Minh forces continued to engage in other battles, including a major Viet Minh defeat of the French at the Mang Yang District, Central Highlands, where a French regiment was annihilated by a series of Viet Minh ambushes. Nevertheless, the Battle of Dien Bien Phu is generally cited by historians as the event that forced the end of the war.
Aftermath By the time of the Battle of Dien Bien Phu, France knew that it could not win the war, and turned its attention on trying to work toward a political settlement and an honorable withdrawal from Indochina. By February 1954, opinion polls at home showed that only 8% of the French population supported the war. However, the Dien Bien Phu debacle dashed French hopes of negotiating under favorable withdrawal terms. On May 8, 1954, one day after the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu, representatives from the major powers: United States, Soviet Union, Britain, China, and France, and the Indochina states: Cambodia, Laos, and the two rival Vietnamese states, Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) and State of Vietnam, met at Geneva (the Geneva Conference) to negotiate a peace settlement for Indochina. The Conference also was envisioned to resolve the crisis in the Korean Peninsula in the aftermath of the Korean War (separate article), where deliberations ended on June 15, 1954 without any settlements made.

On the Indochina issue, on July 21, 1954, a ceasefire and a “final declaration” were agreed to by the parties. The ceasefire was agreed to by France and the DRV, which divided Vietnam into two zones at the 17th parallel, with the northern zone to be governed by the DRV and the southern zone to be governed by the State of Vietnam. The 17th parallel was intended to serve merely as a provisional military demarcation line, and not as a political or territorial boundary. The French and their allies in the northern zone departed and moved to the southern zone, while the Viet Minh in the southern zone departed and moved to the northern zone (although some southern Viet Minh remained in the south on instructions from the DRV). The 17th parallel was also a demilitarized zone (DMZ) of 6 miles, 3 miles on each side of the line.

The ceasefire agreement provided for a period of 300 days where Vietnamese civilians were free to move across the 17th parallel on either side of the line. About one million northerners, predominantly Catholics but also including members of the upper classes consisting of landowners, businessmen, academics, and anti-communist politicians, and the middle and lower classes, moved to the southern zone, this mass exodus was prompted by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and State of Vietnam in a massive propaganda campaign, as well as the peoples’ fears of repression under a communist regime.

In August 1954, planes of the French Air Force and hundreds of ships of the French Navy and U.S. Navy (the latter under Operation Passage to Freedom) carried out the movement of Vietnamese civilians from north to south. Some 100,000 southerners, mostly Viet Minh cadres and their families and supporters, moved to the northern zone. A peacekeeping force, called the International Control Commission and comprising contingents from India, Canada, and Poland, was tasked with enforcing the ceasefire agreement. Separate ceasefire agreements also were signed for Laos and Cambodia.

Another agreement, titled the “Final Declaration of the Geneva Conference on the Problem of Restoring Peace in Indo-China, July 21, 1954”, called for Vietnamese general elections to be held in July 1956, and the reunification of Vietnam. France DRV, the Soviet Union, China, and Britain signed this Declaration. Both the State of Vietnam and the United States did not sign, the former outright rejecting the Declaration, and the latter taking a hands-off stance, but promising not to oppose or jeopardize the Declaration.

By the time of the Geneva Conference, the Viet Minh controlled a majority of Vietnam’s territory and appeared ready to deal a final defeat on the demoralized French forces. The Viet Minh’s agreeing to apparently less favorable terms (relative to its commanding battlefield position) was brought about by the following factors: First, despite Dien Bien Phu, French forces in Indochina were far from being defeated, and still held an overwhelming numerical and firepower advantage over the Viet Minh; Second, the Soviet
Union and China cautioned the Viet Minh that a continuation of the war might prompt an escalation of American military involvement in support of the French; and Third, French Prime Minister Pierre Mendes-France had vowed to achieve a ceasefire within thirty days or resign. The Soviet Union and China, fearing the collapse of the Mendes-France regime and its replacement by a right-wing government that would continue the war, pressed Ho to tone down Viet Minh insistence of a unified Vietnam under the DRV, and agree to a compromise.

The planned July 1956 reunification election failed to materialize because the parties could not agree on how it was to be implemented. The Viet Minh proposed forming “local commissions” to administer the elections, while the United States, seconded by the State of Vietnam, wanted the elections to be held under United Nations (UN) oversight. The U.S. government’s greatest fear was a communist victory at the polls; U.S. President Eisenhower believed that “possibly 80%” of all Vietnamese would vote for Ho if elections were held. The State of Vietnam also opposed holding the reunification elections, stating that as it had not signed the Geneva Accords, it was not bound to participate in the reunification elections; it also declared that under the repressive conditions in the north under communist DRV, free elections could not be held there. As a result, reunification elections were not held, and Vietnam remained divided.

In the aftermath, both the DRV in the north (later commonly known as North Vietnam) and the State of Vietnam in the south (later as the Republic of Vietnam, more commonly known as South Vietnam) became de facto separate countries, both Cold War client states, with North Vietnam backed by the Soviet Union, China, and other communist states, and South Vietnam supported by the United States and other Western democracies.

In April 1956, France pulled out its last troops from Vietnam; some two years earlier (June 1954), it had granted full independence to the State of Vietnam. The year 1955 saw the political consolidation and firming of Cold War alliances for both North Vietnam and South Vietnam. In the north, Ho Chi Minh’s regime launched repressive land reform and rent reduction programs, where many tens of thousands of landowners and property managers were executed, or imprisoned in labor camps. With the Soviet Union and China sending more weapons and advisors, North Vietnam firmly fell within the communist sphere of influence.

In South Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Diem, whom Bao Dai appointed as Prime Minister in June 1954, also eliminated all political dissent starting in 1955, particularly the organized crime syndicate Binh Xuyen in Saigon, and the religious sects Hoa Hao and Cao Dai in the Mekong Delta, all of which maintained powerful armed groups. In April-May 1955, sections of central Saigon were destroyed in street battles between government forces and the Binh Xuyen militia.

Then in October 1955, in a referendum held to determine the State of Vietnam’s political future, voters overwhelmingly supported establishing a republic as campaigned by Diem, and rejected the restoration of the monarchy as desired by Bao Dai. Widespread irregularities marred the referendum, with an implausible 98% of voters favoring Diem’s proposal. On October 23, 1955, Diem proclaimed the Republic of Vietnam (later commonly known as South Vietnam), with himself as its first president. Its predecessor, the State of Vietnam was dissolved, and Bao Dao fell from power.

In early 1956, Diem launched military offensives on the Viet Minh and its supporters in the South Vietnamese countryside, leading to thousands being executed or imprisoned. Early on, militarily weak South Vietnam was promised armed and financial support by the United States, which hoped to prop up the regime of Prime Minister (later President) Diem, a devout Catholic and staunch anti-communist, as a bulwark against communism in Southeast Asia.
In January 1955, the first shipments of American weapons arrived, followed shortly by U.S. military advisors, who were tasked to provide training to the South Vietnamese Army. The U.S. government also endeavored to shore up the public image of the somewhat unknown Diem as a viable alternative to the immensely popular Ho Chi Minh. However, the Diem regime was tainted by corruption and nepotism, and Diem himself ruled with autocratic powers, and implemented policies that favored the wealthy landowning class and Catholics at the expense of the lower peasant classes and Buddhists (the latter comprised 70% of the population).

By 1957, because of southern discontent with Diem’s policies, a communist-influenced civilian uprising had grown in South Vietnam, with many acts of terrorism, including bombings and assassinations, taking place. Then in 1959, North Vietnam, frustrated at the failure of the reunification elections from taking place, and in response to the growing insurgency in the south, announced that it was resuming the armed struggle (now against South Vietnam and the United States) in order to liberate the south and reunify Vietnam. The stage was set for the cataclysmic Second Indochina War, more popularly known as the Vietnam War (next article).
Background In July 1954, the First Indochina War (previous article) ended with the Geneva Accords, which partitioned the French colony of Vietnam into two military zones at the 17\textsuperscript{th} parallel, the northern and southern zones. The northern zone was assigned to and occupied by the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV). The DRV was led by the Viet Minh (Vietnamese: Việt Nam Độc Lập Đồng Minh Hội, or “League for the Independence of Vietnam”), a nationalist communist-led organization headed by the revolutionary Ho Chi Minh, who had fought to end French colonial rule in Vietnam. The southern zone was assigned to the French-established State of Vietnam.

The Geneva Accords stipulated that Vietnam’s partition at the 17\textsuperscript{th} parallel was only a temporary expedient to separate the warring sides. The 17\textsuperscript{th} parallel was designated as a demilitarized zone (DMZ) of 6 miles wide (3 miles on both sides of the line), and was not a political/territorial boundary, and the reunification of the two halves of Vietnam was to be undertaken after nationwide elections could be held in July 1956. However, the reunification elections did not take place, and the DRV in the northern zone and the State of Vietnam in the southern zone became de facto separate states, with the former becoming more widely known as North Vietnam, and the latter known as South Vietnam.

In Hanoi, the capital of North Vietnam, Ho and his DRV government consolidated power and established a Marxist state. All lands and industries were nationalized, agrarian reform was implemented, and dissent suppressed. As in the First Indochina War, North Vietnam received military and economic support from the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and the Soviet Union. In South Vietnam, which officially was a democracy based along Western lines, Prime Minister Ngo Dinh Diem only gradually consolidated power. In April 1955, Diem launched military campaigns to suppress the militant religious groups, Cao Dai and Hoa Hao, and the organized crime syndicate, Binh Xuyen. These operations were successful, but only after some intense fighting in the capital, Saigon, that left hundreds of people dead and thousands of others homeless. Then in October 1955, to determine South Vietnam’s political future, a referendum (which the government manipulated using fraud) showed that the South Vietnamese overwhelmingly favored setting up a republic, and rejected the return of the monarchy. Following the referendum, Diem declared the formation of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam) and named himself as its (first) President. Thereafter, President Diem reached the peak of his political power, although his government became mired in corruption, nepotism, and stagnation. Diem soon also repressed all forms of political dissent.

Also in 1955, President Diem launched a suppression campaign against the re-emerging communist movement in South Vietnam, and in August 1956, instituted the death penalty for persons being involved in communism. In the aftermath of the Geneva Accords, some 100,000 Viet Minh southerners migrated to North Vietnam, although about 10,000 Viet Minh southerners, with the encouragement of the North Vietnamese leadership, remained in South Vietnam. These stay-behind Viet Minh communists carried out political activism using front organizations, such as religious, farmers, students, workers, and women
groups, in order to conceal their political objectives, and also to appeal to a wider segment of the population.

In March 1956, the fledging South Vietnamese insurgency asked for military support from North Vietnam, which was turned down by the Ho government, because China and the Soviet Union were reluctant to becoming involved in another potentially costly war so soon after the recent Korean War (which just ended nearly three years earlier, in July 1953). But in December 1956, when reunification of Vietnam became unlikely and North Vietnam and South Vietnam were forming separate states, North Vietnam agreed to provide only limited support to the insurgents.

In 1957, the South Vietnamese insurgents, whom the Saigon government called Viet Cong (Vietnamese communists; a contraction from the Vietnamese: Việt Nam Cộng-sản), unleashed a wave of violence in South Vietnam, with many incidents of assassinations, murders, bombings, and other terrorist acts taking place. By 1958, the Viet Cong had established a command structure, with militias organized into a regular army-type organization.

In January 1959, North Vietnam agreed to provide military support to the Viet Cong, and in May of that year, it formed the 559th Transportation Group of the North Vietnamese Army, to establish a supply route to South Vietnam. This supply route, which initially passed directly through the DMZ, was intercepted by South Vietnamese forces. North Vietnam then moved its supply route to eastern Laos and Cambodia, where manpower and war materials were transported to the Viet Cong in South Vietnam.

The supply route that developed, which became known as the Ho Chi Minh Trail, was located close to the shared borders of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, and initially consisted of foot tracks in sparsely inhabited rugged mountains that were covered in the dense canopy of tropical rainforests. One year earlier (May 1958), North Vietnamese forces had crossed over into and occupied sections of eastern Laos, including the strategically placed Tchepone in Savannakhet Province, in support of the Pathet Lao, a Laotian communist movement that was fighting a revolutionary war in Laos against the West-aligned Royal Lao Government.

Within a few months after Group 559’s formation, weapons and supplies from North Vietnam were being transported in large quantities through the Ho Chi Minh Trail to the insurgents in South Vietnam. As well, the first batches of Viet Minh southerners who had moved to North Vietnam following the Geneva Accords and were now officers and soldiers of the North Vietnamese Army, were trekking down the Ho Chi Minh Trail toward South Vietnam, where they would serve as the leaders and advisers of, or otherwise joined the ranks of, the Viet Cong.

**War** In December 1960, under North Vietnam’s guidance, the South Vietnamese insurgents (Viet Cong) reorganized as the National Liberation Front for South Vietnam (usually shortened to National Liberation Front, or NLF), as a united front aimed at overthrowing the Diem government. Since at this time, the Viet Cong made great efforts to conceal its ties with North Vietnam, the NLF succeeded in gaining support from a broad range of non-communist anti-Diem sectors, including the religious groups Hoa Hao and Cao Dai, ethnic minorities, political and social groups, and even some Roman Catholics. By the early 1960s, the NLF had gained influence in large sections of the South Vietnamese countryside, and by 1962, counted 300,000 members and one million supporters. Scores of armed clashes were taking place between the South Vietnamese forces (officially called Army of the Republic of Vietnam, ARVN) and the Viet Cong (which officially was called the People’s Liberation Armed Forces, PLAF).

Because of the deteriorating security situation, President Diem asked the United States for more military assistance. U.S. military involvement in Vietnam had begun much earlier, in July 1950, when
Vietnam was yet a part of French Indochina. Back then, U.S. President Truman furnished military and economic assistance to France as a result of the communist victory in China in October 1949 in the Chinese Civil War, and the outbreak in June 1950 of the Korean War, where North Korea, backed by the Soviet Union and China, launched an invasion of West-aligned South Korea. By this time, the Cold War had intensified and President Truman, through his policy of “containing” communism, which had been aimed to counter the perceived expansionist ambitions of the Soviet Union in Europe, was now similarly directed at Asia, where Truman believed that China and the Soviet Union were also determined to spread communism. The U.S. government saw Vietnam as the frontline against communism, and therefore gave large amounts of military support to French forces in the First Indochina War[3]. However, this effort came to naught as France was defeated in the war and was forced to withdraw from Vietnam and the whole Indochina region.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower, who succeeded as U.S. head of state in January 1953, likewise provided substantial military support to France during the First Indochina War, and with the partition of Vietnam in the Geneva Accords, to South Vietnam, aimed at preventing what became known as the Domino Theory, that is, that expansionism by China and the Soviet Union in Asia would cause Asian countries to fall to communism one after the other, like a row of dominoes. The U.S. government also sent military advisers to train the South Vietnamese military (which at that time suffered from leadership and cohesion problems), and to turn the latter into a viable fighting force.

Figure 4. Southeast Asia countries by the mid-1960s.
President John F. Kennedy, who in January 1963 succeeded Eisenhower, was faced with a number of Cold War crises in his first year in office, including the failed Bay of Pigs Invasion in Cuba (April 1961), and the Berlin Crisis (June - November 1961). President Kennedy initially had been reluctant to become involved in Vietnam, but with the growing Cold War crisis in Indochina that threatened to undermine American political credibility globally, he decided to increase military support to South Vietnam. The number of military advisers was greatly increased, from 900 to 16,000 over the course of his presidency. President Kennedy adopted a number of counter-insurgency initiatives which the British Army had developed in the 1950s, and which had proved successful during the Malayan Emergency (separate article): 1. Counter-insurgency warfare – U.S. Special Forces (“Green Berets”) trained the South Vietnamese military in anti-insurgency combat, and later also organized ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands into guerilla militias to fight the Viet Cong; 2. The use of herbicides and defoliants – U.S. planes sprayed many types of herbicides and defoliants, more usually Agent Orange, to deprive the insurgents of jungle cover and food crops, and clear vegetation along road and water routes; and 3. Forced resettlement in rural areas – Villages in the countryside were depopulated and their residents forced to relocate into government-designated camps under the Strategic Hamlet Program.

In the Strategic Hamlet Program which peaked in 1962-1963, over 8 million South Vietnamese people were relocated to 8,000 protected villages called “hamlets”, in order to separate the rural population from the Viet Cong/NLF, and thus deprive the rebels of their main source of food, supplies, information, and recruits. The Hamlet program was extremely unpopular among the affected population, since it forcibly resettled civilians away from their traditional ancestral and burial grounds (Vietnamese are predominantly Buddhists who practice ancestral worship), and also because the hamlets suffered from inadequate public facilities, and more crucially, lack of security protection. Hamlets located in Viet Cong-controlled areas were extremely vulnerable to rebel attacks, and the South Vietnamese military was unable, even unwilling, to confront these attacks. By late 1963, the Hamlet program was in decline and ceased completely in 1964, when the hamlets were abandoned and the villagers returned to their former areas to rebuild their villages, or became refugees in Saigon and other urban centers.

Because of the perceived threat of an invasion by China or North Vietnam into the insurgency-weakened South Vietnam, the U.S. military made plans to deploy U.S. combat troops in South Vietnam. However, President Kennedy was reluctant to do so, believing that a fully capable South Vietnamese military (with U.S. military guidance and support) was more than sufficient to quell the Viet Cong insurgency, and that introducing U.S. ground troops should be done only as a last resort. He did send U.S. pilots, who flew U.S. military helicopters that transported South Vietnamese troops to the battlefield.

In 1963, the political climate in South Vietnam deteriorated considerably, and opposition rose against the graft-ridden Diem government. President Diem, a Roman Catholic in an overwhelmingly Buddhist country, appointed many Catholics to top government and military positions, angering Buddhists. Then in May 1963, in a Buddhist street protest condemning the government’s ban on raising Buddhist flags on Vesak (Buddha Day), security forces opened fire on the crowd, killing nine people. The next month, in protest, a Buddhist monk committed self-immolation by setting himself on fire, this event being captured on camera by a news reporter, with the photograph shocking the international community. In the following months, other Buddhist monks also set themselves on fire, and widespread protests erupted in Saigon.

Then in August 1963, South Vietnamese Special Forces raided Buddhist temples, killing and arresting hundreds of Buddhists and causing extensive property damage. The United States, by this time greatly alarmed at South Vietnam’s deteriorating situation, began to distance itself from President Diem.
In particular, the Kennedy administration was outraged at Ngo Dinh Nhu, the president’s younger brother and chief advisor, who it believed was behind the South Vietnamese government’s oppressive policies. The U.S. government had pressed President Diem to dismiss Nhu and stop the repression. But with no reforms coming and South Vietnam’s security situation deteriorating, the United States tacitly gave its consent to a plot by South Vietnamese generals to overthrow the Diem government. In a coup on November 1–2, 1963, Diem was shot and killed, together with Nhu. A military junta led by high-ranking officers was then installed to rule the country.

Meanwhile in 1962, the South Vietnamese military had begun to make progress in suppressing the Viet Cong. General Paul Harkins, commander of U.S. forces in South Vietnam (which was officially called Military Assistance Command, Vietnam or MACV), announced that the Viet Cong would be defeated by December 1963, by which time American advisers could be withdrawn from South Vietnam. However, in January 1963, at the Battle of Ap Bac, the Viet Cong scored a stunning victory over the numerically superior (by a 4:1 ratio) South Vietnamese Army. The Viet Cong had developed new tactics to counter the enemy’s modern weapons, and held its ground against South Vietnamese forces that attacked using air, mechanized, and artillery support.

In 1963-1964, the Viet Cong/NLF expanded considerably: its forces, now numbering over 100,000 fighters, consisted of both regular and guerilla units, and were increasingly capable of fighting conventional battles. By then, the Viet Cong/NLF controlled or had influence over vast areas from the Central Highlands to the Mekong Delta (areas it called “liberated zones”), or nearly 50% of South Vietnam’s land area, and 50% of the total population. There, it set up quasi-governments in local villages, which collected taxes from the residents and distributed agricultural lands to the peasants. The Ho Chi Minh Trail also had grown extensively, allowing thousands of North Vietnamese Army soldiers to move south and join the war against South Vietnam. The North Vietnamese Army operated in northern South Vietnam while the Viet Cong/NLF, aided by some North Vietnamese Army units, operated in the other areas.

In the aftermath of Diem’s overthrow, South Vietnam experienced political instability by a series of military coups, where juntas were formed and were toppled one after the other. The South Vietnamese military was plagued with corruption, and suffered from low morale and poor combat capability. The new U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson was convinced that South Vietnam would fall to the Viet Cong, although like President Kennedy, he did not want to escalate American involvement in Vietnam. At this time, President Johnson was focusing his administration on domestic policies, particularly his Great Society programs. But like his predecessors, President Johnson was concerned about the United States loss of prestige and credibility as the leader of the free world in the event of a Viet Cong/NLF (i.e. communist) victory in South Vietnam. Furthermore, the American people, as well as politicians and military officers, called for more decisive action in South Vietnam. Starting in April 1964, President Johnson increased U.S. air and naval presence in the coastal waters off Vietnam; U.S. planes then began launching covert bombing raids on the Laotian border.

Meanwhile in North Vietnam, in December 1963, the Hanoi government, convinced that South Vietnam was verging on defeat, approved plans to intensify the war to hasten the fall of the Saigon government. More North Vietnamese Army troops were sent through the Ho Chi Minh Trail, raising North Vietnamese combat strength in the south from 174,000 soldiers in December 1963 to 300,000 in 1964. Large quantities of weapons and other supplies also were transported to the Viet Cong/NLF.

As early as 1961, under the top-secret Oplan 34A by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and later in 1964, under the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam – Studies and Operations Group (MACV-SOG), U.S. Navy fast patrol boats transported South Vietnamese commandos on small
attack missions inside North Vietnam. One such mission, which would have far-reaching consequences, occurred on July 30, 1964, when South Vietnamese commandos attacked two North Vietnamese islands in the Gulf of Tonkin. The *USS Maddox*, an American destroyer operating as an electronic spy ship, was located nearby. On August 2, 1964, the commander of the *USS Maddox* reported being attacked by three North Vietnamese torpedo boats, but that the attack was thwarted. Two days later, August 4, the *USS Maddox*, now joined by another electronic spy ship, the *USS Turner Joy*, again reported being attacked by North Vietnamese torpedo boats.

This second incident was later determined to not having occurred. However, after the second “attack”, President Johnson announced to the American public that U.S. naval forces in the Gulf of Tonkin had been attacked by North Vietnam. President Johnson then ordered retaliatory air strikes, where U.S. planes struck North Vietnamese naval bases and an oil storage facility. President Johnson also called on the U.S. Congress to pass a resolution that would guarantee “freedom…and peace in Southeast Asia” and support “all necessary action to protect our Armed Forces”.

On August 7, 1964, U.S. Congress overwhelmingly passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution (Senate: 88-2 and House of Representatives: 416-0), which came into law on August 10, which gave President Johnson broad powers to use all necessary military force in Southeast Asia in support of its allies there. The Resolution essentially gave President Johnson the authority to go to war against North Vietnam without first obtaining a Declaration of War from U.S. Congress.

The U.S. air strikes, the U.S. spy activities in the Gulf of Tonkin, and the South Vietnamese infiltration missions convinced the Hanoi government that the United States was intervening in the war, and worse, it was planning to invade North Vietnam. As a result, the Ho regime increased military pressure in South Vietnam to overthrow the Saigon government before the United States could intervene. In early 1965, North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces launched a series of attacks across South Vietnam, with concentrations in the Central Highlands east toward the coast to cut South Vietnam in two, and in the region west of Saigon and near the Cambodian border. U.S. military installations in South Vietnam also were targeted. In November 1964, the Bien Hoa airport, headquarters of the U.S. Air Force command in South Vietnam, was attacked by Viet Cong mortar fire, killing and wounding dozens of American servicemen and damaging several planes. Then in February 1965, Viet Cong units attacked the U.S. air base at Pleiku, Central Highlands, killing 9 U.S. soldiers and wounding 70 others, which was followed three days later, by an explosion that destroyed a hotel at Qui Nohn, killing 23 U.S. soldiers.

As a result of the Viet Cong escalation, President Johnson authorized Operation Rolling Thunder, a limited-scale bombing of North Vietnam, which began on March 2, 1965, with the stated aims of boosting South Vietnamese morale, deterring North Vietnam from supporting the Viet Cong/NLF, and stopping North Vietnamese forces from entering South Vietnam. Initially planned to last only 8 weeks, the bombing campaign became an incremental, sustained effort that lasted 44 months, ending in November 1968. Under Operation Rolling Thunder, President Johnson required that the U.S. military’s list of potential targets be subject to his approval, which generated great consternation among the generals who wanted an all-out, large-scale strategic bombing campaign of North Vietnam. U.S. planes also were only allowed to hit targets (such as road and rail systems, industries, and air defenses) inside a designated radius away from Hanoi and Haiphong, as well as from a buffer zone from the North Vietnam-China border. Some of these restrictions would be lifted later.

The incremental nature of Operation Rolling Thunder allowed North Vietnam enough time to strengthen its air defenses. Thus, by 1968, Hanoi, Haiphong, and other vital centers were bristling with 8,000 Soviet-supplied anti-aircraft guns and 300 surface-to-air missile batteries, supported by 350 radar facilities, as well as scores of Soviet MiG-21 fighter planes and 15,000 Soviet air-defense advisers.
In February 1965, the Soviet Union further increased its military support to North Vietnam when an American bombing attack coincided with the visit of Soviet Deputy Premier Alexei Kosygin to Hanoi. Previously, the Soviet government had sought a diplomatic resolution to the Vietnam War (despite providing military support to North Vietnam). Ultimately, by the end of Rolling Thunder, the United States lost over 900 planes, while North Vietnam continued to deliver even larger amounts of weapons to South Vietnam through the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

Throughout the war, the United States launched other aerial operations (Steel Tiger, Tiger Hound, and Commando Hunt) on the Ho Chi Minh Trail to try and stop the flow of men and materiel from North Vietnam to South Vietnam, but all of these ultimately proved unsuccessful.
Over the course of the war, the Ho Chi Minh Trail system expanded considerably into an elaborate network of small and wide roads, foot and bike paths, and concealed river crossings across a vast and ever-increasing area in the eastern regions of Laos and Cambodia. With 43,000 North Vietnamese and Laotian laborers, dozens of bulldozers, road graders, and other road-building equipment working day and night, by December 1961, the Trail system allowed for truck traffic, which became the main source of transporting men and supplies for the rest of the war. Apart from construction crews, other units in the Ho Chi Minh Trail were tasked with providing food, housing, and medical care, and other services to soldiers and transport crews moving along the system. To counter U.S. air attacks, which intensified as the war progressed, the Trail system was massively fortified with air defenses, eventually bristling with 1,500 anti-aircraft guns. Supply convoys also traveled only at night to lessen the risk of U.S. air attacks.

But because of the U.S. air campaign, American bases came under greater threat of Viet Cong retaliatory attacks. Thus, in March 1965, on President Johnson’s orders, 3,500 U.S. Marines arrived to protect Da Nang air base. These Marines were the first U.S. combat troops to be deployed in Vietnam. Then in April 1965, when the U.S. government’s offer of economic aid to North Vietnam in exchange for a peace agreement was rejected by the Hanoi government, President Johnson soon sent more U.S. ground forces, raising the total U.S. personnel strength in Vietnam to 60,000 troops. At this point, U.S. forces were authorized only to defend American military installations.

Then in May 1965, in a major effort to overthrow South Vietnam, Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces launched attacks in three major areas: just south of the DMZ, in the Central Highlands, and in areas around Saigon. U.S. and South Vietnamese forces repulsed these attacks, with massive U.S. air firepower being particularly effective, and in mid-1965, Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces retreated, and the danger to the Saigon government passed. By that time also, President Johnson agreed to the U.S. military’s request and sent more troops to Vietnam, raising the total to 184,000 by the end of 1965. More crucially, he now authorized U.S. forces to not merely defend U.S. facilities, but to undertake offensive combat missions, in line with American military doctrine to take the war to the enemy.

Meanwhile in June 1965, South Vietnam’s political climate eased considerably with the appointment of Nguyen Cao Ky as Prime Minister and Nguyen Van Thieu as (figurehead) Chief of State. The new South Vietnamese regime imposed censorship and restrictions on civil liberties because of the unstable security situation, as well as to curb widespread local civilian unrest. In 1966, Prime Minister Ky quelled a Buddhist uprising and brought some stability to the South Vietnamese military. Ky and Thieu were political rivals, and after Thieu was elected president in the 1967 presidential election, a power struggle developed between the two leaders, with President Thieu ultimately emerging victorious. By the late 1960s, Thieu had consolidated power and thereafter ruled with near autocratic powers.

During the Vietnam War, the United States, which soon was joined with combat forces from its anti-communist allies Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, Thailand, and the Philippines, began to take direct command of the war in what was called the period of the “Americanization” of the war, relegating the South Vietnamese military to a supporting role. Nevertheless, President Johnson imposed restrictions on the U.S. military – that it was to engage only in a limited war (as opposed to a total war) that was sufficiently aggressive enough to deter North Vietnam from attacking South Vietnam, but should not be too overpowering to incite a drastic response from the major communist powers, China and the Soviet Union.

The United States was concerned that China might intervene directly for North Vietnam (as it had done for North Korea in the Korean War), or worse, that the Soviet Union might invade Western Europe.
A consequence of U.S. policy in Vietnam to not incite a wider war with China and the Soviet Union meant that U.S. forces could not invade North Vietnam, and that U.S. bombing missions in North Vietnam were to be screened so as not to kill or harm Chinese or Soviet military personnel there or destroy Chinese and Soviet assets (e.g. ships docked at North Vietnamese ports). Thus, U.S. ground forces were limited to operating in South Vietnam, where subsequently nearly all of the land fighting took place. Even then, the U.S. high command was confident of success, and General William Westmoreland, commander of U.S. forces in Vietnam, predicted American victory over the Viet Cong/NLF by the end of 1967.

To achieve this goal, the U.S. military employed the “search and destroy” strategy (which was developed by the British in the 1950s), where U.S. intelligence would locate large Viet Cong/NLF concentrations, which would be destroyed using massive American firepower involving air, artillery, infantry, and in some cases armored, units. U.S. military planners believed that the use of overwhelming force would inflict such heavy losses that the Viet Cong would be unable to replace its manpower and material losses, ultimately leading to the defeat of the southern insurgency.

During the Vietnam War, the number of American troops over the Viet Cong/NLF did not reach the 10:1 ratio that is conventionally taken as required to quell an insurgency. As a result, the U.S. military measured the success of search and destroy missions not by seizing and holding territory, but by quantifying enemy losses, namely, the amount of Viet Cong/NLF stockpiles and armed caches captured or destroyed, the number of enemy strongholds overran, and most important, the number of insurgents killed (“body count”). The U.S military focused its search and destroy missions around the major Viet Cong areas in the central region near Da Nang and Qui Nhon, the central Mekong Delta, and in the west and north of Saigon.

General Westmoreland believed that the Viet Cong’s greatest threat to South Vietnam was in the areas near Saigon, particularly in the western frontier regions adjacent to the Cambodian border, in locations called the Iron Triangle, and Battle Zones C and D (Figure 5). For most of the war, U.S. forces carried out successive search and destroy operations in these areas, which ultimately proved only partially successful. General Westmoreland’s other plan was to establish a network of American strategic strong points in South Vietnam from where U.S. forces would launch search and destroy operations. He envisioned that search and destroy operations would be followed by clear and hold missions, where South Vietnamese forces would re-establish control over former Viet Cong/NLF areas. In December 1965, because of aggressive U.S. combat tactics, the Viet Cong was forced to return to guerilla warfare, and only fought in the open when the odds were clearly in its favor.

In June 1965, U.S. forces launched their first major offensive of the war, targeting a Viet Cong hideout northwest of Saigon, which was followed in 1966 with several major operations in other Viet Cong/NLF strongholds: Operation Crimp (January 1966) in the Cu Chi District, 40 kilometers northwest of Saigon where a yet undiscovered massive Viet Cong underground tunnel complex was located; Operation Birmingham (April-May 1966) in War Zone C, a Viet Cong/NLF stronghold located 80 kilometers northwest of Saigon, which involved U.S. and South Vietnamese troops, supported by air and armored units; Operation Attleboro (September 1966) in Tay Nihn Province, where U.S. and South Vietnamese forces preempted a planned Viet Cong attack on the Suoi Da U.S. Special Forces base and after six weeks of several small engagements, inflicted heavy Viet Cong casualties and seized large quantities of enemy supplies.

In early 1967, further sweeps were made on Viet Cong/NLF strongholds northwest of Saigon. In Operation Cedar Falls (January 1967), 30,000 American and South Vietnamese troops attacked the Iron Triangle, a 60-square mile Viet Cong/NLF stronghold, and seized control of the area (including capturing a stockpile of weapons, food, supplies, and documents). U.S. forces encountered no major resistance
as the bulk of Viet Cong forces had withdrawn earlier from the area. Then in Operation Junction City (February 1967), 30,000 U.S. and 5,000 South Vietnamese troops, supported by air, artillery, and armored units, swept down on War Zone C, which was believed to be the insurgent command headquarters called COSVN (Central Office for South Vietnam), and seized large quantities of Viet Cong/NLF stockpiles, but failed to locate major enemy units.

In the aftermath of these operations, the U.S. military cleared these areas of jungle cover using specially made engineering equipment, and also by conducting aerial spraying with defoliants to prevent the re-growth of vegetation. Nonetheless, within a short period of time, U.S. intelligence observed that Viet Cong/NLF activity had returned to these areas.

Meanwhile, in November 1965 in the Central Highlands, one of the early major battles of the war occurred when outnumbered U.S. forces engaged the North Vietnamese Army in intense fighting near the Chu Pong massif. This encounter, called the Battle of La Drang, saw heavy casualties on both sides, but the arrival of U.S. planes and their overwhelming firepower forced the North Vietnamese to withdraw to Cambodia, with U.S. forces not pursuing because of Cambodia’s official neutrality in the war. The battle was notable because of the U.S. military’s first large-scale use of helicopters to transport troops to the battle zone (using the newly developed Airmobile Offensive strategy).

In the northern part of South Vietnam (which the South Vietnamese government designated as I Corps Tactical Zone), U.S. Marines, who were based at Da Nang, Phu Bai, and Chu Lai, supplemented by South Vietnamese forces, were tasked with defending the areas south of the DMZ. The U.S. Marines launched several search and destroy missions in the surrounding village areas (which were under the nominal control of the Viet Cong/NLF). These operations yielded little results, as the Viet Cong refused to fight in the open, but retreated to the jungles, only to return after the Americans had departed. Unable to locate the enemy, the U.S. Marines changed their strategy, and instead implemented a “hearts and minds” campaign of providing social, medical, economic, and political programs, aimed at winning the support of the local population. Ultimately, the “hearts and minds” program proved only partially successful, as Viet Cong influence in these agriculturally rich lowland coastal areas remained strong. General Westmoreland also viewed these conciliatory efforts by the U.S. Marines as contrary to the American war strategy of seeking and destroying the Viet Cong.

By mid-1966, North Vietnamese infiltrations across the DMZ had increased considerably. North Vietnam had timed these infiltrations to take advantage of the ongoing massive civilian unrest occurring in South Vietnam. In response, the U.S. military launched offensives to counteract these infiltrations. In August 1966, under Operation Starlite, U.S. Marines pre-empted a North Vietnamese planned assault on the U.S. Marine base at Chu Lai. The North Vietnamese were forced to retreat to their side of the DMZ, where they regrouped and again crossed the DMZ into South Vietnam, which was met with U.S. Marines in Operation Prairie, which again forced the enemy to fall back across the DMZ.

Because of the increased North Vietnamese pressure, by mid-1966, the U.S. Marines had established a series of combat bases across and adjacent to the DMZ; these bases included Khe Sanh, Dong Ha, Con Thien, and Gio Linh, all of which were supported by the artillery bases of Camp Carroll and Rockpile (Figure 6).

In June 1966, North Vietnamese forces again attacked across the DMZ, but were repulsed by U.S. Marines, supported by South Vietnamese units and American air, artillery, and naval forces. U.S. forces then launched Operation Hastings, leading to three weeks of large battles near Dong Ha and ending with the North Vietnamese withdrawing back across the DMZ. The year 1966 also saw the United States greatly escalating the war, with U.S. deployment being increased over two-fold from the year before,
from 184,000 in 1965 to 385,000 troops in 1966. In 1967, U.S. deployment would top 485,000 and then peak in 1968 with 536,000 soldiers.

Throughout 1967, combat activity in the DMZ consisted of artillery duels, North Vietnamese infiltrations, and firefights along the border. As the North Vietnamese actually used their side of the DMZ as a base to stage their infiltration attacks, in May 1967, the U.S. Marines militarized the southern side of the DMZ, which sparked increased fighting inside the DMZ. Also starting in September 1967 and continuing for many months, North Vietnamese artillery batteries pounded U.S. Marine positions near the DMZ, which inflicted heavy casualties on American troops. In response, U.S. aircraft launched bombing attacks on North Vietnamese positions across the DMZ.

In early 1967, North Vietnam began preparing for a massive offensive into South Vietnam. This operation, which later came to be known as the Tet Offensive, would have far-reaching consequences on the outcome of the war. The North Vietnamese plan to launch the Tet Offensive came about when political hardliners in Hanoi succeeded in sidelining the moderates in government. As a result of the hardliners dictating government policies, in July 1967, hundreds of moderates, including government officials and military officers, were purged from the Hanoi government and the Vietnamese Communist Party.

By fall of 1967, North Vietnamese military planners had set the date to launch the Tet Offensive on January 31, 1968. In the invasion plan, the Viet Cong was to carry out the offensive, with North Vietnam only providing weapons and other material support. The Tet Offensive, which was known in North Vietnam as “General Offensive, General Uprising”, called for the Viet Cong to launch simultaneous attacks on many targets across South Vietnam, which would be accompanied with calls to the civilian population to launch a general uprising. North Vietnam believed that a civilian uprising in the south would succeed because of President Thieu’s unpopularity, as evidenced by the constant civil unrest and widespread criticism of government policies. In this scenario, once President Thieu was overthrown, an NLF-led communist government would succeed in power, and pressure the United States to end its involvement in South Vietnam. Faced with the threat of international condemnation, the United States would be forced to acquiesce, and withdraw its forces from Vietnam.
As part of its general strategy for the Tet Offensive, North Vietnam increased its military activity along the border region. In the last months of 1967, the North Vietnamese military launched attacks across the border, including in Song Be, Loc Ninh, and Dak To in order to lure U.S. forces away from the main urban areas. These diversionary attacks succeeded, as large numbers of U.S. troops were moved to the border areas.

In a series of clashes known as the “Border Battles”, American and South Vietnamese forces easily threw back these North Vietnamese attacks, inflicting heavy North Vietnamese casualties. However, U.S. military planners were baffled at North Vietnam’s intentions, as these attacks appeared to be a waste of soldiers and resources in the face of overwhelming American firepower.

But the North Vietnamese had succeeded in drawing away the bulk of U.S. forces from the populated centers. By the start of the Tet Offensive, half of all U.S. combat troops were in I Corps to confront what the Americans believed was an imminent major North Vietnamese invasion into the northern provinces. U.S. military intelligence had detected the build ups of Viet Cong forces in the south and the North Vietnamese in the north. But the U.S. high command, including General Westmoreland, did not believe that the Viet Cong had the capacity to mount a large offensive like that which actually occurred in the Tet Offensive.

Following some attacks one day earlier (January 30), on January 31, 1968 (which was the Vietnamese New Year or Tet, when a truce was traditionally observed), some 80,000 Viet Cong fighters, supported by some North Vietnamese Army units, launched coordinated attacks in Saigon, in 36 of the 44 provincial capitals, and in over 100 other towns across South Vietnam. In Saigon, many public and military
infrastructures were hit, including the government radio station where the Viet Cong/NLF tried but failed to broadcast a pre-recorded message from Ho Chi Minh calling on the civilian population to rise up in rebellion (electric power to the radio station was cut immediately after the attack). A Viet Cong attempt to seize the U.S. Embassy in Saigon also failed.

Taken by surprise, South Vietnamese and American forces quickly assembled a defense, and then soon counterattacked. Crucially, U.S. forces that had been sent to the Cambodian border returned to Saigon just before the start of the Tet Offensive.

Viet Cong units occupied large sections of Saigon, but after bitter street-by-street, house-to-house fighting, South Vietnamese and U.S. forces soon gained the upper hand. South Vietnamese forces also mounted successful defenses in other parts of the country. In early February 1968, the Viet Cong leadership ordered a general retreat. The rebels, now suffering heavy human and material losses, withdrew from the cities and towns.

At Hue, the ancestral capital, the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong attackers, who had seized large sections of the city, were ordered to stay and defend their positions. A 28-day battle ensued, with U.S. forces, supported by naval and ground artillery and air support, advancing slowly and engaging the enemy in intense house-to-house battles. By late February 1968 when the last North Vietnamese/Viet Cong units had been driven out of Hue, some 80% of the city had been destroyed, 5,000 civilians killed, and over 100,000 people left homeless. Combat fatalities at the Battle of Hue were 700 American/South Vietnamese and 8,000 North Vietnamese/Viet Cong soldiers.

While the Tet Offensive was ongoing, General Westmoreland continued to believe that the Tet Offensive was a diversion for a major North Vietnamese attack in the north, particularly on the Khe Sanh American combat base, in preparation for a full invasion of South Vietnam’s northern provinces. Thus, he sent back only few combat troops already committed to defend the towns and cities. After the war, North Vietnamese officials have since insisted that the Tet Offensive was their main objective, and that their attack on Khe Sanh was merely a diversion to draw away U.S. forces from the Tet Offensive. Some historians also postulate that North Vietnam planned no diversion at all, but that its purpose was to launch both the Khe Sanh and Tet offensives.

Based on the second scenario, North Vietnam planned the siege at Khe Sanh as a repetition of its successful 1954 siege of the French base at Dien Bien Phu. A North Vietnamese victory at Khe Sanh would have the Americans meet the same fate as the French at Dien Bien Phu. Conversely, the U.S. military wanted Khe Sanh to be a major showdown with the North Vietnamese Army, where overwhelming American firepower would be brought to bear in battle and inflict serious losses on the enemy.

The siege on Khe Sanh began on January 21, 1968 (ten days before the Tet Offensive), when 20,000 North Vietnamese troops, after many months of logistical buildup and moving heavy artillery into the heights surrounding Khe Sanh, began a barrage of artillery, mortar, and rocket fire into the Khe Sanh combat base, which was defended by 6,000 U.S. Marines and some elite South Vietnamese troops. Another 20,000 North Vietnamese troops served as reinforcements and also cut off road access to Khe Sanh, sealing off, and thus surrounding, the base. The 77-day battle featured 1. artillery duels by both sides; 2. Khe Sanh being supplied solely by air; 3. North Vietnamese probing attacks on the Khe Sanh base; and 4. North Vietnamese assaults to dislodge U.S. Marines outposts situated on a number of nearby strategic hills.

In early April 1968, the Siege of Khe Sanh ended, with U.S. air firepower being the decisive factor. By then, American B-52 bombers had dropped some 100,000 tons of bombs (equivalent to five
Hiroshima-size atomic bombs), which wreaked havoc on North Vietnamese positions. U.S. bombing also destroyed the extensive network of trenches which the North Vietnamese were building to inch ever closer to U.S. positions. The North Vietnamese planned to use the trenches as a springboard for their final assault on Khe Sanh. (The Viet Minh had used this tactic to overrun the Dien Bien Phu base in 1954.) North Vietnamese forces retreated to Laos and North Vietnam. Combat fatalities during the siege of Khe Sanh included 270 Americans, 200 South Vietnamese, and 10,000 North Vietnamese soldiers.

In May and August 1968, the Viet Cong launched smaller “Mini-Tet” attacks as part of its ongoing “General Offensive, General Uprising” campaign. South Vietnamese and American forces, now being more vigilant, parried these attacks. Also in the immediate aftermath of the first Tet Offensive, the Viet Cong/NLF initially gained control of the rural areas which South Vietnamese forces had evacuated to defend the cities and towns. But in the post-Tet period, American and South Vietnamese large-scale search and destroy operations regained control of the countryside.

Ultimately, the Tet Offensive was a military disaster for the Viet Cong/NLF, as its military units were expelled from South Vietnam and forced into hiding in the Cambodian border regions. As a result, the Viet Cong experienced desertions, low morale, and difficulty to recruit new fighters. The Viet Cong soon ceased to be a native southern insurgency, as its ranks increasingly became filled by North Vietnamese cadres. In the end, the Viet Cong came under full control of North Vietnam.

For the United States, the Tet Offensive was a decisive military victory, but one that soon turned into a moral defeat for the American people, and a political disaster for President Johnson. During the early years of the war, President Johnson had issued only carefully measured amounts of information to the American public regarding the true military situation in Vietnam. He continued to declare that U.S. war strategy in Vietnam remained the same, despite the fact that American military involvement in the war was deepening and more and more troops were being sent to Vietnam. Soon, the American mass media detected a “credibility gap” between the U.S. government official pronouncements and the reports coming from Vietnam. In 1966, the first signs of American public opposition became evident, which by 1967, grew into a more vocal and radical protest movement.

Initially, President Johnson’s increased involvement in Vietnam enjoyed overwhelming political support, as evidenced by the near unanimous passage of the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, as well as the high popular support. Opinion polls at the time showed that 80% of Americans supported the war. But by 1967, surveys were showing growing opposition to the war. To counter falling public support, and media reports that the war had reached a stalemate, in the fall of 1967, the Johnson administration embarked on a high-profile propaganda campaign stating that the war was being won. Government officials, including Vice-President Hubert Humphrey and the American ambassador to South Vietnam, issued glowing statements in support of the war. High-ranking military officers also released data showing that the enemy was suffering from high numbers of its soldiers killed, weapons lost, and bases and camps captured. General Westmoreland also announced that the U.S. military had “reached an important point when the end begins to come into view”, implying that American victory was imminent.

However, President Johnson’s attempts to win back public support through propaganda backfired, as the Tet Offensive showed that not only was the Viet Cong far from being defeated, it had the strength to launch a full-scale offensive across South Vietnam. As a result, support for the anti-war movement in the United States increased dramatically. Hundreds of thousands of people participated in protest marches and rallies. These demonstrations sometimes deteriorated into violent confrontations with security forces. Anti-war sentiment particularly was strong among college students, and universities and colleges became centers of unrest. Active involvement came from many sectors, including women’s movements, social rights groups, African-Americans, and even Vietnam War veterans.
Tet also fatally damaged President Johnson’s political career. Opposition within the president’s own Democratic Party came at a crucial time, as the presidential election was scheduled later that year, in November 1968. Following a lackluster performance in the New Hampshire primary, President Johnson, in a nationwide broadcast, announced that he would not seek re-election as president. In the same broadcast, he suspended U.S. bombing of North Vietnam in all areas north of the 19th parallel as an incentive to North Vietnam to start peace talks. The North Vietnamese government responded positively, and in May 1968, peace talks opened in Paris. Because the talks made little progress, on November 1, 1968, on President Johnson’s orders, aerial bombing of all North Vietnam was stopped (ending the 3½-year-long bombing campaign of Operation Rolling Thunder).

Also in 1968, because of domestic pressures, the Johnson administration implemented a major shift in American involvement in the war: henceforth, the U.S. military would gradually disengage from the Vietnam War, and after a period of being built up, the South Vietnamese military would take over the fighting (the process known as the “Vietnamization” of the war). The South Vietnamese military buildup was meant to balance out the phased reduction of U.S. ground forces. U.S. forces in Vietnam, which peaked in 1968 at 530,000 troops, would see a steady reduction in succeeding years: 1969 – 475,000; 1970 – 335,000; 1971-156,000; 1972 – 24,000; and 1973 – 50. More than these numbers alone, the pull-out of American troops would have a decisive impact on the outcome of the war.

In June 1968, General Creighton Abrams, who succeeded as over-all commander of U.S. forces in Vietnam (MACV), gradually shifted U.S. combat strategy away from search and destroy missions to “clear and hold” (i.e. to clear the insurgents from an area, which would then be held) operations, and implemented a moderately successful “hearts and minds” campaign (under a newly formed agency, the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support, CORDS) to gain the sympathy of the civilian population for the South Vietnamese government.

In 1969, newly elected U.S. president, Richard Nixon, who took office in January of that year, continued with the previous government’s policy of American disengagement and phased troop withdrawal from Vietnam, while simultaneously expanding Vietnamization, with U.S. military advice and material support. He also was determined to achieve his election campaign promise of securing a peace settlement with North Vietnam under the Paris peace talks, ironically through the use of force, if North Vietnam refused to negotiate.

In February 1969, the Viet Cong again launched a large-scale Tet-like coordinated offensive across South Vietnam, attacking villages, towns, and cities, and American bases. Two weeks later, the Viet Cong launched another offensive. Because of these attacks, in March 1968, on President Nixon’s orders, U.S. planes, including B-52 bombers, attacked Viet Cong/North Vietnamese bases in eastern Cambodia (along the Ho Chi Minh Trail). This bombing campaign, codenamed Operation Menu, lasted 14 months (until May 1970), and segued into Operation Freedom Deal (May 1970-August 1973), with the latter targeting a wider insurgent-held territory in eastern Cambodia.

In the 1954 Geneva Accords, Cambodia had declared its neutrality in regional conflicts, a policy it maintained in the early years of the Vietnam War. However, by the early 1960s, Cambodia’s reigning monarch, Norodom Sihanouk, came under great pressure by the escalating war in Vietnam, and especially after 1963, when North Vietnamese forces occupied sections of eastern Cambodia as part of the Ho Chi Minh Trail system to South Vietnam. Then in the mid-1960s, Sihanouk signed security agreements with China and North Vietnam, where in exchange for receiving economic incentives, he acquiesced to the North Vietnamese occupation of eastern Cambodia. He also allowed the use of the port of Sihanoukville (located in southern Cambodia) for shipments from communist countries for the Viet Cong/NLF through a newly opened land route across Cambodia. This new route, called the Sihanouk Trail (Figure 5) by
the Western media, became a major alternative logistical system by North Vietnam during the period of intense American air operations over the Laotian side of the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

In July 1968, under strong local and regional pressures, Sihanouk re-opened diplomatic relations with the United States, and his government swung to being pro-West. However, in March 1970, he was overthrown in a coup, and a hard-line pro-U.S. government under President Lon Nol abolished the monarchy and restructured the country as the Khmer Republic. For Cambodia, the spill-over of the Vietnam War into its territory would have disastrous consequences, as the fledging communist Khmer Rouge insurgents would soon obtain large North Vietnamese support that would plunge Cambodia into a full-scale civil war. For the United States (and South Vietnam), the pro-U.S. Lon Nol government served as a green light for American (and South Vietnamese) forces to conduct military operations in Cambodia.

The U.S. bombing operations on Viet Cong/North Vietnamese bases in eastern Cambodia forced North Vietnam to increase its military presence in other parts of Cambodia. The North Vietnamese Army seized control particularly of northeastern Cambodia, where its forces defeated and expelled the Cambodian Army. Then in response to the Cambodian government’s request for military assistance, starting in late April to early May 1970, American and South Vietnamese forces launched a major ground offensive into eastern Cambodia. The main U.S. objective was to clear the region of the North Vietnamese/Viet Cong in order to allow the planned American disengagement from the Vietnam War to proceed smoothly and on schedule. The offensive also served as a gauge of the progress of Vietnamization, particularly the performance of the South Vietnamese Army in large-scale operations.

In the nearly three-month successful operation (known as the Cambodian Campaign) which lasted until July 1970, American and South Vietnamese forces, which at their peak numbered over 100,000 troops, uncovered several abandoned major Viet Cong/North Vietnamese bases and dozens of underground storage bunkers containing huge quantities of materiel and supplies. In all, American and South Vietnamese troops captured over 20,000 weapons, 6,000 tons of rice, 1,800 tons of ammunition, 29 tons of communications equipment, over 400 vehicles, and 55 tons of medical supplies. Some 10,000 Viet Cong/North Vietnamese were killed in the fighting, although the majority of their forces (some 40,000) fled deeper into Cambodia. However, the campaign failed to achieve one of its objectives: capturing the Viet Cong/NLF leadership COSVN (Central Office for South Vietnam). The Nixon administration also came under domestic political pressure: in December 1970, and U.S. Congress passed a law that prohibited U.S. ground forces from engaging in combat inside Cambodia and Laos.

Before the Cambodian Campaign began, President Nixon had announced in a nationwide broadcast that he had committed U.S. ground troops to the operation. Within days, large demonstrations of up to 100,000 to 150,000 protesters broke out in the United States, with the unrest again centered in universities and colleges. On May 4, 1970, at Kent State University, Ohio, National Guardsmen opened fire on a crowd of protesters, killing four people and wounding eight others. This incident sparked even wider, increasingly militant and violent protests across the country. Anti-war sentiment already was intense in the United States following news reports in November 1969 of what became known as the My Lai Massacre, where U.S. troops on a search and destroy mission descended on My Lai and My Khe villages and killed between 347 and 504 civilians, including women and children.

American public outrage further was fueled when in June 1971, the New York Times began publishing the “Pentagon Papers” (officially titled: United States – Vietnam Relations, 1945–1967: A Study Prepared by the Department of Defense), a highly classified study by the U.S. Department of Defense that was leaked to the press. The Pentagon Papers showed that successive past administrations, including those of Presidents Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy, but especially of President Johnson, had many times misled the American people regarding U.S. involvement in Vietnam. President Nixon sought legal
grounds to stop the document’s publication for national security reasons, but the U.S. Supreme Court subsequently decided in favor of the New York Times and publication continued, and which was also later taken up by the Washington Post and other newspapers.

As in Cambodia, the U.S. high command had long desired to launch an offensive into Laos to cut off the logistical portion of the Ho Chi Minh Trail system located there. But restrained by Laos’ official neutrality, the U.S. military instead carried out secret bombing campaigns in eastern Laos and intelligence gathering operations (the latter conducted by the top-secret Military Assistance Command, Vietnam – Studies and Observations Group, MACV-SOG that involved units from Special Forces, Navy SEALS, U.S. Marines, U.S. Air Force, and CIA) there.

The success of the Cambodian Campaign encouraged President Nixon to authorize a similar ground operation into Laos. But as U.S. Congress had prohibited American ground troops from entering Laos, South Vietnamese forces would launch the offensive into Laos with the objective of destroying the Ho Chi Minh Trail, with U.S. forces only playing a supporting role (and remaining within the confines of South Vietnam). The operation also would gauge the combat capability of the South Vietnamese Army in the ongoing Vietnamization program.

In February-March 1971, about 17,000 troops of the South Vietnamese Army, (some of whom were transported by U.S. helicopters in the largest air assault operation of the war), and supported by U.S. air and artillery firepower, launched Operation Lam Son 719 into southeastern Laos. At their furthest extent, the South Vietnamese seized and briefly held Tchepone village, a strategic logistical hub of the Ho Chi Minh Trail located 25 miles west of the South Vietnamese border. The main South Vietnamese column was stopped by heavy enemy resistance and poor road conditions at A Luoi, some 15 miles from the border. North Vietnamese forces, initially distracted by U.S. diversionary attacks elsewhere, soon assembled 50,000 troops against the South Vietnamese, and counterattacked. North Vietnamese artillery particularly was devastating, knocking out several South Vietnamese firebases, while intense anti-aircraft fire disrupted U.S. air transport operations. By early March 1971, the attack was called off, and with the North Vietnamese intensifying their artillery bombardment, the South Vietnamese withdrawal turned into a chaotic retreat and a desperate struggle for survival. The operation was a debacle, with the South Vietnamese losing up to 8,000 soldiers killed, 60% of their tanks, 50% of their armored carriers, and dozens of artillery pieces; North Vietnamese casualties were 2,000 killed. American planes were sent to destroy abandoned South Vietnamese armor, transports, and equipment to prevent their capture by the enemy. U.S. air losses were substantial: 84 planes destroyed and 430 damaged and 168 helicopters destroyed and 618 damaged.

Buoyed by this success, in March 1972, North Vietnam launched the Nguyen Hue Offensive (called the Easter Offensive in the West), its first full-scale offensive into South Vietnam, using 300,000 troops and 300 tanks and armored vehicles. By this time, South Vietnamese forces carried practically all of the fighting, as fewer than 10,000 U.S. troops remained in South Vietnam, and who were soon scheduled to leave. North Vietnamese forces advanced along three fronts. In the northern front, the North Vietnamese attacked through the DMZ, and captured the northern provinces, and threatened Hue and Da Nang. In late June 1972, a South Vietnamese counterattack, supported by U.S. air firepower, including B-52 bombers, recaptured most of the occupied territory, including Quang Tri, near the northern border. In the Central Highlands front, the North Vietnamese objective to advance right through to coastal Qui Nhon and split South Vietnam in two, failed to break through to Kontum and was pushed back. In the southern front, North Vietnamese forces that advanced from the Cambodian border took Tay Ninh and Loc Ninh, but were repulsed at An Loc because of strong South Vietnamese resistance and massive U.S. air firepower.
To further break up the North Vietnamese offensive, in April 1972, U.S. planes including B-52 bombers under Operation Freedom Train, launched bombing attacks mostly between the 17th and 19th parallels in North Vietnam, targeting military installations, air defense systems, power plants and industrial sites, supply depots, fuel storage facilities, and roads, bridges, and railroad tracks. In May 1972, the bombing attack was stepped up with Operation Linebacker, where American planes now attacked targets across North Vietnam. A few days earlier, U.S. planes air-dropped thousands of naval mines off the North Vietnamese coast, sealing off North Vietnam from sea traffic.

At the end of the Easter Offensive in October 1972, North Vietnamese losses included up to 130,000 soldiers killed, missing, or wounded and 700 tanks destroyed. However, North Vietnamese forces succeeded in capturing and holding about 50% of the territories of South Vietnam’s northern provinces of Quang Tri, Thua Thien, Quang Nam, and Quang Tin, as well as the western edges of II Corps and III Corps. But the immense destruction caused by U.S. bombing in North Vietnam forced the latter to agree to make concessions at the Paris peace talks.

At the height of North Vietnam’s Easter Offensive, the Cold War took a dramatic turn when in February 1972, President Nixon visited China and met with Chairman Mao Zedong. Then in May 1972, President Nixon also visited the Soviet Union and met with General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev and other Soviet leaders. A period of superpower détente followed. China and the Soviet Union, desiring to maintain their newly established friendly relations with the United States, aside from issuing diplomatic protests, were not overly provoked by the massive U.S. bombing of North Vietnam. Even then, the two communist powers stood by their North Vietnamese ally and continued to send large amounts of military support.

Since it began in May 1968, the peace talks in Paris had made little progress. Negotiations were held at the main conference hall. However, since February 1970, U.S. National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger and North Vietnamese negotiator Le Duc Tho had been holding secret talks separate from the main negotiations. These secret talks achieved a breakthrough on October 17, 1972 (ten days after the U.S. bombings had forced North Vietnam to return to negotiations), when Kissinger announced that “peace is at hand” and that a mutually agreed draft of a peace agreement was to be signed on October 31, 1972.

However, South Vietnamese President Thieu, when presented with the peace proposal, refused to agree to it, and instead demanded 129 changes to the draft agreement, including that the DMZ be recognized as the international border of a fully sovereign, independent South Vietnam, and that North Vietnam withdraw its forces from occupied territories in South Vietnam. On November 1972, Kissinger presented Tho with a revised draft incorporating South Vietnam’s demands as well as changes proposed by President Nixon. This time, the North Vietnamese government was infuriated and believed it had been deceived by Kissinger. On October 26, 1972, North Vietnam broadcast details of the document. In December 1972, talks resumed which went nowhere, and soon broke down on December 14, 1972.

Also on December 14, 1972, the U.S. government issued a 72-hour ultimatum to North Vietnam to return to negotiations. On the same day, U.S. planes air-dropped naval mines off the North Vietnamese waters, again sealing off the coast to sea traffic. Then on President Nixon’s orders to use “maximum effort...maximum destruction”, on December 18-29, 1972, U.S. B-52 bombers and other aircraft under Operation Linebacker II, launched massive bombing attacks on targets in North Vietnam, including Hanoi and Haiphong, hitting airfields, air defense systems, naval bases, and other military facilities, industrial complexes and supply depots, and transport facilities. As many of the restrictions from previous air campaigns were lifted, the round-the-clock bombing attacks destroyed North Vietnam’s war-related logistical and support capabilities. Several B-52s were shot down in the first days of the operation,
but changes to attack methods and the use of electronic and mechanical countermeasures greatly reduced air losses. By the end of the bombing campaign, few targets of military value remained in North Vietnam, enemy anti-aircraft guns had been silenced, and North Vietnam was forced to return to negotiations. On January 15, 1973, President Nixon ended the bombing operations.

One week later, on January 23, negotiations resumed, leading four days later, on January 27, 1973, to the signing by representatives from North Vietnam, South Vietnam, the Viet Cong/NLF through its Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG), and the United States of the Paris Peace Accords (officially titled: “Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam”), which (ostensibly) marked the end of the war. The Accords stipulated a ceasefire; the release and exchange of prisoners of war; the withdrawal of all American and other non-Vietnamese troops from Vietnam within 60 days; for South Vietnam: a political settlement between the government and the PRG to determine the country’s political future; and for Vietnam: a gradual, peaceful reunification of North Vietnam and South Vietnam. As in the 1954 Geneva Accords (which ended the First Indochina War), the DMZ did not constitute a political/territorial border. Furthermore, the 200,000 North Vietnamese troops occupying territories in South Vietnam were allowed to remain in place.

To assuage South Vietnam’s concerns regarding the last two points, on March 15, 1973, President Nixon assured President Thieu of direct U.S. military air intervention in case North Vietnam violated the Accords. Furthermore, just before the Accords came into effect, the United States delivered a large amount of military hardware and financial assistance to South Vietnam.

By March 29, 1973, nearly all American and other allied troops had departed, and only a small contingent of U.S. Marines and advisors remained. A peacekeeping force, called the International Commission of Control and Supervision (ICCS), arrived in South Vietnam to monitor and enforce the Accords’ provisions. But as large-scale fighting restarted soon thereafter, the ICCS became powerless and failed to achieve its objectives.

For the United States, the Paris Peace Accords meant the end of the war, a view that was not shared by the other belligerents, as fighting resumed, with the ICCS recording 18,000 ceasefire violations between January-July 1973. President Nixon had also compelled President Thieu to agree to the Paris Peace Accords under threat that the United States would end all military and financial aid to South Vietnam, and that the U.S. government would sign the Accords even without South Vietnam’s concurrence. Ostensibly, President Nixon could fulfill his promise of continuing to provide military support to South Vietnam, as he had been re-elected in a landslide victory in the recently concluded November 1972 presidential election. However, U.S. Congress, which was now dominated by anti-war legislators, did not bode well for South Vietnam. In June 1973, U.S. Congress passed legislation that prohibited U.S. combat activities in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, without prior legislative approval. Also that year, U.S. Congress cut military assistance to South Vietnam by 50%. Despite the clear shift in U.S. policy, South Vietnam continued to believe the U.S. government would keep its commitment to provide military assistance.

Then in October 1973, a four-fold increase in world oil prices led to a global recession following the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) imposing an oil embargo in response to U.S. support for Israel in the Yom Kippur War. South Vietnam’s economy was already reeling because of the U.S. troop withdrawal (a vibrant local goods and services economy had existed in Saigon because of the presence of large numbers of American soldiers) and reduced U.S. assistance. South Vietnam experienced soaring inflation, high unemployment, and a refugee problem, with hundreds of thousands of people fleeing to the cities to escape the fighting in the countryside.
The economic downturn also destabilized the South Vietnamese forces, for although they possessed vast quantities of military hardware (for example, having three times more artillery pieces and two times more tanks and armor than North Vietnam), budget cuts, lack of spare parts, and fuel shortages meant that much of this equipment could not be used. Later, even the number of bullets allotted to soldiers was rationed. Compounding matters were the endemic corruption, favoritism, ineptitude, and lethargy prevalent in the South Vietnamese government and military.

In the post-Accords period, South Vietnam was determined to regain control of lost territory, and in a number of offensives in 1973-1974, it succeeded in seizing some communist-held areas, but paid a high price in personnel and weaponry. At the same time, North Vietnam was intent on achieving a complete military victory. But since the North Vietnamese forces had suffered extensive losses in the previous years, the Hanoi government concentrated on first rebuilding its forces for a planned full-scale offensive of South Vietnam, planned for 1976.

In March 1974, North Vietnam launched a series of “strategic raids” from the captured territories that it held in South Vietnam. By November 1974, North Vietnam’s control had extended eastward from the north nearly to the south of the country. As well, North Vietnamese forces now threatened a number of coastal centers, including Da Nang, Quang Ngai, and Qui Nhon, as well as Saigon. Expanding its occupied areas in South Vietnam also allowed North Vietnam to shift its logistical system (the Ho Chi Minh Trail) from eastern Laos and Cambodia to inside South Vietnam itself. By October 1974, with major road improvements completed, the Trail system was a fully truckable highway from north to south, and greater numbers of North Vietnamese units, weapons, and supplies were being transported each month to South Vietnam.

North Vietnam’s “strategic raids” also were meant to gauge U.S. military response. None occurred, as at this time, the United States was reeling from the Watergate Scandal, which led to President Nixon resigning from office on August 9, 1974. Vice-President Gerald Ford succeeded as President.

Encouraged by this success, in December 1974, North Vietnamese forces in eastern Cambodia attacked Phuoc Long Province, taking its capital Phuoc Binh in early January 1975 and sending pandemonium in South Vietnam, but again producing no military response from the United States. President Ford had asked U.S. Congress for military support for South Vietnam, but was refused.

In March 1975, North Vietnam launched its spring offensive that would finally bring the war to an (abrupt) end. Under Campaign 275, on March 10, North Vietnamese forces attacked Ban Me Thout, which was captured after eight days of fighting; the whole Dak Lak Province then fell. On the desperate appeal of the U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam, President Ford asked U.S. Congress for emergency assistance to South Vietnam, but American legislators, now viewing South Vietnam as lost, instead cut appropriations to that country by 50%. In North Vietnam, encouraged by this victory, military planners moved to capture Pleiku, Ton Kum and the whole Central Highlands (South Vietnam’s II Corps Tactical Zone).

Meanwhile, on March 14, 1975, President Thieu, meeting with his top commanders, ordered that South Vietnamese forces in the northern half of the country (I Corps and II Corps Tactical Zones) conduct an orderly withdrawal to the southern half (III Corps and IV Corps Tactical Zones), or the nation’s major economic and industrial centers. Also for the Central Highlands, the South Vietnamese military did not have the men and resources to defend that region, and the forces there were ordered to withdraw. On March 16, 1975, some 80,000 South Vietnamese troops in Pleiku and Ton Kum began their retreat to coastal Tuy Hoa, which in the following days, turned into chaos as tens of thousands of civilians, panic-stricken at being abandoned, also fled, causing delays by crowding the narrow, poorly maintained roads. North Vietnamese forces, soon learning of the withdrawal, shelled the roads with artillery fire, inflicting
heavy casualties and soon causing the retreat to be called the “column of tears”. In total, only 20,000 of 60,000 South Vietnamese soldiers reached Tuy Hoa, and II Corps was effectively destroyed as a fighting unit. Civilian losses also were immense: 120,000 killed, missing, and captured, while 60,000 survived.

Also as part of the Spring Offensive, in March 1975, North Vietnamese forces, numbering 100,000 soldiers and supported by tanks and artillery, launched a multi-pronged offensive in the northern provinces (Quang Tri, Thua Thien, Quang Nam, and Quang Tin; South Vietnam’s I Corps Tactical Zone), attacking from the north, west, and south aimed at pushing back South Vietnamese forces to Da Nang (Figure 5) and destroying them there. President Thieu, who had envisaged a string of defensive positions along the coastal areas from where I Corps units would make a fighting retreat, now issued a series of contradictory orders to his commanders regarding whether to defend or abandon Hue. Then as Quang Tri and Hue in the north and Chu Lai and Tam Ky in the south became indefensible, South Vietnamese units withdrew to Da Nang, and retreating troops were joined by tens of thousands of panic-stricken civilians, and in a repeat of the debacle at the Central Highlands, the withdrawal turned into a chaotic, desperate retreat, all the while being subject to North Vietnamese artillery fire. Some 100,000 South Vietnamese soldiers and two million civilians were soon packed at Da Nang, which came under North Vietnamese artillery fire that that killed tens of thousands of people. The city was soon surrounded on three sides, with North Vietnamese forces blocking all roads to the city. Then in the frenzied evacuation by air and sea from Da Nang, with few transports available, only 16,000 soldiers and 50,000 civilians escaped. Some 70,000 South Vietnamese troops and two million civilians were trapped in the city, and were captured by North Vietnamese forces. Soon thereafter, the remaining northern coastal towns and cities fell without resistance, and the northern provinces were captured. Within a few weeks, the northern half of South Vietnam had collapsed without much resistance. The rapid North Vietnamese advance shocked the international community.

North Vietnamese leaders, who also were surprised by their quick successes, now decided to advance their timeline for conquering South Vietnam by 1976 to capturing Saigon by May 1, 1975. The offensive on Saigon, called the Ho Chi Minh Campaign and involving some 150,000 troops and supplied with armor and artillery units, began on April 9, 1975 with a three-pronged attack on Xuan Loc, a city located 40 miles northeast of the national capital and called the “gateway to Saigon”. Resistance by the 18,000-man South Vietnamese garrison (which was outnumbered 6:1) was fierce, but after two weeks of desperate fighting by the defenders, North Vietnamese forces had broken through, with the road to Saigon now lying open.

In the midst of the battle for Xuan Loc, on April 10, 1975, President Ford again appealed to U.S. Congress for emergency assistance to South Vietnam, which was denied. South Vietnamese morale plunged even further when on April 17, 1975 neighboring Cambodia fell to the communist Khmer Rouge forces. On April 21, 1975, President Thieu resigned (and went into exile abroad) and was replaced by a government to try and negotiate a settlement with North Vietnam. But the latter, by now in an overwhelmingly superior position, rejected the offer.

By April 27, 1975, some 130,000 North Vietnamese troops had encircled Saigon, with some intense fighting breaking out at the outskirts and bridges at the city’s approaches. The South Vietnamese military set up five defensive lines north, west, and east of Saigon, manned by 60,000 troops and augmented by other units that had retreated from the north. However, by this time, the South Vietnamese forces were verging on collapse, with morale and discipline breaking down, desertions widespread, and ammunition and supplies running low. In Saigon, desperation and anarchy reigned, with the government’s imposition of martial law failing to quell the panic-stricken population.
The end came on April 30, 1975 when North Vietnamese forces, after launching an artillery barrage on the city one day earlier, attacked Saigon and entered the city with virtually no opposition, as the South Vietnamese military high command had ordered its troops to lay down their weapons. The Mekong Delta south of Saigon soon also fell. By early May 1975, the war was over.

In the lead-up to Saigon’s fall, thousands of South Vietnamese made a desperate attempt to leave the country. As early as March 1975, the U.S. government had begun to evacuate its citizens and other foreign nationals, as well as some South Vietnamese civilians. In April 1975, the U.S. launched Operation New Life, where some 110,000 South Vietnamese were evacuated, the great majority consisting of South Vietnamese military officers, Catholics, bureaucrats, businessmen, locals employed in U.S. military and civilian facilities, and other Vietnamese who had cooperated or associated with the United States and thus were considered to be potential targets for North Vietnamese reprisals. Also in the final days of the war, the U.S. military conducted Operation Frequent Wind, where the remaining U.S. nationals and American troops (U.S. Marines) were evacuated by helicopters from the Defense Attaché Compound and U.S. Embassy in Saigon onto U.S. ships waiting offshore. The chaotic evacuation, which succeeded in moving over 7,000 Americans and South Vietnamese, was captured in film, with dramatic camera footage showing thousands of frantic South Vietnamese civilians crowding the gates of the U.S. Embassy, and helicopters being thrown overboard the packed decks of U.S. carriers to make room for more evacuees to arrive.

Some 58,000 U.S. soldiers died in the Vietnam War, with 300,000 others wounded. South Vietnamese casualties include: 300,000 soldiers and 400,000 civilians killed, with over 1 million wounded. North Vietnamese and Viet Cong human losses are variously estimated at between 450,000 and over 1 million soldiers killed and 600,000 wounded; 65,000 North Vietnamese civilians also lost their lives.

**Aftermath** The war had a profound, long-lasting effect on the United States. Americans were bitterly divided by it, and others became disillusioned with the government. War cost, which totaled some $150 billion ($1 trillion in 2015 value), placed a severe strain on the U.S. economy, leading to budget deficits, a weak dollar, higher inflation, and by the 1970s, an economic recession. Also toward the end of the war, American soldiers in Vietnam suffered from low morale and discipline, compound by racial and social tensions resulting from the civil rights movement in the United States during the late 1960s and also because of widespread recreational drug use among the troops. During 1969-1972 particularly and during the period of American de-escalation and phased troop withdrawal from Vietnam, U.S. soldiers became increasingly unwilling to go to battle, which resulted in the phenomenon known as “fragging”, where soldiers, often using a fragmentation grenade, killed their officers whom they thought were overly zealous and eager for combat action.

Furthermore, some U.S. soldiers returning from Vietnam were met with hostility, mainly because the war had become extremely unpopular in the United States, and as a result of news coverage of massacres and atrocities committed by American units on Vietnamese civilians. A period of healing and reconciliation eventually occurred, and in 1982, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial was built, a national monument in Washington, D.C. that lists the names of servicemen who were killed or missing in the war.

Following the war, in Vietnam and Indochina, turmoil and conflict continued to be widespread. After South Vietnam’s collapse, the Viet Cong/NLF’s PRG was installed as the caretaker government. But as Hanoi de facto held full political and military control, on July 2, 1976, North Vietnam annexed South Vietnam, and the unified state was called the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.
Some 1-2 million South Vietnamese, largely consisting of former government officials, military officers, businessmen, religious leaders, and other “counter-revolutionaries”, were sent to re-education camps, which were labor camps, where inmates did various kinds of work ranging from dangerous land mine field clearing, to less perilous construction and agricultural labor, and lived under dire conditions of starvation diets and a high incidence of deaths and diseases.

In the years after the war, the Indochina refugee crisis developed, where some three million people, consisting mostly of those targeted by government repression, left their homelands in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, for permanent settlement in other countries. In Vietnam, some 1-2 million departing refugees used small, decrepit boats to embark on perilous journeys to other Southeast Asian nations. Some 200,000-400,000 of these “boat people” perished at sea, while survivors who eventually reached Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, and other destinations were sometimes met there with hostility. But with United Nations support, refugee camps were established in these Southeast Asian countries to house and process the refugees. Ultimately, some 2,500,000 refugees were resettled, mostly in North America and Europe.

The communist revolutions triumphed in Indochina: in April 1975 in Vietnam and Cambodia, and in December 1975 in Laos. Because the United States used massive air firepower in the conflicts, North Vietnam, eastern Laos, and eastern Cambodia were heavily bombed. U.S. planes dropped nearly 8 million tons of bombs (twice the amount the United States dropped in World War II), and Indochina became the most heavily bombed area in history. Some 30% of the 270 million so-called cluster bombs dropped did not explode, and since the end of the war, they continue to pose a grave danger to the local population, particularly in the countryside. Unexploded ordnance (UXO) has killed some 50,000 people in Laos alone, and hundreds more in Indochina are killed or maimed each year.

The aerial spraying operations of the U.S. military, carried out using several types of herbicides but most commonly with Agent Orange (which contained the highly toxic chemical, dioxin), have had a direct impact on Vietnam. Some 400,000 were directly killed or maimed, and in the following years, a segment of the population that were exposed to the chemicals suffer from a variety of health problems, including cancers, birth defects, genetic and mental diseases, etc.

Some 20 million gallons of herbicides were sprayed on 20,000 km² of forests, or 20% of Vietnam’s total forested area, which destroyed trees, hastened erosion, and upset the ecological balance, food chain, and other environmental parameters.

Following the Vietnam War, Indochina continued to experience severe turmoil. In December 1978, after a period of border battles and cross-border raids, Vietnam launched a full-scale invasion of Cambodia (then known as Kampuchea) and within two weeks, overwhelmed the country and overthrew the communist Pol Pot regime. Then in February 1979, in reprisal for Vietnam’s invasion of its Kampuchean ally, China launched a large-scale offensive into the northern regions of Vietnam, but after one month of bitter fighting, the Chinese forces withdrew. Regional instability would persist into the 1990s.
CAMBODIAN CIVIL WAR

Background By the late 1960s, Cambodia’s policy of non-alignment in the Indochina conflicts was seriously undermined. Prince Norodom Sihanouk, Cambodia’s long-time head of state and de facto ruling monarch, had successfully maintained his country’s neutrality during Indochina’s tumultuous periods from the second half of the 1940s to the 1960s, particularly in relation to the First Indochina War (1946-1954; separate article) and ongoing Vietnam War (since 1955; previous article). Sihanouk enjoyed immense popularity in his homeland, and was revered by most Cambodians as a semi-deity, first after becoming king in 1941 when Cambodia was yet under a French protectorate, and then in March 1945 when he declared Cambodia’s independence under the auspices of the occupying Japanese Imperial forces during World War II.

In October 1945, after Japan’s defeat in World War II, France re-established its colonial presence in Indochina, and voided Cambodia’s wartime declaration of independence. Then in December 1946, with the outbreak of the First Indochina War and the French military’s pre-occupation with trying to quell the Viet Minh, (a Vietnamese nationalist organization that was seeking to overthrow French rule), in 1953, Sihanouk pressured France into granting Cambodia’s independence. France acquiesced, and Cambodia was proclaimed independent on November 9, 1953. Four years earlier, in November 1949, Sihanouk had launched his self-styled “royal crusade for independence”, which had forced France to grant Cambodia some autonomy and administrative and security functions, although France continued to hold the real power by controlling the judiciary, taxation, customs, and most military and security functions of Cambodia.

In March 1955, Sihanouk abdicated the throne (and was succeeded by his father, Suramarit, who was crowned the country’s new king). Sihanouk relegated himself to a prince to engage in local politics. He then formed Sangkum Reastr Niyum, a political party. In the September 1955 parliamentary elections, Sangkum won all the seats to the National Assembly, and Sihanouk became Prime Minister (he would dominate Cambodian politics for many decades thereafter). Then in June 1960, after his father’s death, Sihanouk became Cambodia’s head of state, a dual position where he retained his political functions and took on (but was not formally crowned) the ceremonial duties of a Cambodian king.

In political matters, Sihanouk often always sought to achieve a balance between the right-wing and left-wing factions in his pluralistic government. He even allowed leftist politicians to form a “counter government” when the rightist faction in his regime gained a disproportionate amount of power. Sihanouk also used the military (which aligned with the conservative and right-wing faction) to suppress radical leftist elements. Sihanouk implemented socialist policies (which were considered too radical for the political right), and nationalized the country’s banking and business sectors, and placed foreign trade under state control.

In July 1954, the Geneva Accords ended the First Indochina War. The French colonial presence in Indochina also ended, and the region was broken up into Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. Vietnam was
temporarily partitioned into two military zones at the 17th parallel, with the northern zone occupied by the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam), and the southern zone occupied by the State of Vietnam, and later the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam). As stipulated in the Geneva Accords, the two Vietnamese zones would be merged into a single sovereign state after reunification elections were held in July 1956.

However, no elections took place, and the two Vietnamese zones became de facto sovereign (and rival) states. The Cold War, now in full swing, transformed Vietnam into a proxy war battleground for the superpowers, with socialist North Vietnam associated with the socialist states, particularly the Soviet Union and China; and West-aligned South Vietnam, associated with the democratic West, particularly the United States.

In the late 1950s, South Vietnam faced a growing communist-led insurgency led by the Viet Cong (official name: Liberation Army of South Vietnam), which obtained material support from North Vietnam. By the mid-1960s, the insurgency appeared strong enough to defeat and overthrow the South Vietnamese government.

Meanwhile in Cambodia, Sihanouk sought to stay away from the conflict in Vietnam by maintaining a policy of non-alignment (which he called “extreme neutrality”) for Cambodia. He took part in the 1955 Bandung Conference (in Bandung, Indonesia) which led to the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement.

But by the second half of the 1950s, Sihanouk had also established friendly ties with China, particularly to serve as a deterrent against Cambodia’s historical ethnic enemies, the Thais and Vietnamese, and also because he viewed the U.S. presence in Indochina as temporary, when considered over the long term, just as it had been for the French. In an agreement made in February 1956, Cambodia received economic aid from China. In 1958, Cambodia and China established diplomatic relations. Two years later, 1960, they signed the Treaty of Friendship and Non-aggression.

Thailand and South Vietnam, Cambodia’s neighbors on either side, viewed the Cambodian government with deep suspicion, believing Sihanouk to be aligning with the communists. Then when two attempts were made on Sihanouk (in January and August 1959), he accused South Vietnam of plotting his assassination.

Invariably intertwined with Cambodia’s foreign relations were the ancient Cambodians’ historical animosity with their neighbors, the Thais and Vietnamese. In particular, during the 1800s, the Vietnamese had sought to eradicate the Indian-influenced Cambodian culture and introduce the Chinese-influenced Vietnamese culture to the Cambodians. The Vietnamese also annexed a large section of Khmer territory, specifically the Mekong Delta of present-day Vietnam. As a result, later-day Cambodians viewed the Vietnamese with suspicion and resentment, and these sentiments would play a part in the coming civil war.

While establishing diplomatic relations with China, Sihanouk also maintained friendly ties with the West, particularly the United States. In 1955, Cambodia and the United States signed a military agreement where the U.S. government provided weapons to Cambodia’s military (which was called FARK, Forces Armées Royales Khmères). By the early 1960s, the Americans were providing military support equivalent to 30% of Cambodia’s defense appropriations.

In the mid-1960s, Cambodia’s neutrality was increasingly being undermined, first because North Vietnam had extended the Ho Chi Minh Trail (its logistical route to South Vietnam) across eastern Cambodia, and second, to counteract this North Vietnamese action, U.S. planes conducted surveillance
and bombing operations along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and South Vietnamese forces occasionally entered Cambodia to pursue the Viet Cong.

Sihanouk and his declared non-alignment also came under U.S. scrutiny when he signed agreements with China and North Vietnam. In these agreements, Cambodia allowed the following stipulations: that the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong could occupy eastern Cambodia; that the port of Sihanoukville (Figure 7) would be opened to communist bloc ships that supplied war materials for the Viet Cong; and that the North Vietnamese would be allowed to use a road network across Cambodia to transport the supplies from Sihanoukville to South Vietnam (this route became known in the West as the Sihanouk Trail).

In the early 1960s, as Cambodia moved toward establishing closer ties with China and North Vietnam, so did its relations with the United States deteriorate. The decline in Cambodian-American relations resulted from a number of factors: First, Sihanouk began to fear that a stronger Cambodian military (which was supplied with U.S. weapons), would soon threaten his government; Second, he believed that the United States was involved in the assassination plots against him; and Third, he suspected that the U.S. military were supporting the Khmer Serei, a right-wing guerilla group that was fighting an insurgency war against the Cambodian government. In November 1963, Sihanouk cut U.S. aid to Cambodia, and in May 1965, diplomatic relations between the two countries broke down.

In the September 1966 Cambodian parliamentary elections, right-wing candidates of the ruling Sangkum party won most of the seats in the National Assembly, leading to the Cambodian government shifting to the right. Pro-U.S. General Lon Nol became the new Prime Minister. Also by the second half of the 1960s, Sihanouk again turned his foreign policy toward the West, for the following reasons: First, Cambodia’s relations with China and North Vietnam did not produce clear economic benefits to Cambodia; Second, the loss of American aid was negatively affecting the Cambodian economy; and Third, this new foreign policy would balance the rightist and leftist elements in Cambodia’s deeply politicized government. In June 1969, following the U.S. government’s promise to respect Cambodia’s neutrality and sovereignty, diplomatic relations between Cambodia and the United States were restored.

By this time, the right-wing faction in the Cambodian government had lost confidence in Sihanouk’s capacity to resolve the country’s many political and economic problems. In September 1969, conservative politicians, frustrated at the continuing Vietnamese occupation of eastern Cambodia, made plans to overthrow Sihanouk. Then in March 1970, while Sihanouk was on a trip outside the country, anti-Vietnamese demonstrations broke out in Phnom Penh. The protests turned violent, with mobs entering and looting the embassies of North Vietnam and Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam (the Viet Cong’s government-in-exile).

Taking advantage of the widespread anti-Vietnamese sentiment among Cambodians, Prime Minister Lon Nol closed down Sihanoukville to communist-flagged vessels. Lon Nol also voided Sihanouk’s trade agreement with North Vietnam, and on March 12, 1970, he demanded that Vietnamese forces leave Cambodian territory within 72 hours.

Lon Nol initially was unwilling to support the plot to overthrow Sihanouk. But on March 18, 1970, he convened the National Assembly, which in a 92-0 non-confidence vote, declared its ceasing recognition of Sihanouk as Cambodia’s head of state, and deposed him. Subsequently in October 1970, Lon Nol declared the end of the Kingdom of Cambodia. In its place, he formed the Khmer Republic, taking the position of president. The new regime was firmly pro-American, and U.S. advisers, weapons, and military equipment soon arrived.
Meanwhile, the deposed Sihanouk took up residence in Beijing, China, where Mao Zedong’s government granted him political asylum. In Phnom Penh in the days after the coup, tens of thousands of Cambodians, mainly peasants with whom Sihanouk was extremely popular, launched large protest demonstrations in Kampong Cham, Takeo, and Kampot Provinces. Some 40,000 farmers marched on Phnom Penh demanding that Sihanouk be restored to power. The demonstrations turned violent when security forces dispersed the crowds, killing hundreds of protesters. Violence also broke out against ethnic Vietnamese living in Cambodia. In the countryside, Cambodians massacred hundreds of ethnic Vietnamese.

Lon Nol launched a program to strengthen Cambodia’s armed forces. Many civilians signed up to join the military, with many recruits motivated by the sole desire to fight and expel the Vietnamese Army from eastern Cambodia. As a result of heavy recruitment, the Cambodian Army grew from 35,000 in early 1970, to a peak of 250,000 in 1974.

Sihanouk’s overthrow and the emergence of a pro-U.S. government would have profound effects for Cambodia, particularly with regards to the ongoing Vietnam War. The United States, long restrained by Cambodia’s official neutrality, increased bombing operations on North Vietnamese Army/Viet Cong bases in eastern Cambodia, this aerial campaign extending from May 1970 – August 1973. U.S. bombing had actually started one year earlier (under Operation Menu), in March 1969, in which Sihanouk may have given his tacit consent. The bombings were very intense, in total, over 500,000 tons of ordnance were dropped (equivalent to 30% of the 1.5 million tons of all bombs that U.S. planes dropped in Europe during World War II). Various estimates place the number of Cambodian civilian casualties caused by American bombing at between 40,000 and 150,000 killed. The U.S. bombings, together with the ground fighting, destroyed much of eastern Cambodia, forcing hundreds of thousands of civilians to flee to Phnom Penh, the capital. Phnom Penh soon grew to a population of 2 – 2½ million by 1975, from 600,000 in 1970.

In April 1970, in a major offensive known as the Cambodian Campaign, American and South Vietnamese forces crossed the border from South Vietnam into eastern Cambodia aimed at destroying North Vietnamese Army/Viet Cong military bases and supply depots along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The success of this operation was deemed crucial to the withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Vietnam in line with the American de-escalation from the Vietnam War. In the Cambodian Campaign, American and South Vietnamese forces killed some 10,000 North Vietnamese/Viet Cong troops, and destroyed enemy bases and captured large quantities of weapons and supplies in underground storage bunkers. Even then, the operation was only partially successful, as most of the North Vietnamese/Viet Cong forces had earlier fled deeper into Cambodia.

In the United States, the Cambodian Campaign sparked widespread criticism among the American public, which by now had grown weary of the Vietnam War. In December 1970, U.S. Congress passed legislation that banned American ground forces from entering Cambodia (and Laos).

North Vietnam ignored the Cambodian government’s 72-hour deadline to leave eastern Cambodia, and instead launched Campaign X in April 1970, where in three months, North Vietnamese forces captured large areas of eastern Cambodia, including the whole northeast region, or in total, over half of Cambodia’s territory. The Cambodian military (now officially renamed Forces Armées Nationales Khmères, or FANK), whose soldiers consisted mostly of fanatical but inexperienced young recruits, was easily overpowered by the battle-hardened North Vietnamese, who had fought long wars against the French and now American forces. FANK also suffered from corrupt, inept leadership, as well as understrength units. FANK units were padded to allow dishonest officers to collect the salaries of non-existent soldiers.
The North Vietnamese Army soon turned over some its captured areas to a small Cambodian communist rebel group called the Khmer Rouge[4]. This allowed the still fledging Khmer Rouge to extend its areas of control, and pursue its goal of overthrowing the Cambodian government and forming a communist state. The Khmer Rouge was formed in September 1960 as a revitalization of the moribund communist movement in Cambodia, and an alliance between old communist cadres and a new generation of Paris-educated young Marxist intellectuals. The alliance led to the formation of a new organization, the Workers’ Party of Kampuchea (WPK), which replaced the Kampuchean People’s Revolutionary Party (KPRP).

In July 1962, following a Cambodian military crackdown on communists that saw the disappearance and likely execution of party leader Tou Samouth, the younger batch of communists gained control of the movement. Saloth Sar (later more known by his nom de guerre, Pol Pot) was elected party leader in 1963. Then later in 1963, at the height of another government suppression campaign, WPK party leaders, including Saloth Sar, fled to North Vietnamese-held territory in northeast Cambodia, where they established an alliance with the North Vietnamese communists.

However, since Sihanouk maintained close ties with North Vietnam and China, these two countries provided only a token amount of military support to the Khmer Rouge. Consequently, the Khmer Rouge obtained most of its weapons through its own efforts, including through raids and ambushes on government forces, or by purchasing firearms directly, even from corrupt Cambodian military officials through third-party channels.

War During the years 1965-1969 when the Khmer Rouge was yet in its formative period, China and North Vietnam did not support the overthrow of the Cambodian government, as the two countries enjoyed friendly relations with Sihanouk. In turn, Sihanouk tolerated the construction of the Ho Chi Minh Trail in eastern Cambodia, and agreed to the use of the Sihanouk Trail and Sihanoukville by the North Vietnamese/Viet Cong.

But with Sihanouk’s fall from power and the emergence of a pro-U.S. regime in Phnom Penh, North Vietnam began to fully support the Khmer Rouge. The U.S. bombing of eastern Cambodia, which caused extensive destruction of homes and livelihoods, also saw a rise in Khmer Rouge membership.

Another crucial aspect to the growing crisis was the role played by the deposed Sihanouk. On May 5, 1970, Sihanouk announced the formation of the Khmer United National Front, or FUNK (French: *Front uni national du Kampuchea*), in opposition to the Lon Nol regime. Then with mediation by North Vietnam and China, Sihanouk formed an alliance with the Khmer Rouge. The Sihanouk-Khmer Rouge alliance established the Royal Government of the National Union of Kampuchea, GRUNK (French: *Gouvernement royal d’union nationale du Kampuchea*), a rival Cambodian government (of the Lon Nol regime in Phnom Penh), with Sihanouk as its head of state.

However, GRUNK operated only as a figurehead, while the Khmer Rouge, with its armed force, held the real power. The West believed that GRUNK, since it was led by Cold War neutralist Sihanouk, was politically moderate and thus acceptable to the Western democracies. Also at this time, GRUNK’s ties to the ultra-secretive Khmer Rouge did not yet invite careful scrutiny in the West, because the Khmer Rouge had not yet officially declared that it advocated communist ideology.

Because of Sihanouk’s immense popularity in Cambodia, large numbers of Cambodians joined the Khmer Rouge, raising rebel strength from 6,000 to 35,000 fighters and 100,000 irregulars by 1972. Many of the recruits were non-political civilians who had not even heard of the Khmer Rouge or knew the
concept of communism, but were motivated by their loyalty to Sihanouk whom they wanted to be restored to the throne.

In April 1967, peasants in Samlaut, Battambang Province, attacked a group of soldiers whom the Cambodian government had sent to carry out the tax collection of rice in order to end the black market sale of rice to the North Vietnamese Army. Following the incident, a full-scale uprising, called the Samlaut Uprising, broke out which spread to nearby provinces. The Cambodian government sent security forces that killed thousands of rebellious peasants and destroyed many villages. In January 1968, in the midst of the Samlaut Uprising, the Khmer Rouge’s newly organized militia, the Revolutionary Army of Kampuchea (RAK), launched its first attack on government troops, which marked the start of the Cambodian Civil War.

![Map of Cambodia](attachment:image.png)

Figure 7. Cambodian Civil War.

The events of 1970, which saw Cambodia being drawn into the maelstrom of the Vietnam War, greatly benefited the Khmer Rouge, as its powerful ally, the North Vietnamese Army, seized control of more than half of Cambodian territory. At this time, the Khmer Rouge was still a small guerilla force, and thus acted only in a support role to the Vietnamese.
In August 1970, Cambodian President Lon Nol, now boasting an enlarged Cambodian army, felt confident enough to go on the offensive. He launched Operation Chenla I, aimed at recapturing Kompong Cham Province. The offensive was only partially successful, as the Cambodian Army failed to capture the North Vietnamese/Viet Cong strongholds near the province’s rubber plantation areas. Then in January 1971, North Vietnamese/Viet Cong commandos attacked Pochentong air base in Phnom Penh and destroyed nearly all the Cambodian planes, forcing the Cambodian military to withdraw some forces from Operation Chenla I to the capital. In February 1971, Lon Nol suffered a stroke and was forced to go for medical treatment in Hawaii. As a result, Operation Chenla I was aborted.

President Lon Nol soon recovered, and returned to Cambodia in April 1970 to start another offensive. Despite opposition from the Cambodian military high command, in August 1970, Lon Nol launched Operation Chenla II, whose main objective was more ambitious than Chenla I, that of extending government control up to Kompong Thom Province further north. By October 25, 1970, the Cambodian Army appeared headed for victory. But the next day, the North Vietnamese/Viet Cong counter-attacked, and trapped and destroyed Cambodian forces at Rumleng. Some 3,000 Cambodian soldiers, including some of the Cambodian Army’s best units, and large quantities of armored vehicles and other equipment, were lost. After this debacle, the Cambodian military permanently lost the initiative, and generally remained in a defensive posture for the rest of the war, apart from launching a number of smaller offensives.

In January 1973, North Vietnam, South Vietnam, and the United States signed the Paris Peace Accords, which ostensibly ended the Vietnam War. The war did end for the United States, which withdrew its forces from Vietnam, but not for the two Vietnams, which restarting hostilities, now on a larger scale. By 1973, North Vietnam had moved its forces and supply lines along the Ho Chi Minh Trail from eastern Cambodia to the western border fringes of South Vietnam, which had been captured a year earlier during the Easter Offensive (March-October 1972). The vacated Cambodian territories were turned over to the Khmer Rouge, which set up local administrations in towns, villages, and other so-called “liberated areas” under a hard-line Marxist system.

Militarily, the Khmer Rouge had become a formidable armed force, centered on its core of highly trained, well-motivated, fanatical, and well-equipped units and auxiliary and civilian irregulars. The Khmer Rouge now fought its own battles (after the North Vietnamese/Viet Cong had withdrawn from Cambodia), although it continued to incur heavy losses in clashes with government forces.

However, by 1973, the Khmer Rouge controlled 60% of the country’s territory and 50% of the population. By this time, relations between Sihanouk and the Khmer Rouge deteriorated, with the Cambodian communist rebels now determined that the monarchy would not be restored to authority in the post-war period.

In late January 1973, as a result of the Paris Peace Accords which officially ended the Vietnam War, Lon Nol declared a unilateral ceasefire and offered to hold peace talks with the Khmer Rouge. Now holding a commanding position, the Khmer Rouge rejected the offer, ignored the ceasefire, and continued fighting. In April 1973, the Khmer Rouge launched a three-front offensive on Phnom Penh, advancing from the northwest, north, and east, and reached the vicinity of the capital, which it placed under siege, and pounded with artillery and rocket fire. The United States intervened, sending B-52 bombers on massive aerial attacks on the communist forces. In July 1973, after suffering heavy losses, the Khmer Rouge retreated to the countryside, and the three-month siege of the capital ended.

Then in January 1974, the Khmer Rouge again advanced toward the capital, which it shelled with artillery, rocket, and mortar fire that caused hundreds of civilian deaths and destroyed thousands of houses. Government forces pushed back the attack, but by April 1974, Khmer Rouge forces, positioned
on the surrounding countryside, tightened their grip on the city. By November 1974, Phnom Penh was encircled and placed under siege, with the rebels controlling all land access to the capital.

In January 1975, the Khmer rebels launched a major offensive to finally take the capital, laying mines on the Mekong River that blocked supply barge convos from delivering food to the city. By this time, 90% of Phnom Penh’s food supplies were being delivered through American-facilitated barge convoys from South Vietnam through the Mekong River. With the waterways blocked off, U.S. planes carried out airlifts of food, supplies, and ammunitions to the capital, which by now had fallen into anarchy and pandemonium by the breakdown of security and public services, uncontrolled inflation, and the struggle for ever-dwindling resources by the over two million residents, most of whom were refugees who had fled from the countryside. The Cambodian Armed Forces ceased to be a viable fighting force, with cohesion breaking down, desertions rampant, and morale broken.

Meanwhile, the Khmer Rouge continued to bombard the capital with artillery fire. By late March 1975, some 40,000 rebel soldiers had closed in for the final attack, and were confronted by the remaining 20,000 government troops. On April 1, 1975, the last government defenses outside the city collapsed. Lon Nol abdicated and went into exile abroad. A government led by political moderates was installed to try and negotiate an end to the war, but this was rejected by the Khmer Rouge.

On April 12, 1975, the U.S. government, deciding Cambodia was lost, evacuated its embassy personnel in Phnom Penh. Under Operation Eagle Pull, U.S. helicopters pulled out 82 American diplomatic staff and their families, 159 high-ranking Cambodian civilian and military officials, and 35 nationals from other countries. Many other high-ranking Cambodian officials declined U.S. offers to leave, despite their names being on the Khmer Rouge’s death list – they were promptly executed after the city’s fall.

On April 15, 1975, the remaining Cambodian Army positions west of the city fell. The following day, a government appeal for peace talks to Sihanouk (who was in Beijing) was rejected by Sihanouk. In any case, Sihanouk knew that he was powerless to stop the Khmer Rouge, which held the real power.

On April 17, 1975, the new Cambodian military-led government tried to fly out of the city to move the seat of government in the northwest region, but this attempt failed and the leaders were arrested by the Khmer Rouge. Also on April 17, 1975, Khmer Rouge forces entered the capital, meeting no resistance as they spread out and took control of the city, with the Cambodian military ordering its troops to lay down their weapons. The war was over.

**Aftermath** The Khmer Rouge was determined to impose a radical form of communism to Cambodia, and turn the country’s capitalist society into a classless state of peasants. Within a few hours after seizing Phnom Penh, the Khmer Rouge forced all residents – some 2.5 million – to leave their homes, and walk long distances to newly established agrarian communes in the countryside. There, they were to begin their new lives as peasant laborers. Similar forced evacuations and marches took place in all towns and cities across the country. Within a short time, the country’s entire population of eight million people became peasant workers. Nobody was spared, even hospitals were emptied and the sick and elderly were forced to move to the countryside. In the process, tens of thousands perished from exhaustion, hunger, diseases, summary executions, and exposure to the elements.

From 1975 to 1978, the Khmer Rouge, which was known to the people simply by the cryptic (and highly feared) name “Angkar” (‘the organization’) and whose highest leaders were not known to the general population, ruled Cambodia as an anonymous but all-powerful, one party communist state called Democratic Kampuchea.
The Khmer Rouge regarded all forms of Western influences as capitalist, and thus were abolished. Schools, banks, hospitals, and nearly all industries were closed down, and all economic activity was placed under strict state control. The Khmer Rouge implemented policies to eradicate Cambodian traditional life – religion, though not officially banned, was suppressed, and thousands of Buddhists, Muslims, and Christians were killed. Families and social life were regulated under communal administration, with marital relations controlled, sexes separated, and children placed under state care.

Living conditions under the Khmer Rouge were extremely harsh. Food, medicine, and other basic necessities were lacking or absent. Government policies targeted the former city dwellers (the so-called “New People”), and glorified the peasant villagers (the “Old People”). Government repression against perceived enemies of the state led to the catastrophe known as the Cambodian Genocide (next article), where the Khmer Rouge caused the deaths of 1½ – 2 million people (25% of the Cambodian population) as a result of executions, starvation, disease, exposure to the elements, and other causes.
Cambodian Genocide

**Background** On April 17, 1975, the Khmer Rouge, a Cambodian communist rebel group, emerged victorious in the Cambodian Civil War (previous article) when its forces captured Phnom Penh, overthrew the United States-backed government of the Khmer Republic, and took over the reins of power. In January 1976, the Khmer Rouge ratified a new constitution, which changed the country’s name to “Democratic Kampuchea” (DK). In the Western press, DK, as well as the new Cambodian government, continued to be referred to unofficially as “Khmer Rouge”.

In April 1976, the Khmer Rouge’s newly formed legislature, called the Kampuchean People’s Representative Assembly, elected the country’s new government with Pol Pot (whose birth name was Saloth Sar) appointed as Prime Minister. In September 1976, Pol Pot declared that his government was Marxist-Leninist in ideology that was closely allied with Chairman Mao Zedong’s Chinese Communist Party. The following year, September 1977, he revealed the existence of Kampuchea’s state party called the Kampuchean Communist Party, also stating that it had been formed 17 years earlier, in September 1960. These disclosures confirmed the long-held belief by international observers that the Khmer Rouge was a communist organization, and that DK was a one-party totalitarian state.

Pol Pot had long held absolute power in the Khmer Rouge and (secretly) held the position of General Secretary of the party since 1963 behind the façade of a front organization called Angkar Padevat (“Revolutionary Organization”, usually shortened to Angkar, meaning “Organization”). Ostensibly, Angkar was politically moderate, as its leaders were former high-ranking Cambodian government officials who held only moderate leftist/socialist beliefs. However, behind the scenes, hard-line communist party ideologues controlled the movement.

During the Cambodian Civil War, the Khmer Rouge operated behind the cover of Prince Norodom Sihanouk, the deposed Cambodian ruler who was widely popular among the Cambodian masses, through a political-military alliance called the Royal Government of the National Union of Kampuchea, or GRUNK (French: Gouvernement royal d'union nationale du Kampuchéa). GRUNK supposedly was a coalition of all opposition movements, and was nominally controlled by Sihanouk as its head of state. When the Khmer Rouge seized power in April 1975, Sihanouk continued to hold the position of head of state under the new Khmer Rouge regime, but held no real political power. In April 1976, after resigning as head of state, he was placed under house arrest.

In foreign relations, DK isolated itself from much of the international community. Shortly after coming to power, the remaining 800 foreign nationals in Cambodia were gathered at the French Embassy in the capital, and then trucked out of the country through the Thai border. All foreign diplomatic missions in Kampuchea were closed down. However, when the DK government later was granted a seat at the United Nations (UN) to represent Kampuchea (Cambodia’s new name), a small number of foreign embassies were allowed to reopen in Phnom Penh. But as foreign travel to Kampuchea was severely restricted, the country was virtually cut off from the outside world. As a result, apart from official government pronouncements, practically nothing was known in the outside world about the true conditions in the country during the Khmer Rouge regime.
At the core of the Khmer Rouge’s Marxist ideology was the regime’s desire to achieve the purest form of communism, that of a classless society. The Khmer Rouge also advocated ultra-nationalism and anti-imperialism, and desired to eliminate foreign control and achieve national self-sufficiency, first through the phased, collectivized agricultural development of the countryside. Before coming to power, the Khmer Rouge had rejected the advice of Chinese communist leaders who told them that the process of transition from socialism to communism should not be rushed. But the Khmer Rouge, particularly its leader Pol Pot, was determined to achieve communism rapidly without the transitional phases of socialism.

The Khmer Rouge first implemented its concept of communism sometime in 1970 at Ratanakiri Province in the northeast, where it forced the local population to move from villages to agrarian communes. The Khmer Rouge also carried out other forced relocations at Steung Treng, Kratie, Banam and Udong. In 1973, the Khmer Rouge concluded that the “final solution” to end capitalism in Cambodia was to empty all the towns and cities, and move all Cambodians to the rural areas. Simultaneously, in areas under its control, the Khmer Rouge executed teachers, local leaders, traders, and other “counter-revolutionaries”. As well, all forms of dissent or opposition were met with brutal reprisals. By 1974, the Khmer Rouge was carrying out indiscriminate killings of men, women, and children. The rebels also destroyed villages, such as those that occurred in Odongk and Ang Snuol districts, Sar Sarsdam village, and other areas.

The Cambodian government soon received reports of these brutalities being committed by the Khmer Rouge, but ignored them. An invaluable insight into the workings of the Khmer Rouge came in 1973 (two years before the rebels came to power) when a former school teacher, Ith Sarin, went to the northwest and central regions and joined the Khmer Rouge. Eventually, Ith Sarin became disillusioned and left, and returned to the fold of the law. His work, Regrets for the Khmer Soul (Khmer: Sranaoh Pralung Khmer), revealed that the Khmer Rouge was a Marxist organization that operated behind a front movement called “Angkar”. Angkar had a well-structured organization that imposed brutal, repressive policies in controlled areas, which it called “liberated zones”.

The Cambodian government banned Ith Sarin’s book and jailed its author for being a communist sympathizer. Then, a report by an American diplomatic officer, Kenneth Quinn, which described Khmer Rouge atrocities in eastern and southern Cambodia, was also ignored, this time by U.S. authorities. Contemporary news reports by some American newspapers (e.g. The New York Times, Baltimore Sun), which described the Khmer Rouge carrying out massacres, executions, and forced evacuations, also escaped scrutiny by the U.S. government.

On April 17, 1975, a few hours after capturing Phnom Penh, the Khmer Rouge ordered all residents to leave their homes and move to the countryside. The order to leave was both urgent and mandatory – those who resisted would be (and were) killed. There were no exceptions, and even the sick and elderly were ordered to leave. Hospitals were closed down and the patients, regardless of their medical conditions, were evacuated, some still in their beds and attached to intravenous tubes.

Within a few days, Phnom Penh was completely depopulated, with all its residents – some 2.5 million (30% of the country’s population) and ordered to take only a few belongings – making their way in long convoys in ox carts, motorbikes, scooters, and bicycles, but mostly on foot, to rural areas across the country. The Khmer Rouge’s order was for all persons to return to their ancestral villages.

In later testimonies, genocide survivors said of being told by Khmer Rouge cadres that the evacuation was being undertaken because American planes were about to bomb the city, or that the Khmer Rouge was conducting operations to flush out remaining government soldiers hiding in the city, or that U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) agents were planning to launch subversive actions in Phnom Penh to
undermine the revolution, etc. Other survivors said of being told that their destination was only “two or three kilometers away” and that they could return “in two or three days”.

The Khmer Rouge, in official pronouncements at the time and after the genocide, said that the forced evacuation of Phnom Penh was necessary because of an imminent food shortage and the danger of starvation to city residents, and that the Khmer Rouge did not have the logistical capability to fill the void left by the American departure. (In the final stages of the war, the U.S. military was supplying Phnom Penh with food supplies through the Mekong River and later by airlifts.) Furthermore, the Khmer Rouge leadership stated that the presence of large numbers of people in the rural areas would force the former urban residents to grow their own food (thus averting a food shortage), and also help in the reconstruction of the war-ravaged countryside.

The decision to depopulate Phnom Penh was made sometime in February 1975 (three months before the city’s capture), which was part of the Khmer Rouge’s plan of turning the country into a single collectivized agriculture-based socialist state worked by peasant-farmers in a classless society. The Khmer Rouge drew its inspiration from the ancient Khmer Empire (A.D. 800-1400), whose wealth and power came from its vast agricultural estates. The Khmer Rouge sought to duplicate this past greatness, but under the principles of Marxism-Leninism and ultra-nationalism.

The Khmer Rouge viewed the Cambodian countryside as the means to achieve pure communism, self-sufficiency, and isolation from foreign influences. During the Cambodian Civil War, the Khmer Rouge owed much of its success to the rural areas, where it had established its first permanent bases, and from where it relied on rural support for its food, information, recruits, and sanctuaries. By contrast, the Khmer Rouge did not obtain any support from large urban areas, which it viewed as decadent, West- and capitalism-corrupted, and must be eliminated, as they served no purpose for the transformation of the country into a communist state.

Within a few months after the Khmer Rouge completed the mass transfer of the Cambodian population to the countryside, Phnom Penh was partially repopulated, but only by the Khmer Rouge central government and its associated security units. During the DK period, Phnom Penh’s population probably reached 40,000 – 100,000 people.

In September 1975 through 1976 and 1977, the Khmer Rouge carried out other forced depopulations in other regions across Kampuchea, particularly in the newly designated Central, Southwest, Western, and Eastern Zones, (present-day provinces of Takeo, Kampong Cham, Kampong Chhnang, Kampong Speu, Kampong Thom, and Kandal) the Siem Reap and Preah Vihear Sectors, Northwest Zone (present-day provinces of Banteay Meanchey, Battambang, and Pursat), and Central (Old North) Zone (Kampong Cham and Kampong Thom).

The Khmer Rouge classified the general population into two groups: “Old People” (also called base people or full-rights people) and “New People” (also called April 17 people or dépositées). The “Old People” were the peasants, villagers, and essentially those who had supported the Khmer Rouge during the civil war, and were deemed essential to the nation’s communist transformation. Also designated as Old People were Kampuchean Communist Party cadres, government officials, and military personnel. The “New People” were the evacuated residents of the cities and towns, including the civilian and military components of the previous regime, and essentially those who had opposed the Khmer Rouge during the war, and who were deemed non-essential to the socialist revolution, and thus were expendable.

During the civil war, the Khmer Rouge prepared a list of high-ranking civilian and military officials targeted for execution. Instead, after the war, the Khmer Rouge arrested and executed all captured government officials, military officers, businessmen, academics and intellectuals, teachers, and anyone
who had played even only a moderate role in or were identified with the former regime. Perhaps the worst mass killing committed at this time was the Tuol Po Chrey Massacre, where some 3,000 (to as many as 10,000) mostly military officers, including the provincial governor and government officials, were executed in a single day in Tuol Po Chrey, Pursat Province. As a result, professional people, including doctors and engineers, technicians, and anyone who possessed some education or skilled training, did not reveal their backgrounds and pretended as belonging to the common people. Even then, the Khmer Rouge arrested and killed those who wore eyeglasses, spoke French or other foreign languages, or anyone it considered to be an intellectual, or had been part of the former regime, or displayed some Western influence.

On arriving at their destinations, the New People were organized into brigades to begin work in agrarian communes. Collectivized farming was the cornerstone of the Khmer Rouge regime, and communal farms were set up across the country, consisting of separate Old People and New People communes. The Khmer Rouge called the start of its social revolution “Year Zero”, when it planned to wipe out everything that had come before, and establish a new Kampuchean state that would achieve greatness equal to that of the ancient Khmer Empire.

The communal farms that were set up were slave labor camps, where people worked everyday from dawn to dusk (sometimes up to 10 or 11 at night) doing farm work such as growing crops, clearing forests, draining swamps, digging irrigation ditches, and building dams. There were no rest days, and all work was done by hand or using basic tools (but no machineries). Rest breaks and meals were restricted and inadequate, and work quotas and regulations were strictly enforced. Exhaustion and illness were deemed equivalent to laziness, while complaining about the work or foraging for root crops, vegetables, or fruit in the forest or wayside for personal consumption were subject to severe punishment. Taking anything from the ground or water was considered stealing from the state. These rules were administered by armed youths, some as young as twelve years old.

Men and women were segregated into separate living and dining quarters, and marital relations were restricted to specified schedules. Social life was eliminated, with religious holidays, celebrations, music, and dance forbidden, as were courtship and family life. Private ownership was prohibited – the fields, farmlands, crops, and all items in the communes, even the clothes and utensils a person used, were state property.

Workers were subjected to revolutionary teachings. The government, which was identified only as “Angkar” (organization), was described as the all-powerful, all-knowing, and benevolent entity that worked only for the common good. Unknown and unseen, Angkar was feared by all. Indeed, the highest ranking leaders of the Khmer Rouge regime, referred to as Angkar Loeu (“Upper Organization”), were hardly known or rarely seen by the general population. A worker who violated any regulation was given a warning. Three warnings automatically led to an “invitation” by Angkar, which meant death by execution. Executions were usually carried out at nightfall in a wooded area just outside the commune.

The Khmer Rouge considered children as indispensable to the socialist revolution, and thus housed them collectively and separately from their parents, and indoctrinated them into communist teachings. Children also were trained to reject their parents and families, to submit to Angkar, and to hate their enemies. Children were made to feel no sympathy or emotions, and were trained to kill animals in violent ways.

The Khmer Rouge particularly targeted the “New People” who, having lived in the towns and cities, were unprepared for agrarian work and lifestyle. As well, the regime’s harshest policies were directed at them. In the first year, the “New People” population declined considerably as a result of overwork,
sickness and disease, summary executions, and starvation. The Khmer Rouge also took away most of the harvest, which left the New People communes with insufficient food supplies.

“Old People” communes generally were treated much better. However, in post-war testimonies, survivors from “Old People” communes have stated that they were subject to the same harsh, repressive conditions experienced by the “New People”.

The Khmer Rouge applied radical measures to speed up the country’s transition to communism. Banks were closed down; money was abolished. Industries were dismantled as government focused on agricultural production. A few industries, e.g. rubber-processing plants, were later reopened, but placed under strict state control. Schools also were closed down, and teachers were executed. The Khmer Rouge later opened a number of schools that taught only revolutionary ideology, and only the children of the “Old People” class were allowed to study in them.

Hospitals also were closed down, and most doctors were executed. The Khmer Rouge viewed modern medicine as “counter-revolutionary” and anathema to communist ideology. As a result of the absence of proper medical care, most of the general population suffered from sicknesses and diseases. About 80% of the people contracted malaria. Only traditional forms of medicine were allowed, which proved ineffective, particularly for more serious illnesses. The government did reopen some hospitals which practiced modern medicine, but these medical facilities serviced only government officials, the military, party cadres, and their families.

The practice of religion, although guaranteed by the Khmer Rouge constitution, was suppressed. Thousands of Buddhist monks (Buddhism was the country’s predominant religion) were executed or forced to become farm workers, Buddhist images were destroyed, and temples and pagodas were turned into prisons, execution sites, or pig pens. Other religions were persecuted as well. The ethnic minority Chams, who were Muslims, were forced from their homeland and dispersed among the agrarian communes in other regions. As well, they were killed in large numbers in massacres, and their mosques were used to raise pigs. The country’s small Roman Catholic population also was forced into slave labor, and the Notre Dame Cathedral and other churches in the capital were destroyed. To end all knowledge of and ties to the past, the Khmer Rouge destroyed libraries and burned books.

The Khmer Rouge, with its vision of achieving Khmer racial purity, targeted other ethnicities, including Chams, Laotians, Chinese, and particularly the Vietnamese, who were blamed for all the country’s past and present troubles. Nearly all the remaining 200,000 ethnic Vietnamese were expelled from the country within a few months after the Khmer Rouge came to power, following an earlier expulsion of 300,000 by the previous regime. Other ethnic minorities were subject to persecutions that resulted in high numbers of deaths, forcing thousands of others to flee the country.

During the Cambodian Civil War, the Khmer Rouge functioned as a coalition of different regional guerrilla militias, with each militia operating as a virtually autonomous unit under the nominal control of the KCP Central Committee headed by Pol Pot. After achieving victory in the war, these regional forces took control of the administrative and military functions in their respective regions. Although Saloth Sar (now going by his nom-de-guerre Pol Pot) and his deputies were recognized as the national leaders of the new state, the various regional administrations continued to exercise broad autonomous powers in their areas and outside the control of the Phnom Penh central government. Two (failed) coup attempts against the central government – in July and September 1975 – highlighted the political instability during this time. This period also coincided with the social upheavals generated by the population transfers, when just after the war (April 1975) and then in late 1975 until 1976, the Khmer Rouge executed thousands of “enemies of the state” and “counter-revolutionaries” who were identified with the previous regime.
Then in 1977, Pol Pot was ready to launch a purge of the party. After Pol Pot entered into an alliance with Southwest Zone leader Ta Mok, their combined forces initiated a series of purges in the Eastern, Northern, and Western zones in February 1977, and in the Northwest zone in May. The purges were most intense in the Eastern Zone, where some 100,000 local cadres, whom Pol Pot believed were traitors and in alliance with the Vietnamese government in Hanoi, were killed in massacres. Pol Pot had derisively called Eastern Zone cadres as having “Khmer bodies with Vietnamese minds”.

Suspected disloyal cadres were sent to “interrogation and detention centers”, which really were torture and execution facilities. These institutions originally were established to prosecute “counter-revolutionaries” (i.e. persons identified with the previous regime), but soon became packed with arrested communist cadres as the purges intensified. Some 150 such facilities existed, which included Security Prison 21 (S-21) at Tuol Sleng, Phnom Penh, where many civilian and military cadres, including those with high-ranking positions, were imprisoned, tortured, and executed. Various forms of tortures were employed which were so brutal and painful that the prisoners confessed to committing nonsensical crimes which government authorities had prepared beforehand. In many cases, prisoners were forced to
implicate members of their own family, who then were arrested and subjected to the same tortures. After a period of detention, the prisoners were taken to another location, where they were executed and buried in mass graves. To save on ammunition, Khmer Rouge executioners rarely shot their prisoners. Instead, the executions were carried out using a pickaxe, iron bar, or wooden club, which were struck on prisoners’ head, killing them. Children were executed first by grasping them by their legs and then bashing their heads onto a tree trunk.

The Khmer Rouge killed a large number of Cambodians into what tantamounts to genocide. Various estimates place the total deaths of the Cambodian Genocide at $1\frac{1}{2} - 2\frac{1}{2}$ million people, to even as high as 3 million, with about half of the fatalities caused by executions, and the rest due to overwork, starvation, sickness, and diseases. Another 300,000 perished from starvation in the immediate aftermath of the genocide (in the period after January 1979). Starting in the 1990s, some 20,000 mass graves have been unearthed containing the skeletal remains of some 1.4 million executed prisoners. These mass graves are known also as the killing fields, that is, they were the execution sites used by the Khmer Rouge.

After two decades of war, in late 1991, peace was restored in Cambodia. In 1997, the Cambodian government began efforts to investigate the mass killings that occurred during the Khmer Rouge era. In June 2003, Cambodia and the United Nations established the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC; informally known as the Khmer Rouge Tribunal) to prosecute high-ranking Khmer Rouge leaders for various crimes including genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. The start of the trials was delayed because of the lack of government funds. But with financial support provided by foreign countries, the ECCC started the judicial processes in 2006. A number of top Khmer Rouge officials (i.e. Nuon Chea, the second-highest leader; Khieu Samphan, Khmer Rouge head of state; and Kang Kek Iew (“Comrade Duch”), head of internal security and S-21 commandant) have since been found guilty of criminal acts. Pol Pot had earlier passed away in April 1998, and thus was not tried.

The Cambodian Genocide ended in early January 1979, with the overthrow of the Khmer Rouge government following the Vietnamese Army’s invasion of Cambodia (next article).
CAMBODIAN-VIETNAMESE WAR

Background On April 17, 1975, the Khmer Rouge overthrew the West-aligned government in Cambodia (Cambodian Civil War, separate article), and then turned the country into a communist state. Nearly two weeks later, on April 30, 1975, North Vietnamese forces captured Saigon and ended the West-aligned South Vietnamese government (Vietnam War, separate article) and later merged the two Vietnams into a single state, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

In the aftermath of these communist victories, the international community believed that the two Marxist states would establish close relations due to their shared ideological ties. Instead, shortly after achieving their revolutionary victories, fighting began to break out between their forces. These countries’ respective main ethnic groups, the Khmers (Cambodians) and Vietnamese, have a long history of animosity and conflict since the 12th century, when their ancient feudal monarchies fought over land and resources.

In the 1800s, the Vietnamese Nguyen Dynasty took control of the Cambodian region of the Mekong Delta (present-day southernmost region of Vietnam) after a period of settlement by ethnic Vietnamese. As well, the Vietnamese conquerors in Cambodia tried to replace the Indian-influenced Khmer culture of the Cambodians with their own Chinese-influenced Vietnamese culture.

During the period 1887-1893, France gained control of the Indochina region, imposing direct rule or entering into protectorate treaties that virtually turned into colonies the territories of Cambodia, Vietnam, and Laos (which were collectively called French Indochina). Thereafter, the Cambodians and Vietnamese turned their nationalist struggles against the French, sometimes forming alliances to defeat and expel their common enemy. Even so, Cambodians continued to harbor a mistrust of the Vietnamese – which would become a major cause of the Cambodian-Vietnamese War.
The revolutionary movements that eventually prevailed in Vietnam and Cambodia (as well as in Laos) trace their origin to 1930 when the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) was formed. VCP soon reorganized itself into the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) to include membership to Cambodian and Laotian communists into the Vietnamese-dominated movement. The great majority of ICP Khmers were not indigenous to Cambodia; rather they consisted mostly of ethnic Khmers who were native to southern Vietnam, and ethnic Vietnamese living in Cambodia.

In 1951, the ICP split itself into three nationalist organizations for Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos respectively, i.e. Workers Party of Vietnam, Khmer People’s Revolutionary Party (KPRP), and Neo Lao Issara. In December 1946, the Viet Minh (or League for the Independence of Vietnam), a Vietnamese nationalist group that was formed in World War II to fight the Japanese, began an independence war against French rule (First Indochina War, separate article). The Viet Minh prevailed in July 1954. The 1954 Geneva Accords, which ended the war, divided Vietnam into two military zones, which became socialist North Vietnam and West-aligned South Vietnam. War soon broke out between the two Vietnams, with North Vietnam supported by China and the Soviet Union; and South Vietnam supported by the United States. This Cold War conflict, called the Vietnam War (separate article) and which included direct American military involvement in 1965-1970, ended in April 1975 with a North Vietnamese victory. As a result, the two Vietnams were reunified, in July 1976.

Meanwhile in Cambodia, the local revolutionary struggle ended with the 1954 Geneva Accords, which gave the country, led by King Sihanouk, full independence from France. The Accords also ended both French rule and French Indochina, and independence also was granted to Laos and Vietnam.
Following the First Indochina War, most of the Khmer communists moved into exile in North Vietnam, while those who remained in Cambodia formed the Pracheachon Party, which participated in the 1955 and 1958 elections. However, government repression forced Pracheachon Party members to go into hiding in the early 1960s.

By the late 1950s, the Cambodian communist movement experienced a resurgence that was spurred by a new generation of young, Paris-education communists who had returned to the country. In September 1960, ICP veteran communists and the new batch of communists met and elected a Central Committee, and renamed the KPRP (Kampuchean People’s Revolutionary Party) as the Worker’s Party of Kampuchea (WPK).

In February 1963, following another government suppression that led to the arrest of communist leaders, the WPK soon came under the control of the younger communists, led by Saloth Sar (later known as Pol Pot), who sidelined the veteran communists whom they viewed as pro-Vietnamese. In September 1966, the WPK was renamed the Kampuchean Communist Party (KCP).

The KCP and its members, as well its military wing, were called “Khmer Rouge” by the Sihanouk government. In January 1968, the Khmer Rouge launched a revolutionary war against the Sihanouk regime, and after Sihanouk was overthrown in March 1970, against the new Cambodian government. In April 1975, the Khmer Rouge triumphed and took over political power in Cambodia, which it renamed Democratic Kampuchea.

During its revolutionary struggle, the Khmer Rouge obtained support from North Vietnam, particularly through the North Vietnamese Army’s capturing large sections of eastern Cambodia, which it later turned over to its Khmer Rouge allies. But the Khmer Rouge held strong anti-Vietnamese sentiment, and deemed its alliance with North Vietnam only as a temporary expedient to combat a common enemy – the United States in particular, Western capitalism in general. The Cambodian communists’ hostility toward the Vietnamese resulted from the historical domination by Vietnam of Cambodia during the pre-colonial period, and the perception that modern-day Vietnam wanted to dominate the whole Indochina region.

Soon after coming to power, the Khmer Rouge launched one of history’s most astounding social revolutions, forcibly emptying cities, towns, and all urban areas, and sending the entire Cambodian population to the countryside to become peasant workers in agrarian communes under a feudal-type forced labor system. All lands and properties were nationalized, banks, schools, hospitals, and most industries, were shut down. Money was abolished. Government officials and military officers of the previous regime, teachers, doctors, academics, businessmen, professionals, and all persons who had associated with the Western “imperialists”, or were deemed “capitalist” or “counter-revolutionary” were jailed, tortured, and executed. Some 1½ - 2½ million people, or 25% of the population, died under the Khmer Rouge regime (Cambodian Genocide, previous article).

In foreign relations, the Khmer Rouge government isolated itself from the international community, expelling all Western nationals, banning the entry of nearly all foreign media, and closing down all foreign embassies. It did, however, later allow a number of foreign diplomatic missions (from communist countries) to reopen in Phnom Penh. As well, it held a seat in the United Nations (UN).

The Khmer Rouge was fiercely nationalistic and xenophobic, and repressed ethnic minorities, including Chams, Chinese, Laotians, Thais, and especially the Vietnamese. Within a few months, it had expelled the remaining 200,000 ethnic Vietnamese from the country, adding to the 300,000 Vietnamese who had been deported by the previous Cambodian regime.
**War** The apparent communist solidarity between Vietnam and Cambodia was only superficial. As early as 1973 even before they had won their revolutions, the Khmer Rouge regularly ambushed North Vietnamese patrols that had crossed over into Cambodia. In 1974, armed clashes took place between their units. Then in 1975, barely one month after both sides won their revolutions, small-scale fighting was breaking out along their common border. Also that month, Khmer Rouge forces seized Phu Quoc (Figure 10), a Vietnamese island located off the Kampuchean coast. They also occupied the island of Tho Chu. Vietnamese forces quickly recaptured these islands, and retaliated by seizing the Cambodian island of Koh Wai.

In June 1975, on an official visit to Hanoi, Pol Pot sought to forge a treaty of friendship with the Vietnamese government. Although no agreement was signed, Vietnam was encouraged enough to withdraw its forces from Koh Wai in August 1975. However, border skirmishes continued in Cambodia’s northeast regions. Also during this time, the Khmer Rouge government expelled ethnic Vietnamese from Kampuchea.

In 1976, the two countries experienced a period of improved relations. Border fighting diminished, mainly because the Khmer Rouge regime was facing internal struggles at this time. In foreign relations, Cambodia called for Vietnam’s membership to the UN. In turn, Vietnam played down reports of widespread human rights violations occurring in Cambodia, which had come from horrific tales told by Cambodian refugees who had managed to escape into Thailand. Commercial flights between the two capitals, Phnom Penh and Hanoi, opened in September 1976.

In May 1976, Cambodian and Vietnamese delegations met to try and resolve their disputed maritime border along the Brévié Line, a French colonial-era demarcation line, but talks broke down. In earlier and later negotiations, both sides remained firm in their positions, and nothing was resolved. Furthermore, many Cambodians also resented the loss of the historic Cambodian lands that now form the southernmost territory of Vietnam (i.e. the Mekong Delta), although the Khmer Rouge government apparently did not officially claim this territory to be part of Cambodia.

The year 1977 saw a resurgence of fighting. In April of that year, the Khmer Rouge attacked the Vietnamese town of Chau Doc (in An Giang Province), and later in September, in what was a prelude to full-scale war, thousands of Khmer soldiers made incursions in Tay Ninh Province. Hundreds of Vietnamese villagers were killed in the fighting, and also as a result of Khmer Rouge atrocities. Vietnam retaliated by sending its planes that attacked targets in Cambodia. In October 1977, Vietnam sent eight divisions which threw back the invaders. Then with the arrival of 58,000 reinforcements in December 1977, in early January 1978, Vietnamese forces entered Kampuchea’s Svay Rieng Province, where they tried to incite the local population to revolt against the Khmer Rouge government. However, no revolt occurred, and the Vietnamese were forced to withdraw across the border.

Also in 1977, Pol Pot visited Beijing, which strengthened Cambodian-Chinese relations. China soon began sending large quantities of weapons and military hardware to Cambodia. The Cambodia-Vietnam crisis took on the dimension of a proxy conflict between China and the Soviet Union, as the Chinese supported the Khmer Rouge regime while the Soviets backed the Vietnamese, for the same reason, i.e. to gain control of the Indochina region, and bring it under their sphere of influence. While the Khmer Rouge’s motives against Vietnam were based on historical reasons, Vietnam in turn found itself surrounded by hostile forces from the southwest (Cambodia) and from the north (China).

In May 1978, Pol Pot began a party purge in the Eastern Zone, whose cadres he believed were too pro-Vietnamese, and who possessed “Khmer bodies with Vietnamese minds”. The Eastern Zone purge was only the latest in a series of violent purges that had taken place across Kampuchea since 1977. Some 100,000 party members were killed in massacres and executions in the Eastern Zone. Also prior
to the purge, Pol Pot boasted that only two million Cambodian troops were needed to defeat Vietnam and eradicate its population of fifty million people.

However, the Eastern Zone purge forced thousands of Khmer Rouge party cadres there to flee to Vietnam, where they were arrested and interned by the Vietnamese Army, and subsequently won over by the Vietnamese government. On December 3, 1978, under Vietnamese sponsorship and direction, these ex-Khmer Rouge Eastern Zone cadres organized themselves as the “Kampuchean United Front for National Salvation (KUFNS), a political/military movement whose aim was to overthrow the Khmer Rouge regime.

In June 1978, Vietnam began preparations for a full-scale offensive of Cambodia. And by November 1978, Vietnamese forces were massing along the southwestern border. The Vietnamese government also had taken the precaution to secure its northern border against a possible Chinese invasion by signing the “Vietnamese-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation” in November 1978, which guaranteed Russian military intervention in case of a Chinese attack. To counter the Vietnamese build-up, Kampuchea sent 14 divisions to reinforce its eastern border. China also increased its weapons deliveries to Kampuchea.

Full-scale war began on December 25, 1978. On that day, following a diversionary attack on Kratie in Cambodia’s northwest region, the main attack force of the 120,000-strong Vietnamese forces, supported by 20,000 KUFNS fighters and air, artillery, and armored units, launched a swift offensive into southern Cambodia through Takeo Province. The Khmer Rouge had massed its forces in Svay Rieng Province, where the Pol Pot regime believed the Vietnamese would strike. But Vietnamese forces outflanked Svay Rieng Province.

With the fall of Takeo, the road to Phnom Penh lay open. Vietnamese tanks now sped down the flat countryside to the capital. On January 7, 1979, the Vietnamese Army captured Phnom Penh, and overthrew the Khmer Rouge regime. Pol Pot and his staff, together the bulk of the Khmer Rouge Army, made a strategic withdrawal to the jungle mountains of western Cambodia near the Thai border, where they set up a resistance government.
On January 10, 1979, the Vietnamese turned over Cambodia’s civilian administration to its KUFNS allies, who took over political power as the People’s Republic of Kampuchea (PRK), Cambodia’s new official name. But Vietnam, whose forces remained in Cambodia, held the real power, and convinced the PRK government to sign with it, in February 1979, a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, which formalized continued Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia, for mutual security reasons. The new government also abolished the agrarian communes set up by the old regime and allowed Cambodians to return to their homes. The mass killings perpetrated by the deposed Khmer Rouge (Cambodian Genocide, previous article) also came to an end.

However, the Khmer Rouge’s ouster did not end the war, but transitioned into a decade-long war of attrition. The Khmer Rouge, ensconced in jungle hideouts near the Thai border, reorganized as a guerilla militia, and had as its objectives the overthrow of the PRK regime and the expulsion of the Vietnamese Army. Some 600,000 Cambodian civilians had also fled to the western and northern borders, where they ended up in refugee camps which were administered by foreign relief agencies. These refugees also became a source of potential recruits for the Khmer Rouge.

Tainted by its genocidal regime, the Khmer Rouge tried to recast its image. It organized the “Patriotic and Democratic Front of the Great National Union of Kampuchea” (PDFGNUK), supposedly a coalition of anti-Vietnamese, anti-PDK forces, and also appointed Khieu Samphan, a party moderate, as its new leader. In reality, however, the hard-line Pol Pot remained in charge behind the scenes.

The second phase of the war also was fought as much on the diplomatic and international front, centered on the recognition of the Vietnamese-sponsored PRK state. At the UN, China, the United States, and ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) pressed to have DK (the Khmer Rouge state) retain its seat at the UN, while the Soviet Union and Vietnam lobbied that Cambodia’s UN membership be transferred to the PRK. Countries that supported DK were motivated by different reasons: 1. China wanted to restore the Khmer Rouge to power. 2. ASEAN countries supported Thailand, which felt threatened by the Vietnamese presence in Cambodia. 3. The United States, because of the Vietnam War, wanted to see Vietnam destabilized.

Because of American lobbying pressures, Western countries imposed sanctions on the PRK. At the UN, 29 countries (mostly Eastern Bloc or pro-Soviet Union) supported PRK, while 80 countries backed DK. By contrast, Vietnam argued that DK as a legitimate state ended with its overthrow, and that it had committed genocide on its own people. In September 1979, following a plenary vote, the UN General Assembly declared that DK would continue to represent Cambodia at the UN. PRK’s application to the UN was also rejected.

Prince Norodom Sihanouk, Cambodia’s long-time ruler from the 1940s to 1970, also lent his popularity to sway international opinion by denouncing the Vietnamese invasion and supporting the Khmer Rouge (he had briefly served as its head of state). He later severed ties with the Khmer Rouge and pressed the UN to have Cambodia’s seat left vacant, stating that both the DK (the Khmer Rouge state), because of its genocidal regime, and PRK, because it was a “puppet” state of Vietnam, were not worthy to represent Cambodia in the international community.

Presently, the Khmer Rouge was challenged by two non-communist resistance movements: the Khmer People’s National Liberation Front (KPNLF), a right-wing, pro-West militia formed in October 1979; and the “National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful, and Cooperative Cambodia” (FUNCINPEC; French: FRONT UNI NATIONAL pour un Cambodge indépendant, Neutre, Pacifique, et
Coopératif), formed in March 1981 and led by Prince Sihanouk. China provided military support to the Khmer Rouge, while the United States backed KPNLF and FUNCINPEC. Even then, the three resistance groups failed to seriously challenge the 200,000-man Vietnamese occupation forces or the Vietnam-backed PRK government during the war.

Because of the Khmer Rouge’s tainted history, ASEAN pressured the three resistance groups to form a coalition to enhance the Cambodian opposition’s image in the international stage. Negotiations among the three parties were long and difficult. The Khmer Rouge, which had the largest and most effective fighting force, was unwilling to compromise its superior position, and the leaders of the two non-communist groups, KPNLF and FUNCINPEC, bickered in personal and political rivalries. Nonetheless, in June 1982, the three groups struck an agreement, and formed the “Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea” (CGDK; led by Prince Sihanouk as its President). CGDK was a coalition of the Khmer Rouge, KPNLF, and FUNCINPEC, and had as its objective improving the Cambodian opposition’s legitimacy in the international stage. CGDK immediately became recognized internationally, and Cambodia’s seat at the UN was given to CGDK.

By contrast, the Vietnamese-sponsored PDK government, like Vietnam itself, continued to face regional and international isolation. The PDK government was deprived of much needed foreign (Western) financial assistance, which was badly needed to rehabilitate Cambodia’s war-ravaged economy. The financial assistance that it received from the Soviet Union was inadequate and barely enough to sustain the country. The Khmer Rouge regime’s fixated obsession with creating a purely agricultural nation had left infrastructures and industries in disrepair, while the vital pool of doctors, engineers, technicians, teachers, intellectuals, and businessmen had been eliminated. Furthermore, the Khmer Rouge government, just before its collapse during the Vietnamese invasion, had embarked on a scorched-earth campaign. Its retreating forces laid waste to the countryside, destroying farmlands to deprive the advancing Vietnamese Army of food resources.

Furthermore, the Vietnamese occupation was having a negative impact on the country, greatly frustrating most Cambodians who were traditionally hostile toward their eastern neighbors. The resistance groups also claimed that large numbers of Vietnamese were flooding into Kampuchea and “vietnamizing” the country. The Hanoi government denied these accusations, stating that Vietnamese soldiers comprised the vast majority of its citizens in Cambodia, and that it did not intend to destroy or replace the Cambodian people’s culture and traditions.

The PRK’s own military forces suffered from shortage of weapons, inadequate funding, and poor morale. As a result, the Vietnamese Army did most of the fighting during the war. From 1980 to 1987, the Vietnamese launched yearly dry-season offensives against the Khmer Rouge, KPNLF, and FUNCINPEC along the Thai border. Vietnamese forces also sometimes penetrated into Thailand to pursue the guerillas, leading to armed clashes with Thai forces. Artillery, rocket, and mortar duels between Thai and Vietnamese forces frequently occurred, which caused heavy casualties on Thai civilians and Cambodian refugees caught in the crossfire.

The Vietnamese experienced their greatest success in 1984-1985, when they destroyed most of the rebel camps and forced the guerillas to flee into Thailand. In the aftermath, the KPNLF also lost 30% of its fighters, and the power struggles within the rebel organization worsened. Also under its K5 Plan, the Vietnamese Army strengthened the 800-long Thai-Cambodia border, building obstacles such as trenches, barb wire fences, and minefields to stop rebel attacks from Thailand into Cambodia, and prevent the exodus of Cambodians into Thailand.

Ultimately, the war ended not in the battlefield but as a result of global events. By the late 1980s, socialist countries in Eastern Europe were shedding off Marxist ideology and moving toward adopting
Western democracy. And at the end of 1991, the Soviet Union collapsed, and its Cold War rivalry with the United States ended. The Soviets earlier also cut back and then stopped sending economic aid to their socialist allies around the world, and also encouraged those with internal security problems to negotiate a peace settlement with local insurgent groups.

As a result of the loss of Soviet aid, the economies of Vietnam and Cambodia were severely affected. In 1986, Vietnam began the process of withdrawing its forces from Cambodia, which was completed in September 1989 when its last troops departed. Before leaving, Vietnam had built up the PRK’s military forces to take on the fighting against the rebels.

Because of the end of the Cold War and the easing of global tensions, the PRK government toned down its hard-line position. The PRK changed the country’s socialist name, the “People’s Republic of Kampuchea”, to the “State of Cambodia” (SOC) in May 1989, and then announced that SOC would maintain a policy of neutrality and non-alignment. SOC adopted a free-market economy and restored private ownership, but remained a one-party state.

Starting in the mid-1980s, many attempts by the government to initiate peace talks with the resistance groups had been made, but had accomplished little, mainly because the PRK government insisted that any settlement should not include the Khmer Rouge. In turn, the Khmer Rouge refused to recognize the legitimacy of the Vietnamese-sponsored PRK regime. But in 1989 with the Vietnamese Army’s withdrawal from Cambodia, peace negotiations proceeded in earnest under UN auspices. In October 1991, a resolution was reached in the Paris Peace Accords (officially titled, “Agreement on a Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodia Conflict”), which ended the twelve-year war.

**Aftermath** As stipulated in the Accords, all four parties (SOC and the three resistance groups), formed a provisional coalition government called the Supreme National Council of Cambodia, with Prince Sihanouk as its president, and thus the country’s head of state. In November 1991, Sihanouk returned to Phnom Penh, with large crowds greeting his arrival. However, Khieu Samphan, a high-ranking Khmer Rouge leader, was nearly killed when he returned to Phnom Penh by an angry mob that wanted to exact revenge for the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime. Then in December 1991, violent anti-government riots and demonstrations rocked the capital, threatening the peace process.

In November 1991, the United Nations Advance Mission in Cambodia (UNAMIC) arrived to assist in enforcing the ceasefire. In March 1992, the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), a peacekeeping force which also absorbed UNAMIC, became operational in Cambodia, and was tasked with implementing the 1991 Paris Peace Accords, including enforcing the ceasefire, disarming the various armed militias, and repatriating Cambodian refugees. UNTAC also was given the unique mandate of administering several Cambodian government agencies.

In May 1993, Cambodia held elections for its Constituent Assembly (legislature), which were marred by violence as the Khmer Rouge refused to disarm and demobilize (all other armed groups had voluntarily disarmed to UNTAC) and set up road blocks in their controlled areas, and also attacked ethnic Vietnamese civilians in the period before the elections. In July 1993, the newly elected Constituent Assembly began to work on a new constitution, which was completed and ratified in September 1993.

Under the new constitution, the country became a constitutional monarchy and was renamed as the “Kingdom of Cambodia”, with Sihanouk restored as king (he first became king in 1941 but abdicated in 1955) and head of state, with a Prime Minister as the head of government.
Soon thereafter, the Khmer Rouge, isolated and abandoned by its military backers, particularly China, started to decline in power, with its officers and soldiers accepting the government’s offers of amnesty and returning to the fold of the law. Then in April 1998, with the death of its long-time leader Pol Pot, who had been deposed, tried and found guilty for murdering a subordinate Khmer Rouge official, and placed under house arrest by his own commanders, the Khmer Rouge ceased to exist. After three decades of war, Cambodia was at peace.
SINO-VIETNAMESE WAR

**Background** In late December 1978, Vietnam invaded Cambodia, and within two weeks, its forces toppled the Khmer Rouge government, and set up a new Cambodian government that was allied with itself (*previous article*). The Khmer Rouge had been an ally of China, and as a result, Chinese-Vietnamese relations deteriorated. In fact, relations between China and Vietnam had been declining in the years prior to the invasion.

During the Vietnam War (*separate article*), North Vietnam received vital military and economic support from China, and also from the Soviet Union. But as Chinese-Soviet relations had been declining since the early 1960s (with both countries nearly going to war in 1969), North Vietnam was forced to maintain a delicate balance in its relations between its two patrons in order to continue receiving badly needed weapons and funds. But after the communist victory in April 1975, the reunified Vietnam had a gradual falling out with China over two issues: the persecution of ethnic Chinese in Vietnam, and a disputed border.

Following the Vietnam War, the Vietnamese central government in Hanoi launched a campaign to break down the free-market economic system in the former South Vietnam to bring it in line with the country’s centrally planned socialist economy. Ethnic Chinese in Vietnam (called Hoa), who controlled the South’s economy, were subject to severe economic measures. Many Hoa were forced to close down their businesses, and their assets and properties were seized by the government. Vietnamese citizenship to the Hoa was also voided. The government also forced tens of thousands of Hoa into so-called “New Economic Zones”, which were located in remote mountainous regions. There, they worked as peasant farmers under harsh conditions. The Hoa also were suspected by the government of plotting or carrying out subversive activities in the North.

As a result of these repressions, hundreds of thousands of Hoa (as well as other persecuted ethnic minority groups) fled the country. The Hoa who lived in the North crossed overland into China, while those in the South went on perilous journeys by sea using only small boats across the South China Sea for Southeast Asian countries. Vietnam also initially refused to allow Chinese ships that were sent by the Beijing government to repatriate the Hoa back to China. The Hanoi government also denied that the persecution of Hoa was taking place. Then when the Hanoi government allowed the Hoa to leave the country, it imposed exorbitant fees before granting exit visas. Furthermore, North Vietnamese troops in the northern Vietnamese frontier regions forced ethnic Chinese who lived there to relocate to the Chinese side of the China-Vietnam border.

Vietnam and China also had a number of long-standing territorial disputes, including over a piece of land with an area of 60 km\(^2\), but primarily in the Gulf of Tonkin, and in the Spratly and Paracel Islands in the South China Sea. The dispute over the Spratly and Paracel Islands became even more pronounced after it was speculated that the surrounding waters potentially contained large quantities of petroleum resources.

The Vietnamese also generally distrusted the Chinese for historical reasons. The ancient Chinese emperors had long viewed Vietnam as an integral part of China, and brought the Vietnamese under direct
Chinese rule for over a millennium (111 B.C.–938 A.D.). Then during the Vietnam War, the Vietnamese accepted Chinese military support with some skepticism, and later claimed that China provided aid in order to bring Vietnam under the Chinese sphere of influence. Furthermore, China’s improving relations with the United States following U.S. President Richard Nixon’s visit to Beijing in 1972 also was viewed by North Vietnam as a betrayal to its reunification struggle during the Vietnam War. In May 1978, with Cambodian-Vietnamese relations almost at the breaking point, China cut back on economic aid to Vietnam; within two months, it was ended completely. Also in 1978, China closed off its side of the Chinese-Vietnamese land border.

Meanwhile, just as its ties with China were breaking down, Vietnam was strengthening its relations with the Soviet Union. In 1975, the Soviets provided large financial assistance to Vietnam’s post-war reconstruction and five-year development program. Two events in 1978 brought Vietnam firmly under the Soviet sphere of influence: in June, Vietnam became a member of the Soviet-led Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon) and in November, Vietnam and the Soviet Union signed the “Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation”, a mutual defense pact that stipulated Soviet military and economic support to Vietnam in exchange for the Vietnamese allowing the Soviets to use air and naval facilities in Vietnam. The treaty also formalized the Soviet and Chinese domains in Indochina, with Vietnam aligned with the Soviet Union, and Cambodia aligned with China.

China now saw itself surrounded by the Soviet Union to the north and Vietnam to the south. But Vietnam also saw itself threatened by hostile forces in the north (China) and southwest (Cambodia). Vietnam then made its move in late December 1978, when it invaded Cambodia and conquered the country in a lightning offensive. Chinese authorities were infuriated, as their ally, the Khmer Rouge regime, had been toppled by the Vietnamese invasion. Since one year earlier (1978), tensions between China and Vietnam had been rising, causing many incidents of armed clashes and cross-border raids. In January 1979, the Hanoi government accused China of causing over 200 violations of Vietnamese territory.

By February 1979, 30 divisions of the People’s Liberation Army, or PLA (China’s armed forces) were massed along the border. On February 15, 1979, China announced its plan to attack Vietnam. Also on that day, China’s 1950 “Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance” with the Soviet Union ended, thus freeing China from its obligation to pursue non-aggression against a Soviet ally. Because of the threat of Soviet intervention from the north, on February 16, Chinese authorities declared that it was also prepared to go to war with the Soviet Union. By this time, the bulk of Chinese forces (some 1.5 million troops) were concentrated along the northern border, while 300,000 Chinese civilians in these border regions were evacuated.

**War** On February 17, 1979, some 200,000 PLA troops, supported by armor and artillery, attacked along two fronts across the 1,300-kilometer China-Vietnam border. China officially announced that its offensive was a “self-defense counterattack” to “teach Hanoi a lesson”. From Yunnan Province, the PLA’s western offensive was aimed at Vietnam’s Ha Tuyen, Lao Cai, and Lai Chau provinces, while from Guangxi Province, the Chinese eastern front advanced into Vietnam’s Cao Bang, Lang Son, and Quang Ninh provinces. Air and naval forces were not deployed by either side, although Soviet electronic surveillance ships off Vietnamese waters tracked PLA radio traffic, which they then relayed to Vietnamese intelligence. The PLA’s main thrusts were concentrated on the provincial capitals of Cao Bang, Lang Son, and Lao Cai, with diversionary feints also launched against 23 other targets.
Within 24 hours, the Chinese offensive had advanced eight kilometers into Vietnam before being bogged down by increasingly strong resistance of the 70,000-100,000 Vietnamese forward defenses which consisted of border and regional units and local militias. The PLA also encountered logistical problems, where its frontline units ran short of water, food, and ammunitions. Furthermore, the Chinese incurred high casualties by launching reckless human wave assaults against the enemy’s entrenched positions, as well as ineffective Chinese artillery fire in support of these attacks. With Chinese forces later making more territorial gains, Vietnamese regular forces, which initially held the second line of defense, were moved to the frontlines.

On February 21, 1979, with the arrival of an additional eight divisions, the Chinese renewed their offensive. Heavy fighting took place at Cao Bang, Lang Son, Quang Ninh, Lien Son Mountains, and Lai Chau. The provincial capital of Cao Bang was taken on February 27, 1979, and finally cleared of stiff resistance in early March 1979. At Lang Son, which was the focus of the whole offensive, the Chinese paused at the northern heights overlooking the city in a ploy to lure the Vietnamese regular forces, which would then be destroyed by an overwhelming combined artillery, armor, and infantry PLA attack. One of China’s war objectives was to force Vietnam to withdraw its forces from Cambodia to defend the Vietnamese homeland. But the Vietnamese stuck to its strategy of not concentrating its forces in the urban areas, but to mobilize in smaller units in the surrounding countryside from where they could subject the PLA to pin-prick attacks and ambushes. The Vietnamese government reserved some 300,000 troops for Hanoi’s defense, but it did not withdraw its forces from Cambodia.

The PLA then attacked Lang Son, taking the city on March 4, 1979 after bitter house-to-house fighting. The following day, the Chinese government, declaring that it had sufficiently punished Vietnam, ordered its forces to withdraw from Vietnam. On their withdrawal, the PLA carried out a scorched-
earth campaign, destroying buildings, properties, and farmlands, before crossing into China on March 16, 1979. But the PLA did not cede the 60 km² strip of disputed border territory which it had captured during the invasion. The continued hold by the Chinese of this territory would become a source of dispute in the ensuing decade.

The war was over. No official casualty figures exist, as China and Vietnam have not released their battlefield human losses incurred during the war. But perhaps the PLA suffered some 60,000 troops killed or wounded, with Vietnamese forces suffering a nearly equivalent number of casualties.

Vietnamese forces, both regular and irregular units, fought exceedingly well during the war, their vast combat experience in their wars against the French and Americans, and their ability to adopt quickly to changing battlefield conditions, blunted the enemy’s numerical superiority. By contrast, the war exposed the many deficiencies in Chinese military strategy and combat capability. The PLA used costly human wave assaults, had obsolete weapons, did not use air and naval power, had deficient communications, transport, and logistical infrastructures, and suffered from poor unit coordination. In subsequent years, China would address these problems with an ambitious military reorganization and modernization program.

China also failed in its strategic objective to force Vietnam to withdraw from Cambodia. However, China also exposed the failure of the Soviet Union to intervene directly for Vietnam, and came to believe that it probably would not have to face a two-front war with the Soviet Union and Vietnam in a future confrontation.

As a result of the war, Vietnam drew closer to the Soviet Union. And because of continued tensions with China, the Soviets increased military support to Vietnam, and operated the military bases of the former U.S. facilities at Da Nang and Cam Ranh Bay. During the 1980s, the Soviet Union gave substantial financial assistance to support Vietnam’s perennially depressed economy. Vietnam was a UN member, but in the 1980s, it was diplomatically isolated from much of the world apart from Eastern Bloc countries.

Because of Vietnam’s military occupation of Cambodia, the danger of a new war with China persisted. The Chinese government also threatened to launch another attack to teach Vietnam a “second lesson”. As a result, throughout the 1980s, the Vietnam-China border became heavily militarized. At its peak, some 600,000 Vietnamese and 400,000 Chinese troops were deployed to guard the border approaches. Numerous armed clashes, artillery exchanges, and cross-border intrusions took place, much of them initiated by the PLA, generally in response to events currently occurring in Cambodia. For instance, in June 1980, when Vietnamese forces in Cambodia attacked the Khmer Rouge bases along the Cambodia-Thailand border, the PLA launched operations in Vietnam’s Lang Son and Ha Tuyen Provinces. PLA attacks, in turn, provoked Vietnam to retaliate by attacking border regions in China’s Guangxi and Yunnan Provinces. In these battles, both sides lost hundreds of soldiers killed.

In April-July 1984, major battles again broke out when Chinese forces attacked the border areas in Lang Son and Ha Tuyen Provinces in retaliation for the Vietnamese dry season offensive in Cambodia, which together with its 1985 offensive, destroyed nearly all Khmer rebel bases in Cambodia. The PLA advanced some 2-3 kilometers into Vietnam in battles that involved armored units.

Then in March 1988, the Chinese and Vietnamese navies clashed in the South China Sea for control of a number of reefs in the Spratly Islands (Figure 12). This naval encounter, called the Johnson South Reef Skirmish, was won by the Chinese. The Vietnamese incurred some 70 casualties.
In 1986, the Soviet Union implemented new political and economic liberalization reforms (“glasnost” and “perestroika”), and toned down its hard-line position. The Soviet government also called on Vietnam and China to resolve their differences. By this time, the Soviet Union was experiencing an economic crisis and faced greater challenges with its continued support for Vietnam’s stalemate war in Cambodia. But the belligerents were unyielding, with China demanding that Vietnam first withdraw from Cambodia, while Vietnam believed that occupying Cambodia was necessary for its own survival against Chinese hegemonic ambitions in Indochina.

However, by the early 1990s, communism was waning, and Eastern Bloc countries were shedding off their socialist identity. At the end of 1991, the Soviet Union disintegrated. In Vietnam, the end of Soviet aid led to severe economic difficulties. And as a result of the end of the Cold War, in 1989, the Hanoi government withdrew its forces from Cambodia.

**Aftermath** Soon thereafter, tensions between China and Vietnam eased. In September 1990, the two countries held secret talks in Chengdu, China, which led to the normalization of diplomatic relations in November 1991. The two countries then held negotiations to settle their common border. In late December 1999, a border treaty was signed, where the disputed 60 km² strip of land was awarded to China. In November 2001, the Chinese-Vietnamese Joint Committee for Land Border was established to demarcate and place markers across the border. With this work’s completion, the two countries signed a final land border agreement in January 2009. China and Vietnam continue to pursue competing claims to the Spratly and Paracel Islands in the South China Sea, which are also claimed by other Southeast Asian countries (Figure 12).
Figure 12. China and Vietnam, as well as other Southeast Asian countries, have disputed territorial claims in the South China Sea.
LAOTIAN CIVIL WAR

Background In March 1889, France established a protectorate over the Kingdom of Luang Prabang. Then in October 1893, the French extended the boundaries of Luang Prabang after gaining more territory on the western side of the Mekong River. Also in 1893, following the Franco-Siamese War, France formally established Luang Prabang’s borders by annexing the regions of Vientiane, Xiangkhoang, and Luang Namtha. With the further addition of Phongsali and Houaphan, the French protectorate of Luang Prabang essentially delineated the borders of what is the present day country of Laos. The French protectorate of Laos formed part of French Indochina, which included Tonkin, Annam, and Cochinchina (these three regions forming modern-day Vietnam), and Cambodia.

In the early 1940s, France encouraged nationalism among the different Lao tribes to counteract Thailand’s irredentist territorial ambitions on Laos. This had the unintended consequence of generating anti-French, anti-colonial sentiment among Laotians, which led to the founding of the short-lived separatist organization, Lao Pen Lao (Lao for Laos).

In September 1939, World War II broke out in Europe, and in December 1941, in the Asia Pacific. In June 1940, France fell to Germany, and the new French Vichy government became allied with the Axis Powers, including Japan. In August 1940, Japan and Vichy France signed the Matsuoka-Henry Pact, which granted Japanese forces access to French Indochina for Japan’s invasion of other parts of Southeast Asia. The treaty also allowed French colonial authorities to continue governing Indochina.

But by 1944, World War II had turned decisively in favor of the Allied Powers. In September of that year, France was recaptured by the Allies, and a pro-Allied provisional government came to power. By early 1945, French commando infiltrations into Indochina and the subsequent formation of French-Lao guerilla resistance groups forced the Japanese to dismantle French colonial authority in Indochina. As a result, the Japanese ruled Indochina directly. The Japanese then exerted pressure on King Sisavang Vong, the pro-French Lao monarch, who in April 1945, ended the French protectorate and declared Lao an independent state. But just four months later, on August 14, 1945, Japan surrendered to the Allies, bringing an end to World War II.

In the immediate post-war period, Indochina was racked by anarchy and unrest. In Laos, rival political elements competed in a power struggle to fill the void left by the sudden Japanese capitulation. In Luang Prabang (the royal capital of Laos), Prince Phetsarath, the Prime Minister, tried to convince King Sisavang Vong to implement policies relevant to an independent Laos. King Sisavang Vong refused, as he was determined to permit the restoration of French rule. After being stripped of his positions of Prime Minister and viceroy, on August 27, 1945, Phetsarath took control of Vientiane (Laos’ administrative capital). There, on September 15, 1945, Phetsarath declared a unified Laos comprising Luang Prabang and the four southern provinces of Khammouan, Savannakhet, Champasak, and Saravane (Figure 14).

On October 7, 1945, a Lao partisan force led by Prince Souphanouvong arrived at Savannakhet, where other nationalists had taken control of the town’s administration. Their combined forces, with Souphanouvong as over-all commander, proceeded north to join Phetsarath in Vientiane. There, in October 1945, the Lao nationalists, now led by the three princes, the brothers Phetsarath and Souvanna Phouma, and their half-brother Souphanouvong, declared Laos’ independence under a revolutionary
government called Lao Issara (“Free Laos”). (Souvanna Phouma and Souphanouvong would later play major roles in the coming Laotian Civil War.) On October 10, 1945, the Lao Issara sent a force to Luang Prabang, where it forced King Sisavang Vong into submission.

However, the Lao Issara failed to consolidate power. In the immediate post-World War II period, major political decisions were dictated by the victorious Allied Powers, which accepted France’s desire to restore colonial rule in Indochina. But in the meantime that France was yet assembling a force for that purpose, the Allies also allowed the Chinese Nationalist forces to enter Laos to formally accept the Japanese surrender there.

As a result, Laos became partitioned into areas of control by different forces. The Lao Issara controlled the capital and the towns of Thakhek and Savannakhet. Chinese forces held the northern regions (Luang Prabang, Phongsali and Luang Namtha). The French-Lao forces controlled the south (Xiangkhoang, Khammouan, and Savannakhet provinces, together with Pakxe and Saravane, where the pro-French political warlord Prince Boun Oum operated). And the Viet Minh (a Vietnamese anti-French revolutionary movement) occupied Houaphan along the northeast border with Vietnam.

The Lao Issara, apart from its lack of foreign support, faced many other major problems: a dearth of money to run a government, a shortage of weapons, and political infighting. These problems undermined the Laos Issara’s capacity to survive. By October 1945, the French had reestablished its military presence in southern Indochina (Cochinchina and Cambodia). From Saigon, French troops advanced north toward Laos. In January 1946, French-Lao forces seized full control of Laos’ southern regions and soon entered Savannakhet, meeting only light resistance. In March 1946, following lengthy French-Nationalist Chinese negotiations, China withdrew its forces from Laos (and Vietnam).

On March 21, 1946, at the decisive Battle of Thakhek, French-Lao forces attacked and defeated the Lao Issara. A few days later, the Lao Issara government abandoned the capital, Vientiane, which was taken over by the French. Arriving at Luang Prabang on March 23, 1946, the Lao Issara made appeasement with Sisavang Vong, restoring him to the throne. King Sisavang Vong only reluctantly accepted reconciliation, and on April 23, 1946, he announced a new constitution and declared Laos’ unity. French forces continued their advance north, and entered Luang Prabang in May 1946. The French ended the remaining Lao Issara resistance, and presently regained control of all Laotian territory.

France reinstated King Sisavang Vong as monarch over Laos, and then reversed its plan to restore direct colonial rule. Instead, the French government prepared to hand over self-government to the Lao people. In December 1946, elections were held to the Lao National Assembly (the state legislature), which then convened to prepare a new constitution. In May 1947, the completed constitution, ratified by the king, declared Laos an autonomous state within the French Union. In July 1949, in the Franco-Lao General Convention, France granted the Lao government greater prerogatives in Laos’ foreign affairs. In February 1950, with France again confirming Laos’ self-determination status, the United States and Britain recognized Laos as a sovereign state. In December 1955, Laos joined the United Nations.

However, despite Laos’ apparent independence, France retained a virtual stranglehold over the country, controlling Laos’ finance, defense, and major foreign policy functions. French forces also were stationed in the country, which by the late 1940s, had become extremely vital to French regional interests, because of the ongoing conflict in Vietnam (First Indochina War, separate article).

Meanwhile, the Lao Issara, following its defeat, fled to Thailand, where it set up a government-in-exile and a guerilla force. Lao Issara fighters then began launching cross-border attacks into Laos. But in November 1947, a military coup in Thailand brought to power a regime that restored relations with France, recognized Laos, and dismantled Lao Issara bases in Thailand. The Lao Issara then experienced infighting within its leadership, particularly between Phetsarath and Souphanouvong, on whether to seek assistance from the communist Viet Minh to continue the revolutionary struggle. Souphanouvong, a
ideologue, subsequently was expelled from the Lao Issara. He then moved to Vietnam, where he previously had lived many years, and came into contact with Ho Chi Minh, the Vietnamese communist revolutionary leader.

In October 1949, the remaining Lao revolutionaries disbanded the Lao Issara and dissolved their government-in-exile. Souvanna Phouma accepted a Lao government amnesty and returned to Laos, where he would play a major political role in the next 25 years. After the 1951 National Assembly elections, he became Prime Minister, holding this position until 1954. In subsequent years, he would return as Prime Minister in 1956-1958, 1960, and 1962-1975.

Phetsarath remained in Thailand, and ceased to play an important role in Laotian politics. In Vietnam, Souphanouvong met with other Lao anti-French radicals. These included communists, but also non-communists, such as former Lao officials and royals, and ethnic minorities, who saw the Lao royal government as no more than a French puppet. In August 1950, these anti-colonialists formed the Neo Lao Issara (Free Laos Front), purportedly a united front of Lao opposition groups comprising different political persuasions. A revolutionary government also was formed, called the “Resistance Government of the Lao Homeland”, led by Souphanouvong as its president. The Western press soon began using its shortened name, “Pathet Lao” (Lao Homeland), to refer to this organization.

During its revolutionary struggle, the Pathet Lao would put great efforts to portray itself as an ideologically and politically pluralistic organization. In large part, it relied on the prestige of Prince Souphanouvong. In fact, however, the Pathet Lao was controlled behind the scenes by hard-line communists led by Kaysone Phomvihane and Nouhak Phoumsavan. To gain the widest popular support, the Pathet Lao kept hidden its Marxist background. It also did not overtly call for the end of the Lao monarchy, and did not reveal its desire to implement agrarian reform and collectivized farming. Land reform ran contrary to Laos’ socio-economic structure, as most farmers owned their own lands, and landless peasantry was almost non-existent in Laos.

The communist movement in Laos traces its origin to the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP), formed in 1930. The ICP consisted nearly exclusively of ethnic Vietnamese, and had as its main goals the overthrow of French rule in Indochina and the establishment of socialist governments in an independent Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. In February 1951, the ICP reorganized into three separate but allied communist parties, one each for Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. The Lao communist group, in March 1955, secretly formed the Lao People’s Party (LPP), which later in February 1972, was renamed the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party (LPRP), both of which were not known to the general public at that time.

As early as January 1949, with the military guidance and support provided by the Viet Minh, the fledging Lao communist movement organized an armed militia to launch the revolutionary struggle in Laos. By the early 1950s, with the formation of the Pathet Lao and also with Viet Minh leading the way in the escalating First Indochina War, the Lao guerrillas were transformed into an auxiliary force behind the Viet Minh.

War In large part, the Laotian Civil War can be viewed as a direct result of the events taking place in neighboring Vietnam, first during the First Indochina War (1946-1954) and later during the Vietnam War (1955-1975). In Vietnam during the First Indochina War, by the early 1950s, the French and Viet Minh forces had fought to a stalemate. In April 1953, to break the deadlock and also to over-extend the French forces, the Viet Minh, comprising some 40,000 fighters and supported by 2,000 Pathet Lao auxiliaries, invaded northeastern Laos, and seized control of most of the Houaphan Province and sections of Phongsali, Xiangkhoang, and Luang Prabang provinces. The offensive consisted of the Viet Minh leading the advance. Then when enemy defenses had nearly been broken, the Viet Minh
would allow the Pathet Lao to move in and clear the remaining resistance. In this way, the Viet Minh hoped to conceal its involvement in Laos, and portray the war there as being undertaken by the Lao revolutionaries themselves. By April 1953, the Pathet Lao, together with the Viet Minh, occupied eastern Laos. Souphanouvong, the Pathet Lao leader, then set up his government in Houaphan Province.

In May 1954, French forces were defeated at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu, forcing France to end its involvement in Indochina under the terms of the Geneva Accords, signed on July 21, 1954. In the Geneva Accords, French Indochina was dissolved, and Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos became independent states. Earlier in October 1953, France had also granted Laos full independence. The Geneva Accords also stipulated that Laos (and Cambodia) were to remain neutral in regional military issues. A peacekeeping force, the International Control Commission (ICC), comprising representatives from India, Poland, and Canada, was tasked with enforcing the Geneva Accords. One day earlier, July 20, 1954, the terms for peace in Laos, called the “Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities in Laos” was signed, which provided for a ceasefire, the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Laos (i.e. the French military and Viet Minh), and the assembling of Pathet Lao forces in Houaphan and Phongsali, in the meantime that a political settlement was being worked out. Subsequently, the Lao government and Pathet Lao formed a Joint Committee to negotiate the terms of the peace agreement.

From 1954-1956, the two sides met in a series of talks, and a major source of contention was for control of the provinces of Houaphan and Phongsali. The Lao government wanted these provinces reintegrated with Laos, while the Pathet Lao insisted that it retain exclusive administrative control over them. In August 1956, an agreement was reached which contained the following provisions: 1. Houaphan and Phongsali would be reintegrated to Laos; 2. a coalition government for Laos would be formed; 3. supplementary elections to the National Assembly would be held in May 1958; and 4. two battalions (1,500 soldiers) of the Pathet Lao would be integrated into the Lao Royal Army.

In November 1957, (the first) Lao coalition government was formed, and Souphanouvong and other Pathet Lao leaders were appointed to national-level positions. Also that month, Houaphan and Phongsali provinces were formally returned to Lao government control. Then in the May 1958 National Assembly elections, the Lao Patriotic Front (LPF), the Pathet Lao’s political party, won a surprising 13 of the 21 contested seats.

Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma believed that the best course for Laos was taking the middle road and forming an inclusive coalition government. However, by the second half of the 1950s, this neutralist approach was being undermined by the weight of regional and global power politics. The Cold War politics emerged in Asia, and the Soviet Union and the United States, as well as China, were vying for influence in Indochina.

More ominously for neutral Laos, the North Vietnamese Army (formerly the Viet Minh militia) continued to occupy the border regions in northeast Laos, in violation of the 1954 Peace Accords. In September 1954, the North Vietnamese formed Group 100, which was tasked by the Hanoi government to train and arm the Pathet Lao. The Pathet Lao continued to be mobilized in the northeast frontier, despite the agreement with the government that two battalions of Pathet Lao troops would be integrated into the Lao Royal Army.

North Vietnam viewed its continued occupation of Laos in strategic terms, since by December 1956, the Hanoi government began to realize that its reunification with South Vietnam was becoming unlikely. North Vietnam therefore agreed to support the Viet Cong, a guerilla militia that had began an insurgency war in South Vietnam. By the terms of the 1954 Geneva Accords, North Vietnamese forces were not allowed to remain in Laos.

United States involvement in Indochina began in December 1950 when the U.S. government provided military support to France in the Indochina War. By then, the Indochina War had turned from
a purely colonial war to an emerging Cold War conflict. Then after France’s defeat and withdrawal from Indochina in 1954, U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower was determined to establish an American military presence in the region to prevent Southeast Asia from falling to the Domino Theory, a concept that conjectured that one Southeast Asian country after another would fall to communism, like a row of dominoes.

The 1954 Geneva Accords had allowed the French to maintain a small military presence in Laos to provide training to the Lao military. The United States considered this effort insufficient to totally defend the country from a communist take-over. The Geneva Accords guaranteed Laos’ non-aligned status and also barred foreign powers from establishing military bases in Laos. The United States circumvented these stipulations by forming (in December 1955) the Programs Evaluation Office (PEO). The PEO was a covert military mission disguised as a civilian aid agency. It was tasked with arming, training, and funding the Lao Royal Army, as well as other local anti-communist forces, including the Hmong and other mountain tribes.

Lao right-wing politicians also were beneficiaries of U.S. support. The PEO, based in Vientiane, was administered by U.S. military officers who wore civilian clothes and had their names deleted from the Department of Defense personnel rosters in order to conceal U.S. direct involvement in Laos. During the course of the war, the U.S. government supplied Laos with large military and financial aid, and even paid the full cost of the Laotian military’s budgetary requirements, including the salaries of Lao officers and soldiers.

The large influx of U.S. funds led to corruption, particularly in the Lao military’s top echelons. As well, it produced high inflation that brought negative consequences to the Lao general population.

Events in the late 1950s would lead to a resumption of the Laotian conflict. In August 1958, the Lao National Assembly ousted Souvanna Phouma as Prime Minister in a vote of no confidence. In his place, the right-wing pro-U.S. government under new Prime Minister Phoui Sananikone returned to power (he previously had served in this position in 1950-1951). Phoumi reversed the agreements made by his neutralist predecessor. In December 1958, after suspending the constitution, Phoumi suppressed the Pathet Lao, and purged Pathet Lao supporters from government office, and jailed Pathet Lao leaders, including Souphanouvong. Subsequently, Souphanouvong and his deputies escaped from prison and returned to the rebel strongholds in the hinterlands of the Laotian northeast. The two Pathet Lao battalions designated for integration with the Royal Lao Army also slipped away and rejoined the main rebel forces in the jungles. As a result, the (first) Lao coalition government broke down.

More crucially, in January 1959, North Vietnam gave its full military support to the Viet Cong in South Vietnam and made plans to construct a supply route (later known as the Ho Chi Minh Trail) across southeastern Laos. One month earlier (December 1958), North Vietnamese forces seized sections of Xepon District in southeastern Laos. In May 1959, North Vietnam formed Group 559 to construct the Ho Chi Minh Trail to South Vietnam.

In July 1959, hostilities restarted between Lao government forces and the Pathet Lao, with fighting centered in eastern Laos. The North Vietnamese Army led the fighting for the Pathet Lao, defeating the Lao Army and then allowing the Pathet Lao to occupy the captured areas. In this way, North Vietnamese-Pathet Lao territories widened. North Vietnamese/Pathet Lao bases in the northeast were used as a springboard to attack government forces, while rebel bases in the southeast were part of the Ho Chi Minh Trail network. In September 1959, North Vietnam replaced Group 100 with Group 959, which it also tasked with arming and training the Pathet Lao.

Meanwhile in Vientiane, the Lao government’s political troubles continued. In December 1959, General Phoumi, the ultra-right wing Defense Minister, overthrew the Phoumi government. But General Phoumi’s attempts to influence the new king, Sisivang Vatthana (who succeeded to the throne after King
Sisavang Vong’s death in October 1959), failed when western diplomats, intervened, and prevailed upon the monarch not to appoint General Phoumi as Prime Minister. Instead, Prince Somsanit was named Prime Minister. However, General Phoumi, who remained as Defense Minister, held the real power in the Lao government.

Then in August 1960, Lao Army Captain Kong Le, dismayed by the resumption of the war, seized control of Vientiane to depose the government. Among Kong Le’s stated aims for the coup were to end the civil war and restore Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma and his neutralist government to power. With the coup gaining strong popular support, the National Assembly ousted the Somsanit government and restored the neutralist Souvanna Phouma as Prime Minister.

The political neutralists then offered reconciliation to the rightists, and on August 31, 1960, a new government was formed with neutralist Souvanna Phouma (still) as Prime Minister and right-wing general Phoumi as deputy Prime Minister. The United States was skeptical, however, as the earlier neutralist-led coalition government had included the communist Pathet Lao. Thailand, a U.S. ally, also was alarmed at the neutralists’ return to power. The Thai government thus imposed a trade blockade of Laos, causing food shortages, inflationary prices, and financial hardships to the Lao economy.

Then when in October 1960, neutralist Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma entered into negotiations with the Pathet Lao, General Phoumi broke off with the neutralist government and joined forces with right-wing Prince Boun Oum in southern Laos, forming the anti-communist “Revolutionary Committee”. The United States and Thailand immediately switched their support to this right-wing movement.

Meanwhile, the neutralist Lao government and communist Pathet Lao also reached an agreement, but now deprived of U.S. military support, they began receiving weapons and supplies from the Soviet Union. By this time, the Royal Lao Army was divided, with most units siding with the rightists and some units supporting the neutralists. In November 1960, with substantial U.S. and Thai support, right-wing General Phoumi launched his offensive. In the decisive Battle of Vientiane in mid-December 1960, rightist forces defeated Kong Le’s neutralists, forcing the neutralists to withdraw to the strategic Plain of Jars (Figure 14), located 400 kilometers northeast of the capital. One month earlier (November 1960), the Lao National Assembly ousted neutralist Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma from office and named rightist Prince Boun Oum as the new Prime Minister (although General Phoumi continued to hold the real power). But Souvanna Phouma, who had fled to Cambodia a few days before the Battle of Vientiane, remained defiant, insisting that he was the legitimate Prime Minister of Laos.

Following these events, fighting increased. More Vietnamese troops joined the fighting, which allowed the Pathet Lao to extend its areas of control. The United States increased its support to the Boun Oum-Phoumi rightist government, and also began sending military supplies to its “Secret Army”, the 30,000-strong anti-communist Hmong guerillas, who gradually took over much of the fighting in northeastern Laos. A Central Intelligence Agency-owned airline, “Air America”, operating disguised as a civilian private enterprise, delivered weapons and supplies to remote Hmong outposts deep inside communist-held territory.

In 1961, newly elected U.S. President John F. Kennedy dramatically reversed his predecessor’s hard-line position on Laos. Initially, President Kennedy had studied his options, and even considered sending combat troops to southern Laos, including nuclear weapons. But following the failed Bay of Pigs invasion in Cuba (April 1961), President Kennedy called for a negotiated settlement in Laos, which was welcomed by the Soviet Union and China.

In Laos, the local warring sides initially were opposed to negotiations. However, in May 1961, peace talks opened in Geneva, Switzerland, with the three sides of the conflict represented by the “three princes”: rightist Prince Boun Oum, neutralist Prince Souvanna Phouma, and leftist Prince Souphanouvong. The Geneva negotiations, which lasted over a year (May 1961-July 1962), produced a
settlement, the “International Agreement on the Neutrality of Laos”, commonly called the 1962 Geneva Accords, where the major powers (United States, Soviet Union, China, France, and Britain) as well as Laos’ neighbors (North Vietnam, South Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, and Burma) agreed to respect the neutrality of Laos.

In June 1962, the three rival Lao factions also reached an internal settlement: the second Lao coalition government was formed, which consisted of neutralists, rightists, and leftists. Neutralist Souvanna Phouma was named Prime Minister, and rightist General Phoumi and leftist Souphanouvong were appointed as co-deputy Prime Ministers.

But once again, regional events, particularly the now raging Vietnam War, put great pressure on the already fragile neutrality of Laos and the Lao coalition government. By 1963 in South Vietnam, the Viet Cong had gained the upper hand. In the following years, the Viet Cong would nearly bring down the government of South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem. North Vietnam, pursuing its objective of reuniting the two halves of Vietnam, increased military support to the Viet Cong via the Ho Chi Minh Trail, which made its occupation of southeastern Laos absolutely necessary. In turn, the United States secretly provided military assistance to the Lao Royal Army and the anti-communist Hmong paramilitary, through a new covert agency, the “Requirements Office” of the U.S. Embassy in Vientiane.

In the first half of 1963, violence broke out in Vientiane, which included the assassination of the leftist foreign minister in April. Then in 1964, two coup attempts by right-wing security forces were made against the Lao coalition government. Although both coups were foiled, the coalition government remained unstable. At this point, the Pathet Lao broke off ties with Souvanna Phouma and returned to their jungle bases, thus ending the second coalition government. As a result, the civil war resumed.

The unity of the neutralist forces also broke apart when their leader, Kong Le, accepted aid from the U.S. military. One neutralist faction became left-leaning and joined the Pathet Lao, while the other faction, led by Kong Le, became right-leaning neutralists. The neutralist forces soon were marginalized in the war, and succeeding battles were fought between the West-aligned Royal Lao Army-Hmong forces, and the communist-aligned Pathet Lao-North Vietnamese Army. Neutralist Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma remained undeterred, and continued to advocate his country’s non-aligned status, and tried to maintain normal diplomatic relations with the United States and South Vietnam, and also with the Soviet Union, China, and North Vietnam.
In 1965-1966, Souvanna Phouma’s neutralist government remained unstable and was hit by a number of coup attempts, including one led by rightist General Phoumi, who had previously led four attempts to topple the government. Loyalist forces quelled these revolts, and General Phoumi was forced to flee into exile in Thailand.

In 1965, the United States intervened directly in Vietnam, leading to the most intense phase of the Vietnam War. In southeastern Laos, U.S. bombing attacks were carried out under Operations Steel Tiger (April 1965-November 1968), Tiger Hound (December 1965-November 1968), and Commando Hunt (November 1968-March 1972). In these aerial campaigns, U.S. planes, including the B-52 Stratofortress, launched strategic bombing raids on North Vietnamese supply lines along the Ho Chi Minh Trail (Figure 5) in southeastern Laos. In total, some 2.5 million tons of ordnance were dropped in Laos, more than the combined amount of bombs dropped by the United States in Europe and Japan during World War II, and making Laos the most bombed country in history. Despite this massive U.S. airpower, over the course of the Vietnam War, North Vietnam continued to expand the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Subsequently, the Trail became a complex network of small and wide roads, foot and bike paths, and concealed river crossings across a vast and ever-enlarging area in the eastern regions of Laos (and Cambodia).

In northern Laos, the United States also launched bombing attacks (Operation Barrel Roll) on North Vietnamese-Pathet Lao forces, in support of its Royal Lao Army (RLA) and Hmong allies. In this sector where most of the ground fighting of the Laotian Civil War took place, early in the war, Lao government forces launched a series of offensives, which generally were ineffective against the much more powerful North Vietnamese Army. In July 1966, the RLA formed a defensive perimeter along the Nam Bac Valley to protect Luang Prabang. In January 1968, a powerful North Vietnamese-Pathet Lao offensive gained

Figure 13. Southeast Asia during the 1960s.
control of the valley, driving away and inflicting heavy losses on Lao government forces. Thereafter, the RLA ceased to be a major player for much of the rest of the war, with the bulk of its forces remaining in static defensive positions in the populated areas of the lower Mekong region.

Instead, during much of the civil war, the ground fighting on the Lao government side was borne by paramilitary forces of the highland-dwelling ethnic minorities, particularly the Hmong “Secret Army” of the CIA. The Hmong irregulars were led by General Vang Pao, commander of Lao Military Region II in the northeast. General Vang Pao led an army of 30,000 Hmong fighters. Organized as a guerilla force,
the Hmong operated in the highland ridges, launching ambushes and intelligence gathering operations on the communist forces in the plains below.

However, North Vietnamese-Pathet Lao annual dry season offensives (October-March), which intensified over time, gradually overcame General Vang Pao’s forces. As a result, Hmong civilians and soldiers were forced to abandon their homes in the northeast regions. The Plain of Jars, a strategically located area of hills and flatlands, became the battleground of some of the most intense fighting in the war, as it served as a main invasion route toward the population centers in the Mekong region.

In 1968, North Vietnam dramatically intensified the war in Laos concurrent with the Viet Cong’s ongoing large-scale Tet Offensive (January-March 1968) in South Vietnam. In January, North Vietnamese forces defeated the RLA in the Nam Bac Valley, and also expelled Hmong guerillas in the highlands around the Plain of Jars, and seized the whole region. In March 1968, the North Vietnamese Army captured the U.S. Tactical Air Navigation (TACAN) facility in Phou Phai in northeast Laos.

In late 1968, U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson ordered the end of U.S. bombing operations in North Vietnam. The now freed U.S. planes were then directed at Laos. As a result, in 1969-1970, Laos experienced a spike in bombing raids, particularly in the north of the country. These bombing attacks also allowed U.S. allies to achieve some success on the ground. In September 1969, with American air support, Hmong forces, which were now reorganized by the CIA into conventional military units, launched Operation About Face, which captured the Plain of Jars and Xiang Khouang, and seized large quantities of weapons and supplies. In March 1970, the North Vietnamese counterattacked, gaining back the Plain of Jars and then advancing toward Long Tieng, the main CIA base.

In May 1971, under Operation About Face II, Hmong forces, again with massive U.S. air support, recaptured the Plain of Jars. But in October 1971, the North Vietnamese, using long-range Soviet-made 130 mm artillery guns, regained the Plain of Jars and then advanced further south, capturing Sam Thong, and threatening Long Tieng. Fierce resistance by Hmong forces and massive U.S. bombing prevented the fall of Long Tieng and forced the enemy to withdraw to the Plain of Jars. By 1972, the North Vietnamese-Pathet Lao forces were firmly in control of the Plain of Jars and had captured the Bolovens Plateau, and were advancing on the Mekong region and threatening Thakhek and Vientiane.

In February 1971, the civil war was punctuated by a South Vietnamese offensive (Operation Lam Son 719) into southern Laos aimed at the Ho Chi Minh Trail. A North Vietnamese counter-offensive threw back the attack, with the South Vietnamese retreating in chaos after incurring heavy personnel and material losses.

The end of the Laotian civil war was a consequence of developments in the Vietnam War. Since 1968, the United States had sought a negotiated settlement with North Vietnam to end the Vietnam War. In the fall of 1972, peace talks gained momentum after the United States launched heavy bombing operations that forced North Vietnam to return to the negotiating table. In January 1973, the United States, North Vietnam, and South Vietnam signed the Paris Peace Accords, which ostensibly ended the Vietnam War. The United States withdrew its remaining forces from South Vietnam, but fighting between North Vietnam and South Vietnam resumed.

Similarly in Laos, peace negotiations between the Lao government and the communist Pathet Lao began in October 1972. Then on February 21, 1973, a peace agreement (officially titled: “Agreement on the Restoration of Peace and National Reconciliation”) was reached. The following day, a ceasefire went into effect in Laos. As stipulated in the peace agreement, a (third) Lao coalition government, called the Provisional Government of National Union (PGNU) was formed in April 1974, with neutralist Souvanna Phouma as Prime Minister and the Lao government and Pathet Lao sharing equal numbers of Cabinet positions. The Lao National Assembly was dissolved, and a quasi-legislature, the National Political Consultative Council (NPCC), was formed, also with equal representation from both sides.
Lao

Pathet Lao leader Souphanouvong was named as the NPCC chairman, which granted him co-ruling powers with Souvanna Phouma.

In September 1973, another agreement mandated the withdrawal of all foreign military personnel from Laos. While the United States complied, North Vietnam kept its 38,000 troops in eastern Laos. By this time, the political and military landscape in Laos (and across Indochina) had changed considerably, with the communists having negotiated peace terms in a position of equal if not greater power. At the same time, the situation for the non-communists deteriorated further, as the United States reduced and then completely ended its involvement in Indochina in 1974-1975.

In August 1973, a last-ditch coup attempt by right-wing Lao military elements to prevent the formation of the coalition government was foiled by loyalist Lao government troops. In May 1974, one month after the Lao coalition government was formed, Souphanouvong released an 18-point proposal for Laos’ reconstruction, which included among others, the holding of free elections, promotion of democracy, and respect for civil and religious rights. But until now, the Pathet Lao had not publicly revealed its ideological persuasion, despite widespread belief that it was a communist movement. In February 1972, its official party name was changed from Lao People’s Party (LPP) to Lao People’s Revolutionary Party (LPRP), which also remained unpublicized.

By early 1975, with U.S. forces effectively fully withdrawn from Indochina, the communists in the region launched their final offensives, with North Vietnamese forces advancing inside South Vietnam and the Khmer Rouge laying siege to the last Cambodian government strongholds in southern Cambodia. With the fall of Phnom Penh on April 17, 1975 and Saigon on April 30, the Cambodian and Vietnamese communist movements, respectively, prevailed in their revolutionary wars.

In Laos, in late April 1975, Pathet Lao forces launched an offensive against the Hmong, who held the mountains that separated the Plain of Jars from the Mekong lowlands. The Pathet Lao captured the strategic junction of Sala Phou Khoum, thus clearing the road toward Luang Prabang and Vientiane.

Neutralist Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma, wishing to avoid further bloodshed and destruction in a lost cause, ordered his forces not to resist the Pathet Lao. Now isolated, General Vang Pao appealed to the U.S. government to evacuate the Hmong people, particularly since the North Vietnamese-Pathet Lao forces had vowed to eradicate the Hmong people, who had resisted for 15 years and prevented the communists from achieving total victory in Laos.

In May 1975, as communist forces were approaching, a desperate evacuation of Hmong fighters and their families at Long Tieng was undertaken by a number of American civilian pilots, who flew to Thailand some 2,000 Hmong people, including General Vang Pao. By this time, Long Tieng was packed with some 50,000 Hmong refugees who had fled from the fighting. Within a few days after the evacuation, Long Tieng fell to the communists. In the aftermath, tens of thousands of Hmong people traveled overland across Laos to safety in Thailand, where they were resettled in refugee camps. Ultimately, over 250,000 Hmong were resettled in foreign countries, mainly in the United States, but also in Canada, Europe, and elsewhere.

In May 1975, Lao communist-led demonstrations broke out in several locations in the Mekong region of Laos aimed at the right-wing government. High-ranking Lao government officials and military officers, fearing for their lives, rushed to leave the country and crossed the Mekong River into Thailand. Pathet Lao forces met no resistance as they entered many towns and cities in Laos, including Pakxe, Savannakhet, and Thathek, and seized control of local government administrations. Luang Prabang was occupied in June 1975, and Vientiane in August. A further mass flight from Laos occurred among rightist elements and other people who had associated with the United States. In total, some 10% of the Lao population fled the country.
In the ensuing weeks, the Pathet Lao consolidated political and military power. Then after more communist-led demonstrations broke out, the coalition government and quasi-legislature NPCC were dissolved. Then on December 2, 1975, the Lao communists proclaimed the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (LPDR), a one-party socialist state. The 600-year old monarchy was abolished, and King Sisivang Vatthana was forced to abdicate. Souphanouvong was named the LPDR’s president. However, the real power was held by Prime Minister Kaysone Phomvihane, who seemingly emerged from obscurity, but in fact, together with Nouhak Phoumsavan, (the new Deputy Prime Minister), had led the long revolutionary struggle from behind the scenes. President Souphanouvong was relegated to being the regime’s public face, but was not part of the government’s inner ruling circle that made all the major policy decisions.

Aftermath The LPDR became closely associated with and subordinate to Vietnam. In July 1977, Laos and Vietnam signed a 25-year Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation. The Lao government also cut ties with its other geographical neighbors: Thailand, Burma, Cambodia, and also with China. Laos ended its ties with China as a result of the ongoing strained Chinese-Vietnamese relations, which would lead to a brief border war in 1979 (Sino-Vietnamese War; previous article).

Tens of thousands of former government officials, civil servants, military personnel, businessmen, and other “reactionaries” who had failed to escape Laos were sent to so-called “seminar camps” or re-education centers located in remote locations, for political indoctrination and forced labor. Living and working conditions were extremely harsh in these work prisons, where thousands perished and survivors spent up to several years before being released. In March 1977, the communist government, concerned that the monarchy might incite a counter-revolutionary resistance, banished ex-King Sisavang Vatthana to one of these “seminar camps”, where he, his wife, and eldest son soon died under unclear circumstances.

The massive U.S. bombing campaigns brought catastrophic effects to Laos. Particularly in the Plain of Jars and Xiang Khouang Province, thousands of villages were destroyed, tens of thousands of civilians were killed, and hundreds of thousands became refugees. Between 1964 and 1973, some 2.5 million tons of ordnance were dropped in 580,000 bombing sorties, equivalent to one bombing run by U.S. planes coming one after another every 8 minutes, 24 hours a day, for 9 years. Some 270 million cluster bombs were dropped in Laos, and of that number, 80 million or 30%, failed to detonate. Over the years after the end of the war, some 50,000 people have been killed or wounded after coming into contact with these unexploded ordnance.
KOREAN WAR

Background With its victories in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) over China, and the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) over Russia, Japan gained full control of Korea. In 1905, Japan established a protectorate over Korea. In 1910, Japan abolished the 500-year Korean monarchy, and annexed the whole Korean Peninsula, and declared that Korea was an integral part of Japan. Then over the course of its 35-year rule, the militarized Japanese government in Tokyo sought to fully integrate Korea with Japan, outlawing the Korean language, culture, and traditions, forcing Koreans into the Japanese labor and military systems, and establishing infrastructures and industries to exploit Korea’s natural resources to benefit Japan’s industrialization programs.

In 1931, Japan invaded Manchuria, followed six years later with the outbreak of full-scale war between Japan and Nationalist China. In December 1941, the Asia-Pacific theater of World War II broke out when Japan launched a surprise attack on the U.S. naval base in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. After achieving a series of spectacular victories in its rapid conquest of Southeast Asia, by 1944, the tide of World War II invariably had turned against Japan. Then in August 1945, the Soviet Red Army invaded Manchuria and Korea, and the United States dropped atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Faced with complete destruction, on August 15, 1945, the Japanese government announced its acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration and surrendered, bringing an end to World War II.

During World War II, the Allied Powers met many times to decide the disposition of Japanese territorial holdings after the Allies had achieved victory. With regards to Korea, at the Cairo Conference held in November 1943, the United States, Britain, and Nationalist China agreed that “in due course, Korea shall become free and independent”. Then at the Yalta Conference of February 1945, the Soviet Union promised to enter the war in the Asia-Pacific in two or three months after the European theater of World War II ended.
Then with the Soviet Army invading northern Korea on August 9, 1945, the United States became concerned that the Soviet Union might well occupy the whole Korean Peninsula. The U.S. government, acting on a hastily prepared U.S. military plan to divide Korea at the 38th parallel, presented the proposal to the Soviet government, which the latter accepted.

The Soviet Army continued moving south and stopped at the 38th parallel on August 16, 1945. U.S. forces soon arrived in southern Korea and advanced north, reaching the 38th parallel on September 8, 1945. Then in official ceremonies, the U.S. and Soviet commands formally accepted the Japanese surrender in their respective zones of occupation. Thereafter, the American and Soviet commands established military rule in their occupation zones.

As both the U.S. and Soviet governments wanted to reunify Korea, in a conference in Moscow in December 1945, the Allied Powers agreed to form a four-power (United States, Soviet Union, Britain, and Nationalist China) five-year trusteeship over Korea. During the five-year period, a U.S.-Soviet Joint Commission would work out the process of forming a Korean government. But after a series of meetings in 1946-1947, the Joint Commission failed to achieve anything. In September 1947, the U.S. government referred the Korean question to the United Nations (UN). The reasons for the U.S.-Soviet Joint Commission’s failure to agree to a mutually acceptable Korean government are three-fold and to some extent all interrelated: intense opposition by Koreans to the proposed U.S.-Soviet trusteeship; the struggle for power among the various ideology-based political factions; and most important, the emerging Cold War confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Historically, Korea for many centuries had been a politically and ethnically integrated state, although its independence often was interrupted by the invasions by its powerful neighbors, China and Japan.
Because of this protracted independence, in the immediate post-World War II period, Koreans aspired for self-rule, and viewed the Allied trusteeship plan as an insult to their capacity to run their own affairs. However, at the same time, Korea’s political climate was anarchic, as different ideological persuasions, from right-wing, left-wing, communist, and near-center political groups, clashed with each other for political power. As a result of Japan’s annexation of Korea in 1910, many Korean nationalist resistance groups had emerged. Among these nationalist groups were the unrecognized “Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea” led by pro-West, U.S.-based Syngman Rhee; and a communist-allied anti-Japanese partisan militia led by Kim Il-sung. Both men would play major roles in the Korean War. At the same time, tens of thousands of Koreans took part in the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) and the Chinese Civil War, joining and fighting either for Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist forces, or for Mao Zedong’s Chinese Red Army.

The Korean anti-Japanese resistance movement, which operated mainly out of Manchuria, was divided along ideological lines. Some groups advocated Western-style capitalist democracy, while others espoused Soviet communism. However, all were strongly anti-Japanese, and launched attacks on Japanese forces in Manchuria, China, and Korea.

On their arrival in the southern Korean zone in September 1948, U.S. forces imposed direct rule through the United States Army Military Government In Korea (USAMGIK). Earlier, members of the Korean Communist Party in Seoul (the southern capital) had sought to fill the power vacuum left by the defeated Japanese forces, and set up “local people’s committees” throughout the Korean peninsula. Then two days before U.S. forces arrived, Korean communists of the “Central People’s Committee” proclaimed the “Korean People’s Republic”.

In October 1945, under the auspices of a U.S. military agent, Syngman Rhee, the former president of the “Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea” arrived in Seoul. The USAMGIK refused to recognize the communist Korean People’s Republic, as well as the pro-West “Provisional Government”. Instead, U.S. authorities wanted to form a political coalition of moderate rightist and leftist elements. Thus, in December 1946, under U.S. sponsorship, moderate and right-wing politicians formed the South Korean Interim Legislative Assembly. However, this quasi-legislative body was opposed by the communists and other left-wing and right-wing groups.

In the wake of the U.S. authorities’ breaking up the communists’ “people’s committees” violence broke out in the southern zone during the last months of 1946. Called the Autumn Uprising, the unrest was carried out by left-aligned workers, farmers, and students, leading to many deaths through killings, violent confrontations, strikes, etc. Although in many cases, the violence resulted from non-political motives (such as targeting Japanese collaborators or settling old scores), American authorities believed that the unrest was part of a communist plot. They therefore declared martial law in the southern zone. Following the U.S. military’s crackdown on leftist activities, the communist militants went into hiding and launched an armed insurgency in the southern zone, which would play a role in the coming war.

Meanwhile in the northern zone, Soviet commanders initially worked to form a local administration under a coalition of nationalists, Marxists, and even Christian politicians. But in October 1945, Kim Il-sung, the Korean resistance leader who also was a Soviet Red Army officer, quickly became favored by Soviet authorities. In February 1946, the “Interim People’s Committee”, a transitional centralized government, was formed and led by Kim Il-sung who soon consolidated power (sidelining the nationalists and Christian leaders), and nationalized industries, and launched centrally planned economic and reconstruction programs based on the Soviet-model emphasizing heavy industry.

By 1947, the Cold War had begun: the Soviet Union tightened its hold on the socialist countries of Eastern Europe, and the United States announced a new foreign policy, the Truman Doctrine, aimed at stopping the spread of communism. The United States also implemented the Marshall Plan, an aid
program for Europe’s post-World War II reconstruction, which was condemned by the Soviet Union as an American anti-communist plot aimed at dividing Europe. As a result, Europe became divided into the capitalist West and socialist East.

Reflecting these developments, in Korea by mid-1945, the United States became resigned to the likelihood that the temporary military partition of the Korean peninsula at the 38th parallel would become a permanent division along ideological grounds. In September 1947, with U.S. Congress rejecting a proposed aid package to Korea, the U.S. government turned over the Korean issue to the UN. In November 1947, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) affirmed Korea’s sovereignty and called for elections throughout the Korean peninsula, which was to be overseen by a newly formed body, the United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCOK).

However, the Soviet government rejected the UNGA resolution, stating that the UN had no jurisdiction over the Korean issue, and prevented UNTCOK representatives from entering the Soviet-controlled northern zone. As a result, in May 1948, elections were held only in the American-controlled southern zone, which even so, experienced widespread violence that caused some 600 deaths. Elected was the Korean National Assembly, a legislative body. Two months later (in July 1948), the Korean National Assembly ratified a new national constitution which established a presidential form of government. Syngman Rhee, whose party won the most number of legislative seats, was proclaimed as (the first) president. Then on August 15, 1948, southerners proclaimed the birth of the Republic of Korea (soon more commonly known as South Korea), ostensibly with the state’s sovereignty covering the whole Korean Peninsula.

A consequence of the South Korean elections was the displacement of the political moderates, because of their opposition to both the elections and the division of Korea. By contrast, the hard-line anti-communist Syngman Rhee was willing to allow the (temporary) partition of the peninsula. Subsequently, the United States moved to support the Rhee regime, turning its back on the political moderates whom USAMGIK had backed initially.

Meanwhile in the Soviet-controlled northern zone, on August 25, 1948, parliamentary elections were held to the Supreme National Assembly. Two weeks later (on September 9, 1948), the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (soon more commonly known as North Korea) was proclaimed, with Kim Il-Sung as (its first) Prime Minister. As with South Korea, North Korea declared its sovereignty over the whole Korean peninsula.

The formation of two opposing rival states in Korea, each determined to be the sole authority, now set the stage for the coming war. In December 1948, acting on a report by UNTCOK, the UN declared that the Republic of Korea (South Korea) was the legitimate Korean polity, a decision that was rejected by both the Soviet Union and North Korea. Also in December 1948, the Soviet Union withdrew its forces from North Korea. In June 1949, the United States withdrew its forces from South Korea. However, Soviet and American military advisors remained, in the North and South, respectively.

In March 1949, on a visit to Moscow, Kim Il-sung asked Joseph Stalin, the Soviet leader, for military assistance for a North Korean planned invasion of South Korea. Kim Il-sung explained that an invasion would be successful, since most South Koreans opposed the Rhee regime, and that the communist insurgency in the south had sufficiently weakened the South Korean military. Stalin did not give his consent, as the Soviet government currently was pressed by other Cold War events in Europe.

However, by early 1950, the Cold War situation had been altered dramatically. In September 1949, the Soviet Union detonated its first atomic bomb, ending the United States’ monopoly on nuclear weapons. In October 1949, Chinese communists, led by Mao Zedong, defeated the West-aligned Nationalist government of Chiang Kai-shek in the Chinese Civil War, and proclaimed the People’s Republic of China, a socialist state. Then in 1950, Vietnamese communists (called Viet Minh) turned
the First Indochina War from an anti-colonial war against France into a Cold War conflict involving the Soviet Union, China, and the United States. In February 1950, the Soviet Union and China signed the Sino-Soviet Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance Treaty, where the Soviet government would provide military and financial aid to China.

Furthermore, the Soviet government, long wanting to gauge American strategic designs in Asia, was encouraged by two recent developments: First, the U.S. government did not intervene in the Chinese Civil War; and second, in January 1949, the United States announced that South Korea was not part of the U.S. “defensive perimeter” in Asia, and U.S. Congress rejected an aid package to South Korea. To Stalin, the United States was resigned to the whole northeast Asian mainland falling to communism.

In April 1950, the Soviet Union approved North Korea’s plan to invade South Korea, but subject to two crucial conditions: Soviet forces would not be involved in the fighting, and China’s People’s Liberation Army (PLA, i.e. the Chinese armed forces) must agree to intervene in the war if necessary. In May 1950, in a meeting between Kim Il-sung and Mao Zedong, the Chinese leader expressed concern that the United States might intervene if the North Koreans attacked South Korea. In the end, Mao agreed to send Chinese forces if North Korea was invaded. North Korea then hastened its invasion plan.

The North Korean armed forces (officially: the Korean People’s Army), having been organized into its present form concurrent with the rise of Kim Il-sung, had grown in strength with large Soviet support. And in 1949-1950, with Kim Il-sung emphasizing a massive military buildup, by the eve of the invasion, North Korean forces boasted some 150,000–200,000 soldiers, 280 tanks, 200 artillery pieces, and 200 planes.

By contrast, the South Korean military (officially: Republic of Korea Armed Forces), which consisted largely of police units, was unprepared for war. The United States, not wanting a Korean war, held back from delivering weapons to South Korea, particularly since President Rhee had declared his intention to invade North Korea in order to reunify the peninsula. By the time of the North Korean invasion, South Korean weapons, which the United States had limited to defensive strength, proved grossly inadequate. South Korea had 100,000 soldiers (of whom only 65,000 were combat troops); it also had no tanks and possessed only small-caliber artillery pieces and an assortment of liaison and trainer aircraft.

North Korea had envisioned its invasion as a concentration of forces along the Ongjin Peninsula. North Korean forces would make a swift assault on Seoul to surround and destroy the South Korean forces there. Rhee’s government then would collapse, leading to the fall of South Korea. Then on June 21, 1950, four days before the scheduled invasion, Kim Il-sung believed that South Korea had become aware of the invasion plan and had fortified its defenses. He revised his plan for an offensive all across the 38th parallel. In the months preceding the war, numerous border skirmishes had begun breaking out between the two sides.

**War** On June 25, 1950, after some initial fighting in the Ongjin area, North Korea launched a full-scale invasion across the 38th parallel. North Korean invasion forces, which consisted of 90,000 troops and supported by armored and artillery units, crossed into South Korea from east to west of the line. South Korean border defenses south of the line were easily overcome. South Korean forces, lacking heavy artillery and powerful anti-tank weapons, surrendered or defected en masse, or fled south. On June 28, 1950, Seoul fell, with President Rhee and his government having vacated the capital in advance of the North Korean offensive. To forestall the North Koreans, the South Korean military destroyed the main bridge south of Seoul across the Han River, causing the deaths of hundreds of civilians who were crossing
the bridge at the time. Thousands of South Korean troops also were unable to leave the city and were later captured by the North Koreans. By the third day of the invasion, South Korea was verging on collapse.

On June 25, 1950, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) passed Resolution 82 which called for an end to hostilities, and demanded that North Korean forces withdraw from South Korea. The resolution passed because at that time, the Soviet Union, which was a permanent UNSC member with veto power, had boycotted the UNSC meetings in protest of the UN’s continued non-recognition of China. The Soviet government also challenged the UN’s legitimacy to decide on the Korean conflict, stating that the war was an internal security issue, and that the 38th parallel was a military demarcation and not an international border.

Then on June 27, 1950, the UNSC passed Resolution 83, which called on UN member states to provide military assistance to South Korea to counter the North Korean invasion. Like South Korea, the United States was caught off-guard by the invasion, but quickly moved into action, and used its strong diplomatic influence to mobilize international condemnation of North Korea. Up until now, President Truman viewed the Cold War as relating only to Europe, and the U.S. containment policy as directed against the Soviet Union and its Eastern Bloc allies. But with the outbreak of the Korean War, for the United States, the Cold War had come upon Asia.

President Truman particularly likened the North Korean invasion to Germany’s aggression in World War II, and announced that his government would not repeat the pre-war Allied appeasement policy, and that the United States would meet the North Korean “challenge” with force. And in view of this expanded Cold War policy, on June 27, 1950 (two days after the start of the Korean War), President Truman ordered the U.S. 7th Fleet to proceed to the Taiwan Strait, to prevent hostilities between the Republic of China (Taiwan) and the People’s Republic of China. Both Chinese states pursued a policy to destroy its rival, but the arrival of the American naval fleet deterred the People’s Republic of China from launching its long-planned invasion of Taiwan.

At the start of the war, the U.S. military was undergoing a drastic reduction in combat strength because of major cutbacks in military appropriations following World War II. Furthermore, because of the perceived greater security threat in Europe, the United States concentrated its forces there in line with its “Europe First” policy, leading to the U.S. military scrambling to assemble enough American military units for Korea. During the early stages of the war, the United States experienced some difficulty dispatching sufficient forces to the fighting, as U.S. units in Japan were insufficiently trained for combat and seriously under-strength. As a result, only small advance units initially were sent to the fighting in Korea.

Subsequently during the war, a combined total of some 370,000 foreign troops from 16 UN countries fought on the side of South Korea. Of this number, nearly 90% was provided by the United States (326,000 troops), while Britain (14,000), Canada (8,000), and Turkey (5,000) also sent sizable contingents.

On the day of the invasion, the U.S. government evacuated American civilians from South Korea. On June 27, 1950, with the passage of UNSC Resolution 83 authorizing the use of force against the North Korean invasion, the U.S. military based in Japan sent warplanes into bombing raids in North Korea. U.S. planes attacked airfields and destroyed several North Korean planes on the ground. U.S. ships also were rushed to Korean waters, where they shelled North Korean positions along the coast, somewhat slowing down the North Korean advance in these coastal areas.

On July 7, 1950, the UNSC passed Resolution 85, which merged all UN member units into one unified force (called the United Nations Command, or UNC) under one commander. That same day, President Truman named General Douglas MacArthur (head of the Far East Command based in Tokyo, Japan) as commander-in-chief of the UNC. The Eighth U.S. Army, headquartered in Japan, would serve
as the main American force in the Korean War. Its commander, General Walton Walker, was named as commander of the UNC ground forces. The South Korean government, whose army had been reduced to 22,000 troops from 90,000 since the start of the war, allowed its remaining forces to be placed under the UNC.

On July 1, 1950, the first U.S. force, a 400-man battalion called Task Force Smith (named after its commander), arrived in Korea. Four days later, July 5, Task Force Smith encountered an armored North Korean column consisting of 5,000 troops that was advancing toward Osan. In the ensuing battle, Task Force Smith caused some material damage to the enemy, destroying a number of North Korean tanks, but itself was decimated and forced into a chaotic retreat. But Task Force Smith achieved one objective: it delayed the North Korean advance to allow time for more UN forces to arrive in the southern edge of the peninsula, where they could establish a stronger defensive line.

Meanwhile, other American units that had arrived in Korea also used delaying tactics in clashes at Pyeongtaek, Cheonan, Chochiwon, and Taejon, but were forced to retreat by numerically superior North Korean forces that advanced using both frontal attacks and flanking tactics. At Taejon particularly, the U.S. 24th Infantry Division was nearly destroyed and its commander, Major General William Dean, was captured by the North Koreans. By this time, South Korean and UN forces had been pushed to nearly the southern edge of the Korean Peninsula and faced the danger of being annihilated or driven to the sea.

However, in early August 1950, UN forces succeeded in establishing the Pusan Perimeter (Figure 16), a 140-mile long defensive line that partially followed the length of the Naktong River. The Pusan Perimeter was so-named for Pusan, South Korea’s major southern port, where U.S. and other UN forces, together with their war materials, were arriving in large numbers daily.

In August 1950, North Korean forces attacked many points along the Pusan Perimeter, and heavy fighting took place in Taegu, Masan, P’ohang-dong, and across the Naktong River. Because UN forces yet were numerically inadequate to defend the whole line, General Walker used a “mobile defense” strategy, where his forces were moved constantly to areas of enemy attack. North Korean forces broke through in many places, including a flanking maneuver that threatened to drive straight to Pusan. But UN forces succeeded in establishing new defensive positions and then counterattacked, driving back the North Koreans.

By early September 1950, North Korean forces were experiencing supply problems, as UN (mainly American) planes, which controlled the skies, were taking a heavy toll on North Korean logistical lines, attacking North Korean rail and road networks, weapons depots, oil refineries, and military facilities. As well, UN forces now had 180,000 troops. By contrast, the North Korean invasion force, which had experienced heavy casualties, stood at some 100,000 troops with the arrival of more reinforcements. UN forces also now had 600 tanks while North Korean armor, which had spearheaded the invasion, had been reduced to fewer than 100 tanks from the original 270 at the start of the war.
Nevertheless, in early September 1950, North Korean forces, comprising 13 divisions, launched an all-out coordinated five-prong offensive in a desperate attempt to finally break through the Pusan Perimeter. Intense fighting took place in Haman, Kyongju, Yongsan Tabu-Dong, and Ka-san. The North Koreans, using the element of surprise and exceptionally fierce attacks, pushed back the UN forces in many places. But by mid-September 1950, UN forces had succeeded in re-establishing a new defensive line, although the situation remained critical.
As early as July 1950, General MacArthur had conceived of a plan to launch a UN amphibious assault at Inchon harbor, located 27 kilometers southwest of Seoul on the central west coast. The success of such an operation would have the strategic effect of destabilizing the North Korean supply lines to the south, and threaten the North Korean forces fighting in the Pusan Perimeter. The U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) initially were skeptical about the operation because of the risks involved, but soon gave its approval when General MacArthur expressed unwavering optimism in the feasibility of his plan. U.S. forces then prepared to launch an amphibious landing on Inchon.

On September 15, 1950, preceded by days of heavy air attacks and naval artillery bombardment, some 75,000 U.S. and South Korean troops (of the newly reconstituted U.S. X Corps) in 260 naval vessels were amphibiously landed north and south of Inchon, taking the city where they met only light resistance from the small North Korean garrison.

The unexpected UN landing at Inchon dealt a psychological blow to North Korean forces at the Pusan Perimeter. Already weakened by shortages of food and ammunitions, and rising casualties, by the third week of September 1950, North Korean resistance collapsed, with whole military units breaking down, and tens of thousands of troops fleeing north or to the mountains, or surrendering en masse. For the North Korean Army, its defeat at the Pusan Perimeter was catastrophic: some 65,000 (over 60%) of its 98,000 troops were lost; it had lost nearly all its tanks and artillery pieces; and most crucially, it ceased to be a force capable of stopping the UN forces which now began to steamroll northward.

By September 23, 1950, UN forces, comprising largely of the Eighth U.S. Army, had broken out of the Pusan Perimeter, and advanced north some 100 miles, on September 27 linking up with X Corps units from the Inchon landings at Osan. However, the UN forces’ aim of linking their units rather than actively pursuing the enemy allowed some 30,000 retreating North Korean soldiers from the Pusan Perimeter to escape and eventually cross the 38th parallel into North Korea, where they soon were reorganized into new fighting units. Other North Korean units that took to the mountains in the south also formed small militias that engaged in guerilla warfare.

UN forces at Inchon soon recaptured Kimpo airfield. There, U.S. planes began to conduct air strikes on North Korean positions in and around Seoul. UN ground forces then launched a three-pronged attack on the capital. They met heavy North Korean resistance at the perimeter but soon captured the heights overlooking the city. On September 25, 1950, UN forces entered Seoul, and soon declared the city liberated. Even then, house-to-house fighting continued until September 27, when the city was brought under full UN control. On September 29, 1950, UN forces formally turned over the capital to President Syngman Rhee, who reestablished his government there. And by the end of September 1950, with remnants of the decimated North Korean Army retreating in disarray across the 38th parallel, South Korean and UN units gained control of all pre-war South Korean territory.

On October 1, 1950, the South Korean Army crossed the 38th parallel into North Korea along the eastern and central regions; UN forces, however, waited for orders. Four days earlier, on September 27, 1950, President Truman sent a top-secret directive to General MacArthur advising him that UN forces could cross the 38th parallel only if the Soviet Union or China had not sent or did not intend to send forces to North Korea.

Earlier, the Chinese government had stated that UN forces crossing the 38th parallel would place China’s national security at risk, and thus it would be forced to intervene in the war. Chairman Mao Zedong also stated that if U.S. forces invaded North Korea, China must be ready for war with the United States.
At this stage of the Cold War, the United States believed that its biggest threat came from the Soviet Union, and that the Korean War may very well be a Soviet plot to spark an armed conflict between the United States and China. This would force the U.S. military to divert troops and resources to Asia, and leave Western Europe open to a Soviet invasion. But after much deliberation, the Truman administration concluded that China was “bluffing” and would not really intervene in Korea, and that its threats merely were intended to undermine the UN. Furthermore, General MacArthur also later (after UN forces had crossed the 38th parallel) expressed full confidence in the UN (i.e. U.S.) forces’ military superiority – that Chinese forces would face the “greatest slaughter” if they entered the war.

On October 7, 1950, the UNGA adopted Resolution 376 (V) which declared support for the restoration of stability in the Korean Peninsula, a tacit approval for the UN forces to take action in North Korea. Two days later, October 9, UN forces, led by the Eighth U.S. Army, crossed the 38th parallel in the west, with General MacArthur some days earlier demanding the unconditional surrender of the North Korean Army. UN forces met only light resistance during their advance north. On October 15, 1950, Namchonjam fell, followed two days later by Hwangju.

In North Korea’s eastern coast, the U.S. X Corps made unopposed amphibious landings at Wonsan on October 25, 1950 (with South Korean forces having taken this port town days earlier) and at Iwon, further north, on October 29. On October 24, 1950, under the “Thanksgiving Offensive” issued by General MacArthur who wanted the war ended before the start of winter, UN forces made a rapid advance to the Yalu River, which serves as the China-North Korea border.

In late October 1950, UN forces clashed with the Chinese Army, and a new phase of the war began. Earlier, in June 1950 in Beijing, Chairman Mao had declared his intention to intervene in the Korean conflict, which received strong reluctance from Chinese military leaders. But with the support of Premier Zhou Enlai, and General Peng Dehuai, (military commander of China’s northwest region, who would be appointed to lead the Chinese forces in the Korean War), the plan for the Chinese Army (officially called the People’s Liberation Army, or PLA) to become involved in Korea was approved.

On October 8, 1950, the day that UN forces crossed the 38th parallel into North Korea, Chinese forces in Manchuria (the North East Frontier Force, or NEFF) were ordered to deploy at the Yalu River in preparation to enter North Korea from the north. On October 19, 1950, the day Pyongyang fell, on Chairman Mao’s order, the NEFF crossed into North Korea. Chinese authorities called this force the “People’s Volunteer Army”, the “volunteer” designation conferring on it a non-official status in order that China would not be directly involved in a war with the US/UN.

The Chinese deployment from Manchuria to Korea was carried out under strict secrecy, and Chinese troops travelled only at night and remained camouflaged during the day. So successful were the Chinese in using secrecy and concealment that U.S. surveillance planes, even with their full control of the skies, were unable to detect the massive Chinese buildup at the Yalu River. Chinese forces soon entered North Korea.

On October 25, 1950, using surprise and overwhelming numerical force, the Chinese struck at the UN forces (led by the Eighth U.S. Army), which was moving up the western region toward the Yalu River. The Chinese particularly targeted the UN right flank along the Taebaek Mountains, which consisted of South Korean forces. In the ensuing four-day encounter at Onjong (Battle of Onjong), the Chinese severely crippled the South Korean forces and punched a hole in the UN lines. Thousands of Chinese soldiers then poured through the gap and advanced behind UN lines. On November 1, 1950 at Unsan, the Chinese attacked along three points at the UN line at its center, inflicting heavy casualties on the American and South Korean forces. At this point, the U.S. high command ordered the Eighth U.S. Army to retreat south of the Chongchon River.
On November 6, 1950, the Chinese forces also broke contact and withdrew north to the mountains. Unknown to UN forces, the Chinese had over-extended their supply lines, which would be a problem that Chinese forces would face constantly during the war. Furthermore, in this early stage of their involvement in the war, the Chinese relied on weapons supplied by the Soviet Union. Later on, the Chinese would also manufacture their own armaments, and reduce their reliance on foreign imports.

The fighting in the north also saw the first air battles between American and Soviet jet planes, leading to many intense dogfights during the war. Early on, the newly released, powerful Soviet MiG-15 easily outclassed the U.S. first-generation jet planes, the P-80 Shooting Star and the F9F Panther, and posed a serious threat to the U.S. B-29 bombers. But with the arrival of the U.S. F-86 Sabre, parity was achieved in the sky in terms of jet fighter aircraft capability on both sides. Ultimately, U.S. planes would continue to hold nearly full control of the sky for the duration of the war.

The sudden Chinese withdrawal during the Battle of Onjong perplexed the U.S. military high command. Weeks earlier, General MacArthur stated his belief that China had some 100,000-125,000 troops north of the Yalu River, and that if half of this number was sent to Korea, his forces easily could meet this threat. In the ensuing lull (November 6–24, 1950), U.S. surveillance planes detected no significant Chinese military buildup, and sightings of enemy troop strength on the ground seemed to confirm General MacArthur’s estimates. Convinced that China was not intending to fully intervene in Korea, General MacArthur launched the “Home-by-Christmas” Offensive, a cautious two-sector advance toward the Yalu River: UN forces in the western sector led by the Eighth U.S. Army as the main attacking force, and in the eastern sector led by the U.S. X Corps to support the attack and also cut off enemy supply and communication lines.

The next day, November 25, 1950, Chinese forces sprung their next surprise. The Chinese XIII Army Group, comprising some 230,000 troops, attacked the Eighth U.S. Army in the Chongchon River Valley (the Battle of Chongchon River, November 25-December 2, 1950), particularly targeting the sector’s right flank held by South Korean forces in the mountainous region near Tokchon. Chinese forces broke through and rushed large numbers of troops behind the UN line, threatening to encircle the Eighth U.S. Army. By now, General MacArthur, aware of the Chinese forces’ true numbers (some 350,000 troops), announced that “We face an entirely new war. Our present strength of force is not sufficient to meet this undeclared war by the Chinese. This command has done everything humanly possible within its capabilities. But now it’s faced with conditions beyond its control and its strength”.

General MacArthur then asked the U.S. government for more reinforcements, but was turned down. President Truman was concerned that should the United States become committed in Asia, Western Europe (whose defense was his top priority) would be vulnerable to an invasion by the Soviet Union. President Truman did not want an escalation of the Korean War, and that for the United States, the conflict should only be a “limited war”. He imposed air space restrictions, forbidding U.S. planes from entering China to pursue enemy aircraft and attack Chinese military positions. At this time, reports surfaced that the United States was considering using nuclear weapons to stop the Chinese offensives in Korea.

With the UN western sector coming under greater attack, on November 29, 1950, General MacArthur ordered a full retreat of the Eighth U.S. Army and all UN forces. Turkish units of the UNC, which bore the brunt of a heavy Chinese attack, successfully fought delaying tactics (but suffered heavy casualties) for three days (November 27-29, 1950) which allowed other UN forces to escape encirclement. Then on November 30-December 1, 1950, the U.S. 2nd Infantry Division also fought rear-guard actions, but lost one-third of its troops.

By December 5, 1950, the Eighth U.S. Army had retreated 25 miles south of Pyongyang. U.S. commanders had decided against setting up a defensive line along the North Korean capital because of the high UN casualty rates among individual units. Also by this time, UN forces were losing cohesion,
and demoralization was setting in among the troops. By December 15, 1950, UN forces crossed south of the 38th parallel. In the United States, President Truman declared a state of national emergency.

By December 23, 1950, the Eighth U.S. Army had established defensive lines north and east of Seoul. On that day, UN forces received another psychological blow when General Walker, UN ground forces commander, was killed in a vehicular accident. General Matthew Ridgway succeeded as the Eighth U.S. Army commander.

Meanwhile in the UN eastern sector of the “Home-by-Christmas” Offensive, the U.S. 1st Marine Division advanced from Yudami-ni on the western side of the Chosin Reservoir, while the U.S. 7th Infantry Division and other units took positions in Sinhung-ni and on the eastern side of the reservoir. On November 27, 1950, some 67,000 Chinese troops of the PVA IX Army Group sprung surprise attacks along three fronts aimed at trapping and destroying the 30,000-man U.S. forces. What followed was the Battle of Chosin Reservoir, a 17-day series of clashes at high altitude and sub-freezing temperatures of minus 40°C (minus 40°F). U.S. forces fought retreating battles in a desperate attempt to avoid encirclement. The U.S. 1st Marine Division, outnumbered 7:1, made a successful break-out, and with strong U.S. air support, inflicted heavy casualties on the advancing Chinese forces. Task Force Faith (named after its commander, Colonel Don Faith; comprising three battalions of the U.S. 7th Infantry Division) also escaped encirclement by two Chinese divisions (comprising 20,000 troops). But Task Force Faith was decimated, losing 2,000 of its 3,000 soldiers, and all of its vehicles and heavy equipment, although it also caused heavy casualties on the Chinese forces.

By December 8, 1950, General MacArthur had ordered the U.S. X Corps to withdraw from the eastern sector and set up a defensive line around the port of Hungnam for a full evacuation from North Korea. On December 10-24, 1950, the U.S. military carried out the largest naval evacuation in American history, with 193 ships at Hungnam evacuating some 100,000 soldiers, 100,000 North Korean civilians (who chose to defect to South Korea), 17,000 vehicles, and 350,000 tons of supplies.

Armed clashes between U.S. and Chinese units took place outside Hungnam, but U.S. naval and air firepower deterred the Chinese from launching any large-scale offensive on Hungnam, and thus the evacuation proceeded without difficulty. On December 24, 1950, the last day of the evacuation, U.S. forces destroyed Hungnam port, to deny its use by the Chinese Army, which entered the town the next day.

China’s entry on the side of North Korea changed the dynamics of the war – the UN and the United States now abandoned the plan to reunify the Korean peninsula by force. However, the fighting in northern Korea had caused China dearly: some 40% of its troops had been lost and its IX Army in the eastern sector was rendered incapacitated, forcing the Chinese military to send more reinforcements to Korea from other regions in China. Even so, the extensive Chinese losses were not detected by UN commanders, who, in their haste to withdraw their forces from North Korea, had failed to conduct aerial reconnaissance of the remaining Chinese troop strength. Furthermore, although individual American and South Korean units had suffered major losses, UN forces had generally preserved much of their troop strength. In the aftermath, the intact U.S. X Corps was merged into the Eighth U.S. Army for a more integrated defense of South Korea.

With the UN withdrawal, the Chinese and (the now revitalized) North Korean forces gained control of all territories north of the 38th parallel (i.e. North Korea). China achieved both a strategic and a psychological victory. On December 11, 1950, the UN offered to negotiate a ceasefire at the 38th parallel, which the Chinese government rejected. On December 30, 1950, General MacArthur recommended to
the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff that air and naval strikes be launched against China, and that forces of Nationalist China (Taiwan), whose leader Chiang Kai-shek, was eager to go to war with China, become involved in the Korean conflict. President Truman rejected these proposals, not wanting the Korean War to escalate. Such an escalation could potentially require the United States to transfer troops and resources from Western Europe, leaving the latter vulnerable to an invasion by the Soviet Union. Instead, the U.S. high command advised General MacArthur to hold onto Korea as best he could, but that if this became impossible, to abandon the peninsula and evacuate his forces to Japan.

At this point, top Chinese military commanders in Beijing called for caution against proceeding further. Rejecting this advice, in late December 1950, Chairman Mao ordered his forces to cross the 38th parallel to expel the UN forces from Korea and reunify the Peninsula under the leadership of the communist north. On December 31, 1950, Chinese and North Korean forces launched an attack on Seoul, breaking through South Korean and American positions and threatening to encircle the whole UN defensive lines north and east of the city. On January 4, 1951, UN forces, who were outnumbered 2:1 by the attackers, retreated from Seoul, which was captured by the Chinese and North Koreans, and marked the third time the city changed hands during the war.

UN forces retreated 50 miles south of the 38th parallel, to a line extending from Suwon in the west, Wonju at the center, and Samcheok in the east (Figure 16). At this point, morale among UN troops reached its lowest point, and General Ridgway was upset particularly with the Eighth U.S. Army’s performance in the defense of Seoul.

Determined to reverse the UN fortunes, General Ridgway carried out a major overhaul of his army’s top command, replacing underperforming commanders with officers who actively took to the field. He also concluded that he had enough troops, and that no further reinforcements were needed. Instead, he devised a strategy to utilize the U.S. Army’s overwhelming superiority in air, armor, and artillery firepower. As well, he would use his forces in a “war of maneuver”, that is, they would go on the attack when the enemy withdrew, and would conduct a fighting retreat to prepared lines when the enemy attacked.

General Ridgway’s emphasis on using aggressive tactics had a dramatic effect on UN forces, as morale rose among the troops. By mid-January 1951, General MacArthur, who had given General Ridgway a free hand in reorganizing the Eighth U.S. Army, announced that UN forces would not leave Korea but would stay on and fight.

Another significant development was that Chinese forces did not actively pursue the retreating UN forces after the Seoul battle. To General Ridgway, this meant that the Chinese had exceeded their logistical capability, which he estimated at 1-2 weeks, when their supplies would run out. His estimate was fairly accurate, as by this time, the Chinese were running low on food, ammunitions, and other supplies. The Chinese Army used a primitive logistical system, where tens of thousands of laborers moved on foot or bicycles carrying war materials from the Yalu River to the front lines in South Korea. This slow, tedious system was made more difficult because the porters travelled only at night to avoid the UN air attacks.

In mid-January 1951, UN forces conducted a series of reconnaissance probes to gauge Chinese strength. These operations met only light resistance from the Chinese Army. Encouraged by these maneuvers, in late January 1951, General Ridgway launched Operation Thunderbolt, where U.S. forces launched a “reconnaissance in force”, supported by air and artillery firepower, and advanced north from the western sector of the UN line. The Americans faced strong enemy resistance initially, but by February 10, 1951, they had broken through and recaptured Inchon and Kimpo Airfield, and were approaching the Han River.
The next day, February 11, Chinese forces counterattacked, capturing Hoengsong after two days of fighting. On February 15, U.S. and French units stopped the Chinese offensive at Chipyong-ni. By then having overextended their logistical lines, Chinese forces retreated all across the front. On February 20, 1951, under Operation Killer, UN forces regained the initiative, and went on the offensive to pursue and destroy the enemy. Operation Killer, which lasted until March 1951, saw UN forces advance some 12 to 15 miles to a new frontline designated “Arizona Line”. As well, Hoengsong and all territories south of the Han River were recaptured. However, UN forces failed to trap the bulk of the Chinese Army, which refused to do battle, and instead retreated to a stronger defensive position further north.

In the first week of March 1951, UN forces launched Operation Ripper to retake Seoul and then advance to positions south of the 38th parallel. Preceded by a massive artillery barrage and supported by air cover, American and South Korean forces crossed the Han River. On March 15, 1951, they entered Seoul, which had been evacuated by the Chinese and North Korean forces. By the end of March 1951, other UN forces further east had advanced practically unopposed some 20 miles north to a new frontline designated the “Idaho Line”, located just south of the 38th parallel. As in Operation Killer, Operation Ripper failed to locate and destroy the bulk of the Chinese and North Korean forces, which retreated further north.

![Map of UN front lines in March 1951](image)

**Figure 17.** A series of UN counter-attacks in the first months of 1951 established new front lines.

On March 20, 1951, General MacArthur received a communication from the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff stating that the U.S. government was ready to offer peace talks with China and North Korea, before President Truman would allow UN forces to cross the 38th parallel into North Korea. Instead, on March 24, General MacArthur announced an ultimatum, demanding that China withdraw its troops or face the consequences of UN forces advancing into North Korea. In early April 1951, with General MacArthur’s approval, UN forces crossed the 38th parallel, and by April 10, had advanced some 10 miles north to a new line designated the “Kansas Line”.

On April 11, 1951, in a nationwide broadcast, President Truman relieved General MacArthur of his command in Korea, stating that a crucial objective of U.S. government policy in the Korean conflict was to avoid an escalation of hostilities which potentially could trigger World War III, and that “a number of events have made it evident that General MacArthur did not agree with that policy.” General MacArthur had openly advocated an escalation of the war, including directly attacking China, involving forces from Nationalist China (Taiwan), and using nuclear weapons.
General Ridgway, Eighth U.S. Army commander, was named to succeed as Supreme UN and U.S. Commander in Korea. Unlike his predecessor who desired nothing short of total victory, General Ridgway favored a limited war and accepted a divided Korea, and thus worked closely with the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Truman administration.

On April 22, 1951, the Chinese and North Koreans launched their largest campaign of the war, the “Spring Offensive”, where a massive force of 700,000 troops comprising three Chinese field armies and two Korean corps, attacked first along the western sector of the 38th parallel aimed at recapturing Seoul. Aside from sending two new field armies, the Chinese also brought in six artillery divisions, four anti-aircraft divisions, one multiple-rocket launcher division, and four tank regiments, marking the first time in the war that they deployed such units. At this time, UN forces totaled some 400,000 troops. Two major clashes took place at the UN’s outer lines, at the Imjin River and at Kapyong. There, UN forces, spread thinly and lacked strong defenses, were forced to retreat to prepared lines, but not before fighting delaying tactics which held back the attackers for three days. By April 25, the Chinese/North Korean offensive had ground to halt at the “No-Name Line” north of Seoul.

Three weeks later, in mid-May 1951, the Chinese and North Koreans attacked again, this time directed along the central-east sector of the line, and advanced some 30 miles before being stopped by strong UN resistance and unrelenting U.S. artillery and air bombardment. On May 20, 1951, UN forces went on the offensive. The exhausted and depleted Chinese and North Korean forces only offered little resistance while retreating north, allowing UN forces to recapture the lost territory and advance to just south of the Kansas Line by May 31. In early June 1951, UN forces moved further north, and by mid-month, they controlled the Kansas Line and established a salient in the west-central sector called the Wyoming Line.

U.S. and South Korean forces then settled down to a defensive posture, fortifying existing positions. Meanwhile at the United Nations, American and Soviet delegates met to try and end the war. Then on June 23, 1951, the Soviet representative to the UN proposed an armistice between China and North Korea on the one hand, and the United States, South Korea, and the UN, on the other hand, a proposal that was received favorably by the U.S. and Chinese governments. On July 10, 1951, delegates from the warring parties opened armistice talks at Kaesong. Within a few months, negotiations were moved six miles east to Panmunjom (Figure 16), which became the permanent site of negotiations. Subsequently, for the Korean War, the active phase of full-scale warfare came to an end.

Kim Il-sung and Syngman Rhee, leaders of North Korea and South Korea, respectively, strongly opposed the peace negotiations and wanted to continue the war, as both were determined to reunify the Korean Peninsula by force under their rule. But without the support of the major powers, the two Korean governments were forced to back down. The negotiations proved long and arduous, and ultimately lasted two years (July 1951-July 1953) punctuated by a number of stoppages in the talks. During this period, the fighting produced no major territorial changes, leading to a stalemate in the battlefield.

One major cause of the delay in the settlement was that the war had produced an uneven line across the 38th parallel, with the central and eastern sections being north of the parallel and the western section being south of the parallel, and with a net territorial loss to North Korea. Chinese and North Korean delegates argued that the 38th parallel must be the armistice line, which American and South Korean representatives opposed, stating that the current frontlines must be the armistice line, as these are much more defensible compared to the topography along the 38th parallel. By late 1951, with no agreement reached and fighting continuing, the communist side dropped its demand of opposing forces returning to the 38th parallel, and the two warring sides came to an agreement that the frontlines during the time of the signing of a truce would serve as the armistice line.
A second major point of contention was the issue of the prisoners of war (POWs). UN forces held some 150,000 Chinese and North Korean POWs, of which a sizable number refused to be repatriated back to their homelands, which provoked China and North Korea to accuse UN forces of using underhanded methods to prevent repatriation. In particular, the Chinese government claimed that anti-communist Chinese POWs were allowed to torture communist Chinese POWs to force the latter to refuse being repatriated. In one notable event in mid-June 1953 (one month before the armistice agreement was signed), the South Korean government released some 27,000 anti-communist North Korean POWs, stating that the prisoners had escaped from prison.

On the UN side, American and South Korean POWs were much more subject to physical abuse than other UN prisoners, especially by their North Korean captors. American POWs suffered from tortures, starvation, and forced labor, if not being outright executed. UN prisoners in Chinese POW camps rarely were executed, but suffered mass starvation, particularly in the 1950-1951 winter, where nearly half of all U.S. POWs died from hunger. Responding to accusations by the Truman administration that American POWs were being ill-treated, the Chinese government stated that because its logistical system suffered severe inadequacies, food shortages were widespread at the frontlines, and in fact thousands of its own troops also perished from starvation (as well as from the sub-zero harsh winter conditions).

Furthermore, 80,000 South Korean soldiers remained missing, whom the UN command and South Korean government believed had been captured by North Korean forces, and were then coerced into joining the North Korean Army or were being used as forced laborers. North Korea rejected these accusations, saying that it had only 10,000 South Korean POWs, that its other POWs already had been released or were killed by the UN air attacks, and that it did not use forced recruitment into its armed forces. As a result, the fates of the missing South Korean POWS remained undetermined after the war.

The armistice talks ended the period of large-scale offensives. Then during the ensuing two-year period of stalemate, only small- to medium-scale limited-scope battles took place. Most of these battles were initiated by UN forces, and were aimed at gaining territory that would give the UN forces better strategic and defensive positions.

In September-October 1951, after negotiations temporarily broke down, American and South Korean forces launched a limited operation in the central sector, advancing seven miles north of the Kansas Line. In the western sector, UN forces also succeeded in establishing new positions north of the Wyoming Line.

U.S. planes continued its domination of the skies, attacking enemy road and rail networks, supply centers, and ammunition depots. In 1952, U.S. air strikes in North Korea increased. The vital hydroelectric facility at Suiho was attacked in July, and Pyongyang was subject to a large raid in August. The attack on the North Korean capital, which involved 1,400 air sorties, was the largest single-day air operation of the war.
In May 1952, General Mark Clark became the new commander of UN forces, replacing General Ridgway. In June 1952, after a series of fierce clashes, U.S. forces dislodged the enemy from the heights in Chorwon County, and established 11 patrol bases in a number of hills, including the highest and most strategically important hill called “Old Baldy”. Many intense battles took place during the second half of 1952, as Chinese and North Korean forces attacked UN frontline outposts in response to U.S. air raids in North Korea. By this time, UN forces had adopted a defensive posture, and fortified their positions with trenches, bunkers, minefields, barbwire, and other obstacles all across the UN main line of resistance from east to west of the peninsula.

In spring 1953, Chinese forces again put pressure on UN lines. But by now with fortified positions on both sides, the mounting casualties, the absence of large-scale offensives, and the stalemated battlefield situation, the deadlock appeared to last indefinitely. In April 1953, peace talks resumed. Six months earlier, on November 29, 1952, President-elect Dwight Eisenhower, who had just won the U.S. presidential elections three weeks earlier and had promised to end the war, visited Korea to determine how the negotiations could be accelerated. He also threatened to use nuclear weapons in response to a build-up of Chinese forces in the western sector of the line. Furthermore, with the death of Soviet hard-line leader Joseph Stalin in March 1953, the new Soviet government was more conciliatory with the West, and put pressure on China to reach a peace settlement in Korea.

On April 20-26, 1953, under Operation Little Switch, both sides exchanged sick and wounded POWs. In May-June 1953, as peace talks continued, Chinese forces launched limited attacks on UN positions, which were repulsed with heavy Chinese losses by American air, armored, and artillery firepower.

On June 18, 1953, the armistice negotiations produced a mutually acceptable agreement. However, the agreement was rejected by South Korean President Rhee, and shelved. Taking advantage of the new stalemate, on July 6, 1953, the Chinese renewed their offensive, first attacking a UN outpost known as Pork Chop Hill, which forced the defending American troops of the U.S. 7th Division to retreat after four days of fighting, with heavy losses to both sides.

Then on July 13, 1953, in the last major battle of the war, a massive Chinese force of 250,000 troops, supported with heavy artillery (over 1,300 artillery pieces), struck at UN positions on a 22-kilometer front, pushing the mainly defending South Korean forces 50 kilometers south and gaining 190 km$^2$ of
Meanwhile, armistice talks resumed, which culminated in an agreement on July 19, 1953. Eight days later, July 27, 1953, representatives of the UN Command, North Korean Army, and the Chinese People’s Volunteer Army signed the Korean Armistice Agreement, which ended the war. A ceasefire came into effect 12 hours after the agreement was signed. The Korean War was over.

War casualties included: UN forces – 450,000 soldiers killed, including over 400,000 South Korean and 33,000 American soldiers; North Korean and Chinese forces – 1 to 2 million soldiers killed (which included Chairman Mao Zedong’s son, Mao Anying). Civilian casualties were 2 million for South Korea and 3 million for North Korea. Also killed were over 600,000 North Korean refugees who had moved to South Korea. Both the North Korean and South Korean governments and their forces conducted large-scale massacres on civilians whom they suspected to be supporting their ideological rivals. In South Korea, during the early stages of the war, government forces and right-wing militias executed some 100,000 suspected communists in several massacres. North Korean forces, during their occupation of South Korea, also massacred some 500,000 civilians, mainly “counter-revolutionaries” (politicians, businessmen, clerics, academics, etc.) as well as civilians who refused to join the North Korean Army.

**Aftermath** Under the armistice agreement, the frontline at the time of the ceasefire became the armistice line, which extended from coast to coast some 40 miles north of the 38th parallel in the east, to 20 miles south of the 38th parallel in the west, or a net territorial loss of 1,500 square miles to North Korea. Three days after the agreement was signed, both sides withdrew to a distance of two kilometers from the ceasefire line, thus creating a four-kilometer demilitarized zone (DMZ) between the opposing forces.

The armistice agreement also stipulated the repatriation of POWs, a major point of contention during the talks, where both parties compromised and agreed to the formation of an independent body, the Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission (NNRC), to implement the exchange of prisoners. The NNRC, chaired by General K.S. Thimayya from India, subsequently launched Operation Big Switch, where in August-December 1953, some 70,000 North Korean and 5,500 Chinese POWs, and 12,700 UN POWs (including 7,800 South Koreans, 3,600 Americans, and 900 British), were repatriated. Some 22,000 Chinese/North Korean POWs refused to be repatriated – the 14,000 Chinese prisoners who refused repatriation eventually moved to the Republic of China (Taiwan), where they were given civilian status. Much to the astonishment of U.S. and British authorities, 21 American and 1 British (together with 325 South Korean) POWs also refused to be repatriated, and chose to move to China. All POWs on both sides who refused to be repatriated were given 90 days to change their minds, as required under the armistice agreement.

The armistice line was conceived only as a separation of forces, and not as an international border between the two Korean states. The Korean Armistice Agreement called on the two rival Korean governments to negotiate a peaceful resolution to reunify the Korean Peninsula. In the international Geneva Conference held in April-July 1954, which aimed to achieve a political settlement to the recent war in Korea (as well as in Indochina, see First Indochina War, separate article), North Korea and South Korea, backed by their major power sponsors, each proposed a political settlement, but which was unacceptable to the other side. As a result, by the end of the Geneva Conference on June 15, 1953, no resolution was adopted, leaving the Korean issue unresolved.

Since then, the Korean Peninsula has remained divided along the 1953 armistice line, with the 248-kilometer long DMZ, which was originally meant to be a military buffer zone, becoming the de facto
border between North Korea and South Korea. No peace treaty was signed, with the armistice agreement being a ceasefire only. Thus, a state of war officially continues to exist between the two Koreas. Also as stipulated by the Korean Armistice Agreement, the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission (NNSC) was established, comprising contingents from Czechoslovakia, Poland, Sweden, and Switzerland, tasked with ensuring that no new foreign military personnel and weapons are brought into Korea.

Because of the constant state of high tension between the two Korean states, the DMZ has since remained heavily defended and is the most militarily fortified place on Earth. Situated at the armistice line in Panmunjom is the Joint Security Area, a conference center where representatives from the two Koreas hold negotiations periodically. Since the end of the Korean War, there exists the constant threat of a new war, which is exacerbated by the many incidents initiated by North Korea against South Korea. Some of these incidents include: the hijacking by a North Korean agent of a South Korean commercial airliner in December 1969; the North Korean abductions of South Korean civilians; the failed assassination attempt by North Korean commandos of South Korean President Park Chung-hee in January 1968; the sinking of a South Korean naval vessel, the ROKS Cheonon, in March 2010, which the South Korean government blamed was caused by a torpedo fired by a North Korean submarine (North Korea denied any involvement), and the discovery of a number of underground tunnels along the DMZ which South Korea has said were built by North Korea to be used as an invasion route to the south.

Furthermore, in October 2006, North Korea announced that it had detonated its first nuclear bomb, and has since stated that it possesses nuclear weapons. With North Korea aggressively pursuing its nuclear weapons capability, as evidenced by a number of nuclear tests being carried out over the years, the peninsular crisis has threatened to expand to regional and even global dimensions. Western observers also believe that North Korea has since been developing chemical and biological weapons.

Since the end of the war, the two Koreas have pursued totally divergent paths. North Korea, a Marxist state, implemented a centrally planned policy, nationalized industries, lands, and properties, and collectivized agriculture. During the Japanese occupation of the Korean Peninsula, industrialization (and thus also wealth and power) was concentrated in the north. Following the Korean War, North Korea focused on heavy industrialization, particularly power-generating, mineral, and chemical industries, which was helped greatly by large technical and financial assistance from the Soviet Union, China, and other Eastern Bloc countries. It was also determined to achieve juche (self-reliance). Simultaneously, North Korea funneled a large share of its national budget to building a large Army. To fund both its large industrial and military programs, the government borrowed heavily from foreign sources. But after the 1973 global oil crisis, the price of minerals fell in the world market, negatively affecting North Korea which was unable to pay its large foreign debt. By the mid-1980s, it failed to meet most of its debt repayment obligations, and defaulted.

By the late 1980s, socialism was waning across eastern and central Europe, with Eastern Bloc countries shedding off Marxism-Leninism and centrally planned economies, and adopting Western-style democracy and a free market system. In December 1991, the Soviet Union disintegrated. North Korea, suddenly without Soviet financial support, went into an economic freefall. Also in the 1990s, widespread famine in North Korea caused by various factors, including failed government policies, massive flooding in 1995-1996, a drought in 1997, and the loss of Soviet support, led to mass starvation. The number of deaths from the famine is estimated at between 500,000 and 2 million people, even up to 3 million. The international community responded to the calamity, and North Korea received food and other humanitarian aid from the UN, China, South Korea, the United States, and other countries. At present, North Korea, when measured in terms of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP), ranks among the poorest and least developed countries in the world.
By contrast, South Korea, which pursued Western-style democracy and a free market economy, initially suffered from severe political, social, and economic difficulties in the years following the Korean War. The country, which traditionally had an impoverished agricultural economy, was nearly exclusively dependent on U.S. financial aid (up to 90%). In October 1953, South Korea and the United States signed a Mutual Defense Treaty.

In May 1961, General Park Chung-hee came to power in South Korea through a military coup. Soon becoming president, Park began the dramatic economic transformation of South Korea. Within a few decades, the country had become a regional and global economic powerhouse, its rapid growth being called the “Miracle on the Han River” (referring to the Han River, which flows through Seoul).

Because of the prevailing unstable security climate, President Park imposed authoritarian rule and a one-party state system. His regime suppressed political opposition, censored the press, and committed grave human rights violations. But at the same time, his government initiated large-scale modernization and export-centered industrialization. Succeeding national administrations (after President Park was assassinated in 1979) have continued the country’s economic growth. By the 1990s, South Korea had become one of Asia’s business and commercial centers, boasting a highly developed economy. South Korea has since become the world’s 12th large economy, with a GDP that is nearly forty times greater than that of North Korea.
SINO-SOViet BORDER CONFLICT

**Background** In November 1917, Russian communists seized power in Petrograd, and after emerging victorious in the Russian Civil War (October 1917-October 1922), they established the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (usually shortened to USSR or Soviet Union). Nearly 27 years later, in October 1949 in China, Mao Zedong founded the People’s Republic of China (PRC) when his Red Army all but defeated Chiang Kai-shek and the Chinese Nationalist (Kuomintang) forces in the Chinese Civil War. In December 1949, Chiang and the Kuomintang fled from the Chinese mainland and moved to Taiwan, where he established his new seat of government.

Thereafter, the Soviet Union and Red China established close fraternal ties. In February 1950, the two countries signed the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance, a thirty-year military alliance which included a Soviet low-cost loan of $300 million to assist in the reconstruction of war-ravaged China. In December 1950, the Soviet government returned to China sovereignty of the region of Lushun, including Port Arthur, located in the Chinese northeast. And with China militarily intervening in the Korean War (previous article) in October 1950, the Soviet Union sent large amounts of weapons to China, and provided air cover during the Chinese counter-offensive starting in late 1950. The period 1950-1958 saw close political, diplomatic, and economic relations between the two communist powers, particularly in relation to their common ideological struggle against their Cold War enemies, the United States and capitalist West.

In March 1953, Joseph Stalin, who had ruled the Soviet Union for over three decades, died suddenly, and was succeeded by Nikita Khrushchev. Khrushchev brought about a radical shift in Russia’s domestic affairs, implementing a series of reforms collectively known as de-Stalinization. The most repressive aspects of Stalinist policies were reversed: suppression and censorship were reduced; some economic and social reforms were introduced; political prisoners were released; the Gulag camp conditions were improved; and Stalinist landmarks, places, and monuments were renamed to erase memories of the Stalin era.

In foreign affairs, Khrushchev implemented “peaceful coexistence” with the West, which was a dramatic reversal of Stalin’s policy of confrontation against capitalist-democratic countries. The Soviet Union increased trade with the West, participated in international sports events, and allowed greater cultural and educational exchanges, and Western cinema and arts to enter the Soviet Union.

However, in China, Mao was alarmed by these changes in the Soviet Union. He had drawn inspiration for China’s political and economic development on the Stalinist model, and perceived Khrushchev’s “peaceful coexistence” policies with the West as deviating from Marxism-Leninism. As a result, Chinese-Soviet relations became strained, leading to a decade-long period (late 1950s through the 1960s) of hostility known as the Sino-Soviet split. This split was aggravated by other regional and global events which occurred during this period.

In 1958, Mao launched the Great Leap Forward, a large-scale series of programs in agriculture and heavy industries aimed at accelerating China’s path to communism. Mao’s plan was to vault China into a global economic power that would surpass the Soviet Union and even the industrialized Western powers, including Britain and the United States. However, the program ended in utter failure. Together with a massive drought, the policies of the Great Leap Forward caused widespread famine that led to mass
starvation. Some 36 million people died from hunger, and another 40 million babies failed to be born, or a total of 76 million deaths due to the “Great Chinese Famine”.

The Great Leap Forward also further strained Sino-Soviet relations, as Khrushchev perceived Mao’s ambitious programs as a direct challenge to the Soviet Union’s leadership in the socialist world. The Soviet government then pulled out its military, technical and economic advisers from China. Then when Khrushchev visited the United States in September 1959, China saw this as further evidence that the Soviet Union had strayed from Marxism-Leninism, and had become “soft” in its relations with the West.

In March 1959, when the Dalai Lama (Tibet’s spiritual leader) fled from Tibet into India following a failed Tibetan revolt against Chinese rule, the Soviet government gave moral support to Tibet, angering Mao. India itself also had a long-standing border dispute with China. When border clashes between India and China broke out in 1959 which ultimately led to a limited war in 1962 (Sino-Indian War, separate article), the Soviet Union remained neutral in the conflict and even tacitly sided with India, which again provoked Mao.

China also wanted to invade Taiwan to fulfill its long-sought goal of reunifying China. However, China’s invasion plan received only tepid support from the Soviet Union. In 1958, after China provoked the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis by shelling Quemoy and Matsu islands, the Soviet Foreign Ministry cautioned China against escalating the conflict, because the United States had sent a naval force to defend Taiwan.

In the early 1960s, the United States and Soviet Union became embroiled in a number of security crises, including when a U.S. U-2 spy plane was shot down in Soviet airspace in May 1960; the Berlin Crisis in June-November 1961; and the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962. China viewed the Soviet responses to these crises as not strong enough to provoke a major armed confrontation with the United States. During the Cuban Missile Crisis, China condemned Khrushchev when he faltered under intense U.S. pressure and removed Soviet nuclear missiles from Cuba.

Then as a result of Soviet fear of nuclear war between the Americans and Soviets during the Cuban Missile Crisis, in August 1963, the United States, Soviet Union, and Britain signed the Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. China saw this as another sign of Soviet weakness, and acquiescence to the West.

Mao also saw the Khrushchev regime’s withdrawing 1,400 Soviet technicians from China and the scrapping of 200 joint scientific projects with China as a Soviet attempt to prevent China from developing nuclear weapons. China had a long-held ambition to develop nuclear weapons to raise its stature in the world stage. Mao’s supposition was not without merit. For example, during the early 1960s in the midst of the Sino-Soviet split, the United States proposed to the Soviet Union a joint strike on China’s nuclear facilities in Lop Nur, Xinjiang Province, which however was rejected by Khrushchev. In October 1964, China detonated its first nuclear weapon.

By the early 1960s, in international communist conferences, China and the Soviet Union were trading criticisms against the other side’s brand of communism. The Chinese accused the Soviets of corrupting Marxism-Leninism, while the Soviets denounced the Chinese of ideological extremism that threatened world peace.

Historically, the communist parties of Russia and China had not had close ties, and were even hostile to each other. During the early years of the Chinese Communist Party, in 1923, the Soviet government under Vladimir Lenin encouraged the Chinese communists to join the non-communist Kuomintang (Chinese Nationalists). Then in World War II, Stalin urged Mao to form an alliance with Chiang Kai-shek to fight the Japanese. In the 1930s, Mao began to view traditional Marxism, like that applied in the Soviet Union, as relevant only in the industrialized countries, and not consistent with China’s agricultural society. Mao soon developed a new branch of Marxism called Maoism, which stated that in agricultural societies, the revolutionary struggle should be led by the peasants.
In September 1963-July 1964, Mao published a series of papers condemning Khrushchev and Soviet policies. In October 1964, Leonid Brezhnev succeeded as the new leader of the Soviet Union, and overturned some of the liberal reforms of his predecessor, although he generally continued to implement party policies. Brezhnev adopted a hard-line stance on the West, which did not lead to improved Sino-Soviet relations. Instead, ties between the two communist countries continued to decline. By 1963, the Sino-Soviet split involved the long-standing territorial dispute along the two countries’ poorly defined 4,380-kilometer shared border. In July 1964, Mao stated that the territory of the Soviet Union was excessive, and that Soviet regions of Lake Baikal, Vladivostok, Khabarovsk, and Kamchatka formerly belonged to China. Mao then said that China had “not yet presented our bill for this list” to the Soviet Union.

China then declared that two 19th century treaties with the Soviet Union, the Treaty of Aigun (1858) and the Convention of Peking (1860), were “unequal treaties”, in that the then ruling powerful Russian Empire had forced the war-weakened Chinese Qing Dynasty to cede one million square kilometers of territory in Manchuria and Siberia to Russia. Mao’s government also stated that through other “unequal treaties” which the Qing court was forced to sign in the 19th century, China lost some 500,000 square kilometers of land in its western border, lands which now are part of the Soviet Union.

Figure 19. China had a long-standing border dispute with the Soviet Union, which was inherited by the Soviet Union’s successor states, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.

The Chinese government soon made the clarification that by bringing up the matter of “unequal treaties” with the Soviet Union, China did not seek to reclaim these territories, but that it wanted the Soviet Union to acknowledge that the treaties indeed were unjust, and that the two sides must negotiate a final border agreement on the basis of present-day boundaries. In this respect, for China, the disputed
territory amounted to only 35,000 square kilometers along the common border. And of this figure, 34,000 square kilometers were located in the western side bordering the Soviet Socialist Republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Another 1,000 square kilometers were located along the eastern side running along the length of three rivers: the Argun, Amur, and Ussuri (Figure 20).

Both the Treaty of Aigun and the Convention of Peking, which codified the border along the eastern side, stipulated that the Sino-Russian border was located on the Chinese side running the whole length of the three rivers, thus giving the Russians full sovereignty along these rivers, including the many hundreds of islands located therein. China wanted to negotiate a readjustment of this river border, and proposed that the new border line be placed at the midpoint of the rivers. The Soviet Union rejected any readjustments, stating that the existing treaties had already fixed the border.

Furthermore, the Soviet Union denied that the 19th century treaties were “unequal treaties”, and countered by stating that the Chinese rulers themselves were territorially ambitious at that time. The Soviets also stated that in recently signed land treaties between China and the Soviet Union, Mao’s government had not brought up the matter of the earlier “unequal treaties” in these areas, and thus constituted a tacit acknowledgment of Soviet sovereignty of these areas. In February 1964, the two sides held border talks, which collapsed later that year when Mao raised new criticisms against the Soviet government.

Both sides now increased their forces at the border, raising tensions. The Soviet government also strengthened its relations with Mongolia (a socialist client state of the Soviet Union). In January 1966, the two countries signed a military alliance that allowed Soviet troops to deploy in Mongolia to help defend the country against a possible Chinese attack.

In 1966, Mao launched the Cultural Revolution, where he purged his political rivals and took full control of the Chinese Communist Party. But the Cultural Revolution brought widespread turmoil in China, and also exacerbated the ideological clash between China and the Soviet Union, increasing tensions between them.

In August 1968, the Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia, and overthrew the socialist government there that had tried to implement liberal reforms. Mao saw this aggression as one which the Soviets could potentially undertake against China. By the mid-1960s, the Soviet-Chinese border was heavily militarized, and hundreds of skirmishes took place, which increased in frequency in 1968 in the highly volatile eastern border region. Soviet soldiers used physical force to remove Chinese fishermen and worker groups, as well as Chinese military patrols, which had entered the river islands. In January 1968, China filed a diplomatic protest when Soviet troops attacked and killed Chinese workers in Qiliqin Island.

**War** What became the trigger for the escalation of border clashes that nearly led to total war between China and the Soviet Union was the disputed but nondescript Damansky Island (Zhenbao Island to the Chinese), a small (0.74 square kilometers) 1½-mile long by ½-mile wide island located in the Ussuri River between the Soviet bank in the east and the Chinese bank in the west. By the terms of a treaty signed in the 19th century, Damansky/Zhenbao Island belonged to the Soviet Union. The island was uninhabited, and also experienced flooding from seasonal rains. Both the Chinese and Soviets regularly sent patrols to reconnoiter the island.

During border negotiations in 1964, the Soviet Union agreed to cede the island to China, but then retracted this offer when talks broke down. Thereafter, the island became a flashpoint for armed clashes. In March 1969, China accused the Soviet Union of intruding into Damansky/Zhenbao Island sixteen times during a two-year period in January 1967-March 1969. In December 1968 and again in January

Then on March 2, 1969, Soviet border troops were sent to Damansky/Zhenbao Island to expel 30 Chinese soldiers who had landed on the island. Unbeknown to the Soviets, a large Chinese force, (300 soldiers, according to the Soviets) which was hidden and waiting in ambush in the nearby forest, opened fire on the Soviets. Fighting then broke out, with other units from both sides joining the fray. Chinese units used artillery and small arms fire from their side of the Ussuri River, while the Soviets sent reinforcements to Damansky/Zhenbao Island from their side of the river.

A Chinese military report after the incident stated that the Soviets fired the first shots. More recent information indicates that the Chinese military planned the incident, and used elite army units with battle experience to ambush the Soviet patrol. In this way, China hoped to retaliate for the many Soviet provocations, and also to signal that China would not be intimidated by the Soviet Union.

The two sides released different casualty figures for the Damansky/Zhenbao incident, although the Soviets may have suffered greater losses, at 59 dead and 94 wounded. Both the Chinese and Soviets claimed victory. The two sides also raised strong diplomatic protests against the other, accusing the other side of starting the incident. The Soviet Union accused China of being “reckless and provocative”, while China warned that if the Soviet Union continued to “provoke armed conflicts”, China would respond with “resolute counter-blows”.

Sensationalist news reports by the media from the two sides stirred up the general population in both countries. On March 3, 1969 in Beijing, large protests were held outside the Soviet Embassy, and Soviet diplomatic personnel were harassed. In the Soviet Union, demonstrations were held in Khabarovsk and Vladivostok. In Moscow, angry crowds hurled stones, ink bottles, and paint at the Chinese Embassy.

On March 11, 1969 in Beijing, demonstrators besieged the Soviet Embassy in protest for the attack on the Chinese Embassy. Then when Soviet media reported that captured Russian soldiers during the Damansky/Zhenbao incident had been tortured and executed, and their bodies mutilated, large demonstrations consisting of 100,000 people broke out in Moscow. Other mass assemblies also occurred in other Russian cities.

On March 15, 1969, a second (and larger) clash broke out in Damansky/Zhenbao Island, where both sides sent a force of regimental strength, or some 2,000-3,000 troops. The Chinese claimed that the
The Soviets fielded one motorized infantry battalion, one tank battalion, and four heavy-artillery battalions, or a total of over 50 tanks and armored vehicles, and scores of artillery pieces. The two sides again claimed victory in the 10-hour battle, and also accused the other side of firing the first shots. Both sides suffered heavy casualties.

The Soviets lost a number of armored vehicles, and failed to expel the Chinese from the island. On March 17, 1969, some 70 Soviet soldiers who were sent to retrieve a disabled T-62 tank were forced to retreat. The Chinese subsequently recovered the Soviet tank and transported it to Beijing where it was put on public display. Casualty figures for the March 15-17 battles are disputed. The Soviets place their own losses at 58 dead and 94 wounded. The Chinese place their losses at 29 dead, 62 wounded, and one missing. Foreign independent sources provide much higher combined total casualty figures, from 800 to 3,000 soldiers killed for both sides.

As in the first incident (March 2), more recent Chinese sources indicate that the Chinese Army had prepared for the second encounter (March 15). Chinese authorities had anticipated that the Soviets would return in force. The Chinese Army therefore sent a greater number of Chinese elite units, and fortified its side of the island with land mines. With these preparations, the Chinese succeeded in repelling the Soviets, who had attacked using armored units. After the encounter, the Soviets began an extended artillery barrage of Chinese positions across the river, and hit targets as far as seven kilometers inside China.

The two incidents generated different reactions in the Chinese and Soviet governments. In China, Mao made efforts to prevent the crisis from escalating further. He ordered Chinese border troops not to retaliate to the Soviet artillery shelling of Chinese positions in Damansky/Zhenbao Island, and at the Chinese side of the Ussuri River. In Moscow, the Soviet government was thoroughly provoked by the two incidents, viewing them as a direct challenge from China.

However, Soviet authorities were divided as to the appropriate response. The Foreign Ministry called for caution, but the military wanted aggressive action. On May 24, 1969, because of continued border incidents by Russian troops, China filed a diplomatic protest, accusing the Soviet Union of provoking war. On May 29, the Soviet government threatened to go to war with China, but also called for talks between the two sides.

As tensions increased, so did troop deployment to the disputed regions. Soon, 800,000 Chinese and 700,000 Soviet troops were deployed at the border. The Soviets continued to initiate border incidents, apparently to provoke a wider conflict. On August 13, 1969 in the Tieliketi Incident, 300 Soviet troops, supported by air and armored units, entered China’s Tieliketi area, located in Xinjiang region, in the western border. There, they ambushed and killed 30 Chinese border guards.

By now, the Soviet Union was preparing for war, and increased its forces in Mongolia and carried out a large military exercise in the Far East. Soviet authorities notified Eastern Bloc countries that Russian planes could launch an air strike on China’s nuclear facility in Lop Nur, Xinjiang. In Washington, D.C., a Soviet diplomatic official, while dining with a U.S. State Department officer, broached the planned Soviet attack on China’s nuclear site, to gauge American reaction. The U.S. official reacted negatively, and subsequent U.S. warnings of intervening militarily if the Soviet Union attacked China, would have far-reaching repercussions in the ongoing Cold War.

Meanwhile in Beijing, Chinese authorities were concerned about the growing threat of war with the Soviet Union. Despite appearing defiant, and warning Russia that it too had nuclear weapons, China was unprepared to go to war, and its military was far weaker than that of the Soviet Union. Exacerbating China’s position was its ongoing Cultural Revolution, which was causing serious internal unrest.

In August-September 1969, believing that a Soviet nuclear attack would target China’s major populated centers, the Chinese government prepared to empty the cities and relocate the population and
vital industries to remote locations. Large-scale underground civilian and military shelters were built in Beijing and other areas of the country. At Mao’s urging, national and party leaders moved away from Beijing to different areas across China, to avoid the government being wiped out by a single Soviet nuclear attack on the capital. By this time, even the Western press believed that war was imminent between the two communist giants.

But war did not come. On September 11, 1969, Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin and Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai held an urgent impromptu meeting at Beijing Airport to resolve the crisis which by now was reaching the breaking point. After 3½ hours, the two premiers reached a consensus: that their countries would resolve their differences through peaceful means, that border talks that were broken in 1964 would be restarted, that diplomatic ties between the two states would be restored, and that trade and transportation exchanges between their countries would be reopened.

However, Chinese authorities remained skeptical, believing that Premier Kosygin’s visit might be a ploy to trick China into dropping its guard, whereupon the Soviets would launch a surprise attack, which Mao believed would be on October 1, 1963, the (20th) anniversary of Communist China’s founding. When no invasion occurred on October 1, the Chinese government became even more wrought up in war preparations, believing that the Soviet attack would be on October 20, 1969. On October 17, in anticipation of a major Soviet attack, Chinese authorities evacuated the major cities and towns, relocated the various levels of government to remote countryside regions, and redeployed nearly one million soldiers, 4,000 planes, and 600 ships to prevent them from being directly attacked. The northern border regions particularly were placed under high state of war alert. But October 20, 1969 came and went without incident. In the end, the September 11 Kosygin-Zhou agreement held, and no war occurred between China and the Soviet Union.

China-United States Rapprochement Following the Sino-Soviet split and the Soviet Union’s new policy of “peaceful co-existence” with the West, through the 1960s, China continued to adhere to the strict Marxist-Leninist tenets of class struggle, world revolution, and the ultimate victory of communism over capitalism. China saw the United States not only as its most formidable challenge to achieving global socialist revolution, but also as the greatest threat to its own survival, because of a number of recent events. First, China had been forced to intervene in the Korean War (previous article), believing that war with the United States was inevitable if North Korea fell; Second, China, desiring to invade Taiwan and reunify the whole country, was repeatedly being thwarted by the United States; and Third, in the ongoing Vietnam War (separate article), China and the United States backed rival Vietnamese states. The Chinese government threatened to intervene militarily in the Vietnam War, if U.S. ground forces invaded North Vietnam.

But for Mao, in August-October 1969, the threat of war with the Soviet Union produced a major shift in his view regarding China’s security: that the Soviet Union, not the United States, posed the immediate danger to China. Furthermore, until then, Mao believed that the United States and the Soviet Union were working together to destroy China. Mao soon heeded his military’s counsel that political, ideological, and military competition between the Americans and Soviets prevented them from aligning their forces against China.

By 1969, Mao’s hard-line Marxist views had changed dramatically, this shift also being influenced by the negative effects of China’s long period of diplomatic isolation from the international community. Mao became convinced that China’s security was best served with an alliance of convenience with the United States, which he saw as the lesser danger. Mao remarked that it was better “to ally with the enemy far away … in order to fight the enemy who is at the gate”. Furthermore, in 1968, the United States decision to withdraw its forces from the Vietnam War was received positively by the Chinese government.
In the midst of the Sino-Soviet split, the United States also wanted to establish diplomatic ties with China, in order to play the two communist giants against each. The United States would thereby weaken communism generally, and also undermine the ambitions of its rival, the Soviet Union. Then in 1969, the government of newly elected U.S. President Richard Nixon secretly prepared to foster rapprochement with China. During the course of the year, the United States issued a number of diplomatic feelers, e.g. that the U.S. government would lift trade and travel restrictions to China; that the United States encouraged communication with China; and that China emerging from isolation would benefit Asia and the world community.

The breakthrough came from an unlikely source: at an international table tennis competition in Japan in April 1971, American and Chinese athletes developed a bond of friendship, which led to the U.S. table tennis players visiting China (the first Americans to do so under communist rule) that same month, on the invitation of the Chinese government. This series of events, called the “ping-pong diplomacy”, paved the way for opening secret diplomatic-level communications between the two countries, leading to Henry Kissinger, U.S. National Security Adviser, making two trips (the first being secret) to China in 1971, where he met with Premier Zhou Enlai. In these meetings, Kissinger gave the following assurances: that the United States would work for China’s entry to the United Nations (China was admitted to the UN in October 1971, replacing the Republic of China (Taiwan), which was expelled); that the United States would provide China with American-Soviet dealings; and that U.S. forces gradually would be withdrawn from the Vietnam War.

Kissinger’s trips set the stage for President Nixon’s monumental visit to China in February 1972, which together with the announcement of the trip in July 1971, set shock waves around the world. Closer United States-China relations soon developed, particularly after Mao’s death in September 1976 and the emergence of reformist Deng Xiaoping as the top Chinese leader. Full diplomatic relations between the two countries were established in January 1979. Earlier in 1973, the United States assured Mao of direct American support if the Soviet Union attacked China.

The United States-China rapprochement caused great concern for the Soviet Union. Then on the invitation of Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev, President Nixon visited Moscow in May 1972 (three months after visiting China), where the two sides signed a number of nuclear weapons control agreements, leading to a period of improved relations between the two countries.

Aftermath The threat of a Soviet-Chinese general war abated following the informal meeting between Premiers Kosygin and Zhou in September 1969. However, tensions remained high in the immediate aftermath, and through the 1970s and much of the 1980s. Even in 1990, when the two countries had moved forward toward achieving a political and territorial resolution, their shared border continued to be heavily militarized: the Soviets had 700,000 troops, or ¼ of its ground forces, as well as ⅓ of its air force, and ⅙ of its navy, while the Chinese had 1 million troops.

Furthermore, talks to achieve a definitive border treaty failed to make progress. Both China and the Soviet Union shared the credit in North Vietnam’s victory over South Vietnam in April 1975, but the reunified Vietnam soon came under the Soviet sphere of influence, straining Sino-Vietnamese relations. Then in February-March 1979, during the brief war between Vietnam and China (Sino-Vietnamese War, separate article), tensions spiked along the Chinese-Soviet border. The Soviet Union, apart from raising diplomatic protests, did not intervene militarily for Vietnam, despite a 1978 military agreement between Vietnam and the Soviet Union.

In December 1979, the Soviet Union launched an invasion of Afghanistan, and subsequently occupied the country for nearly a decade (until February 1989), which further exacerbated Soviet-Chinese relations, as China accused the Soviets of planning to encircle China. The Soviet-Chinese ideological
clash also extended to various conflicts in Africa, e.g. Rhodesian Bush War, Angolan Civil War, Ogaden War, etc.

By the early 1980s, China had effectively abandoned Marxism-Leninism and the communist tenets of class warfare and world revolution, and had adopted a mixed, semi-capitalist economy. China’s relations with the West also improved. And with these reforms de-emphasizing communism as paramount in China’s foreign policy, Chinese-Soviet tensions eased. In 1982, with Brezhnev calling for improved ties and the Chinese government responding favorably, vice-ministerial levels and trade relations were restored between the two countries.

In 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev, the new Soviet leader, started to implement major political, social, and economic reforms in the Soviet Union, which soon led to profound and dramatic national, regional and international political and security consequences. By 1989, Eastern Bloc countries had discarded socialism and state-controlled economies, and were adopting Western-style democracy and free market economies. By the end of 1991, the Soviet Union disintegrated, and its Cold War rivalry with the United States ended.

Gorbachev also initiated reconciliation with China, which the latter received favorably. Relations between the two countries improved considerably, particularly after the Soviet Union removed what the Chinese government called the “three obstacles” to Chinese-Soviet relations: Soviet forces were withdrawn from Afghanistan; the Soviet Union ended its support for Vietnam’s occupation of Cambodia; and the Soviet Union and China signed an agreement which reduced their forces at the border.

At the same time, border talks between the two countries accelerated toward the end of the 1980s and into the early 1990s. China promised to honor the 19th century treaties, and negotiations focused only on the currently disputed areas comprising some 35,000 square kilometers.

In May 1991, China and the Soviet Union signed a final border agreement, which delineated much of the frontier along the eastern region. The border agreement gave China a net territorial gain of 720 square kilometers. The thalweg principle, or the median line of a water channel, was used to set the border line. As a result, in the Argun River where 413 disputed islands were located, China gained 209 islands, while Russia retained 204. In the Amur River where 1,680 disputed islands were located, China gained 902 islands while Russia retained 708. In the Ussuri River where 320 disputed islands were located, China gained 153 islands while Russia retained 167. Border lines also were set along Lake Khanka and the Granitnaya and Tumen rivers. In October 2003, a supplementary border agreement was signed, which resolved ownership of three other islands (which were not covered in the 1991 agreement). Of these islands, Damansky/Zhenbao Island, the site of the 1969 clashes, was awarded to China.

Following the Soviet Union’s dissolution in 1991, three former Soviet states in Central Asia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan, became independent countries, and also inherited from Russia the disputed western border with China. Negotiations were held to resolve the issue. In 1994, in the Kazakhstan-China border agreement, of the 944 square kilometers of disputed territory, China gained 406 square kilometers (43%), while Kazakhstan retained 538 square kilometers (57%). In Tajikistan, where much of the former Soviet-Chinese disputed border was located, a border agreement with China was signed in 2002; 1,000 square kilometers of territory in the Pamir mountain region was transferred to China, while 28,000 square kilometers were retained by Tajikistan. In 2004, in the China- Kyrgyzstan border treaty, China gained 900 square kilometers in the Uzengi-Kuush mountain area, or some 32% of the disputed area.
RUSSO-JAPANESE WAR

Background By the 19th century, Russia’s territorial expansion into eastern Asia was encroaching into China, which was then ruled by the weakening Qing Dynasty. Russia and China signed two treaties (the Treaty of Aigun in 1858 and the Convention of Peking in 1860), where China ceded to Russia the territory known as Outer Manchuria (present-day southern region of the Russian Far East). Then in 1896, by the terms of a construction concession, China allowed Russia to build the Chinese Eastern Railway, which would connect the eastern end of the Trans-Siberian Railway to Vladivostok, through northern Inner Manchuria (present-day Northeast China). In July 1897, construction work on this new railway line began.

In December 1897, the Russian Navy started to use the port of Lushunkou, located at the southern tip of the Liaodong Peninsula. Four months later, in March 1898, Russia and China signed an agreement, where the Chinese government granted a 25-year lease (called the “Convention for the Lease of the Liaotung Peninsula”) to Russia for Lushunkou and the surrounding areas, collectively called the Kwantung Leased Territory. The Russians soon renamed Lushunkou as Port Arthur, and developed it into its main naval base in the Far East. Port Arthur was operational all year long, compared to the other Russian naval base at Vladivostok, which was unusable during winter. Both the Chinese Eastern Railway and Kwantung Leased Territory allowed Russia to consolidate its hold over Inner Manchuria (although the region legally remained part of China), which was furthered when Russia began constructing, in 1899, the South Manchuria Railway to connect Harbin with Port Arthur, via Mukden. Also by the latter 19th century, Russia was establishing firmer political and economic ties with the Korean Empire’s weak Joseon Dynasty.

Meanwhile, Japan (which had only recently industrialized and was emerging as a regional military power) also harbored ambitions in southern Manchuria and Korea. For over two centuries (1633-1853), Japan had implemented a near total isolationist policy from the outside world. But in the 1850s, Japan was forced (under threat of military action) to sign treaties with the United States and European powers to establish diplomatic and trade relations. Seeing itself powerless against an attack by the West, Japan reunified under its emperor and then began a massive industrialization and modernization program patterned after the West, which dramatically overturned and completely altered Japan’s traditional feudal-based agricultural society. Within a period of one generation, Japan had become a modern, industrialized, and prosperous state, with the government placing particular emphasis on building up its military forces to the level matching those in the West.

In the 1870s, Japan set its sights to emulating European-style imperialist expansion (during this time, European powers were aggressively establishing colonies in Asia and Africa), and turned to its old rival, Korea. Korea, although nominally sovereign and independent, was a tributary state of China. In September 1875, after failing to establish diplomatic relations with Korea, Japan sent a warship to Korea. Using its artillery, the Japanese ship opened fire and devastated the coastal defenses of Ganghwa Island, Korea. Six months later, February 1876, Japan sent six warships to Korea, forcing the Korean government to sign a treaty with Japan, the Gangwa Treaty, which among other provisions, established diplomatic relations between the two countries, and forced Korea to open a number of ports to trade with
Japan. Thereafter, European powers followed, opening diplomatic and trade ties with Korea, and ending the latter’s self-imposed isolationist policy (Korea until then had been known as the “Hermit Kingdom”).

But Japan was interested not only in opening trade with Korea, but in dominating the whole Korean Peninsula. Subsequently, Japan started to interfere in Korea’s internal affairs. Before long, the Korean ruling elite became divided into two factions: the pro-Japanese faction, comprising progressives who wanted to modernize Korea in association with Japan; and the pro-Chinese faction, comprising the conservatives, including the ruling Joseon monarchy, who were firmly anti-Japanese and wanted Korea’s national development under the tutelage of China or with the West.

The growing Japanese interference in Korea’s affairs made conflict between Japan and China inevitable. War finally broke out in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), where Japanese forces triumphed decisively. In the peace treaty (April 1895) that ended the war, China recognized Korea’s independence, (until then, Korea was a tributary state of China), China paid Japan an indemnity, and ceded to Japan the eastern part of the Liaodong Peninsula (as well as Taiwan and the Pescadores Islands). In the aftermath, Japan replaced China as the dominant controlling power in Korea.

But immediately thereafter, Russia, which also had power ambitions in southern Manchuria, particularly the vital Lushunkou (later Port Arthur), convinced France and Germany to join its cause and force Japan to return the Liaodong Peninsula to China, in exchange for China paying Japan a larger indemnity. Japan reluctantly acquiesced, seeing that its forces were powerless to fight three European powers at the same time.

Cash-strapped China sought financial assistance from Russia to pay its large indemnity to Japan. Russia released a loan to China, but also proposed a Sino-Russian alliance against Japan. In June 1896, China and Russia signed the secret Li-Lobanov Treaty where Russia agreed to intervene if China was attacked by Japan. In exchange, China allowed Russia the use of Chinese ports for the Russian Navy, as well as for Russia to build a railway line across North East China (the Chinese Eastern Railway) to Vladivostok. As the treaty also permitted the presence of Russian troops in the region, Russia soon gained full control of northeast China. Then after signing the lease for the Liaodong Peninsula, particularly vital Port Arthur, Russia gained control of southern Manchuria as well.

Meanwhile, in Korea, anti-Japanese sentiment intensified further when in October 1895, Queen Min, wife of King Gojong, was assassinated, with most Koreans blaming the Japanese, because of the queen’s strong anti-Japanese stance. Fearing for his life, Korean King Gojong fled to the Russian diplomatic office. With Russian protection, in October 1897, King Gojong proclaimed the Korean Empire, an act to symbolize the end of China’s domination of his country. Koreans were strongly anti-imperialistic and desired self-rule. Most Koreans also wanted to establish stronger ties with European countries and the United States to stop what they believed were Japan’s ambitions to take over their nation.

Undeterred, in November 1901, Japan approached Russia with a proposal: in exchange for Japan recognizing Manchuria as falling within the Russian sphere of control and influence, Russia would recognize Japan’s control over Korea. As early as June 1896, Japan and Russia had agreed to form a joint protectorate over Korea, which would serve as a buffer zone between them. But in April 1898, in another treaty, Russia acknowledged Japan’s commercial and economic interests in Korea.

In January 1902, Japan and Britain signed a military pact (the Anglo-Japanese Alliance), where the British promised to intervene militarily for Japan in the event that in a Russo-Japanese war, a third party entered the war on Russia’s side against Japan. The British motive in the treaty was to curb Russia’s territorial expansionism in East Asia; for Japan, the alliance strengthened its resolve to go to war with Russia.

Subsequently, Russia appeared to be willing to compromise with Japan, even indicating its intention to withdraw from Manchuria. In March 1902, Russia and France signed a military pact, but the French
government stated that it would intervene for Russia (if the latter went to war) only in a war in Europe and not in Asia. As a result, Russia would have to fight alone in a war with Japan.

A faction in the Russian government, led by the Foreign Ministry, wanted a peaceful settlement with Japan. However, Tsar Nicholas II, the Russian monarch, and the Russian military high command, pressed for continued Russian expansionism in the Far East, being confident that the Russian military, with a long history of wars in Europe, could easily defeat upstart Japan. Then when Russia did not withdraw from Manchuria, in July 1903, the Japanese envoy in St. Petersburg (Russia’s capital) issued a diplomatic protest. But in August 1903, Japan again offered Russia the proposal that in exchange for Russia’s recognition of Japan’s control of Korea, Japan would accept Russia’s control of Manchuria. In October 1903, Russia made a counter-proposal with the following stipulations: that Manchuria fell under Russia’s sphere of influence; that Russia recognized Japan’s commercial interests in Korea; and that all territory north of the 39th parallel in the Korean Peninsula would be a demilitarized buffer zone where no Russian or Japanese forces could deploy.

Each side’s proposals were unacceptable to the other, but the two sides agreed to hold talks. By January 1904, with no progress being made in the talks, Japanese representatives concluded that the Russians were stalling. Again, Japan repeated its August 1903 offer, but after receiving no reply, on February 6, 1904, Japan cut diplomatic ties with Russia. Two days later, Japan declared war on Russia.

**War** On February 8, 1904, three hours before the Russian government received the declaration of war, Japanese Navy ships launched a surprise attack on the main Russian Pacific Fleet anchored at Port Arthur. Fighting lasted until the next day, with the two sides’ battleships being brought into action. Russian shore batteries eventually forced the Japanese Navy to withdraw offshore, where it commenced what became a protracted blockade of Port Arthur. Although the Japanese attack on Port Arthur caused no serious losses to the Russians apart from some damage to a few ships (which were repaired), the suddenness of the war shocked the Russian government. Tsar Nicholas II particularly was incredulous that a small nation such as Japan would provoke a giant, powerful nation such as the Russian Empire.
Figure 21. In 1904, Japan and Russia went to war for control of Korea and southern Manchuria.

The Japanese war strategy was for its Army to engage the Russians in major battles for control of Korea and Manchuria, and for its Navy to establish control of the maritime waters, particularly the Yellow Sea, and defeat the Russian Pacific Fleet at Port Arthur. Early in the war, Japanese ships attacked (unsuccessfully) the Russian secondary naval port at Vladivostok, where a smaller squadron of the Russian Pacific Fleet was based. Subsequently in the months that followed, the Vladivostok squadron launched a number of commerce raiding operations, attacking and sinking many Japanese commercial and military transports off Japanese waters. For a while, Russian maritime raiding operations undermined the Japanese war effort. In August 1904, a Japanese naval force consisting of six cruisers located the Russian raiders off Ulsan (in southern Korea), and in the ensuing battle, inflicted heavy damage on the Russian ships.

Meanwhile, at Port Arthur, no major naval battles took place during much of the war. The Russian fleet refused to venture out to sea, while the Japanese ships also avoided moving close to shore because of the Russian batteries. In April 1904 and again later in August of that year, the Russian fleet tried to break out of Port Arthur. In both cases, the Russian ships were forced to return to port after brief but intense battles with the Japanese fleet. These battles were the first to see modern steel battleships squaring off
in combat. Also in both instances, the Russian commanders leading the breakout were killed, forcing the Russians ships to return to Port Arthur.

General Alexei Kuropatkin, commander of Russian forces in Manchuria, adopted a strategy of defense, and preferred to conduct a delaying war of attrition against the Japanese, until such time that sufficient Russian reinforcements arrived from Saint Petersburg. With a built-up force, he would then go on the offensive. Yevgeni Alekseyev, viceroy of the Russian Far East, opposed General Kuropatkin’s defensive plan and wanted the military to take the offensive immediately. The two men often were locked in bitter disputes regarding the conduct of the war.

Even more pressing for the Russians were other factors: First, the unfinished Trans-Siberian Railway through which troops and weapons were to be transported; Second, the immense distance and travel time involved from the western end of Russia to the Far East; and Third, the relative unimportance of the remote eastern territories to the Russian general population, when viewed in the context of Russia’s more urgent problems at home and in more strategically important Europe.

After the Japanese Navy gained control of the Yellow Sea, Japanese ground forces were landed on the Korean Peninsula. On February 9, 1904, the Japanese won a naval battle at Chemulpo Bay, which allowed 40,000 Japanese troops to be landed at Chemulpo (modern-day Incheon). Japanese forces then spread out across Korea. The main Japanese attacking force advanced north, and reached Pyongyang on February 21 and Anju on March 18, without meeting any opposition. In late March 1904, more Japanese units were landed in Chinampo (in present-day North Korea), and by April 21, the combined Japanese forces were encamped at Wiju and along the Yalu River, on the Korea-Manchuria border.

The Russian military command in Manchuria, pursuant to its defensive strategy, did not oppose the Japanese landings in Korea. Instead, the Russian Army had deployed 16,000 infantry and 6,000 cavalry personnel to defend the Korea-Manchuria border, a difficult task as these units were spread out along a 170-mile front. The Russian defense was focused on Antung, where the Japanese attack was expected.

The Japanese launched their offensive across the Yalu River using a diversionary attack on Antung as a feint. Japanese forces then crossed the Yalu River along three points further east, and then threatened the Russians with encirclement. Heavy fighting broke out on April 29, 1904, but with their left flank collapsing, the Russians were forced to abandon their positions and retreat north to Manchuria. With their victory at the Battle of Yalu River, the Japanese entered Manchuria. Most of the battles of the war subsequently would be fought in Manchuria.
The Japanese Army moved to take Port Arthur. In early May 1904, Japanese forces landed its nearly 40,000-strong Second Army on the southern coast of the Liaodong Peninsula and north of Port Arthur. The approaches to the Russian defenses were heavily fortified by an elaborate network of trenches and barb wire, and artillery pieces and machine guns. Fighting broke out on May 24-26, 1904, with the numerically superior Japanese forces (outnumbering the Russians by 10:1) making many unsuccessful
frontal attacks on the Russian positions, and incurring heavy casualties. But Chinchou fell on May 25, and the strategic Nashan Hill (which the Japanese failed to take in nine attempts) was captured the following day. The Russians were forced to retreat after failing to secure badly needed reinforcements. The Japanese then occupied the nearby port of Dalny, which the Russians had earlier abandoned, leaving Dalny’s facilities, to the amazement of the Japanese, virtually intact, including warehouses, railway lines and train cars, and port machinery.

With Japanese forces now threatening Port Arthur, the Russian high command in Manchuria assembled a relief force of 33,000 troops to move south and breach the Japanese lines, and proceed to reinforce Port Arthur. Upon receiving word of this Russian advance, Japanese forces, numbering 40,000 troops, were ordered to proceed north. On June 14-15, 1904, fighting took place near the village of Telissu. There, the Russians had strengthened their right flank, but the Japanese attack broke through on the Russians’ weak left flank. A Russian counterattack, poorly coordinated, petered out. Threatened with encirclement, the Russians retreated north toward Mukden, which ended Russian hopes of reinforcing Port Arthur.

The war shifted further toward the western coast of the Liaodong Peninsula, at the town of Tashishchiao, a strategic railway junction, which the Japanese command saw as important to further isolating Port Arthur and allowing its forces to move north into Manchuria. The advance toward Kaiping and Tashihchiao saw teams of Japanese soldiers manually hauling train cars (loaded with their equipment and supplies) on the railroad tracks, as Japanese sea transports carrying the locomotives had been lost to Russian naval attacks. In the ensuing battle at Tashihchiao, fought on July 24-25, 1904, by opposing 64,000 Japanese and 60,000 Russian troops, Japanese frontal attacks on Russian entrenched positions were thrown back. Russian artillery fire inflicted heavy casualties on the Japanese. But a surprise nighttime flanking maneuver by Japanese forces broke through on the weak Russian left side, forcing the Russians to abandon Tashihchiao and retreat north toward Liaoyang.

Meanwhile in the south, the Japanese Third Army, with 90,000 troops and hundreds of artillery pieces, was preparing to attack Port Arthur. Japanese military planners anticipated an easy conquest of Port Arthur, as ten years earlier in a war with China (the First Sino-Japanese War in 1894-1895), Port Arthur (then known as Lushunkou) had fallen to a Japanese attack within a single day. However, the Russians had greatly fortified Port Arthur, constructing new defenses and enhancing or expanding existing ones. By the time the war began, Port Arthur was one of the most heavily fortified places in the world. Some 50,000 Russian troops and 500 artillery pieces protected the Russian Pacific Fleet at the port. Also crucial to Port Arthur’s defense were the heavily fortified hills on the north and west overlooking the city.
On August 7, 1904, the Japanese Army launched the attack to take Port Arthur from the northeast. By August 9, Japanese forces had taken the two eastern hills after sustaining heavily casualties from many failed attempts. However, the assaults on the western hills, which began on August 19, 1904, proved disastrous, and with casualties topping 16,000 men with little territory gained by August 24, the Japanese command called off the attack. The Japanese then settled down to a siege of Port Arthur, which ultimately lasted over four months. The Japanese built trenches and tunnels to allow their troops to slowly advance toward the Russian fortifications. Then, the ramparts of the fortifications were brought down with powerful explosives. In this way, the Japanese captured the Waterworks Redoubt and Temple Redoubt. However, in September-October 1904, Japanese attempts using massed frontal assaults to storm the western hills were repulsed, with the Japanese suffering heavy casualties.

Meanwhile, in the northern sector of the war, following their victory at Tashihchiao, the Japanese Army continued to advance north into Manchuria. In late July 1904, the Japanese 4th Army and units of the 2nd Army, numbering some 34,000 troops, clashed with the Russian 2nd Siberian Corps, which totaled 33,000 troops, at Hsimucheng. Again, the Japanese used a flanking attack to break through a weak section in the Russian lines. Threatened with encirclement, the Russians retreated north to Haiching. The stage then was set for the first of a series of major battles for control of southern Manchuria.
The Japanese Army now eyed Liaoyang, a major population center along the Mukden-Port Arthur railway line, and assembled three field armies comprising 130,000 troops and 500 artillery pieces to advance to the city. General Kuropatkin, the commander of all Russian forces in Manchuria, had organized three lines of defense at Liaoyang, which were manned by several Russian Army Corps, the total Russian strength numbering 160,000 soldiers and 670 artillery pieces. The battle for the city, which took place on August 25-September 5, 1904, saw repeated Japanese attacks being thrown back by strong Russian artillery fire. However, General Kuropatkin, wrongly believing that the Japanese forces greatly outnumbered his own, repeatedly ordered his units to abandon their positions and retreat to the inner defensive lines, which dismayed his subordinate generals who pressed for a counterattack. With Japanese units soon breaking through and threatening to encircle the city, General Kuropatkin evacuated his forces from Liaoyang, and retreated north.

As the danger to Mukden, southern Manchuria’s main city now loomed, the Russian high command became determined to stop the advancing Japanese Army (which now comprised 170,000 troops), before it reached the Shaho River, south of Mukden. Russian forces, totaling over 200,000 troops, moved south along three sectors in a 60-kilometer front, with the eastern prong of the offensive acting as a feint for the main attacking force in the east. The Russians advanced rapidly, and by October 8, 1904, had gained a distance of 25-35 kilometers, meeting only light resistance. But the Japanese command fortuitously secured a copy of the Russian battle plan from the body of a dead Russian officer. By modifying their own battle plan, the Japanese struck at the Russians’ weaker western flank, while attempting to hold down the main Russian attack in the east. Both sides suffered heavy casualties (a combined 60,000 killed, missing, and wounded) at the Battle of Shaho, fought on October 5-17, 1904, with the Japanese succeeding in stopping the attack and then pushing back the Russian flanks. By the end of the battle, Japanese forces had gained 25 kilometers toward Mukden. A lull in the fighting ensued which lasted four months. The two sides then settled down for the coming Manchurian winter.

Meanwhile, in the battle for Port Arthur, by November 1904, the Japanese Third Army had received fresh reinforcements, as well as powerful artillery guns capable of firing 500-pound shells a distance of nine kilometers. By this time, the Japanese were focused on taking the high ground called 203-meter Hill (Figure 23), which was strategically situated overlooking Port Arthur. The Russians also were determined to hold this vital hill, and fortified it with artillery and machine gun positions, trenches, steel railings, and barb wire obstacles. Repeated frontal assaults by the Japanese were thrown back, with the attackers suffering heavy casualties. But in late November 1904, the Japanese finally gained control of the hill. Bitter fighting continued for several days, and possession of the hill changed hands many times. But by December 5, 1904, the Japanese had secured full control of 203-meter Hill, throwing back the last Russian counter-attacks.

The battle for Port Arthur now took a decisive turn, as Japanese forces hauled up and positioned their powerful artillery guns atop 203-meter Hill. The Japanese then opened fire on the Russian fleet at the harbor below. Four Russian battleships and two cruisers were destroyed, while one battleship that moved out of range of the Japanese fire eventually was scuttled by her crew to avoid its capture by the Japanese.

Also by December 1904, the ever-widening trenches and tunnels which the Japanese were building soon threatened the Russian fortifications. The Japanese detonated powerful explosives on the fortifications, bringing down the walls of Fort Chikuan (on December 18), Fort Erhlung (on December 28), and Fort Sungshu (on December 31). The Russian commanders of these garrisons were forced to surrender. On January 1, 1905, the Russian commander of Port Arthur offered to surrender, which was accepted by the Japanese. Four days later, the Japanese Third Army entered Port Arthur. The nine-month battle and siege of Port Arthur had cost the Japanese 58,000 casualties. But with its victory, the Japanese
Army now controlled the whole Liaodong Peninsula. Furthermore, the Japanese Third Army was now free to move north to join the continuing battle for southern Manchuria. Port Arthur’s fall demoralized the Russian Army in Manchuria, and shocked the Russian population.

Meanwhile, at Mukden, General Kuropatkin and his commanders hastened plans to launch another offensive at the Japanese Army which was now positioned just south of the city. General Kuropatkin wanted to attack before the Japanese Third Army from Port Arthur arrived to join the three other Japanese field armies in the north. However, the Russian battle plan was leaked to a foreign news outlet. This information about the planned Russian attack soon reached the Japanese Army, a fortuitous development as the 220,000 Japanese troops in Manchuria who were occupying a 160-kilometer front along Mukden did not expect any battles to take place in the harsh winter conditions. The Russian offensive and ensuing major armed clash, known as the Battle of Sandepu (January 25-29, 1905), was fought south of Mukden, in and around the villages of Sandepu, Heikoutai, and Paotaitzu. The Russian attack was poorly executed, and also handicapped by obsolete maps, bad weather, and limited information on enemy positions. Even then, the Russians succeeded in partially breaking through the Japanese defenses at Sandepu. Unexpectedly, however, General Kuropatkin called off the offensive, allowing the Japanese to launch a counter-attack. The Japanese Army then recaptured the lost territory and gained a strategically advantageous position. Thus, once again, the Russian attempt to reverse the tide of the war failed miserably.

By early February 1905, the Japanese Army, now totaling 230,000 troops after being joined by its Third Army, prepared to attack Mukden to deal a major defeat on the Russian forces, which numbered 340,000 troops. By this time, Japan was beset with many political and economic problems at home. In Manchuria, the Japanese Army was experiencing serious logistical problems. Thus, the Japanese military high command faced considerable pressure to achieve an overwhelming victory at Mukden, and not allow the Russian forces to escape, as in previous battles.

The Battle of Mukden (February 20-March 10, 1905), which was the last major land battle of the war, opened with the Japanese main offensive aimed at the Russian flanks, with minor attacks at other points. Again, Russian military planners miscalculated the Japanese plan, believing that the main enemy thrust would be along the eastern flank, when in fact the Japanese focused their offensive in the west. There, the Japanese Second Army comprised the main attacking force and the Japanese Third Army was tasked with advancing in a wide arc in the northwest to the other side of Mukden.

Soon realizing the threat of being encircled, General Kuropatkin moved units from the eastern flank to the western flank, which was badly executed. The Japanese now attacked in force along the weakened Russian eastern flank, breaking through. In the west, the Japanese soon threatened to encircle the Russians. Faced with annihilation, on March 9, 1905, on General Kuropatkin’s orders, Russian forces abandoned Mukden, and retreated north first to Tiehling. The Russians soon also evacuated Tiehling, which they burned to the ground, and retreated further north to Hspingkai. In the Mukden battle, a combined total of 165,000 soldiers were casualties (Japanese: 75,000, including 16,000 killed; Russians: 90,000, including 9,000 killed).

In the aftermath, Japanese forces occupied Mukden and gained control of the entire southern Manchuria. But they had failed to annihilate the Russian Army (which remained relatively potent despite the high losses). Because of serious logistical problems, the Japanese Army decided to abandon plans to advance further north.

Despite the series of battlefield defeats, Tsar Nicholas II continued to believe that the Russian Army would prevail eventually in a protracted war. The now completed Trans-Siberian Railway could transfer more troops and weapons to the Far East. But these hopes would be dashed in the Battle of Tsushima.
In October 1904, while the Japanese Third Army was yet besieging Port Arthur, Tsar Nicholas II ordered the Russian Baltic Fleet, which was led by eight battleships, to head for Port Arthur and break the Japanese naval blockade, and reinforce the Russian Pacific Fleet. The Russian Baltic Fleet, soon renamed the Second Pacific Fleet, then embarked on a seven-month (October 1904-May 1905) 33,000-kilometer voyage half-way around the world by way of the Cape of Good Hope, and around the southern tip of Africa. The Russian fleet was forced to take this much longer route after being denied passage across the Suez Canal by Britain following the Dogger Bank incident. In this incident, which occurred in the North Sea in October 1904, the Russian fleet fired on British trawlers, mistaking them for Japanese torpedo boats. The incident sparked a furious British government protest that nearly led to war between Britain and Russia.

In January 1905, while yet in transit, the Russian fleet received information that Port Arthur had fallen. As a result, it was instructed to head for Vladivostok instead. By May 1905, the Russian fleet had entered the waters south of the Sea of Japan, and while traversing the Tsushima Strait, located between Japan and Korea, the fleet was spotted by a Japanese ship, which then alerted the Japanese Navy. In the previous months, the Japanese had followed the progress of the Russian fleet’s voyage, and thus prepared to do battle with it in a decisive showdown.
In the ensuing Battle of Tsushima (May 27-28, 1905), the Japanese Navy scored a stunning one-sided victory. The Russian Second Pacific Fleet was destroyed, with 10,000 Russians killed or captured, 21 ships sunk, including 7 battleships, and of the 38 Russian ships that started the voyage, only 3 managed to reach Vladivostok. Japanese losses were 700 dead or wounded, and only 3 torpedo boats sunk.

The Battle of Tsushima sent reverberations around the World – an Asian nation dealing a crushing defeat on a European power. In Russia, Tsar Nicholas II abandoned his hard-line position against Japan. On June 8, 1905, one week after the Tsushima battle, Russia agreed to negotiate an end to the war. By this time also, Russia was experiencing massive unrest (the Russian Revolution of 1905) as a result of strikes, demonstrations, peasant protests, and soldiers’ mutinies. This unrest in Russia began in January 1905 when a peaceful demonstration by 150,000 people turned violent when soldiers opened fire and killed scores of people. Russians across the country then rose up against the government. Some military units mutinied, but were contained by loyalist forces. Rail workers and rebellious soldiers seized sections of the Trans-Baikal railway, undermining the Russian war effort in the east. In the end, the Russian government quelled the uprising after agreeing to implement major reforms.

Meanwhile, Japan was faced with a deteriorating economy and mounting foreign debt, and also desired to end the war. The Japanese Army was experiencing logistical problems in Manchuria, and the economic problems at home could seriously undermine Japan’s ability to wage a protracted war. As early as mid-1904, Japan had sought third-party mediation to end the war. U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt agreed to act as mediator, and peace talks opened in Portsmouth, New Hampshire in June 1905. Russian and Japanese mediators took a hard-line stance and refused to compromise. As a result, fighting resumed. In July 1905, Japanese naval and land forces seized Sakhalin Island, located off the Russian Far East mainland, in a three-week campaign.

Negotiations then continued. In August 1905, a number of issues were resolved, but the two sides remained deadlocked over the more contentious issues of war reparations and territorial concessions. The Russian delegation threatened to withdraw from the talks and allow the war to continue. The Japanese then acquiesced, and agreed to the Russian stipulation that no war reparations would be paid.

On September 5, 1905, Russia and Japan signed the Treaty of Portsmouth, ending the war. By the terms of the treaty, Japan gained control of Korea; Russia withdrew its forces from Manchuria but retained the Chinese Eastern Railway; and the Russian lease on the Liaodong Peninsula, including Port Arthur, was transferred to Japan. Sakhalin Island was partitioned at the 50th parallel, with Japan gaining the southern portion and Russia retaining the northern side.

Casualties from the war include: Japanese – 75,000 killed in action and from diseases, and 10,000 wounded; Russians – 65,000 killed in action and from diseases, 140,000 wounded, and 75,000 captured.

**Aftermath** Despite its defeat, Russia continued to be regarded as a major European power. Russia’s greatest loss was its prestige, as it had been humiliated by a tiny Asian nation, and one that had only recently modernized. The Russian monarchy was weakened politically by the war and from the internal unrest in 1905, but survived twelve more years in power. In March 1917, following another revolution amid the Russian defeats in ongoing World War I, Tsar Nicholas II was forced to abdicate the throne, and the Russian monarchy came to an end.

In Japan, the immediate effect of the war was outrage and frustration by the Japanese people, who believed that their nation had been deprived of greater benefits from the war, particularly war reparation and more territory. Protest demonstrations broke out in the cities, which sometimes degenerated into
violence and riots. People were angry at their own government for agreeing to the treaty, and also at U.S. President Roosevelt, whom they accused of siding with the Russians during the negotiations.

However, for Japan, the long-term effects of the war were much more favorable, as it became the supreme power in East Asia, and its status as an equal of the major European powers was strengthened. In August 1910, Japan abrogated Korea’s nominal independence (long recognized by the major powers) and annexed Korea, generating no response from the European powers. Japan then continued to expand militarily.

Japan’s victory in the Russo-Japanese War also dashed the then prevailing notion that Caucasians were military superior to Asians. Japan’s feat also gave hope to the colonized peoples of Southeast Asia (e.g. Vietnamese, Indonesians, Filipinos, etc) who were aspiring for independence from their European and American colonial masters.
BOXER REBELLION

Background By the 19th century, China, a great and ancient nation with a civilization spanning 4,000 years, was weakening from internal and external pressures. Internally, the Qing Dynasty, which had ruled China since 1644, had experienced many regional uprisings, including the Panthay Rebellion (1856-1873), Dungan Revolt (1862-1877) Nian Rebellion (1851-1868), and the catastrophic Taiping Rebellion (1851-1864), where 20-30 million people were killed and the most fertile regions of China were devastated. During the 19th century, China was hit with many major famines that caused more than 120 million deaths. China also had experienced a rapid population growth, and by the early 19th century, some 300 million Chinese were competing for land in an overwhelmingly agricultural economy, generating social unrest and discontent. Furthermore, most Chinese had few opportunities, as the Qing court tightly regulated other industries and external trade. The government itself was plagued with corruption, ineptitude, and power struggles.

But the greatest challenge to China in the 19th century, and one that threatened its existence, came from outside its borders, namely the European powers, United States, and Japan. Throughout its history, China saw itself as the center of the civilized world under a mandate from haven, and that all people outside this realm were “barbarians” with inferior cultures and civilizations.

Medieval Europe’s interests in China centered on trade, and Chinese products such as silk, tea, and porcelain were highly valued in the West, and formed a central role in the multi-continental land and sea complex network of trade routes known as the Silk Road (110 B.C.-1450 A.D.). With the decline of the Silk Road, the Portuguese discovered a maritime passage to the Far East via the African continent. European trade with China then experienced a resurgence.

By the 18th century, Portugal had been joined by Spain, France, Britain, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, and the United States. The reclusive Qing government, distrustful of foreigners, restricted trade to the southern port of Canton (present-day Guangzhou), through a private monopoly arrangement called the Canton System (1757-1842). One European nation, Russia, had for centuries traded with China. Thus, the two countries shared deeper relations. They also shared an undefined and disputed frontier, which was resolved by border agreements in the 17th century.

In the last decades of the 19th century, Japan had trading and economic interests in China; it also had political and territorial ambitions there. Japan had only recently (in 1854) awakened from its own centuries-long period of self-isolation. Starting in the 1860s, it launched wide-ranging modernization and industrialization programs using the Western model to transform itself into a modern, affluent nation. Within a span of one generation, Japan became an economic and military powerhouse.

The extent of China’s military backwardness first became apparent in 1842, when Chinese forces were defeated by the British in the First Opium War. In the treaty that ended the war, the Qing government yielded to many British demands, including paying war reparations, ceding territory (Hong Kong), granting British nationals in China exemption from Chinese laws (extraterritoriality), and allowing more Chinese ports to be opened to trade. Thereafter, in similar treaties, China also granted
the same privileges to France and the United States. The First Opium War became the first of many unsuccessful wars that China experienced during the 1800s. Wars and the threats of wars forced the Qing government to agree to other demands by foreign powers.

These imposed agreements, which later Chinese historians called “unequal treaties”, occurred in the period called the “century of humiliation” (1839-1949) when China suffered a series of defeats in wars. China then was forced to submit to the foreign powers, and agreed to the opening of more than 80 ports to trade (so-called “treaty ports”), and cede territories (called “concessions”) to the foreign powers in 19 major cities and urban centers, including Beijing, Shanghai, Canton (present-day Guangzhou), and Tianjin. As a result of the Second Opium War (1856-1860), foreign powers were allowed to establish diplomatic legations in Beijing.

China also lost its tributary states, Indochina, Korea, and Formosa (Taiwan), to foreign powers. By the late 19th century, Britain, France, Germany, Russia, and Japan had established spheres of influence inside China (Figure 25) itself. The foreign powers owned or controlled concessions and treaty ports, where they applied their own laws, deployed their own police and military forces, and imposed their own cultures. And by 1898, China appeared on the verge of being partitioned by the foreign powers.
During the Self-strengthening Movement (1861-1895) and the Hundred Days Reform (June-September 1898), the Qing government attempted to implement reforms to modernize China to the level of the West and Japan. These reforms failed as a result of the opposition of hard-line conservative Qing officials, and especially of Empress Dowager Cixi, who was the de facto ruler of China.

In the late 19th century, a secret society called the ““Righteous and Harmonious Fists” (Yihequan) was formed in the drought-ravaged hinterland regions of Shandong and Zhili provinces. The sect formed in the villages, had no central leadership, operated in groups of tens to several hundreds of mostly young peasants, and held the belief that China’s problems were a direct consequence of the presence of foreigners, who had brought into the country their alien culture and religion (i.e. Christianity).

Sect members practiced martial arts and gymnastics, and performed mass religious rituals, where they invoked Taoist and Buddhist spirits to take possession of their bodies. They also believed that these
rituals would confer on them invincibility to weapons strikes, including bullets. As the sect was anti-
foreign and anti-Christian, it soon gained the attention of foreign Christian missionaries, who called the
group and its followers “Boxers” in reference to the group’s name and because it practiced martial arts.

The Qing government, long wary of secret societies which historically had seditious motives, made
efforts to suppress the Boxers. In October 1899, government troops and Boxers clashed in the Battle of
Senluo Temple in northwest Shandong Province. In this battle, Boxers proclaimed the slogan “Support
the Qing, destroy the foreign” which drew the interest of some high-ranking conservative Qing officials
who saw that the Boxers were a potential ally against the foreigners. Also by this time, the Boxers
had renamed their organization as the “Righteous and Harmonious Militia (Yihetuan)”, using the word
“militia” to de-emphasize their origin as a secret society and give the movement a form of legitimacy.
Even then, the Qing government continued to view the Boxers with suspicion. In December 1899, the
Qing court recalled the Shandong provincial governor, who had shown pro-Boxer sympathy, and replaced
him with a military general who launched an anti-Boxer campaign in the province.

The Boxers’ grassroots organizational structure made its suppression difficult. The movement
rapidly spread beyond Shandong and Zhili provinces. By April-May 1900, Boxers were operating in
large areas of northern China, including Shanxi and Manchuria, and across the North China Plains.
The Boxers killed Chinese Christians, burned churches, and looted and destroyed Christian houses and
properties. As a result of these attacks, and those perpetrated during the Boxer Rebellion, more than
30,000 Chinese Christians, 130 Protestant missionaries, and 50 Catholic priests and nuns were killed.

The Boxer movement’s decentralized organization was its main strength, as individual units could
mobilize and disband at will, and could be transferred quickly to other areas. But its lack of a unified
structure and central leadership were also its weakest points, as Boxer units were restricted by a lack of
coordination and over-all command. Boxers also suffered from a lack of military training and adequate
weapons, and thus fought at a great disadvantage and easily broke apart when the fighting became intense.

By May 1900, thousands of Boxers were occupying areas around Beijing, including the vital Beijing-
Tianjin railway line. They attacked villages, killed local officials, and destroyed government
infrastructures. The violence alarmed the foreign diplomatic community in Beijing. The foreign
diplomats, their staff, and families in Beijing had their offices and residences located at the Legation
Quarter, located south of the city. The Legation Quarter consisted of diplomatic missions from eleven
countries: Britain, France, Russia, United States, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Japan, Italy, Belgium,
Netherlands, and Spain.

In May 1900, the foreign diplomats asked the Qing government that foreign troops be allowed to
be posted at the Legation Quarter, which was denied. Instead, the Chinese government sent Chinese
policemen to guard the legations. But the foreign envoys persisted in their request, and on May 30, 1900,
the Chinese Foreign Ministry (Zongli Yamen) allowed a small number of foreign troops to be sent to
Beijing.

The next day (May 31), some 450 foreign sailors and Marines were landed from ships from eight
countries and sent by train from Taku to Beijing. But as the situation in Beijing continued to deteriorate,
the foreign diplomats felt that more foreign troops were needed in Beijing. On June 6, 1900, and again
on June 8, they sent requests to the Zongli Yamen, with both being turned down. A separate request
by the German Minister, Clemens von Ketteler, to allow German troops to take control of the Beijing
railway station also was turned down. On June 10, 1900, the Chinese government barred the foreign
legations from using the telegraph line that linked to Tianjin. In one of the last transmissions from the
Legation Quarter, British Minister Claude MacDonald asked British Vice-Admiral Edward Seymour in
Tianjin to send more troops, with the message, “Situation extremely grave; unless arrangements are made
for immediate advance to Beijing, it will be too late.” And with the subsequent severing of the telegraph line between Beijing and Kiachta (in Russia) on June 17, 1900, for nearly two months thereafter, the Legation Quarter in Beijing would be cut off from the outside world.

On June 11, 1900, the Japanese diplomat, Sugiyama Akira, was killed by Chinese troops in a Beijing street. Then on June 12 or 13, two Boxers entered the Legation Quarter and were confronted by Ketteler, the German Minister, who drove one away and captured the other; the latter soon was killed under unclear circumstances. Later that day, thousands of Boxers stormed into Beijing and went on a rampage, killing Chinese Christians, burning churches, destroying houses, and looting properties. In the next few days, skirmishes broke out between foreign legation troops, and Boxers with the support of anti-foreigner government units. On June 15, 1900, British and German soldiers dispersed Boxers who attacked a church, and rescued the trapped Christians inside; two days later (June 17), an armed clash broke out between German–British–Austro-Hungarian units and Boxer–anti-foreigner government troops.

The Belgian legation was evacuated, as were those of Austria-Hungary, the Netherlands, and Italy, when they came under Boxer attack. By this time, the Christian missions scattered across Beijing were evacuated, with their clergy and thousands of Chinese Christians taking shelter at the Legation Quarter. Soon, the Legation Quarter was fortified, with soldiers and civilians building barricades, trenches,
bunkers, and shelters in preparation for a Boxer attack. Ultimately, in the Legation Quarter were some 400 soldiers, 470 civilians (including 149 women and 79 children), and 2,800 Chinese Christians, all of whom would be besieged in the fighting that followed. At the Northern Cathedral (Beitang) located some three miles from the Legation Quarter, some 40 French and Italian soldiers, 30 foreign Catholic clergy, and 3,200 Chinese Christians also took refuge, turning the area into a defensive fortification which also would come under siege during the conflict.

Meanwhile in Taku, in response to British Minister MacDonald’s plea for more troops to be sent to the Beijing foreign legations, on June 10, Vice-Admiral Seymour scrambled a 2,200-strong multinational force of Navy and Marine units from Britain, Germany, Russia, France, the United States, Japan, Italy, and Austria-Hungary, which departed by train from Tianjin to Beijing. On the first day, Seymour’s force traveled to within 40 miles of Beijing without meeting opposition, despite the presence of Chinese Imperial forces (which had received no orders to resist Seymour’s passage) along the way. Seymour’s force reached Langfang, where the rail tracks had been destroyed by Boxers. Seymour’s troops dispersed the Boxers guarding the area, and work crews started repair work on the rail tracks. Seymour sent out a scouting team further on, which returned saying that more sections of the railroad at An Ting had also been destroyed. Seymour then sent a train back to Tianjin to get more supplies, but the train soon returned, its crew saying that the rail track at Yangcun was now destroyed. Having to fight off a number of Boxer attacks, his provisions running low, realizing the futility of continuing to Beijing, and now feeling trapped on both sides, Seymour called off the expedition and turned the trains back, intending to return to Tianjin.

Elsewhere at this point, the Boxer crisis deteriorated even further. On June 15, 1900, at the Yellow Sea where Alliance ships were on high alert, and were awaiting further developments, allied naval commanders became alarmed when Qing forces began fortifying the Taku Forts at the mouth of the Peihao River, as well as setting mines on the river and torpedo tubes at the forts. For Alliance commanders, these actions threatened to cut off allied communication and supply lines to Tianjin, threatening the foreign enclave at Tianjin and Legation Quarter at Beijing, as well as Seymour’s force. The foreign alliance had had no communication with the Seymour force for several days. Alliance commanders then issued an ultimatum demanding that the Taku Forts be surrendered to them, which the Qing naval command rejected. Early on June 17, 1900, fighting broke out at the Taku Forts, with Alliance forces (except the U.S. command, which chose not to participate) launching a naval and ground assault that seized control of the forts.

**War** For the Chinese government, the Allied attack on the Taku Forts constituted an act of war. The Qing then turned its position invariably on the side of the Boxers. Up to this point, the Qing court was unsure about its position regarding the Boxers, and Empress Dowager Cixi vacillated between the two opposing factions in her court: the ultra-conservatives who were pro-Boxer, and the reformists who were pro-foreigner. The dilemma faced by the Qing government was that despite the Boxers’ professed loyalty to the monarchy, they still could pose a threat to the monarchy, as all secret societies in the past had. But if indeed the Boxers were loyal, the Qing court could use their hatred of foreigners to rid China of foreign influences. After the allied action on the Taku Forts, Empress Dowager Cixi took a firm stand in support of the Boxers, and ordered her armies to resist the foreigners.
On June 18, 1900, one day after the attack on the Taku Forts, German soldiers at Langfang were attacked by the anti-foreign Chinese Rear Army, more commonly known as “Gansu Braves”, which was composed of Chinese Muslims. This attack by Chinese regular troops further convinced Seymour to call off his advance to Beijing (Seymour had launched his expedition on the belief that he would face only Boxers). Then finding that more sections of the rail tracks had been destroyed at Yangcun, Seymour’s force abandoned the trains there and proceeded to move by foot toward Tianjin. At the Peiho River, they seized a number of Chinese river junks, which they used to carry their wounded men, supplies, and heavy weapons. In the next several days, Seymour and his men faced numerous Boxer attacks, and also soon became low on food and ammunitions. On June 23, they fortuitously came upon the weakly defended Xigu fort located six miles from Tianjin, which they seized and then took refuge in. Subsequently, they were rescued on June 25, 1900 by an Alliance relief force sent from Tianjin.

Meanwhile in Beijing, the situation facing the foreigners and Chinese Christians in the Legation Quarter worsened. On June 19, 1900, the Qing government ordered the foreigners to leave Beijing within 24 hours under the protection of Chinese troops. Most of the foreign envoys were ready to comply, but they requested an audience with the Zongli Yamen for 9 AM the next day (June 20). When the proposed appointment passed with no reply from the Chinese, the German Minister Ketteler, who had opposed the Chinese ultimatum to leave Beijing, decided to go to the Zongli Yamen to confront the Chinese officials. Ketteler ignored the warnings of the other foreign envoys not to do so. On his way there, Ketteler was shot and killed by a Chinese officer. The other foreign envoys then convened and decided to defy the Qing ultimatum and remain at the Legation Quarter. They now distrusted the Qing government, and believed that their lives would be in danger if they left the Legation Quarter.

The next day, June 21, 1900, the Qing court issued a series of decrees which the foreign powers saw as a declaration of war against them. In particular, the foreign powers were rankled by certain hostile statements in the Qing decrees, including the lines, “We should fight this war in a big way… In province adjacent to Peking and Shandong, hundreds of thousands of Boxers have gathered on [their] free will, even…boys would take up weapons to safeguard the homeland. …it is not difficult to put out the
foreigners’ fierce fire, to showcase the might of our nation. The royal court will generously reward those who fight bravely on the front line, [and] will also reward those who donate money in preparation of the war. The royal court will immediately execute traitors who escape from the battlefield or anyone who collaborates with the enemy”

As a result, a state of war existed, as Qing and Boxer forces laid siege to the Legation Quarter. In theory, the 400 foreign troops defending the legations did not stand a chance. They faced thousands of Boxers, but their greater threat was the tens of thousands of Chinese regular forces at the capital, which included five “armies” (of division strength) of the Chinese Army and three divisions of Manchu Bannermen. On June 19, 1900, the Qing court formally incorporated the Boxers as an auxiliary force of the Chinese Army.

Initially, the Chinese tried to burn out the foreigners, starting fires north and west of the British Legation. This strategy failed, but the Hanlin Academy and its thousands of priceless ancient manuscripts and artifacts were destroyed by fire. Chinese forces then built protective barricades, which they expanded gradually closer to the foreign legations. At the Fu palace, where the Chinese Christians were sheltered, Japanese and Italian soldiers blunted these Chinese attempts at constriction. Fighting also took place at the French Legation, which was defended by French and Austro-Hungarian forces. At the Tartar Wall, a 45-foot tall, 45-foot wide rampart located south of the Legation Quarter, the Germans and Americans faced artillery and small-arms fire (including firecrackers which the Chinese regularly used in battle) from Chinese forces. On June 30, 1900, Chinese forces dislodged the Germans from the Wall, and also threatened the American positions. Alliance forces counterattacked three days later and expelled the Chinese from the Tartar Wall.

As a result of the foreign legations in Beijing losing all communication with the outside world, the Alliance governments became alarmed. Many rumors spread emanating from Beijing indicating that the foreigners had been massacred. In early July 1900, Britain warned the Qing court that “all authorities at Peking…will be held responsible…for any act of violence against the Legations”. In the days that followed, more warnings were issued by the other Alliance governments.

On June 25, 1900, a ceasefire was declared, but it failed to hold as fighting continued. As a result of increased foreign pressure, on July 3, 1900, the Qing court tried to appease the Alliance governments, particularly stressing the importance that trade with China brought to the Alliance countries. The Qing court also extended an apology to Germany for the murder of Ketteler, and promised to bring the perpetrator(s) to justice.

From the start, China’s position in the war was weak. The Qing’s “declaration of war” failed to gain the support of the general population. In large parts of the country and particularly in the south, opposition to the “foreign” Qing court persisted (the Qing dynasty was ruled by the Manchu, an ethnic minority, while China was predominated by the Han, which comprised more than 90% of the population). Regional governors in the cities and provinces, e.g. Yuan Shikai in Shandong, Zhang Zhidong in Wuhan, Li Hongzhang in Canton, and Liu Kunyin Nanjing, did not heed the government’s call to take up arms, but signed separate treaties with the foreign powers.

Furthermore, even the Qing leadership continued to be divided by the war, despite Empress Dowager Cixi’s decision to support the Boxers. In particular, General Ronglu, commander-in-chief of all Chinese forces, opposed the war, believing that China was incapable of taking any of the greater foreign powers head-on in a one-on-one war, let alone fighting the Alliance forces simultaneously (which he believed was equivalent to China bringing on its own defeat).
Ronglu took steps to prevent the destruction of the foreign legations. For instance, he sent only old artillery pieces to Chinese troops that were besieging the foreign legation. He also ordered other Chinese army units to attack the Boxers. As a result, the fighting in Beijing involved Chinese forces doing battle with each other, with anti-Boxer government units fighting the Boxers and the anti-foreign Gansu Braves (Chinese Rear Army). Ronglu and other pro-foreign Chinese officials also secretly sent food and supplies to the foreigners. Ronglu also tried to force a number of ceasefires, although these failed.

Meanwhile, the Chinese barricades gradually moved closer to the foreign legations. By July 13, 1900, the Fu verged on collapse, and its Japanese and Italian defenders were clinging to their last defensive lines. The French Legation was also threatened after two powerful mines were detonated by Chinese sappers who had dug an underground tunnel to the building. By then also, some 40% of legation troops were casualties: of the 400 foreign soldiers, 55 were killed and 135 were wounded. Foreign civilian casualties during the siege were 13 killed and 24 wounded, while the number of casualties among Chinese Christians is unknown.

On July 14, 1900, the Qing court announced to the foreign legations that it wanted to end the fighting. The foreign envoys replied favorably, and on July 17, a ceasefire came into effect. The Qing’s decision to a ceasefire probably came about because by this time, the Alliance powers had begun their counter-attack in northern China.

The Alliance counter-offensive consisted of first capturing Tianjin to rescue the foreign community there, and then launching an expedition to Beijing to relieve the foreign legations. The offensive on Tianjin became possible after Alliance forces captured the Taku Forts on June 17, 1900.

In early June 1900 with the Boxer crisis escalating, the 700 foreign nationals in Tianjin, who occupied a settlement near the treaty port, asked their governments for military protection. An international force of 2,400 troops arrived to protect the foreigners, as well as the port, Tianjin railway station, and other infrastructures. About two miles to the northwest of the foreign settlement was the ancient walled city of Tianjin, where the Chinese general population resided.

On June 13, 1900, Boxers attacked the Tianjin railway station, but were repelled by Russian troops. Two days later, the Boxers attacked again, this time the Chinese section of Tianjin, and rampaged across the city, killing Chinese Christians, destroying churches and Christian houses, and looting Christian properties. At this time, Qing government forces, yet awaiting orders from Beijing, did not actively stop the Boxers. On June 16, the Boxers advanced to the foreign concessions and were met with fierce artillery and small arms fire from the foreign troops. Although suffering heavy losses, the Boxers succeeded in laying siege to the foreign settlement. The Boxers cut communication and supply lines to Taku and Beijing, effectively isolating the foreign community in Tianjin.

After Alliance forces attacked the Taku forts, the Chinese Army at Tianjin now joined the Boxers against the foreigners, and on June 17, opened an artillery barrage on the foreign settlement. Boxers launched human wave attacks. The French section in Tianjin was destroyed, but a Boxer attack on the railway station was repulsed by the Russians. Chinese artillery continued to bombard the foreign settlements, firing some 60,000 shells during the siege, but this did not cause substantial damage, as the Chinese used locally made artillery shells which were substandard and defective. The greatest danger to the foreign settlement was an all-out offensive by the Chinese Army. Through couriers, the foreigners in Tianjin made contact with the foreign navies at Taku requesting more troops to be sent to Tianjin.

On June 21, 1900, a 500-man contingent of American and Russian troops was dispatched for Tianjin, but was ambushed by Chinese forces and forced to retreat. Two days later, a larger force of 5,000
foreign troops succeeded in reaching Tianjin. The troops expelled the Boxers and relieved the foreign settlements, ending the siege. On June 26, 1900, an Alliance force from Tianjin set out and rescued Seymour’s force which had taken refuge at Xigu fort, six miles from Tianjin.

In the following days, the Eight-Nation Alliance consolidated its position in the Tianjin foreign settlement and treaty port. By early July 1900, the Alliance had some 10,000 troops in Tianjin and another 10,000 in Taku. Also, railway, communication, and supply lines to the coast were fully restored.

By the second week of July 1900, Alliance commanders were ready to launch a counter-attack on the Chinese forces in the walled city of Tianjin. On July 13, some 6,900 Alliance troops (2,500 Russians, 2,000 Japanese, 900 Americans, 800 British, 600 French, and 100 Germans and Austro-Hungarians) attacked Tianjin, which was defended by 12,000 Chinese troops. The Allied advance, made across swamps and open terrain, was slowed by fierce artillery and small-arms fire from the Chinese defenders. Alliance forces suffered heavy losses. However, the Japanese succeeded in reaching the South Gate. On July 14, Japanese sappers breached the gate using explosives, allowing other Alliance troops to enter the city. At the East gate, Russian and German troops broke through, and also entered Tianjin, which earlier had been evacuated by the Chinese Army and Boxers. Alliance troops then went on a rampage, killing suspected enemies, raping women, and looting houses. The battle for Tianjin was the bloodiest of the war. Alliance forces suffered 250 killed and 500 wounded, and Chinese casualties totaled perhaps several thousands dead and wounded.

Alliance commanders then prepared to advance to Beijing. The consensus was that 50,000-70,000 Alliance troops, which was not yet available at the time, was needed for a successful campaign, mainly because the Chinese had put up strong resistance (until then, Allied commanders had a low opinion of the Chinese Army). The Russian and French commanders also opposed an immediate offensive on Beijing, saying that the intense summer heat would cause sunstroke and heat exhaustion among their troops; they proposed to launch the offensive in the fall. However, British and American commanders wanted immediate action, and threatened to proceed on their own without the others. In the end, the opposing side relented, and the Alliance commanders prepared for the offensive on Beijing.

At this time, Alliance commanders were uncertain about the true situation in Beijing, as the foreign legations there remained cut off, and rumors of all sorts floated around. The Alliance commanders also feared that their countrymen, if not already massacred, likely faced grave danger because of the recent allied victories in Taku and Tianjin. Furthermore, an Alliance attack on Beijing could only worsen the situation for the foreign legations.

The first solid information regarding the situation of the Beijing foreign legations came on July 20, 1900 (one month after the start of the siege), when the U.S. State Department (in the United States) received a ciphered telegram from Edwin Conger, the U.S. envoy in Beijing, in response to the U.S. government’s request for information through the Chinese envoy in Washington, D.C. Conger’s message stated, “For one month, we have been besieged in (the) British legation under continued shot and shell from Chinese troops. Quick relief only can prevent general massacre”. The U.S. government sent a copy of the telegram to its European allies, but the latter were skeptical about the telegram’s authenticity.

Then on July 21, 1900, Alliance commanders in Tianjin received a note from Claude MacDonald, the British envoy in Beijing, through a messenger who had managed to escape from the capital. The note stated that the foreigners in Beijing were still alive. Alliance commanders then hastened to launch the expedition, but they continued to be concerned that their attack on Beijing could provoke the Chinese to finish off the foreigners at the capital.
Finally, on August 4, 1900, an Eight-Nation Alliance force of 20,000 troops (10,000 Japanese, 4,000 Russians, 3,000 British, 2,000 Americans, 500 French, 200 Germans, and 100 Italians and Austro-Hungarians) left Tianjin for Beijing. This force was led by British General Alfred Gaselee, acting in temporary capacity for German General Alfred von Waldersee. General Waldersee, head of a larger German contingent, was yet enroute by ship from Germany to China. Opposing the Gaselee force were Chinese forces which had set up defensive positions at Beicang, located six miles from Tianjin, and at Yangcun, a further 12 miles away.

On August 5, 1900, Alliance forces came upon the Chinese at Beicang, who were encamped on both sides of the Peiho River. Using a pincers movement to attack the 10,000-strong Chinese Army, Alliance forces broke through the enemy’s right flank, with an assault by the Japanese taking the Chinese by surprise. Their lines threatened, the Chinese conducted an orderly retreat, and Chinese rearguard actions blunted allied attempts to pursue.

The following day, August 6, 1900, Alliance forces attacked the Chinese at Yangcun, with American and British troops leading the charge. By late afternoon, the Chinese retreated in disarray, with heavy casualties. Both sides suffered from the extreme heat, with units using up all their water sources and some soldiers dying from heat exhaustion. As well, the Americans suffered casualties from friendly fire, caused by Russian or British artillery batteries that accidentally fired on U.S. troops who had made a rapid advance on enemy positions.

Gaselee then turned the Alliance forces along the Peiho River, choosing this route to Beijing instead of the railway line (which the failed Seymour expedition had taken), which he believed was most likely already destroyed by the enemy. Alliance commanders also concluded that the Peiho River was much more defensible, as Alliance gunboats controlled the waterway. The Alliance force advanced practically unopposed and wreaked havoc on villages and settlements along the way, killing suspected Boxer fighters or sympathizers and even innocent civilians, and looting and destroying houses and properties.

The Chinese tried to oppose the advance, sending tens of thousands of troops and four new divisions. But these Chinese units, comprising new recruits with no battle experience, quickly broke apart and fled when the Alliance forces approached. Only the intense heat posed the greatest difficulty for the allied force, as temperatures topped 38° Celsius (100° Fahrenheit). In August 2, 1900, the Alliance forces reached Tungchow, 12 miles east of Beijing, where they prepared for a swift assault on the capital. But to accommodate the Russian commander who wanted to rest his exhausted troops, the Alliance reached a consensus to instead send out reconnaissance patrols to Beijing the following day to better prepare for the offensive.

The allied attack on Beijing’s walled outer city was launched in the early morning of August 14, 1900, with each of four national contingents tasked to take a separate section of the wall: the Russians at Tung Chih gate, the Japanese at the Chi Hua gate, the Americans at the Tung Pein gate, and the British at the Sha Wo gate. At stake was the honor of relieving the foreign legations first, and thus the offensive became a race over which contingent would be the first to reach and free the Legation Quarter. The Russians and Japanese were stalled at their assigned gates because of strong Chinese resistance. The Americans also failed to start their attack at their assigned gate, as Russian troops had also launched an attack from there, in violation of the allied agreement. As a result, the Americans moved a little distance away from the Russians, and then climbed up the 30-foot wall and descended to the other side. In the end, the British won the race to the Legation Quarter, as they met only light resistance at their assigned gate, and passed through an underground drainage canal to reach the foreign legations. The Americans soon also arrived, followed by the Russians and Japanese later in the evening. The 55-day siege of the Legation Quarter was over.
The timely arrival of the Alliance forces may very well have saved their embattled compatriots, as the Legation Quarter’s defenses were by then falling apart, with the French Legation and the Fu nearly overwhelmed. Casualties among legation guards reached 40%. Furthermore, on August 13, one day before the Alliance offensive, Chinese artillery batteries resumed firing on the Legation Quarter, ending the month-long ceasefire. The bombardment by the Chinese artillery intensified as the day progressed. Chinese forces also launched ground attacks, directed particularly at the British Legation.

Food supplies at the legations also had dropped critically low, and the Chinese Christians were verging on starvation, and subsisting on tree bark, plant seeds, and occasionally captured stray cats or dogs. Much of the remaining provisions at the legations, as well as some foraged food such as horse meat, were reserved for the foreigners, who remained somewhat in better health than the locals. Diseases were rampant, and this, the danger of an outbreak of an epidemic, and mounting casualties, kept busy the small medical team at the foreign legations.

On August 16, 1900, the siege of the North Cathedral (Beitang) was lifted. Japanese troops first entered the church compound, followed by the French. The latter formally received the honor of having rescued the embattled foreigners and Chinese Christians inside the cathedral.

On August 1, 1900, one day after the allies arrived in Beijing, U.S. forces, in response to sniper gunfire being directed at the foreign legations, used artillery fire to break down the walls and gates leading to the Inner City, and the Imperial and Forbidden Cities. Alliance forces then entered the Imperial City. A few hours earlier, Empress Dowager Cixi, dressed in peasant clothes, and a small retinue of her Qing court, slipped away undetected in wooden ox carts from Beijing. Officially, she had announced that her departure was not an admission of defeat, but a “tour of inspection in the west”. After weeks of travel, Empress Dowager Cixi arrived in Xian, Shaanxi Province. Xian was located 1,000 miles from Beijing through mountainous terrain, which had pursuit by Alliance forces virtually impossible. Shaanxi Province was also the homeland of the fiercely anti-foreign Muslim Gansu Braves (the Chinese Rear Army).

On August 16, 1900, the Alliance divided Beijing into separate zones of occupation among the six major powers, one each for Britain, France, Russia, Japan, the United States, and Germany. Twelve days later, August 28, in a show of force, the Alliance partners paraded their troops through the Forbidden City (the Chinese imperial palace), much to the consternation of the remaining Qing officials and Beijing residents. Nonetheless, allied commanders promised not to occupy the Forbidden City, but threatened to destroy it if their entry was resisted.

Earlier on August 17, the Alliance decided that because of continued resistance in other areas around Beijing, Tianjin, and surrounding provinces, and the threat to other foreigners, punitive operations would be conducted to fully eliminate the Boxers. After the Alliance captured Beijing, most of the Boxer bands had returned to their homes in the countryside after bolting or being dispersed from the fighting.

The foreign powers imposed martial law and curfew in Beijing, and banned public mass assemblies. The Alliance’s partition of Beijing into occupation zones and declaration to launch punitive operations, together with the breakdown of Qing authority in northern China, became tacit license for the foreign armies to go on a rampage in Beijing. For several weeks, allied soldiers, foreign civilians, envoys, and even missionaries and clergy, engaged in widespread looting, which was described in the international press as a “carnival of loot”, and “the great Christian nations...[were] being represented in China by robbing, rapine, [and] looting soldiers”. Some of the looters became wealthy by selling the stolen items, a U.S. diplomat carted away several trainloads filled with loot, and the clergy justified their actions by saying that the sale of the looted items would be used to care for the hundreds of Chinese Christian refugees affected by the conflict.
Alliance soldiers also perpetrated widespread atrocities on the civilian population in relation to the lootings or merely out of contempt for the Chinese people, which resulted in hundreds of incidents of murders, rapes, and destruction of houses and properties. Troops of all Alliance nations participated in the violence, and the Russian and Japanese soldiers were particularly notorious.

Believing that the Boxers continued to pose a serious security threat, the Alliance armies launched punitive operations in the rural areas of Zhili, Shandong, and other provinces. Most of these operations were led by German General Waldersee, who arrived in October 1900, together with a large German contingent. In October 1900-April 1901, 46 such expeditions were made, with 35 by the Germans. In Zhili Province, Alliance operations totaled 76, with 51 being led by Germans. These operations brought widespread death and destruction, with thousands of civilians killed, women raped, and properties looted, and houses destroyed. General Gaselee, who had led the final offensive on Beijing, described these operations in the capital and surrounding countryside, thus, “The condition in and about the city…was bad. Looting of the city, uncontrolled foraging in surrounding country, and seizure by soldiers of everything a Chinaman might have, as vegetables, eggs, chickens, sheep, cattle, etc… indiscriminate and generally unprovoked shooting of Chinese… It is safe to say that where one real Boxer has been killed since the capture of Peking, fifty harmless coolies and laborers… including not a few women and children have been slain”. As well, the Eight-Nation Alliance co-opted anti-Boxer Chinese commanders to participate in suppressing the Boxers. Yuan Shikai, the Chinese Army general, led anti-Boxer expeditions in Zhili and Shandong, where his soldiers killed thousands of civilians.

Meanwhile, the Alliance and Qing government (still in Xian) began to open channels of communication to end the impasse. In December 1900, the first series of peace talks between the two sides began. Many Qing officials wanted to continue the war, saying that China’s large territorial size would make foreign conquest and occupation of the whole country virtually impossible. But Empress Dowager Cixi was enticed by the Alliance’s promise that her government would not be forced to cede more territory, and that she would continue to rule over China.

On September 7, 1901, the Eight-Nation Alliance, together with Belgium, Spain, and the Netherlands, and the Qing government signed a peace treaty called the Boxer Protocol, which officially ended the conflict. Among the treaty’s provisions were that China would pay war reparations to the foreign powers over a 35-year period; that ten high-ranking officials would be executed and hundreds of others would be punished with exile or imprisonment; that China was barred from importing weapons, ammunition, and materials to manufacture armaments for a period of two years, subject to a two-year extension; that anti-foreign organizations would be outlawed; that the civil service examinations would be suspended for five years in areas where foreigners were massacred or subject to atrocities; and that China would extend a formal apology to German and Japan for the murders of their envoys, and a memorial arch would be built by the Chinese government on the spot where the German diplomat was killed.

The Qing government, while complying with most of its obligations in the treaty, refused to acquiesce to some impositions, for instance, two high-ranking anti-foreign officials, Prince Zaiyi and General Dong Fuxiang (commander of the Gansu Bravies), were sent into internal exile and not executed, as demanded by the Alliance.

**Manchuria** During the Boxer Rebellion, fighting also occurred in Manchuria, which was under the legal sovereignty of China but was increasingly coming under Russia’s influence. To counter the rising Boxer presence at the start of the Boxer War, Russia sent 100,000 troops to Manchuria to protect its citizens there, as well as its railways, industries, bridges, and communication lines, which were being targeted by the Boxers. Russian forces subsequently not only suppressed the Boxers, but also defeated
the Chinese regular forces in Manchuria, bringing the entire region under Russian control by September 1900. Russian expansionism in Manchuria would soon lead to conflict with Japan, which also was eyeing territorial and economic interests in northern China. This would lead to the Russo-Japanese War in 1904-1905 (previous article).

Shortly after the Boxer Protocol was signed, Alliance forces withdrew from Beijing, leaving a small contingent of foreign troops to guard the various diplomatic legations. In January 1902, Empress Dowager Cixi and her court returned to Beijing, and the Qing government formally returned to power.

**Aftermath** The Boxer War had major consequences both for the Alliance powers, and much more so, for the Qing court. For the Western foreign powers, the period of imposing territorial and economic concessions on China ended, and they saw that allying with the Qing, as well as helping the Chinese government rein in internal unrest, was necessary to protect their own economic interests in China. In the ensuing period, most Alliance powers moved away from confrontation and direct interference in China’s internal affairs. Meanwhile, Japan rose to ascendancy in East Asia, and came into direct conflict with expansionist-rival Russia, leading the two powers to war in 1904-1905. Japan also increasingly encroached into China, before, during, and after World War I, when European powers and the United States were deeply engaged in the war in Europe.

For the Qing monarchy, the Boxer War was a military disaster, as its efforts to modernize its armed forces were exposed as a failure. But the Qing court remained in power, and it had kept China from being dismembered, which had appeared imminent before the war. The Qing government even gained guarantees from the various colony-seeking imperialist foreign powers that they would respect China’s political and territorial integrity.

Following the war, in 1901, Empress Dowager Cixi implemented the “New Policies”, a series of major reforms in government structure, taxation and finance, judiciary, police and military, education, and other sectors, mostly based on the Japanese model. Chinese educational institutions adopted Western-style teaching methods, the imperial civil service examinations were abolished, the police and military were modernized and military academies were set up in many provinces, etc. In 1908, the Qing court also moved to adopt Japan’s Meiji-style constitutional monarchy, which included elections to the legislative bodies at the local, provincial, and national levels. However, this plan was aborted by the death of Empress Dowager Cixi (as well as that of the Guangxu Emperor) in November 1908, and conservative Manchu elements overturned the New Policies reforms. By then also, regional and provincial military governors had formed powerful local armies which, in the next decade, would usher in warlordism, where various rival military governors (called warlords), would engage in a power struggle over supremacy over northern and central China.

Ultimately, the greatest threat to the Qing monarchy emerged from southern China, long hostile to Manchu rule, where in 1911, a revolution led by republican nationalists, overthrew the Qing monarchy and ended 2,000 years of dynastic rule (next article).
**Background** By the early 20th century, the Qing dynasty of China was floundering. It had ruled China for over 2½ centuries (since 1644), but several unsuccessful wars against European powers and Japan not only destroyed its reputation as a great military nation, but the victors imposed onerous territorial, economic, and social demands on China. By forcing what were called “unequal treaties”, the foreign powers forced China to cede territory, pay war reparations, open ports to trade (China had an isolationist foreign policy), and grant foreigners in China immunity from Chinese laws (extraterritoriality).

By the early 1900s, China appeared on the brink of being partitioned, as Britain, France, Germany, Russia, and Japan established spheres of influence in Chinese territories (Figure 25), in regions which they controlled and imposed their own laws, and police and military forces. Then in 1901, following the Boxer Rebellion (previous article), the Qing imperial court was allowed to return to power, but was required to pay war reparations to the victorious Eight-Nation Alliance (Britain, France, Germany, Russia, United States, Japan, Italy, and Austria-Hungary). China’s military impotence was manifested glaringly in the 1904-1905 Russo-Japanese War (separate article), where Russia and Japan fought for control of Manchuria (China’s northeastern territory), with the powerless Chinese forces taking no part in the conflict.

Furthermore, in the 19th century, China’s long period of internal peace under the Qing government ended. Many local and regional uprisings broke out: among these were the various Muslim rebellions (1856-1896) and Nian Rebellion (1861-1868), and the calamitous Taiping Rebellion, where 30 million people perished.

Then in the 1890s, a new anti-Qing movement emerged in the south. Influenced by Western ideas of nationalism, democracy, and republicanism that were creeping into China, its adherents advocated the overthrow of the Qing dynasty through revolution, the end of the monarchy, and the formation of a democratic republic for China. This nationalist movement was led by the ethnic majority Han (which comprise 90% of the Chinese population), who regarded the ruling Qing as “foreigners/barbarians”, since the ruling court was composed of ethnic Manchu, a demographically small ethnic people from China’s far north.

This nationalist movement and its anti-Qing sentiment grew as China’s military position weakened, and because of the Qing’s failure to implement badly needed reforms to solve China’s many problems. Emerging as the most prominent among many groups in the nationalist movement was the Tongmenghui (United League), formed in 1905 and led by a Western-trained physician, Sun Yat-sen, who campaigned abroad, including in the United States, Europe, Japan, and Southeast Asia, to raise funds and gain diplomatic support for his organization. The nationalist movement comprised predominantly Western-influenced activists, such as young educated elite who had studied overseas, as well as businessmen and gentry, and even reformist ex-Qing officials who were forced into exile abroad.
In the first decade of the 20th century, many localized uprisings in the provinces were breaking out, many initiated by different militant groups, including Sun’s Tongmenhui (nine revolts occurred in 1907-1908). Qing forces violently quelled these uprisings. Then in May 1911, the Qing government nationalized private railway projects in order to sell them to foreign investors, and then use the proceeds to pay down China’s war reparations from the Boxer War, particularly to Britain, Germany, France, and the United States. The order to nationalize the railways was resisted fiercely in central and southern China by local businessmen who had invested heavily in the railway projects. They would lose their investments if the railways were nationalized. The government had promised them some compensation, but only an amount that was less than their original investments.

In Sichuan Province, local railway investors, who comprised wealthy businessmen and high-ranking provincial officials, organized the Railway Protection Movement to oppose railway nationalization. In August 1911, they launched protest actions in Chengdu, the provincial capital, which were attended by thousands of their supporters. In September 1911, the Qing national government arrested the leaders of the Railway Protection Movement and closed down the organization, which sparked even larger demonstrations. Violence then broke out, when government troops opened fire on a crowd of demonstrators, killing dozens of people. Local revolutionary militias took advantage of the disturbance to launch attacks on government forces. In response, the Qing government transferred units of the New Army (as Chinese provincial military commands were called) from Hubei Province to Sichuan, which now appeared on the brink of a full-scale rebellion, with many armed groups comprising tens of thousands of fighters putting enormous pressure on local government forces.

**Xinhai Revolution** However, the Hubei New Army command was infiltrated by revolutionary elements, and many of its soldiers had joined local clandestine insurgent groups. Since early 1911, these rebel soldiers had been preparing to launch an uprising in Hubei. Encouraged by the escalating turmoil in nearby Sichuan, the Hubei revolutionaries hastened to launch their uprising. On October 9, 1911, one of the mutinous soldiers accidentally set off an explosive at a weapons stockpile in a Hankou building near Wuhan, the provincial capital. Qing authorities investigating the incident soon learned of the revolutionary plot and the identities of the rebel soldiers. Preempting their arrest, these soldiers launched their rebellion on the evening of November 10, 1911 in Wuchang, located southeast of Wuhan.

By the morning of October 11, the revolutionaries had defeated Hubei provincial forces, expelled local administrators, and seized control of Wuhan. They then declared the province’s independence and secession from the Qing government. This incident, called the Wuchang Uprising, catalyzed revolutionary fervor across much of China – in 6 weeks, 22 local rebellions broke out, and 14 of the 18 provinces seceded from the Qing government. Many of these uprisings involved local groups under Sun’s Tongmenhui, which worked together with mutinous New Army units and other revolutionary groups, as well as with defecting Qing officials.

In large part, the Xinhai Revolution (so-called because it occurred on the year Xinhai (the Chinese calendar year equivalent to 1911) succeeded because of the Qing government’s difficulty to suppress the original revolt in Wuchang. On October 18, 1911, or one week after the start of the Wuchang uprising, the Qing court sent the powerful loyalist Beiyang Army to Hubei. In the ensuing 41-day Battle of Yangxia, the loyalist forces dealt the revolutionaries two decisive defeats at Hankou and Hanyang. But the lengthy battle allowed other provinces to launch their uprisings and secede from the Qing government. When the fighting in Hubei Province ended in early December 1911, central and southern China had seceded (Figure 29). In these regions, revolutionary groups took over the local governments, and also pledged allegiance to Sun’s Tongmenhui. Only parts of northern China, including Manchuria and the regions
around Beijing, remained under Qing control. Mongolia and Tibet, vassal states of the Qing court, also proclaimed independence, but not allegiance to the Tongmenhui.

In December 1911, General Yuan Shikai, the Beiyang Army commander, announced a ceasefire and did not attack the rebels at Wuchang. Yuan, who would play a major role in the immediate post-revolutionary period, had agreed to lead the loyalist forces after repeated requests by the Qing court for him to return to Beijing and take the position of Prime Minister. Now, however, the politically ambitious Yuan was determined to let the recent events play into his hands.

Meanwhile, in late November 1911, nationalist representatives from the revolutionary councils from 11 provinces met to decide the formation of a provisional government for a new state, which was agreed to be a democratic republic. On December 2, with their capture of Nanjing, the revolutionaries agreed to make Nanjing the new republic’s capital. On December 25, 1911, Sun Yat-sen returned to China from the United States, where he had been raising funds for the Tongmenhui. He had played no direct part in the revolution, although his organization was instrumental in the revolutionary triumphs in many provinces.

Figure 28. The Xinhai Revolution ended 2,000 years of dynastic rule in China.

On December 29, 1911 in Nanjing, delegates from the seceding provinces convened and elected Sun as provisional president of the new republic. On January 1, 1912, Sun proclaimed the founding of the Republic of China.

At this point, two rival governments existed, one in Beijing and the other in Nanjing. In Beijing, earlier on November 3, 1911, the now powerless Qing court issued the “Nineteen Articles”, where it
turned itself from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy. Power effectively passed to Yuan Shikai, who as Prime Minister, became the head of government. Yuan then formed a Cabinet comprising ethnic Han, giving him a stranglehold in all government functions.

![Map of China](image)

**Figure 29.** Nationalist-controlled areas (shaded) in the wake of the Xinhai Revolution.

The threat of a civil war now loomed between the Beijing and Nanjing regimes. On December 18, 1911, mediators from the two sides met in Shanghai to negotiate. Sun was fully aware that the Beiyang Army was the most powerful military force in China, and that a civil war most likely would end in his own defeat. Thus, he was ready to cede political power for the survival of the nationalist government. In January 1912, the North-South Conference reached a compromise: Sun would resign as provisional president in favor of Yuan, who would succeed his post, in exchange for Yuan forcing the abdication of the child-Emperor Puyi (and thus ending the Qing monarchy).

Yuan then exerted pressure on Empress Dowager Longyu, the *de facto* regent of six-year old Puyi, to sign the abdication papers, warning her that the Qing court would not be spared if the southern revolutionaries invaded Beijing. In early February 1912, Empress Dowager Longyu consented, and on February 12, signed the “Imperial Edict of the Abdication of the Qing Emperor”, which ended both the Qing dynasty and 2,000 years of dynastic rule in China. The agreement granted the Qing court certain privileges: Puyi kept his imperial title and was to be treated by the republic with the honors of a foreign monarch; the imperial court was to retain its residences at the Forbidden City and Summer Palace; and the republican government would provide the emperor with an annual subsidy.
On January 22, 1912, Sun announced his willingness to cede the presidency to Yuan. On February 14, 1912, the provisional Senate elected Yuan as the second provisional president of the republic; he was sworn into office on March 10. The following day, March 11, a provisional constitution was ratified.

Yuan Shikai in Power From the outset, tensions existed between the pro-Sun groups, led by the Tongmenhui, and President Yuan and his supporters. To counter Yuan’s power base which was in the north, on February 14, 1912, the provisional Senate voted to make Nanjing the capital of the republic. However, two weeks later, mutinous Beiyang Army units rioted in Beijing. Yuan, who most likely masterminded the disturbance, announced that he would remain in Beijing to guard against future unrest. The provisional Senate thus reconvened, and in another vote taken in April 1912, named Beijing as the capital of the republic.

President Yuan soon gained full control of government, and appeared intent on extending his powers. To counter Yuan and also prepare for the upcoming parliamentary elections, in August 1912, Sun’s supporters formed the Kuomintang (KMT, English: Chinese Nationalist Party), merging the Tongmenhui and five smaller organizations. In National Assembly elections held in December 1912-January 1913, the KMT won a decisive victory, taking the most number of seats in both legislative houses over its rivals, including the pro-Yuan Republican Party.

Song Jiaoren, a leading KMT politician who had campaigned strongly against Yuan and had vowed to reduce Yuan’s powers through legislation, appeared headed to become Prime Minister, and thus would form a new Cabinet. But in March 1913, he was assassinated, perhaps under Yuan’s orders. When the newly elected National Assembly convened, the KMT-dominated legislature moved to enact measures to curb Yuan’s powers, and prepared to formulate a permanent constitution and hold national elections for the presidency. Yuan now moved to destroy the political opposition, while his opponents in the south grew more militant – as a result, China began to fracture politically.

In July 1913, many southern provinces rose up in rebellion (sometimes called Sun Yat-sen’s “Second Revolution”), this time against Yuan. The Beiyang government (as the government in Beijing was called during the period 1912-1927) was militarily prepared, as Yuan had recently received a foreign loan which he used to build up his Beiyang Army. In September 1913, Yuan’s forces crushed the rebellion, and captured the insurgent strongholds in Nanchang and Nanjing, and forced Sun and other KMT leaders to flee into exile abroad.

In October 1913, the now intimidated National Assembly elected Yuan as president of the republic for a five-year term. Yuan proceeded to break up all political opposition, first removing, coercing, or bribing KMT provincial officials. Then in November 1913, he dissolved the KMT and expelled KMT legislators from the National Assembly. As these expulsions caused the legislature to fail to reach a quorum to reconvene, in January 1914, Yuan dissolved the National Assembly altogether. In its place, Yuan formed a quasi-legislative body of 66 of his supporters, who drew up and passed a “constitutional compact”, a new charter which replaced the 1912 provisional constitution, and which gave Yuan unlimited powers in political, military, foreign affairs, and financial policy decisions. In December 1914, Yuan’s presidential tenure was extended to ten years, with no terms limits – Yuan now ruled as a dictator.

Then in late 1915, Yuan made plans to return the country to a monarchy. He reasoned that the 1911 Revolution that had toppled the Qing dynasty, and the ensuing republican government, were divisive, transitory phases, and that only a monarchy could restore order and unity to the nation. In November 1915, a “Representative Assembly” was formed to study the matter, which subsequently issued many
petitions to Yuan to become emperor. After pretending to refuse these petitions, on December 12, 1915, Yuan accepted, and named himself “Emperor of the Chinese Empire”. Yuan’s reign, as well as the country’s return to a monarchy as the “Empire of China”, was set to commence officially on January 1, 1916, when Yuan would perform the accession rites.

Widespread protests broke out across much of China. Having experienced great repression under the Qing dynasty, the Chinese people vehemently opposed the return to a monarchy. On December 25, 1915, the military governor of Yunnan Province declared his province’s secession from the Beiyang government, and prepared for war. In rapid order, other provinces also seceded, including Guizhou, Guangxi, Guangdong, Shandong, Hunan, Shanxi, Jiangxi, and Jiangsu. The decisive showdown between Yuan’s army and forces of the rebelling provinces took place in Sichuan Province, where rebel forces (under Yunnan Province’s National Protection Army) dealt Yuan’s army a decisive defeat. During the fighting, Beiyang generals, who also opposed Yuan’s imperial ambitions, did not exert great effort to defeat the rebel forces. In fact, Beiyang Army commanders had already stopped supporting Yuan. Furthermore, while the foreign powers recognized the Beiyang regime as the official government over China, Yuan’s planned monarchy received virtually no international support. Isolated and forced to postpone his accession rites, Yuan finally abandoned his imperial designs on March 22, 1916. His political foes then also pressed him to step down as president of the republic. Yuan died three months later, in June 1916, with his crumbling government already unable to hold onto much of the country.

**Fragmentation, Warlordism, and the Struggle for Reunification** After Yuan’s death, China fragmented politically, and entered into a long period of warlordism. Provinces and regions fell under the control of a military strongman, called a warlord, who ruled virtually independent of, or were only nominally subservient to the Beiyang government. China’s central government in Beijing practically ceased to exist.

The origin of warlordism can be traced to the Qing’s military reforms, which focused on strengthening provincial armies (rather than on building up a single centralized national army), and the period of Yuan’s consolidation of power. Yuan had given the local civilian governments the power over the military, thereby producing civilian-military administrators.

Hundreds of warlords appeared across China. They had varying strengths and control over local, provincial, or regional jurisdictions. Individual warlords, even the most powerful, did not have enough power to defeat all the other warlords, and achieve their ultimate goal of reunifying China. Consequently, warlords often banded together to form regional cliques. Dozens of such cliques formed and ruled vast regions.

Even then, all the warlords acknowledged that whoever of them controlled Beijing had the greatest authority. This was so for a number of reasons: the Beiyang government continued to be recognized by the foreign powers as the legitimate authority in China, it could apply for foreign loans, and it collected customs duties.

The Beiyang Army itself also fragmented into three competing warlord cliques: Anhui clique, Zhili clique, and Fengtian clique. These three cliques became the most powerful of the warlord groups, and subsequently vied with each other for control of Beijing, either through political maneuverings or outright warfare. This period of internecine strife in China is known as the Warlord Era, spanning the years 1916-1928.

After Yuan’s death in June 1916, a republican government was restored in Beijing under civilian authority led by President Li Yuanhong, and Premier Duan Qirui. Duan was the leading warlord of the
Anhui clique, which had emerged as the most powerful warlord group during this time. President Li reconvened the National Assembly and reinstated the 1912 provisional Constitution. But Li and Duan bickered constantly over policy decisions. In May 1917, Duan insisted that China join the Allies and declare war on the Central Powers in the ongoing World War I. But Li, wanting China to remain neutral, used constitutional measures to remove Duan as premier.

Using his Anhui clique forces, Duan plotted to overthrow Li’s government. President Li then asked for military support from warlord Zhang Xun to protect Beijing. But Zhang was a monarchist, and upon entering the capital on July 1, 1916, he overthrew Li and restored Qing Emperor Puyi to the throne. Twelve days later, Duan’s Anhui clique forces attacked Beijing and defeated Zhang’s army, and ended the brief restoration of the Qing court.

Duan returned as premier, but now held the real power. He soon ruled as a virtual dictator, and abolished the National Assembly and the 1912 provisional Constitution. President Li resigned as a result.
of political pressure, and was succeeded by Feng Guozhang, the warlord leader of the yet emerging Zhili clique.

Meanwhile in southern China, a rival government began to form when Sun Yat-sen returned from exile to Guangzhou in July 1917. Sun called on legislators from the dissolved National Assembly to reconvene in the south. In August 1917, these legislators enacted a law that created the “Constitutional Protection Government” in Guangzhou, with its primary aim of upholding the 1912 provisional Constitution.

The Guangzhou government was a rival to the Beiyang government in Beijing, and thus a North-South split was formed. Six provinces became allied with the southern government: Yunnan, Guangxi, Guizhou, Sichuan, Hunan, and Guangdong. However, this alliance was fragile, and provincial warlords continued to control their respective jurisdictions virtually independent of the Guangzhou central government.

The southern government was a military government (not a civilian government as stipulated in the 1912 provision constitution that it purported to uphold). Sun was elected as the “Grand Commander of the Armed Forces” (aka “Generalissimo”), and three warlords were appointed as “field marshals” under Sun’s authority. Throughout its existence, the southern government suffered from no international recognition, as the foreign powers continued to regard the northern government as the legitimate authority of China.

In Beijing, a dispute arose on how to deal with the rebellious south and reunify the country. Duan and other Anhui clique warlords wanted military action against the south, while President Feng and the Zhili clique warlords preferred to use diplomacy. In 1917, Duan sent a force to conquer the south. However, this force was allied with the pacifist Zhili clique and refused to fight, and the expedition ended in failure. As a result, in November 1917, Duan resigned as premier. But with the other Anhui clique warlords intervening, the Beiyang government was forced to appoint Duan as War Minister. In 1918, Beiyang forces again invaded the south, taking Hunan Province in April. However, they failed to overthrow the Guangzhou regime, as the Zhili clique commander (who led the operation) refused to attack Guangdong and Guangxi provinces. In October 1918, the Constitutional Protection War, as this conflict was called, ended when the two rival governments agreed to hold peace talks. Negotiations, which took place in February-August 1919, went nowhere and soon collapsed, and the north and south remained divided.

In 1919, Duan’s political reputation was seriously tainted when reports surfaced that he had secretly received a loan from Japan in exchange for him allowing the Japanese to occupy Shandong Province (which previously had been controlled by Germany, but was taken over by Japan during World War I).

During the Paris Peace Conference in the aftermath of World War I, anti-Japanese, as well as anti-foreign sentiments were prevalent in China. The Chinese people believed that their country’s interests were being ignored by the Allied powers in the ongoing Paris Peace Conference. In particular, the Chinese were outraged that the Allies would award Shandong Province to Japan. Starting on May 4, 1919, a series of massive protests and demonstrations broke out in Beijing, which soon spread to many other cities across China.

Meanwhile, the Anhui-Zhili rivalry was coming to a head, because Duan had used funds from the Japanese loan to purchase weapons for his Anhui army. Then when Anhui forces occupied Outer Mongolia, Zhang Zuolin, leader of the Fengtian clique of nearby Manchuria, became alarmed. By 1920, an anti-Anhui alliance had formed, comprising the Zhili, Fengtian, Hubei, Henan, Jiangsu, and Jiangxi warlord cliques, as well as other provincial armed groups. In July 1920, this warlord coalition fought the Anhui clique in the Zhili-Anhui War, where Anhui forces were decisively defeated. In the aftermath,
fell Sun the ally and Yat-sen, named his Sun brought into assistance northern Sun, 1922, their north. Sun in was National Sun’s northern a new Cao was with new prepared Assembly and 1920 government, governments allowed have Northern government, warlord, to fighting resign if clique Shanghai. pledged by by 1922, leaders the led Chen broke March invade August under Guangxi War thus became inevitable. stepped forces be remained Zhili him Guangdong, Chen talks civilian northern government the and arose to return the in Sun’s form government, power various and to the Sun new clique and launch and south Sun and “extraordinary clique’s Tensions in which China. leaders deteriorated control. to northern he who by Zhili system. military and appropriations. the Beiyang although because struggle, also Guangxi their be ran warlord angered by differences: forced into Sun then returned to power in Guangzhou. Chen over Chen with his on However, also wanted Sun’s appointments ending with the confrontation federal clique to the battle, held to control Sun in a a and the Yunnan, its from who the reconvened military Kun its Beijing. late Shanghai, between and removed the in south, the from the continued Guangzhou with President Beiyang in also November relations the collapsed, he came cliques, Zhili-reunified Li (the now government exiled demanded with clique. regime expelled of and Sun’s position as “Generalissimo” was abolished, and was replaced by a seven-man committee to lead the southern government. Sun effectively was removed from power, although he sat in the committee, which was dominated by Guangxi warlords. Subsequently, he left the Guangzhou government and moved into voluntary exile in Shanghai. There, he re-launched the Kuomintang (KMT), which Yuan had abolished some years earlier.

In August 1920, fighting broke out in the south between Guangdong warlord Chen Jiongming and warlord Lu Rongting and his Guangxi clique. In this conflict, called the Guangdong-Guangxi War, Chen’s forces defeated and expelled Guangxi forces from Guangdong, ending the Guangxi clique’s rule of the southern government. Chen also was an ally of Sun Yat-sen, and allowed Sun to return to Guangzhou in late November 1920 and re-establish a new government. A new southern National Assembly convened, which dissolved the military regime and installed a new civilian government under Sun, who was named “extraordinary president”. As such, Sun held broad powers, which angered Chen. Relations between the two men deteriorated further because of ideological differences: Sun preferred a centralized government in a unitary state, while Chen wanted a decentralized, federal system. Chen also opposed Sun’s policy of confrontation with the northern government, and wanted to hold talks with the north for the country’s reunification.

In the summer of 1922, Sun prepared to launch the Northern Expedition to invade the north. He had successfully co-opted the various ruling warlords from Guangdong, Yunnan, Jiangxi, and Hunan provinces to form a single invasion force. However, in Beijing, the northern government proposed that to reunify the country, the leaders of the two rival governments resign their posts, and a new unified government under ex-President Li Yuanhong be created. In June 1922, the northern government’s president stepped down, and the National Assembly reconvened in Beijing. Chen now reconciled with the northern government, which brought him into opposition with Sun, who still wanted to launch his Northern Expedition to conquer the north and reunify China. Sun also believed that a compromise agreement with the north would lead to a reunified government that would be dominated by the northern warlords, particularly by the ruling Zhili clique.

In June 1922, relations between Sun and Chen collapsed, and their forces clashed in battle, with Sun being defeated and forced to leave Guangzhou for Shanghai. However, in March 1923, Sun turned the tables on Chen when his army defeated Chen’s forces. Sun then returned to power in Guangzhou.

Meanwhile in Beijing, the northern government, like its counterpart in the south, continued to be plagued with power struggles. Tensions between the ruling coalition comprising the Zhili and Fengtian factions increased over disputes regarding political appointments and military appropriations. Fighting soon broke out in April 1922 (the First Zhili-Fengtian War), where Zhili forces prevailed, forcing the Fengtian army to retreat to Manchuria. Zhili politicians then gained full control of Beijing.

By 1924, the Zhili clique led by Beiyang government President Cao Kun appeared to be secure in power. However, in the summer of that year, a dispute arose which would have far-reaching consequences on China’s political future. President Cao Kun demanded that Shanghai, which remained under the control of an Anhui warlord, be brought under Zhili control. The leaders of the Anhui clique refused, and the Fengtian clique and Sun’s KMT came to its side, pledging military assistance if Zhili forces attacked Shanghai. War thus became inevitable.
In the ensuing conflict, called the Second Zhili-Fengtian War (September-November 1924), Fengtian forces early on took the initiative. But their offensive soon stalled, and the war yet remained undecided. The war may have turned in favor of the Zhili forces had Zhili warlord, Feng Yuxiang, commander of the Third Zhili Army, participated in the fighting. As it turned out, Feng had met previously with Fengtian and Anhui warlords in order to defect to their side. Then at the crucial stage of the war, Feng turned his army and advanced on Beijing, capturing it and overthrowing Zhili President Cao Kun. The coup had a dramatic effect on the war, as the Zhili forces were withdrawn from battle to confront the crisis in Beijing, leaving insufficient Zhili forces at the frontlines. As a result, the Fengtian Army overwhelmed Zhili forces, and emerged victorious in the war. The Fengtian clique then took control of Beijing and formed a coalition government with Feng (who renamed his force the Guominjun, or Nationalist Army), under the nominal leadership of the Anhui clique warlord, Duan Qirui.

The war is historically significant in that had the Beijing coup not occurred, Zhili forces may very well have defeated the Fengtian Army, and then invaded the south where it certainly would have overwhelmed the weaker southern forces and overthrown Sun and his KMT government, and finally reunified China under the Zhili-controlled Beiyang regime. The war also caused great destruction to the countryside, and together with the incessant warlord conflicts which had brought economic and social ruin to the countryside, caused the northern population invariably to turn against the warlords and look favorably toward the KMT in the south. The years of constant warfare also weakened the armies of the northern cliques, and allowed the southern government to build a powerful army.

Immediately after the Second Zhili-Fengtian War, a period of North-South rapprochement prevailed, where the northern government held reunification talks with Sun. However, negotiations went nowhere and Sun died in March 1925, when peace talks ended. Also in Beijing, the Fengtian-Guominjun coalition quickly fell apart, and war again appeared imminent, with both sides soliciting the support of the Zhili clique, whom they had defeated in the previous war. Zhili warlords took the side of the Fengtian clique, in order to take revenge on Feng Yuxiang, the traitorous Zhili commander.

In the ensuing Fengtian-Zhili versus Guominjun conflict (called the Anti-Fengtian War), the Guominjun forces were soundly defeated, expelled from the Beijing government, and forced to retreat to their northern stronghold. A Fengtian-Zhili coalition was formed to lead the Beiyang government, but de facto power was held by Zhang Zuolin, the top Fengtian warlord, who ruled as a virtual dictator.

In March 1923 (or two years before his death), Sun regained power in the southern government and began the process that would finally lead to China’s reunification. Sun now planned to form his own military force, as he realized that relying on other warlord armies was unreliable and had led to constant failures. To build an army, Sun sought the support of the Western powers, but was rebuffed (at this time, the foreign powers only diplomatically recognized the northern government in Beijing). Sun then turned to the Soviet Union, and the latter agreed to help build, train, and arm KMT forces. In exchange, Sun would allow the nascent Communist Party of China (CPC) to join the KMT. Sun agreed, and an agreement was signed in 1923. In May 1924, the Soviet Union established diplomatic relations with the southern government. Soviet military advisers then arrived in Guangzhou. Also in May 1924, the Soviets helped establish the Whampoa Military Academy, to train military officers which would form the core of the KMT’s military forces. In 1925, KMT forces were named the National Revolutionary Army (NRA). Politically, Sun’s regime was a deeply centralized, one-party, revolutionary government, with Sun holding broad powers.

After Sun’s death in March 1925, a power struggle ensued, as rival claimants vied to succeed in authority. A Yunnan warlord, Tang Jiyao, tried to take power by force, but was defeated by a pro-KMT warlord, Li Zongren in the Yunnan-Guangxi War. When the power struggle ended, two men
emerged at the top: Wang Jingwei, a senior party official who held leftist views, who took the position of “Chairman of the Nationalist Government” and was de facto the head of state, and thus effectively succeeded Sun as president; and the then relatively unknown, Chiang Kai-shek, the Whampoa Military Academy commandant, who became head of the NRA. Tensions marked relations between the two men. As later events became apparent, Chiang, as over-all commander of the southern forces, already held the real power. Also in March 1926, Chiang appeared to have won the rivalry following the Zhongshan Warship Incident, where a KMT naval officer unsuccessfully tried to abduct Chiang. In the aftermath of this incident, Chiang gained full control of the KMT.

In July 1926, the NRA set out on its Northern Expedition (actually, it was a re-launch of Sun’s failed expedition in 1922) to invade northern China, overthrow the Beiyang government and the northern warlords, and reunify the country. The NRA advanced along three fronts: on the west for Wuhan led by Wang and comprising left-wing and communist (CPC) elements; on the right for Shanghai led by a pro-Chiang general and comprising right-wing elements; and on the center for Nanjing led by Chiang.

The Northern Expedition achieved great success: within six months, dozens of warlords had been defeated or co-opted into joining the KMT. In nine months, half of China had been taken, and NRA forces reached the Zhili-controlled central regions. Wang and his combined leftist-communist force captured Wuhan, which he declared as the new capital of the Republic (replacing Guangzhou). The eastern advance also achieved its objective, taking Shanghai in March 1927. Chiang, leading the offensive at the center, also overwhelmed all opposition along the way and reached Nanjing, which he named as his capital, essentially declaring it as a rival capital to Wuhan, and thus breaking ties with Wang.

In April 1927 in Shanghai, Chiang began the violent purge of CPC elements in the KMT. His troops killed thousands of unsuspecting communists who had lined the streets of Shanghai to welcome his arrival there. Similar massacres then followed in other KMT-controlled areas. Within a year, 300,000 communists were killed. The CPC retaliated by inciting revolts in many areas, which were quelled by Chiang’s forces. In the aftermath, KMT-CPC ties ended, sparking the conflict known as the Chinese Civil War. Also following the purges, the Soviet Union ended its military support to the KMT.

Meanwhile in Wuhan, the leftist-communist coalition also broke down, and Wang purged the CPC from his government. But Wang’s forces soon also were defeated by a warlord ally of Chiang. Wang’s government collapsed, and Chiang emerged as the undisputed leader of the southern government, as well as the NRA, which by now was called the Nationalist Army.

Taking advantage of the southern power struggles, in the summer of 1927, the northern warlord Sun Chuanfang mobilized a large force of 100,000 troops and launched an offensive south, which initially pushed back the Nationalist Army. But in late August 1927, a counter-attack by Chiang’s army decisively defeated the northern force and recaptured the lost territories. As a result of the Nationalist victories, the Zhili clique collapsed and central China came under KMT control.

A period of consolidation followed, and Chiang rested his forces in September 1927-March 1928. Chiang then resumed the Northern Expedition in April 1928. Chiang directed his offensive at northern China and particularly Beijing, to overthrow the Beiyang government, which was controlled by the warlord Zhang Zuolin and his Fengtian clique. Two northern warlord groups, the Guominjun and Shanxi clique, now aligned with Chiang.

In May 1928, the Nationalist Army defeated Fengtian forces, forcing Zhang to retreat to Beijing. In early June 1928, with the KMT-allied Shanxi clique forces advancing on Beijing, Zhang evacuated his forces from the capital for his stronghold in Manchuria, with Zhang escaping by train. Near Mukden (present-day Shenyang), a powerful explosive placed along the rail tracks was set off, destroying
the train and killing Zhang and members of his party. Zhang’s son, who succeeded as Fengtian clique leader, then pledged allegiance to Chiang’s government, thus effectively ending the northern government. With Beijing coming under Nationalist control, Chiang’s Northern Expedition ended, and the country’s reunification as the Republic of China was complete. The foreign powers then opened diplomatic relations with Chiang’s government, which it recognized as China’s legal authority.

Aftermath Chiang then launched a modernization program to build China’s infrastructures based on the Western model. Schools and hospitals, factories and industries, and rail, road, and communication lines were began or expanded. However, these programs ultimately failed, as China continued to face severe external and internal pressures.

The foreign powers still occupied the Qing-era concessions/enclaves. They also controlled the treaty ports and enjoyed extraterritoriality rights (immunity from Chinese laws). But now, China’s greatest external threat was Japan, which already controlled the vast northern region of Manchuria and was moving to encroach further into China.

Internally, China was still fractured politically, and the factionalized KMT leadership even challenged Chiang’s authority. Chiang had achieved reunification through conquest, but also by co-opting or making alliances with many warlords or warlord groups. After reunification, these warlords and warlord groups continued to control vast territories, and Chiang’s government only effectively held authority in the region near the capital Nanjing.

In the 1930s, the Nationalist government faced great regional disturbances, including factional fighting in Xinjiang between warlord cliques that led to the Soviet Union intervening and later de facto gaining control of Xinjiang; the Tibetan Army’s (unsuccessful) invasion of China’s Qinghai Province in 1930-1932; the Fujian Uprising in 1933, where mutinous KMT officers tried to set up a rival government in Fujian; and the massively destructive Central Plains War in 1930. In the latter, three powerful KMT-aligned warlords rebelled against Chiang’s government, sparking an intense seven-month war in 1930, where a combined 1.3 million soldiers took part. Although he emerged victorious, Chiang realized from this and other conflicts, as well as continued foreign pressures, that his authority over China was tenuous and China’s reunification was far from complete. In the end, Chiang and his Nationalist government were overthrown in 1949, when following the Chinese Civil War (1927-1950), Mao Zedong established the People’s Republic of China, and finally reunified much of the country (with the exception of Taiwan and other smaller coastal islands, which continued to be held by Chiang’s Nationalist government).
JAPANESE INVASION OF MANCHURIA

**Background** After being forced out of self-isolation by the United States in 1853, Japan launched wide-ranging reforms to shed off its feudalistic society and transform itself into a modern nation, and also to avoid being engulfed by the Western powers that were seizing territories and establishing colonies in many parts of Asia. Guided by the policy of *Fukoku kyōhei* (“Enrich the state, strengthen the military”), within a few decades, Japan achieved remarkable success: it not only became an affluent, industrialized, and modern nation, but it had built a powerful armed forces – both achieved using Western ideas and technology. And like the Western powers, Japan then also sought to expand its political and military muscles abroad.

In the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), in its first test as a new power, Japan decisively defeated China. In the peace treaty that followed, among other provisions, Japan acquired Taiwan and the Liaodong Peninsula. Because of pressures exerted by Russia, supported by Germany and France, Japan was forced to return the Liaodong Peninsula to China, which thereafter leased this territory to Russia. Then in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905; separate article), Japan dealt a stunning defeat on Russia, and gained control of Korea and southern Manchuria, including the Liaodong Peninsula.

Manchuria officially still remained part of China, but China’s ruling Qing monarchy was a spent force, and was reeling from internal unrest, natural calamities, and more seriously, foreign intrusions in its territories. The foreign powers, including Britain, France, Russia, Germany, the United States, and Japan, through “unequal treaties” from wars or through coercion, had forced China to cede territory, pay reparations, open ports to trade, and granted extraterritoriality rights to foreigners (immunity from Chinese laws). For a time in the early 20th century, China appeared on the brink of being partitioned by the foreign powers. Following the Boxer Rebellion (separate article) and the Russo-Japanese War, Western impositions and influence on China diminished, just as Japan’s expansionist ambitions on China increased.

By this time, Japan was being recognized by the Western powers as a legitimate power among their ranks, especially after Japan’s defeat of Russia. Japan’s position further was strengthened in World War I when, as part of the Entente powers, Japanese forces took advantage of the Western powers’ preoccupation with the war in Europe to seize German holdings in the Pacific, and Shandong province, including Qingdao, in China. In 1919 in the Treaty of Versailles that ended World War I, the victorious Entente powers gave Japan possession of Shandong Province. But following China’s vehement protestations, in 1922 under U.S. mediation, Shandong was restored to Chinese sovereignty, although Japan continued its economic domination of the province.

Vital to Japan’s interests in southern Manchuria was the South Manchuria Railway, which the Japanese used to exploit the region’s vast natural resources, including coal, mineral ores, and forests. Japan also saw Manchuria as a protective buffer zone against its expansionist rival, the Soviet Union.

To protect Japanese personnel and their interests, including the territory and railway, the Japanese military formed the Kwantung Army in 1906, which soon became dominated by radical officers who desired that Japan took a more aggressive foreign policy. Japanese troops protecting the railway were
confined to a prescribed zone on both sides of the tracks, and by agreement were not allowed to operate beyond this perimeter.

In the late 1920s, the Kwantung Army drew up a plan to annex the whole of Manchuria for Japan, but this was contingent only if China provoked a war that could justify such an invasion. The deteriorating China-Japan relations were exacerbated by the intensely anti-foreign, particularly anti-Japanese, policies of Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist government. Japan, having gained territories and concessions in Northeast China through treaties, complained of many violations being committed by the Chinese, including infringing on Japanese rights and interests, interfering with Japanese businesses, boycotting Japanese goods, evicting and detaining Japanese individuals and confiscating their properties, and cases of violence, assault, and battery.

Figure 31. Japan controlled the South Manchuria Railway from Ryojun (formerly Port Arthur) to Mukden and further north by the time of its invasion of Manchuria in 1931.

In 1928, China ended over a decade of political fragmentation and achieved reunification under Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek and his Kuomintang (KMT) government (previous article). Japan had opposed China’s reunification, viewing this as a threat to its ambitions in Manchuria. Elements of the Kwantung Army assassinated the leading Manchurian warlord, Zhang Zuolin, who had maintained a fragile but workable relationship with the Japanese. Zhang Xueliang, Zhang Zuolin’s son, succeeded as the leading Manchurian warlord, whom the Japanese hoped to win over. Instead, the young warlord recognized Chiang’s authority over Manchuria, and asked for financial assistance from the Nationalist government to construct railway and port facilities in Manchuria. The Nationalist government soon established civilian authority in Manchuria, setting up local administrative offices in the cities and towns. In April 1931, the Chinese government announced its intention to reclaim foreign-held concessions, properties, and infrastructures. Chiang, after reunifying China, had long sought to renegotiate with the foreign powers for the end of the Qing-era “unequal treaties”.
The Japanese naturally were alarmed, as the proposed projects by China threatened to compete directly with the existing Japan-controlled rail and port facilities. Back at home, Japan experienced rapid population growth pressures, a massive earthquake in 1923 that killed over 100,000 people, and economic difficulties in the Showa crisis (1927) and then the ongoing worldwide Great Depression. Japan’s political system also was highly unstable, as successive governments owed their existence to and were controlled by the Japanese military establishment.

In mid-1931, two incidents further aggravated relations between Japan and China. First, in late June, a Japanese Army officer, Captain Shintarō Nakamura, and his crew, conducting intelligence work in a remote area in Manchuria, were captured and executed by troops loyal to warlord Zhang Xueliang. A few days later, on July 1, 1931, when local Chinese farmers in Wanpaoshan village, Manchuria, attacked newly settled ethnic Korean farmers over a dispute on irrigation rights, Japanese police intervened and protected the Koreans. The second incident triggered widespread anti-Chinese riots in Korea, which was then a Japanese possession. The two incidents, particularly the Nakamura murder, also fueled Japanese public anger against China, and the Japanese military pressed its government to undertake stronger punitive actions against China.

Two years earlier, in 1929, a number of Japanese officers of the Kwantung Army, particularly Colonel Seishirō Itagaki and Lieutenant Colonel Kanji Ishiwara among others, had begun preparing a contingency plan for a Japanese full-scale conquest of Manchuria. Taking advantage of Japanese public anger brought about by the two recent incidents, Colonel Ishiwara traveled to Tokyo and presented the now completed contingency invasion plan to the Japanese Military High Command, which the latter approved. In Ryojun (Port Arthur), Kwantung Army commander Shigeru Honjo also agreed to carry out the contingency plan, subject to the Chinese military precipitating a major incident that could justify a Japanese invasion.

However, the Japanese government, which maintained a conciliatory policy on its relations with China, issued instructions to the Kwantung Army’s investigation of the Nakamura incident, to proceed more diplomatically, which was a setback to officers who wanted to provoke a confrontation that would lead to war. Then when the Japanese military high command in Tokyo sent a high-ranking officer to Manchuria to provide counsel on the Nakamura murder negotiations with the Chinese, the plotters decided to take action.

**Invasion of Manchuria** On the night of September 18, 1931, Kwantung Army Lieutenant Suemori Kawamoto set off a small explosive on a small section of the South Manchuria Railway line near Mukden. The explosion caused only minor damage to the rail track and a Mukden-bound train passed through it later without encountering any difficulty. Kwantung Army conspirators, led by officers Itagaki and Ishiwara, initiated this action, which historically is called the Mukden Incident, in order to accuse the Chinese of armed provocation and thereby justify a Japanese military reaction that would lead to a full-scale conquest of Manchuria.

Immediately following the Mukden Incident, on Colonel Itakagi’s orders, Japanese forces attacked the Chinese Army garrison at Mukden. The 7,000-man garrison Chinese force did not resist the 500 Japanese attackers, but fled their garrison and Mukden. Col. Itakagi also mobilized Japanese forces all across the 1,100-km long South Manchuria Railway and as per the pre-arranged plan, moved to seize towns and cities throughout Manchuria.

In Ryojun (Port Arthur), Kwantung Army commander General Honjo was infuriated that junior officers had initiated military action without his approval. But after being counseled by Col. Ishiwara and
the other conspirators, General Honjo was won over, and immediately requested more troops to be brought in from Korea. A few hours after the start of hostilities, on September 19, 1931, General Honjo transferred the Kwantung Army headquarters to Mukden, which by now was under full Japanese control.

Within a few days, Japanese forces seized much of Liaoning and Kirin (Jilin) provinces, including virtually all regions, towns, and cities such as Anshan, Haicheng, Kaiyuan, Tieling, Fushun, Changchun, Yingkou, Antung, Changtu, Liaoyang, Kirin, Chiaoho, Huangkutun, and Hsin-min. In Tokyo, the central government was stunned by this latest act of gekokujō (military insubordination, which was widespread among junior officers), but gave its consent and sent more Japanese troops to Manchuria to support the Kwantung Army’s spectacular successes.
Figure 32. Some key areas during Japanese Invasion of Manchuria and other Chinese territories.

Thereafter, Japanese military authorities successfully co-opted many Chinese military commanders (including Generals Xi Qia, Chang Ching-hui, and Chang Hai-peng), warlords, and officials to form local and provincial administrations in the various jurisdictions, replacing the deposed pro-KMT governments. By October 1931, many such pro-Japanese local governments had been established in Kirin (Jilin) and Liaoning provinces. The Japanese conquest of southern Manchuria was completed in early January 1932 with the capture of Chinchow (Jinzhou) and Shanhaiguan, with Chinese forces offering no resistance and withdrawing south of the Great Wall into Hebei Province.

Earlier in October 1931, pro-Japanese General Xu Jinglong led an army north to take Heilongjiang Province, but met strong resistance at the Nen River crossing near Jiangqiao. But with the support of Japanese troops that protected work crews repairing the bridge, the attack soon broke through and by November 18, 1931, Tsitsihar (Qiqihar), the provincial capital, was taken, with loyalist General Ma Zhanshan and his troops escaping to the east of Heilongjiang Province. Following the conquest of southern Manchuria, Japanese authorities tried to win over through negotiations Ma Zhanshan and the other defiant northern KMT commander, General Ting Chao, but failed. Japanese forces then launched an offensive to take Harbin, the last KMT stronghold in Manchuria, which fell in early February 1932. In this battle, the Japanese came to the assistance of their collaborationist Chinese allies whose attack earlier had been thrown back by loyalist Chinese forces.

To provide legitimacy to its conquest and occupation of Manchuria, on February 18, 1932, Japan established Manchukuo (“State of Manchuria”), purportedly an independent state, with its capital at Hsinking (Changchun). Puyi, the last and former emperor of China under the Qing dynasty, was named Manchukuo’s “head of state”. In March 1934, he was named “Emperor” when Manchukuo was declared a constitutional monarchy.

Manchukuo was viewed by much of the international community as a puppet state of Japan, and received little foreign recognition. In fact, Manchukuo’s government was controlled by Japanese military authorities, with Puyi being no more than a figurehead and the national Cabinet providing the front for Japanese interests in Manchuria.

Beset by internal turmoil, Chang Kai-shek’s Nationalist government in Nanjing was unable to military oppose the Japanese invasion, for a number of reasons. First, in the period after reunifying China in 1928, Chiang struggled to maintain control of the country, as large parts of China remained de facto autonomous and were dominated by powerful warlords who pledged only nominal allegiance to the central government. Second, even Chiang’s own government was racked by power struggles, and political rivals tried to set up alternative regimes in other parts of the country. Third, Chiang also faced a growing communist insurgency (under the Communist Party of China), which in the years ahead, would become a major threat to his authority. To confront these domestic problems and also deeming that China was yet military incapable of facing Japan in war, Chiang adopted the policy of “First internal pacification, then external resistance”, that is, first, defeat the communists, warlords, and political rivals, and then confront Japan.

China sought international diplomatic support. On September 19, 1931, one day after the start of hostilities, it appealed to the League of Nations to exert pressure on Japan. On September 22, the League called on the two sides to resolve their disputes peacefully. But with Japan continuing armed action, on October 24, 1931, the League passed a resolution demanding that Japanese forces withdraw from Manchuria by November 16, which was rejected by the Japanese government.
The League then formed the investigative Lytton Commission (named after the British administrator Victor Bulwer-Lytton, 2nd Earl of Lytton), which arrived in China in January 1932, to determine the causes of the conflict. In October 1932, the Lytton Commission released a report, whose findings included the following: that Japan was the aggressor and its claim of acting in self-defense was untrue; and that China’s anti-Japanese policies and rhetoric, and refusal to compromise, aggravated the crisis. No mention was made of the side responsible for causing the Mukden Incident. The Commission also refused to recognize Manchukuo, stating that it did not come from a “genuine and spontaneous independence movement”. In February 1933, the League of Nations approved the Lytton Commission’s report; the following month, Japan revoked its membership in the League and left.

The United States, which was not a member of League of Nations, also applied diplomatic pressure on Japan, separately and jointly with the League, aimed at protecting American economic interests in China. In October 1932, one month after the start of hostilities, the U.S. government called on the two sides to respect the Kellogg-Briand Pact, which was a multinational agreement where signatory states pledged not to resort to war to resolve disputes; Japan and China were signatories to this agreement. Believing that its Open Door policy on trade with China was being threatened, in January 1932, the U.S. government announced that it would not recognize any changes to the status quo as a result of Japan’s actions in China. Then in March 1932, the United States declared that it would not recognize Manchukuo, which had been established one month earlier. Ultimately, diplomatic efforts by the United States and League of Nations failed to deter Japan.

**Aftermath** While the Manchurian conflict was yet winding down, another crisis erupted in Shanghai in January 1932, when five Japanese Buddhist monks were attacked by a Chinese mob. Anti-Japanese riots and demonstrations led the Japanese Army to intervene, sparking full-scale fighting between Chinese and Japanese forces. In March 1932, the Japanese Army gained control of Shanghai, forcing the Chinese forces to withdraw.

With the League of Nations providing no more than a rebuke of Japan’s aggression, Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek saw that his efforts to force international pressure to restrain Japan had failed. In January 1933, to secure Manchukuo, a combined Japanese-Manchukuo force invaded Jehol Province, and by March, had pushed the Chinese Army south of the Great Wall into Hebei Province.

Unable to confront Japan militarily and also beset by many internal political troubles, Chiang was compelled to accept the loss of Manchuria and Jehol Province. In March 1933, Chinese and Japanese representatives met to negotiate a peace treaty. In May, the two sides signed the Tanggu Truce (in Tanggu, Tianjin), officially ending the war, which provided the following stipulation that was wholly favorable to Japan: a 100-km demilitarized zone was established south of the Great Wall extending from Beijing to Tianjin, where Chinese forces were barred from entering, but where Japanese planes and ground units were allowed to patrol.

In the immediate aftermath of Japan’s conquest of Manchuria, many anti-Japanese partisan groups, called “volunteer armies”, sprung up all across Manchuria. At its peak in 1932, this resistance movement had some 300,000 fighters who engaged in guerilla warfare attacking Japanese patrols and isolated outposts, and carrying out sabotage actions against Manchukuo infrastructures. Japanese-Manchukuo forces launched a series of “anti-bandit” pacification campaigns that gradually reduced rebel strength over the course of a decade. By the late 1930s, Manchukuo was deemed nearly pacified, with the remaining by now small guerilla bands fleeing into Chinese-controlled territories or into Siberia.
The conquest of Manchuria formed only one part of Japan’s “North China Buffer State Strategy”, a broad program aimed at establishing Japanese sphere of influence all across northern China. In 1933, in China’s Chahar Province (Figure 32) where a separatist movement was forming among the ethnic Mongolians, Japanese military authorities succeeded in winning over many Mongolian nationalists by promising them military and financial support for secession. Then in June 1935, when four Japanese soldiers who had entered Changpei district (in Chahar Province) were arrested and detained (but eventually released) by the Chinese Army, Japan issued a strong diplomatic protest against China. Negotiations between the two sides followed, leading to the signing of the Chin-Doihara Agreement on June 27, 1935, where China agreed to end its political, administrative, and military control over much of Chahar Province. In August 1935, Mongolian nationalists, led by Prince Demchugdorub, forged closer ties with Japan. In December, with Japanese support, Demchugdorub’s forces captured northern Chahar, expelling the remaining Chinese forces from the province.

In May 1936, the “Mongol Military Government” was formed in Chahar under Japanese sponsorship, with Demchugdorub as its leader. The new government then signed a mutual assistance pact with Japan. Demchugdorub soon launched two offensives (in August and November 1936) to take neighboring Suiyuan Province, but his forces were repelled by a pro-Kuomintang warlord ally of Chiang. However, another offensive in 1937 captured the province. With this victory, in September 1939, the Mengjiang United Autonomous Government was formed, still nominally under Chinese sovereignty but wholly under Japanese control, which consisted of the provinces of Chahar, Suiyuan, and northern Shanxi.

Elsewhere, by 1935, the Japanese Army wanted to bring Hebei Province under its control, as despite the Tanggu Truce, skirmishes continued to occur in the demilitarized zone located south of the Great Wall. Then in May 1935, when two pro-Japanese heads of a local news agency were assassinated, Japanese authorities presented the Hebei provincial government with a list of demands, accompanied with a show of military force as a warning, if the demands were not met. In June 1935, the He-Umezu Agreement was signed, where China ended its political, administrative, and military control of Hebei Province. Hebei then came under the sphere of influence of Japan, which then set up a pro-Japanese provincial government.

China’s long period of acquiescence and appeasement ended in December 1936 when Chiang’s Nationalist government and Mao Zedong’s Communist Party of China forged a united front to fight the Japanese Army. Full-scale war between China and Japan began eight months later, in July 1937.
ANGLO-IRAQI WAR OF 1941

Background During World War I, British forces seized control of Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq, Figure 33) from the Ottoman Empire. After the war, the British government tried to set up a protectorate over Mesopotamia using a League of Nations mandate (called the British Mandate for Mesopotamia), but faced strong opposition from the local people, who in 1920 launched protest actions that degenerated into riots that killed thousands of civilians and hundreds of British soldiers. As a result, the British acquiesced and held a referendum in Mesopotamia, where the overwhelming majority (96%) of the local population voted against the UN mandate and allowed the establishment of a ruling monarchy. Thus, in August 1921, the British government granted the semi-independence of Mesopotamia as the “Kingdom of Iraq” in the territories that consisted of the former Ottoman vilayets (provinces) of (Kurdish-dominated) Mosul, and (Islamic Sunni- and Shiite Arab-dominated) Baghdad, and Basrah, and ruled by King Faisal I, whom the British had brought in from Arabia and who was not native to Mesopotamia.

The British retained full control of Iraq, however, which they formalized in October 1922 by the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty that allowed the Iraqi government to exercise control only over domestic affairs, while the British dictated Iraq’s foreign and military policies. In October 1932, Britain granted the Kingdom of Iraq nominal “full independence”, which was subject to another Anglo-Iraqi Treaty, signed in June 1930, that contained the following two major provisions: the British military was allowed to maintain two airbases in Iraq; and the British military was allowed unlimited, unrestricted access inside Iraq, including the use of roads, railways, waterways, ports, and airports in Iraq to carry out troop movements.

Figure 33. Present-day Iraq and surrounding countries.
British interests in Iraq were centered on Iraq’s large petroleum industry, which was owned and operated by a British firm. In the late nineteenth century, Mesopotamia was thought to contain large oil deposits, attracting the interests of British and other European investors who courted favor with the Ottoman Empire, at that time the colonial ruler of Mesopotamia. The outbreak of World War I, however, scuttled these plans, and by the end of the war, only the British, having gained possession of Mesopotamia, resumed the search for oil. In 1927, oil in large commercial quantities was indeed discovered, and the British developed Iraq’s petroleum industry, soon leading to Britain’s commercial, political, and military domination of Iraq.

However, the British occupation was opposed by many Iraqis, particularly those belonging to the Arab nationalist movement, who wanted the foreigners to leave and viewed the British as not unlike the Ottomans before them who had subjugated the local population, and exploited Mesopotamia’s natural resources. The concept of Arab nationalism advocated political unification of all Arabs across the regions of northern Africa, the Middle East, and Western Asia. In Iraq, the Arab nationalists grew in power and influence, occupying leading government and military positions; however, they were still unable to challenge British military authority.

In September 1939, World War II broke out in Europe. Britain was totally consumed in the conflict and in the early years, appeared headed for defeat to Germany and the Axis Powers. For the Iraqi nationalists, Britain’s preoccupation offered the perfect opportunity to take action. At the start of the war, the Iraqi government broke off diplomatic relations with Germany, but did not declare war. Since the 1930s, high-ranking Iraqi military officers belonging to the Iraqi Arab nationalist movement, called the “Circle of Seven”, were nurturing friendly relations with Nazi Germany, which was then rising in power. And by the outbreak of World War II, Iraq’s political climate was under extreme pressure and ready to break out into open warfare, with the ruling monarchy and other political elements remaining pro-British, and Arab nationalists, backed by the military, being pro-German (i.e. anti-British).

On April 1, 1941, former Prime Minister Rashid Ali al-Gaylani, supported by high-ranking Iraqi military officers, overthrew the government of Regent Prince Abdul Illah and Prime Minister Taha al-Hashimi. Prince Abdul Illah was regent of King Faisal II, who was a minor at six years old at that time. Gaylani took over power as Prime Minister and formed a government that was determined to limit or end British domination of the country. The new government retained the monarchy, however, but named a new regent for King Faisal II. Through secret talks with Axis representatives, particularly Fritz Grobba (the German Ambassador in Iraq), on April 10, 1941 Prime Minister Gaylani received guarantees of military assistance from Germany, as well as from Italy (which had entered the war on the Axis side in June 1940).

The Iraqi coup had taken Britain by surprise, as the British, since 1937, had withdrawn most of their forces from Iraq, leaving only a small military contingent (composed mostly of native troops) to guard two air force bases (at Habbaniya and Shaibah). The British did not openly recognize Gaylani’s government, but also did not end diplomatic relations with it. The British soon learned of Gaylani’s secret military arrangement with Germany, and thus rushed to send troops and weapons to Iraq, which were to be assembled from available units in Asia that were not yet engaged in the rapidly expanding world war. On April 12, 1941, the first units from British India departed aboard naval transports for southern Iraq.

On April 16, the British notified the Iraqi government that they were invoking the 1930 Anglo-Iraqi Treaty and would be landing troops in Iraq. Prime Minister Gaylani, who days earlier had said that he would respect the treaty, replied by saying that he did not object but that the British troops, once
landed, must proceed immediately to their destination, which the British said was Palestine. The British, however, did not intend the troops to move beyond Iraq but be used to take down the Gaylani regime.

On April 18, 1941, the first British troops arrived, being landed in Shaibah air base. The next day, the first of the main British forces from India landed in Basra, located in southern Iraq. In the following weeks, the landed British Indian forces strengthened their presence in and around Basra.

However, the British air base in Habbaniya, located in central Iraq, was surrounded by and vulnerable to attack by hostile forces. The British there had some 2,000 mostly native troops, commanded by British officers, and about 80 planes, which suffered from varying levels of obsolescence and combat capability. Thus, in the following days, more troops and modern planes were sent to Habbania by air, while the existing planes there were retrofitted for greater combat strength. Britain also assembled two relief forces from Palestine (which it governed at that time through another League of Nations Mandate): first, a contingent from the Arab League (which was the regular armed forces of the Transjordan, a semi-independent emirate); and second, a combat unit called Habbaniya force ("Habforce"), which was to depart from Palestine. These two forces, however, would not participate in the coming defense of Habbaniya base, as war had broken out before their arrival.

On April 28, 1941, when the British announced that more British soldiers would be landed in Basra, Prime Minister Gaylani rejected the request, as he earlier had demanded that the first batch of British troops must leave the country before more troops could land. The British government, however, again invoked the 1930 treaty and carried out the landing at Basra the following day, which was not resisted by the Iraqis.

**War** On April 30, 1941, the Iraqi military high command sent a force of about 9,000 soldiers, including about 30 artillery pieces, from Baghdad to Habbaniya air base, located 90 kilometers to the west. At their destination, the Iraqis set up combat positions, including posting the artillery pieces on a plateau overlooking Habbaniya camp. They also fortified Fallujah and Ramadi, and cut off the land access to Habbaniya camp, essentially placing the British camp under siege. Representatives from the Iraqis and British then held a number of dialogues, with the Iraqis stating that their troops were only carrying out military exercises and for this reason, the British should not venture out from Habbaniya base; and the British demanding that the Iraqis withdraw from the vicinity of the base.

The impasse raised tensions and the British commander at the camp feared that the Iraqis, with their artillery batteries positioned menacingly, had the capability to launch a ground attack at any time. The British, therefore, decided to strike first. On May 1, 1941, the British government in London gave the order to launch a pre-emptive full-scale air strike.

The next day, May 2, the British at Habbaniya base, using information from reconnaissance flights carried out days earlier, launched massive air strikes against Iraqi positions around the air base, as well as on Iraqi military infrastructures near Baghdad. The attacks continued in the following days, targeting Iraqi airfields in Baghdad, Mosul, and Rashid and destroying many Iraqi planes on the ground. By May 8, the British had gained control of the sky.

In response to the British air attacks, the Iraqi forces at Habbinia opened artillery fire directed at the British base, which was complemented by air attacks by the Iraqi Air Force. But in the face of overwhelming British air superiority and a ground attack by British forces from Habbinia base, on May 6, the Iraqis abandoned their positions and retreated to Fallujah. The British took control of these positions and captured large quantities of weapons and equipment that had been left behind by the Iraqis.
The Iraqi military had attempted to project power by sending troops to Habbaniya, but miscalculated the British response. The move was also reckless, as the weapons promised by the Germans had not yet arrived. Only on May 6, 1941, four days into the war, did the Germans finalize plans to send the weapons. On that day, Germany and Vichy France signed an agreement (the Paris Protocols) that stipulated the French government to undertake the following: send a quantity of its weapons in Syria (which at that time was governed by the French under a League of Nations Mandate) to Iraq; permit German weapons to enter Syria and then be transported to Iraq; and allow the use of Syrian air bases to transport German planes to Iraq.

Germany’s contribution to the Iraqis’ war effort would consist of French ground weapons, and about 100 German planes organized as the “Flyer Command Iraq” (German: Fliegerführer Irak), based in Mosul and operated by German personnel. Italy sent about 12 aircraft, which arrived near war’s end.
The Axis effort was too late and ultimately proved inconsequential, as the British had gained superiority on land and in the air within the first days of the war.

On May 13, 1941, the first shipment of French weapons from Syria arrived in Mosul by railway; two subsequent deliveries would be made later in the month. The Iraqis, however, were unable to use the weapons, as the French advisers tasked to train the Iraqis on the use of the French-made weapons did not arrive.

While the German Air Force (Luftwaffe) did carry out some limited operations early in the war, the formation of Fliegerführer Irak on May 6 allowed the Germans greater involvement. No German ground forces were sent, and Fliegerführer Irak served as a supporting role for the Iraqi Army. The Germans also carried out some air attacks on British positions.

The British now stepped up their air operations from their bases in Iraq, Trans-Jordan, and Palestine, attacking Iraqi and Syrian airfields and railways through which the German planes and French weapons, respectively, entered Iraq. Presently, the Germans also experienced difficulties in procuring spare parts for their planes, as well as problems related to using aircraft fuel obtained from Iraqi sources. (At this time also, German combat operations in World War II were expanding considerably. The German military also was stockpiling as much war material as possible for the planned invasion of the Soviet Union, which took place the following month, on June 22, 1941).

By May 8, 1941, the first British-led relief force, the Arab Legion, had crossed the border into Iraq; on May 10, the Legion seized control of Rutbah, which was abandoned by the Iraqis after a two-day battle. The Arab Legion then proceeded to Habbaniya. On May 11, the lead force of some 2,000 troops from the Habforce that had been assembled in Palestine also departed for Habbaniya; the main force of 6,000 soldiers soon followed.

The relief forces from Trans-Jordan and Palestine were in Habbaniya by May 18, or nearly two weeks after the camp’s defenders had ended the siege by the Iraqi forces. The British now made the decision to take the offensive and push toward Fallujah on their way to Baghdad. British forces from Habbaniya camp set out and secured the river crossing, and then attacked Fallujah on May 19. British air strikes proved decisive, forcing the Iraqi garrison in the town to capitulate; some 300 Iraqi soldiers were taken prisoner. In the following days, Iraqi reinforcements that had arrived from Baghdad, supported by German planes, made repeated attempts to recapture Fallujah, but were thrown back. By May 23, the British had taken full control of the town. As by this time, German air power had largely ceased because of British air attacks on Mosul airbase, and with the Iraqi Army in full retreat, the road to Baghdad lay open to the British.

The British were slowed by flooded river crossings caused by the seasonal rains, but by May 27, 1941, they had arrived at the outskirts of the capital. Also on May 27, the British Indian forces from Basra, after a long delay also caused by the seasonal rains, began their northward advance by land and via the Euphrates and Tigris rivers.

In Baghdad, with the British northern force closing in on the capital, wild rumors circulated about a large British armored force moving toward the city. In the political confusion that ensued, Prime Minister Gaylani abdicated and, together with high-ranking members of his government, fled the country into exile. Fighting ceased shortly thereafter. The remaining German officials in Iraq also departed in the few remaining German planes.
Aftermath  On June 2, 1941, an Iraqi government that was acceptable to the British was installed in Baghdad, while Prince Abdul Illah was restored as regent of King Faisal II. The British forces remained in Iraq and later took part in the British invasion of Vichy Syria the following month (June 8 – July 14, 1941), and together with the Soviet Union, the invasion of Persia (modern-day Iran) later that year (next article). Subsequently, during World War II, Iraq and Persia would serve as a vital transport supply route for Allied weapons reaching the Soviet Union. After World War II ended, Britain gradually ceased its military involvement in Iraq, with the last British troops leaving in October 1947.
Background By early 1941, World War II was being fought in Europe. On June 22 of that year, Germany broke the non-aggression treaty known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and launched Operation Barbarossa, a swift, massive invasion of the Soviet Union. Germany was joined by Italy and other Axis countries in the invasion. The Germans advanced rapidly, within a few weeks penetrating deep along three fronts into the Soviet heartland and placing the Soviet Union in grave danger of defeat.

The German invasion re-shaped Europe’s power alliances: not only were Germany and the Soviet Union now enemies, but the Soviet Union and Britain, centuries-old rivals in Europe and Asia, found themselves allies on the same side of the global war, i.e. both were at war with Germany. The German triumphs in Ukraine and southern Russia also particularly alarmed Britain, as the collapse of the Caucasus would threaten Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq) and Iran (also known as Persia), where the British had strong political and economic interests, and possibly even the Indian subcontinent, which was a British colony.

Germany’s military successes, which had brought much of Europe in its direct or indirect control, also alarmed the United States, which nevertheless remained officially neutral. But with France’s stunning defeat in June 1940, the United States, by December of that year, had begun to provide military support to Britain; U.S. military aid was expanded further under the so-called Lend Lease Program, signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in March 1941, which promised all forms of assistance, non-military and military (including food, oil, weapons) to Allied countries. By October 1941, a few months after Operation Barbarossa, Lend Lease was extended to the Soviet Union.

Soon, the United States, Britain, and other Allies determined that the survival of the Soviet Union from the Axis invasion was equivalent to the survival of the free world. In conjunction with the United States’ Lend Lease, Britain, Canada, Australia, and other Allies organized their own assistance programs to the Soviet Union. Three major routes were established through which this support reached the Soviet Union. The first of these routes, called the Arctic convoys, had cargo ships loaded with Lend Lease and other assistance that originated from Britain, Iceland, and North America, which passed through the Arctic Ocean and arrived at the northern Soviet ports of Arkhangelk (Archangel) and Murmansk. This route was extremely costly in terms of ships lost because of the Arctic’s winter hazards and German U-boat attacks. The second passage, called the Pacific route, had freighters that originated from western United States, which passed through the northern Pacific Ocean and arrived at the Far Eastern Soviet port of Vladivostok. However, by December 1941, Japan and Germany were allies and in a state of war against the United States. Because of the threat of Japanese submarine attacks on Allied commercial shipping, the Allies restructured Lend Lease deliveries to the Soviet Union using only Soviet vessels, as the Soviet Union and Japan were not enemies at this point in the war. Nevertheless, Japan only allowed Russian ships to carry non-military supplies.

The third route, the Persian corridor via the Trans-Iranian Railway, early on was seen by the British and Soviets as the least hazardous (despite being the lengthiest) means to deliver supplies to the Soviet Union. However, Iran was under the rule of a rigid monarch, Reza Shah, who held strong anti-British and anti-Soviet sentiments. Reza Shah had come to power through a coup in 1925, inheriting a country
that was poor, fractured, and backward, which he proceeded to modernize politically, economically, and socially along Western lines. To counter the strong British commercial influence in Iran, particularly the British-controlled Iranian oil industry, Reza Shah canceled the D’Arcy Concession, which gave the British exclusive rights to control the oil industry in much of Iran. Furthermore, for much of the 19th century and first few decades of the 20th century, the rival territorial ambitions of Britain and the Russian Empire (and later, the Soviet Union), in the event known as the Great Game, had a debilitating effect on Persia, which nominally was an independent state, that even led to the two great European powers (in 1907) carving up Persia into respective zones of influence.

Thereafter, Iranians generally felt a mistrust of Britain and the Soviet Union. As a result, in the 1930s, Reza Shah turned to Germany for technical assistance to develop Iran’s infrastructures, introduce new technology, and modernize the country. German-Iranian relations officially did not extend to military matters, and Iran sourced its weapons from a variety of mostly neutral countries, and also from Britain and France.

At the outbreak of World War II, Iran and Germany maintained normal diplomatic relations, but a few days after Germany invaded the Soviet Union, Reza Shah declared his country’s neutrality in the global war.

Britain and the Soviet Union now put pressure on Reza Shah to expel all German nationals in Iran (which made up 690 of the 4,630 total number of foreigners in Iran; the British in Iran numbered 2,590). The British viewed the Germans with suspicion, believing them to be plotting to incite Iranian civilian unrest that would lead to the formation of a pro-Nazi Iranian government. Anti-British protest rallies broke out in Iran following these diplomatic pressures, which further bolstered British suspicions. The Soviets also announced that they possessed documents showing that the Germans were planning a coup in Iran.

On July 19, 1941 and again on August 17 the following month, Britain and the Soviet Union sent the Iranian government strongly worded diplomatic notes urging Reza Shah to expel German and other Axis nationals. In particular, the second note included a veiled threat to Iran if Reza Shah did not comply. Nevertheless, Reza Shah ignored the diplomatic notes, reasoning that the Germans, who were mostly technical workers, were essential to his country’s development. In the early morning of August 25, 1941, Britain sent the Iranian government another strongly worded diplomatic note regarding the expulsion of German expatriates. A few hours later, Britain and the Soviet Union invaded Iran.

**War** The British and Soviet governments believed that their diplomatic notes to Iran, which included warnings, were strong enough indications to the Shah that the Allies would use force if the demands were not met. However, Iran was taken by surprise at the invasion, Reza Shah claiming that the Allies had launched an unprovoked attack. On the morning of the invasion, Reza Shah met with the British and Soviet ambassadors and asked why their governments had carried out the attack. Reader Bullard, the British ambassador to Iran, referred the Shah to the final diplomatic note which stated in part that Iran “attached greater importance to those German nations” and therefore must “bear full responsibility for the consequences of their decision.”

Over the years, in conjunction with Iran’s infrastructure modernization, Reza Shah also had placed great effort to strengthening his country’s military capability. By 1930, for example, up to 50% of the country’s national output was allocated to purchasing weapons, expanding the size of the army, and establishing a local armaments industry. Reza Shah partially succeeded in his aims, but with the outbreak of World War II, further expansion stalled, including the purchase of a large quantity of modern
weapons that already had been ordered. At any rate, the two great powers of Britain and the Soviet Union possessed much greater military strength than Iran in terms of firepower, tactics, communications, and logistics.

Shortly after the invasion, Reza Shah wrote United States President Franklin D. Roosevelt, appealing to the latter to exert diplomatic pressure on Britain and the Soviet Union, but received a response that appeared to support the Allies’ main war aim to defeat Germany. The British invaded from the west and south, while the Russians attacked from the north.

**British operations** On the morning of August 25, 1941, British planes attacked Iranian airbases and military facilities in Tehran and other places in southern Iran. With Soviet planes also launching air attacks on military targets in Tabriz, Ardabil, Rasht, and other locations in northern Iran, by the first day, the Allies had incapacitated the Iranian Air Force and gained full control of the sky. The British attacked from neighboring Iraq, where they had assembled a sizable force consisting of British and Indian troops after overthrowing a pro-German Iraqi regime in Baghdad a few months earlier (Anglo-Iraqi War of 1941; *previous article*). British Royal Navy ships crossed the Shatt al-Arab, the river separating Iran and Iraq near the Persian Gulf, surprising and overpowering the small Iranian Navy on the eastern shore. British and Indian forces were landed at Abadan, quelling local resistance there in some bitter fighting, and gaining control of and securing the nearby oil fields, which at that time was the largest in the world. With Abadan’s capture, the British achieved one of its war objectives – to secure the vital Abadan oil facility.

![Figure 35. Anglo-Soviet Invasion of Iran.](image-url)
Amphibious landings also were carried out in Bandar Shahpur and Bandar Abbas further south. Within a few days, the British also gained control of much of Khuzestan Province, except at Ahvaz, the provincial capital, where a strong Iranian force, which included armored units, appeared ready to resist the invasion. No confrontation took place, however, as on August 29 1941, Reza Shah, by this time facing certain defeat with the impending collapse of his army in other fronts, announced a unilateral ceasefire and ordered the Iranian military to cease further combat actions.

Also on August 25, the first day of the war, British and Indian forces attacked from Khanaqin, Iraq, aimed at capturing Kermanshah Province in western central Iran, and together with the Soviet offensive from the north, to put direct military pressure on Tehran. The fighting in the central sector was much more intense than in Khuzestan, and the rugged, mountainous terrain allowed the British to advance only slowly, especially along deep, narrow passes. Close air support by the Royal Air Force was decisive, however, allowing British ground troops to take Qasr-e Shirin, Gilan-e Gharb, and Sarpol-e Zahab. By August 29, 1941, the British had captured Shahabad and were poised to advance on the city of Kermanshah, the provincial capital, when Reza Shah announced the ceasefire. On September 1, the British took control of Kermanshah.

Soviet operations The Soviet Union justified its military action against Iran by invoking a clause in the 1921 Russo-Persian Treaty of Friendship that allowed the Soviets to invade Iran (i.e. Persia) if the Soviet Union was threatened in its southern border with Iran. Simultaneous with the British offensive, on the morning of August 25, 1941 and preceded by air strikes on Iranian military facilities, the Soviet Red Army crossed the border from Soviet Azerbaijan into Iranian Azerbaijan. Iranians fought at a big disadvantage there, having no armored units to confront about one thousand Soviet tanks. Soviet armored units sped south, by-passing, cutting of, and forcing the surrender of strong Iranian positions at Tabriz and Ardabil, and bringing the whole province under Red Army control by the following day (August 26). Further Soviet offensives reached Urmia and Meyaneh.

Soviet forces also attacked Iran’s Gilan Province, located next to the Caspian Sea. Supported by air firepower, Soviet ground forces and naval vessels carrying landing troops worked closely to quell strong Iranian opposition. Iranian resistance particularly was fierce at Rasht, the provincial capital, and Bandar Pahlavi, which was overthrown by aerial bombardment and a massive Soviet ground offensive. By August 28, 1941, the Soviets had gained control of much of the province. The Red Army also attacked from Soviet Turkmenistan into Iran’s Khorasan Province, gaining control of the region by August 28 after heavy fighting. With Soviet forces subsequently entering Gorgan and Mazandaran provinces, the whole northern section of Iran came under Soviet control.

On August 30, 1941, one day after much of the fighting ended following the announcement of the ceasefire, units of the Red Army linked up with British troops that had moved north, at Sanandaj and Qazvin.

Continuing tensions and Reza Shah’s abdication British and Russian negotiators, meeting with Iranian representatives, asked that German and other Axis nationals in Iran be surrendered to Allied authorities. The Allies also demanded that Iran cut diplomatic ties with Germany, Italy, Hungary, and Romania (i.e. European Axis countries). Reza Shah refused and secretly allowed the German diplomatic staff to escape through the border into Turkey. Reza Shah’s defiance prompted the British and Soviet forces to advance threateningly to the outskirts of Tehran, with the British in the south of the city and the Soviets in other directions.
Reza Shah, by now politically and militarily demoralized, felt that he had lost all legitimacy to continue in power. A few days after the Allies attacked, he had appointed pro-British Mohammad Ali Foroughi as Prime Minister in a desperate but futile attempt to persuade the British to stop their invasion. On September 16, 1941, Reza Shah, through a letter that was written by Prime Minister Foroughi, announced his abdication from the throne in favor of his son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. British authorities arrested Reza Shah and then forced him into exile; the ex-monarch eventually was settled in South Africa where he died in 1944. The British also arrested the remaining Axis nationals, transporting them to Australia for interment for the duration of the global war.

Reza Shah, as with many Iranians, was humiliated by the rapid collapse and defeat of the Iranian Army. Similarly, the British were surprised at their ease of victory, being particularly aware that the Iranian government had put great efforts and expended considerable resources to building Iran’s military infrastructure. During the war, despite pockets of strong resistance, the Iranian military as a whole broke apart readily, with commanders fleeing the battlefield or attempting to make separate peace with the invaders. Reza Shah, infuriated by what he felt was treachery by the army, summoning his top commanders, pulled out his gun and nearly shot the Iranian Armed Forces chief-of-staff before being restrained; he also had other high-ranking generals face court martial. The Iranian military suffered from an entrenched inward-thinking conservative leadership that had focused on internal security issues and rejected the ideas of European-trained junior officers who were educated in the modern methods of warfare. The Iranian Army possessed some modern weapons but was seriously deficient in logistical support infrastructures and military communications network, e.g. during the war, the army relied on the civilian telephone, telegraph, and postal systems.

**Aftermath** Despite British reluctance, Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, having acted quickly, succeeded in gaining the throne as Iran’s new monarch, which was helped greatly by commendations given by Prime Minister Foroughi. The new Shah would go on to have a lengthy career, serving as Iran’s king for 38 years, and proved to be an invaluable auxiliary to the Allies for the remainder of World War II. In January 1942, Iran signed the Tripartite Treaty with Britain and the Soviet Union, and in September 1943, declared war on Germany. In November 1943, in the so-called Tehran Conference which was highlighted by the presence of the “Big Three”, i.e. U.S. President Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and Soviet General Secretary Joseph Stalin, the Allies declared that Iran was a member of the Allied Powers and served as the Allied “Bridge to Victory”, in reference to the Trans-Iranian Railway.

By early 1943, large numbers of U.S. troops and support personnel had arrived in Iran to assist in the delivery of Lend Lease materiel and other supplies. At their peak, some 200,000 Soviet, British, and American military and civilian personnel were stationed in Iran. In order to facilitate the flow of supplies, the Tripartite Treaty stipulated Allied control of sections of Iran, with the Russians in the north and British in the south, which effectively partitioned Iran into zones of foreign control. Repeated assurances by the Allies of respecting the independence and territorial integrity of Iran did little to tone down local opposition, particularly among nationalists, military officers, and some government officials, who believed that their country had been dismembered by the foreign powers.

The Allies’ desire to support the Soviet Union put much stress on the Iranian economy and local population’s living conditions. Allied control of the road and railway infrastructures disrupted domestic food distributions systems, leading to severe food shortages that were aggravated by hoarding and crop failures. Furthermore, the Red Army seized farm production in Iran’s northern provinces for distribution in the Soviet Union, which also was suffering food shortages because of the German capture of prime
agricultural lands in the west. The presence of large numbers of Allied troops in Iran also limited the amount of food available to the general population.

On September 2, 1945, World War II ended when Japan surrendered to the Allies. The Tripartite Treaty between Iran and the Allies stipulated that the foreign powers must withdraw their troops within six months after the end of World War II, in this case, on March 2, 1946. Britain and the United States complied, but the Soviet Union continued to hold onto northern Iran, and citing the continued presence of a threat to its southern border, established a “buffer zone” over a wide stretch of territory comprising the Iranian provinces of Azerbaijan, Gilan, Mazandaran, Gorgan, and Khorasan. During this early post-war period, the Soviet Union was extending its sphere of influence in Eastern Europe by also citing the need to establish a buffer zone there.

Under Soviet auspices, in November 1945, Iranian Azerbaijanis in the province of Azerbaijan seceded from Iran by declaring the formation of the Azerbaijan People’s Republic. Also with Soviet backing, Iranian Kurds declared independence in January 1946 as the Republic of Mahabad. Iranian troops sent to reclaim these regions were prevented from entering by Red Army units, and also were turned back by Soviet-backed Kurdish and Azerbaijani militias.

Following the March 2, 1946 deadline, the United States put pressure on the Soviet Union to withdraw from Iran. The newly formed United Nations did the same, with the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) passing a number of resolutions calling on the Soviet government to withdraw its forces. But the Soviets remained defiant.

Meanwhile, the governments of Iran and the Soviet Union, negotiating separately, signed a bilateral oil agreement in March 1946, which gave the Soviets exclusive rights to explore for oil in northern Iran. The potential for large economic gains influenced the Soviet government to change its position and withdrew its forces from Iran in May 1946; local opposition to the pro-Soviet governments and the continuing international diplomatic pressures also motivated the Soviets to withdraw.

With the Soviet withdrawal, the secessionist regimes in Iran held talks with the Iranian government, but which soon collapsed, with the Azerbaijani and Kurdish governments ending in November and December 1946, respectively, and the Iranian military regaining control of the whole northern region.

Subsequently in October 1947, Iran reneged on its oil treaty with the Soviet Union, declaring that it had been forced to agree to it because of the Soviet occupation. For much of the superpower rivalry in the Cold War that followed, tensions remained between Iran and the Soviet Union, as the Shah firmly aligned his country with the United States, although no more armed conflicts broke out between the two countries.
MORO REBELLION

Background In the 14th century sea-faring traders from the Arabian Peninsula, and later from southern India and the Malay Archipelago, navigating through the maritime regions of present-day Malaysia and Indonesia, introduced Islam to the lands that now comprise the Philippine islands of Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago. Subsequently, with the arrival of more Muslim missionaries, Islam spread to the natives of Mindanao and Sulu, particularly those that inhabited the low-lying areas in the coastal and inland regions.

By the 15th century, the regions comprising present-day Sulu and much of Mindanao (with the exception of the northeastern sections and mountainous central regions of Mindanao, which were inhabited by many other smaller tribes) had turned from animistic worship to the Islamic faith. Like the rest of the other islands constituting modern-day Philippines (Luzon and the Visayas), in Mindanao, no central government existed. Instead, in these islands, individual villages were autonomous political entities, each ruled by a village chieftain (*datu*) in a socio-political class structure.

The arrival of Islam to Mindanao allowed some datus there to gain more political power either through conquest or by making alliances with other datus. This gave rise to a more powerful polity, the Muslim Sultanate, which possessed greater territory, wealth, and power. The most powerful of these were the Sultanates of Sulu, Lanao, Buayan, and Maguindanao (The name “Mindanao” is derived from the latter sultanate). Most sultanates typically had centralized governments. A notable exception was the decentralized Lanao Sultanate, which was a confederation of four principalities and seventeen “royal houses”.
By the late 15th century, Islam had also spread to some parts of Luzon. In particular, pre-colonial Manila was a major regional economic and trading center known as the Kingdom of Maynila, which was also a vassal state of the Bruneian Sultanate. Other city-states were also prominent in Manila: the Kingdom of Tondo, which was located north of the Pasig River, and the Kingdom of Namayan, situated further inland. In other parts of Luzon, many communities and settlements also existed as autonomous feudal city-states, but the natives there continued to practice animistic worship.

In the Visayas, two major polities were well established: the Confederation of Madja-as in Panay and the Rajahnate of Cebu. These states, along with the Rajahnate of Butuan (in northeastern Mindanao), had Indian-influenced cultures (as a result of the Indianization of the Malayan region during the 5th-15th centuries), and practiced a religion that combined elements of Hinduism, Buddhism, and animism.

No single one among these many political entities in pre-colonial Philippines became powerful enough to conquer and dominate all the others and unify the islands into one nation-state. Intense competition for control of the regional trade (which was conducted with China, Japan, the Malayan states, etc.) reflected the hostile relationships among these many states. Deep hostility also existed between the Indianized Visayan states of Panay and Cebu, and the Islamized states of Mindanao and Luzon. Piratical slave-raider attacks were launched from Sulu and Mindanao to the Visayas, generating a constant state of war between the Visayas and Mindanao.
Figure 37. Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao comprise the three geographical regions of modern-day Philippines.
The Spanish presence in the islands comprising modern-day Philippines began in 1521 when a Spanish expedition led by Ferdinand Magellan, in search of a westward maritime route to the Spice Islands, landed in Homonhon Island (in Eastern Samar). Magellan was killed in battle in one of the Visayan islands, but survivors of his expedition reached the Spice Islands, and one ship with eighteen men eventually returned to Spain.

In the succeeding years, Spain launched many other expeditions to the Philippines through the Pacific Ocean in order to strengthen the Spanish presence in the Moluccan spice trade, and also to explore the yet unknown islands in the Pacific Ocean, and to consolidate its claim to its newly discovered islands there. In one such expedition (in 1542), the Visayan islands of Samar and Leyte were named “Las Islas Filipinas” (The Philippine Islands), a name which the Spanish later extended to the whole archipelago.

Spain’s formal occupation and colonization of the Philippines began in 1865, when Spanish ships carrying hundreds of soldiers arrived in the islands. Using a combination of armed force, coercion, and treaties and alliances, the Spanish eventually gained control of the Philippines. Spain’s other objective in the Philippines was to introduce Catholicism to the natives, which if successful, would have the implication that the natives accepted Spanish authority. In the original Spanish expedition, Magellan had converted Datu Humabon, the Cebu Rajahnate monarch, to Christianity.

The Spanish experienced some difficulty forcing the Visayan states to convert to Christianity. The Confederation of Madja-as accepted Catholicism only in exchange for a military alliance with the Spanish against the enemies of the Madja-as. The Cebu Rajahnate was forced to convert to Catholicism only after being defeated in battle by the Spanish forces. But forcing Spanish rule on the Islamized states of Mindanao and Luzon proved much more difficult.

Initially, the Spanish set up their colonial headquarters in Cebu, and then later in Panay, where they also established permanent settlements. The Spanish soon learned of the Islamic city-states of Manila, and also of Manila’s vast regional trading networks, particularly with China. In 1570, Miguel López de Legazpi, the Spanish commander, sent a force of Spanish soldiers and Visayan warriors to Manila to establish a Spanish presence there. The Spanish-Visayan force soon came into conflict with the Kingdom of Maynila, which it defeated in battle. The nearby city-states then acquiesced to the Spanish, and through coercion, soon also were forced to dissolve their autonomous status and come under Spanish authority. Spain then gained power over Manila, and the natives there soon converted to Christianity.

In 1571, the Spanish moved the seat of colonial government to Manila, which became the permanent capital of the “Spanish East Indies”, comprising the territories of modern-day Philippines, parts of Taiwan (Formosa) and the Moluccas, and the Pacific islands of Guam and the Marianas Islands, and Caroline Islands. Spanish administrative officials and the religious orders soon arrived in Manila, consolidating Spain’s hold of the Philippines. The Spanish extended their control across Luzon and the Visayas, and gained authority over the many other smaller villages and settlements, and also converted all the natives to Catholicism.

In a few decades, Catholicism was firmly established in the Philippines. The religious orders held full administrative, educational, and social control over all aspects of the local, provincial, and regional governments of the colony (a phenomenon called “friarocracy). The Spanish civilian government, although officially having authority over the religious orders, functioned only in Manila, while the rest of the archipelago was de facto under friar control. Only the highland tribes of northern Luzon (such as the Igorots and Negritos) and Mindoro (such as the Mangyans) remained outside Spanish control, because of the remoteness of their villages. These ethnic groups retained their cultures, traditions, and ways of life.
The main reason for the Spanish presence in the Philippines was for Spain to have a base in the Far East from where it could engage in trade for the region’s highly valued products, particularly tea, silk, ivory, and porcelain from China, spices from the Moluccas, gems from India, etc. To this end, Spain set up the Acapulco-Manila Galleon Trade, where trading ships called galleons, made annual voyages between Manila and Acapulco (located in present-day Mexico) to exchange the goods from Asia for silver mined in the New World (the Americas). In this way, the Spanish East Indies was administered from New Spain, and not directly by Spain itself. And for 250 years (1565-1815), Spain’s commercial interests in the Philippines were centered in the highly lucrative Galleon trade, and the colony’s development was relegated to a lower priority. Thus, the Philippines by itself was not profitable to Spain.

Spanish colonial rule in the Philippines was absolute and autocratic. Civilian and religious leaders ruled with near impunity. The native people had few civil rights, and except for a few favorites, owned no land and were miserably poor. The Spanish colonizers developed a race-based social stratified system with Spanish nationals at the top, and the “indios” (literally: Indians; the Spanish word for the native population) at the bottom.[5] The laws passed in the Philippines were aimed at advancing Spanish political and economic interests. The annual 40-day forced labor system (“polo y servicio”) forced all native males to render public service for the Spanish government, which periodically deprived them of their livelihoods. Spain implemented the “encomienda” system, where vast agricultural landholdings were entrusted to Spanish citizens who forced the natives to work the land as peasant laborers in a feudalistic-type system. Spanish authorities also arbitrarily raised the tribute (taxes) on the local population.

Because of these repressive policies, throughout the period of Spanish colonization, scores of local rebellions broke out, but all of these failed to force the Spanish from the islands. One reason for this failure was the multi-ethnic, archipelagic nature of the colony, which prevented the rebellion from spreading to other islands. Spanish authorities also used a “divide and conquer” policy against the revolts: they used an ethnic group from one area or island to quell a rebellion by an ethnic group in another area or island.

By the start of the 19th century, the Spanish Empire had begun its irreversible decline. By the 1830s, it had lost its vast colonial possessions in Central and South America to independence wars, and retained only its Caribbean colonies of Cuba and Puerto Rico.

In the Philippines, by the mid-19th century, Filipino nationalism had emerged, brought about by the rise of a native professional and middle class that gained enough wealth to send their children to the universities in Manila and Europe. Subsequently, a Filipino educated middle class formed in the 1860s, which converged around political activism centered in Europe (called the Propaganda Movement) that called on the Spanish government in Madrid to implement reforms in the Philippines. With no reforms forthcoming, the Propaganda Movement collapsed in 1895. Shortly thereafter, in Manila, radical nationalist elements secretly formed a militant organization whose aims were to overthrow the Spanish colonial government in the Philippines, and gain Philippine independence.

In 1896, war broke out between the Filipino revolutionaries and the Spanish colonial government. Despite initially gaining some battlefield victories, by mid-1897, the rebellion was largely quelled, with the revolutionaries reduced to guerilla warfare and the Spanish army restoring authority over most of the rebel-held areas. But as the Spanish were unable to achieve a decisive military victory, in December 1897, the two sides agreed to end hostilities by signing a (tenuous) peace agreement. Emilio Aguinaldo, head of the Filipino revolutionary movement, together with his party, went into voluntary exile abroad, but localized fighting continued.
Then on April 25, 1898, war broke out between Spain and the United States (the Spanish-American War), with the U.S. government taking the side of the Cuban revolutionaries who for three years had been fighting for independence against Spain. A U.S. naval squadron sent to the Philippines engaged and decisively defeated the Spanish Navy in Manila Bay on May 1, 1898, and then set up a naval blockade of Manila while awaiting the arrival of American ground forces that would carry out the land invasion of the Philippines. U.S. officials stationed in Asia met with Aguinaldo, and a tacit alliance was formed between them to fight Spain. On May 19, 1898, Aguinaldo and his party returned to the Philippines and restarted the independence war. By June 1898, the Filipino revolutionaries had taken control over much of Luzon and the Visayas, with the remaining Spanish forces confined to the fortified city of Manila.

In August 1898, representatives of the U.S. and Spanish governments met to discuss the end of the war, and a ceasefire was signed. In Manila, American and Spanish military officials, unaware of the ceasefire agreement, also met to negotiate the Spanish surrender and the transfer of Manila to the U.S. Army. By this time, Spanish authorities realized the futility of trying to defend Manila against the Filipino siege of the city and the imminent attack by U.S.-Filipino forces. The Spanish and Americans agreed to carry out a mock battle, for the following reasons: to preserve traditional Spanish honor by not surrendering without a fight; to prevent unnecessary bloodshed between Spanish and American soldiers; and to deny the Filipino revolutionaries entry into Manila. The battle was carried out on August 13, 1898 and despite a minor setback that caused casualties to both sides, the plan succeeded, and the “defeated” Spanish military surrendered Manila to the U.S. Army.

On December 10, 1898, Spain and the United States formally ended the war under the Treaty of Paris, which among other stipulations, declared that Spain would cede the Philippines to the United States for the sum of $20 million dollars for “improvements” made in that colony. Both sides complied, and the Spanish government and its army departed from the Philippines, and the colony came under American control.

Tensions now rose between the Filipino revolutionaries and the United States, with the former believing that the Americans had come to deprive them of independence, while the U.S. government wanted to establish a tangible presence in the Far East. Fighting between the two sides broke out on February 4, 1899, which quickly turned into a one-sided war, as the U.S. Army’s superior firepower easily overwhelmed the ill-equipped, undertrained Filipino fighters. Aguinaldo was forced to be constantly on the move to avoid capture, retreating northward across central and northern Luzon and finding some safety in the mountains.

The United States established both a military and civilian administration in the Philippines, the former to operate in the hostile regions and the latter in pacified territories. U.S. authorities succeeded in co-opting former Filipino revolutionary leaders into positions of the civilian government, and soon also won over the trust of the general population by replacing the Spanish-era semi-feudalistic system with a modern and professional system, and launching socio-economic reforms and infrastructure projects.

In March 1901, Aguinaldo was captured by the U.S. Army. However, the “Philippine Insurrection” (as the war was known in the United States) continued until over a year later, in April 1902, when General Miguel Malvar, who had succeeded as the top revolutionary leader, surrendered. Two months later, July 1902, the United States declared the war over, although some localized fighting by “incorrigibles” and “bandits”, as U.S. officials called the remaining revolutionaries, would persist until about 1910. By this time, the U.S. Insular government (as the colonial government was called), led by a U.S. President-appointed Governor-General, was firmly in control of the Philippine Islands.
The Moros During much of its colonization of the islands, Spain was unable to bring under its control the southern part of the Philippine archipelago, comprising the main island of Mindanao and, to its west, the Sulu Archipelago. A great majority of the native population in these regions was Muslim, whom the Spanish called “Moros”, a term they originally ascribed to North African Muslims who invaded and occupied the Iberian Peninsula from the 8th to 15th centuries. Pre-occupation with the Galleon Trade, inadequate military resources, irresoluteness, and the difficulty of converting Muslims prevented Spain from penetrating the vast, hostile interior of Mindanao. The Spanish did launch a number of operations in Moroland, and although they achieved victory in battle as a result of superior firepower, these attacks ultimately were not successful in totally subduing the Moros.

The Moros practiced slavery, and launched slave-raiding attacks using swift war boats on the Christian towns and villages, particularly in the Visayas, and also in Luzon, and carried off the inhabitants of these areas into slavery. The Moros plundered settlements, and burned houses, churches, and buildings. In the 18th century, Moro raids were taking a heavy toll on Spanish resources as a result of the destruction and also the great cost to rebuild the communities, livelihoods, and infrastructures of the affected areas.

In reprisal for these attacks, the Spanish launched punitive expeditions in Moro areas, which in turn, incited reciprocal attacks from the Moros, leading to a constant cycle of raids and counter-raids. By the 17th to early 19th centuries, a perennial state of war existed between Spanish-controlled Luzon and the Visayas, and Moro-dominated Mindanao and Sulu. This period coincided with the reign of Sultan Kudarat, who greatly extended the territories of the Sultanate of Maguindanao to include much of present-day Mindanao through alliances with other sultanates and other Moro tribes. In general, however, the Moros, who comprised many diverse ethnic groups, did not form a united front against the Spaniards; in fact, the various Moro city-states were sworn enemies, and fought the Spanish, as they did each other.

In the mid-19th century, Spain introduced steam-powered ships to the Sulu Archipelago, which finally stopped the Moro piratical attacks. The Spanish vessels greatly outmatched the Moro war boats in speed and power. The Spanish also attacked Moro pirate lairs, and imposed a naval blockade of Jolo, preventing Moros from bringing in firearms from abroad. By the late 1870s, Moro piracy was quelled. At this time also, the Spanish were able to establish several coastal garrisons in Mindanao, from where they launched military expeditions on Moro fortified settlements (called “cotas”) in the island’s interior, particularly against the powerful Maguindanao and Lanao sultanates.

Earlier in 1848 and 1851, Spanish forces attacked Jolo, the seat of the Sulu Sultanate. The Sulu Sultan was forced to move his capital to another section of the island, which allowed the Spanish Army to establish a garrison in Jolo. In 1876, the Spanish Army, assembling a large force of 9,000 soldiers and a fleet of gunboats, attacked Jolo again, this time decisively defeating the forces of the Sulu Sultan. The Spanish then gained full control of Jolo Island.

In July 1878, Spain and the Sulu Sultanate signed a peace treaty called the “Bases of Peace and Capitulation”, which differed in translations between the Spanish and Sultanate’s versions. In the former’s version, Spain was granted full sovereignty over the Sultanate and its territory (i.e. the Sultanate, as a sovereign political entity, ceased to exist), while in the latter’s version, the Sultanate was a protectorate of Spain (i.e. it retained its sovereignty, but was under Spanish protection). In March 1885, Britain, Germany, and Spain, desiring to define their territorial jurisdictions and spheres of interests, signed the Madrid Protocol, which stipulated that the Philippine Islands, including Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago, was officially recognized as belonging to Spain.
By the time of the Philippine Revolution (in August 1896) and later the United States involvement in the Philippines during the Spanish-American War (May 1898), Spain was in the process of consolidating its authority in the Sulu Archipelago, and had established in Mindanao a number of garrisons (in Jolo, Zamboanga, Iligan, Cagayan, Surigao, Cotabato, Davao, etc.) from where they launched expeditions against the Moros in the interior. In these coastal areas, Christian settlements also were established, as Spanish authorities encouraged the native Christians from Luzon and the Visayas to resettle in Mindanao. While most of the Moro sultanates and smaller city-states resisted the Spanish intrusions, a number of Moro chieftains were co-opted to work with the Spanish, and even to fight defiant Moro sultans and datus.

In December 1898, Spain and the United States ended their state of war with the signing of the Treaty of Paris, where Spain ceded to the United States the Philippines (as well as Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Guam). Filipino revolutionaries in Luzon and the Visayas, who had been fighting an independence war against Spain since 1896, then declared war on the United States, resulting in the three-year Philippine-American War (June 1899 – July 1902). The U.S. colonial authorities, preoccupied with the war in the north against the Filipino revolutionaries, applied a policy of non-interference with the Moros in the south in order to not be embroiled simultaneously in two wars. However, U.S. Army units occupied the former Spanish coastal garrisons in Mindanao and Sulu.

In August 1899, the United States and the Sulu Sultanate signed the Bates Agreement (named after U.S. General John Bates, who negotiated for the U.S. government), where the United States established a protectorate over the Sulu Sultanate in exchange for allowing the Moros to maintain their local autonomy, laws, religion and culture. Slavery, which was widely practiced by the Moros, was tacitly tolerated, but would become a contributory factor to the coming war between the United States and the Moro people.

By mid-1902, the Philippine-American War was winding down, and the U.S. Army quelled the last major Filipino revolutionary resistance in Luzon and the Visayas. By this time, conflict with the Moros in southern Philippines also had broken out. Imminent victory in the north also allowed the U.S. military to move more troops to the south to confront the Moros, whom the U.S. government now was determined to bring under its full authority. In July 1902, the U.S. War Department announced that the war with the Filipino revolutionaries was over, but this did not extend to Moroland as stipulated in Proclamation 483 issued by U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt, who declared that “…the insurrection against the authority and sovereignty of the United States is now at an end, and peace has been established in all parts of the archipelago except in the country inhabited by the Moro tribes, to which this proclamation does not apply”.

**War** In early May 1902, as a result of the killing of American soldiers by bands of Moros, the U.S. Army launched its first major operation against the Moros in Lake Lanao. The objective of this operation was directed at two Moro “cotas”, Binadayan and Pandapatan. In this clash, known as the Battle of Bayan, the Americans easily captured Binadayan but met strong resistance at Pandapatan, before prevailing by the second day.
The Moro “cotas” were fortresses enclosed by high walls 1-2 feet thick, and were made from mud, or less often, stone. Outside a cota and running along its length was an array of obstacles consisting of bamboo stakes, thorny vegetation, pit traps with wooden spikes, etc. Beyond these obstacles was a moat that was 20-30 feet deep. The main weapons inside a coat were native brass cannon (called “lantakas”), as well as captured Spanish artillery pieces. A cota was also a settlement consisting of a cluster of huts, where Moro families lived. Religious and cultural events were held in the cota, and a cota was ruled by a sultan or datu.

Typically, U.S. forces attacked a cota by first shelling the fortress’ walls. When a breach was made, American soldiers would launch an attack through the opening. An American expedition usually consisted of a number of U.S. Army battalions and a smaller U.S. Cavalry unit, which were later augmented with units of the Philippine Scouts and Philippine Constabulary. The latter two consisted of recruits among Christian Filipinos (as well, later of Moros). The expedition also included field guns, a pack train, and local guides.

During the fighting, Moro civilians, including women and children, remained in the cotas. This resulted in heavy Moro casualties. For instance, in the Battle of Bayan, over 400 Moros were killed to just 11 American casualties – such disparity in casualty figures became common throughout the war.

The American expedition into Lanao resulted from the plan of U.S. General George Davis, commander of the Department of Mindanao-Jolo, to take full control of the Lanao region, either through negotiations, but also with force, if needed. The “Confederation of Sultanates of Lanao”, which ruled the Lanao region, did not view itself bound to the Bates Agreement, and its many city-states were de facto autonomous and operated independently of each other. The U.S. Army saw that to impose American
authority in Lanao, it had to deal separately with each city-state, in contrast to the Sulu Sultanate, where it had dealt only with the local sultan.

In June 1902, Camp Vickers, the U.S. Army base in Lake Lanao, was placed under the command of Captain John Pershing[6], who took great efforts to establish friendly relations with the Lanao Moros. In a number of peace conferences with the Lanao tribal leaders, he won over a majority of the Lanao sultans, datus, and chieftains. However, he was determined to impose U.S. rule in the region, using force if needed. Pershing launched four major exploratory campaigns in Lanao, including his “March across Lake Lanao” expedition in April-May 1903, which brought U.S. authority over the lake region. For the most part, Pershing succeeded through dialogue and negotiations, as most of the cota communities did not resist.

However, along the western shores of the lake, the cotas of Bacolod and Calahui were defiant. In April 1903, in the Battle of Bacolod, U.S. forces overran the two cotas, causing casualty figures of 120 Moros and 1 U.S. soldier killed. Pershing was determined not to inflict more than necessary bloodshed, and allowed the Moros a clear escape route. As a result, hundreds of Moros were able to escape the fighting.

In May 1903, on the eastern side of the lake, Pershing also faced opposition from 50 small cotas. In the battle that followed, U.S. forces gained control of the area at a cost of 200 Moros and 2 Americans killed. Pershing’s tour at Camp Vickers ended in June 1903. On his return to the United States, his exploits in Moroland had given him considerable prestige. Consequently in September 1906, he was promoted directly from Captain to Brigadier General, bypassing three ranks and over 800 senior officers.

In June 1903, the Moro Province was created with five districts, i.e. Sulu, Lanao, Cotabato, Zamboanga, and Davao. Moro Province was nominally led by a civilian government, but which were filled mostly with U.S. Army officers. In turn, each district was divided into wards, which were the existing Moro villages and settlements, and whose datus and leaders were appointed to the ward's local administrative and judicial positions.

In August 1903, General Leonard Wood[7] succeeded General Samuel Sumner as Governor of Moro Province. General Wood was determined to bring modern Western-style government to Moro province and end the Moros’ medieval-era political and social structures. He abolished slavery and imposed a poll tax (called “cedula”), both of which angered the Moros, and also wished to curb the Moros’ martial culture, and end slave-raiding and the bloody clan wars. General Wood also was prepared to use force on the Moros, and achieve a decisive victory in battle that would teach them “one clear-cut lesson”. Instead, his aggressive policies provoked the Moros, and General Wood’s term as provincial governor became the bloodiest and the most intense phase of the war. Hundreds of battles took place across Moroland. During his tenure, 5,000 Moros and over 200 U.S. soldiers were killed, hundreds of cotas were destroyed, and large areas of the province were destroyed.

In 1903, Moros in Jolo led by Datu Hassan, who opposed the ban on slavery, rose up in rebellion. In October of that year, U.S. forces attacked and overwhelmed Hassan in his mountain fortress. Hassan escaped but was eventually killed in March 1904 in another battle with U.S. forces. Also in March 1904, the United States abrogated the Bates Agreement, which ended the Sulu Sultanate’s autonomous status. U.S. forces then occupied Jolo, placing it under military control.

In April 1904, U.S. forces attacked the Moro cotas at Taraca, whose sultan had refused to participate in a peace conference called by General Wood. Some 130 cotas were destroyed in the attack. In Cotabato District, an uprising led by the powerful Datu Ali, who also opposed the ban on slavery, led
to a lengthy hunt (1904-1906) by the U.S. Army for the defiant Moro leader. Scores of skirmishes and battles occurred, including the Battle of Serenaya (March 1906), where U.S. forces captured Datu Ali’s stronghold at Serenaya, leading to another encounter at Simpton, Cotabato in October 1906, where Datu Ali was killed. Datu Ali’s death ended major resistance to American rule in Cotabato, as Datu Piang, Cotabato’s other major chieftain, had been won over by U.S. authorities in exchange for political and economic privileges.

In Jolo, some 700-900 Moros, including women and children, and led by a fugitive named Pala (who was wanted by British authorities in Borneo) set up fortifications at Bud (Mount) Dajo, an extinct volcano five miles south of Jolo. In March 1906, U.S. forces stormed these fortresses in the encounter known as the Battle of Bud Dajo, resulting in perhaps all 900–1,000 Moros killed; U.S. Army casualties were 21 killed and 75 wounded.

American colonial authorities tried to suppress information in the United States regarding the Battle of Bud Dajo, but details of the encounter that surfaced in U.S. news services generated outrage from the American public and a firestorm of controversy that reached the top levels of the U.S. government. Particularly alarming was the report that the “wanton slaughter” of Moro women and children had taken place. Legislators of the opposition Democratic Party condemned General Wood’s conduct of the battle, and put pressure on President Theodore Roosevelt. The U.S. Congress asked the War Department to turn in the battlefield reports from the Bud Dajo operation. Nevertheless, the Republican Party stood behind General Wood, while military authorities explained that the presence of women and children in the Moro cotas during the battle naturally led to high civilian casualties, and that the women were armed and fought alongside the men, and that the Moros used their children as “human shields”.

In February 1906, General Tasker Bliss succeeded as governor of Moro Province as well as the commander of Mindanao Department. General Bliss’ tenure was a marked contrast to that of his predecessor, as the new governor did not launch any large-scale campaign and instead focused on the social and economic development of the Moro region. For military operations and patrol/outpost duties, he sent out more native troops, believing that they would less likely provoke hostility from the Moro people than if U.S. forces were used. In the absence of large-scale fighting during this period, Moros called General Bliss’ tenure the “peace era”.

To achieve this level of peace, however, General Bliss tolerated some lawlessness. For example, bandits and criminals took refuge in their home cotas without fearing that the U.S. Army would pursue them there, and risk confronting the warriors in the cotas. General Bliss received both criticism and praise from his superiors. His critics accused him of inaction, while his supporters praised his efforts at maintaining peace and of having a genuine desire to improve conditions of the Moros.

In November 1909, John Pershing, now Brigadier General, succeeded as Governor of Moro Province and commander of Mindanao Department. General Pershing’s tenure (1909-1913) and that of General Bliss’ were periods where relations between the U.S. occupation forces and the Moro people greatly improved. Upon his return, General Pershing was warmly received by the Moros, particularly in the Lanao region where he had served six years earlier.

However, opposition to American rule continued. Shortly after General Pershing assumed his post as governor, thousands of defiant Subanon tribal people in Zamboanga District gathered on Mount Boburan where they built cota fortifications. Then in Davao District, the highland Manobo people, a non-Moro tribal group, went on a killing rampage. In both cases, General Pershing used a great deal of persuasion, as well as guarantees that the U.S. government was operating in the native people’s best interests, to convince the rebels to break up their mountain bases and return to their homes.
The U.S. Army also used force on the most defiant rebels. By 1911, the security situation in Moro Province continued to be a major problem for U.S. authorities. Bandits and outlaws roamed the countryside, and attacks by “amoks” and “juramentados” were an ever-present danger to American and Christian Filipino soldiers, just as it had been for the Spanish Army before them. An amok was a Moro whose attack was not religiously motivated, while a juramentado (from the Spanish word *juramentar*, to take an oath) attacked after performing a Muslim ritual, and thus was motivated by religion. A juramentado was determined to lose his life in the attack. He believed that, upon death, he would enter Heaven. An amok or juramentado attack, either singly or by a group, always was carried out in a crowded, public place, such as a market place, to maximize carnage. The attacker(s) carried a Moro bladed weapon, which he used to kill his targets, which were usually American or Filipino Christian soldiers, until he was shot to death.

General Pershing concluded that the Moros’ warrior culture was the root cause of the security problems of Moro Province. For this reason, he decided to end the Moro tradition of possessing weapons.

In April 1911, a U.S. Army officer was attacked and killed in a juramentado attack. This incident prompted General Pershing to issue, on September 8, 1911, Executive Order No. 24, which required all residents of Moro province to surrender their weapons, both firearms and blades, to military authorities by December 1, 1911. In return, the owners would be paid the market value of their weapons. This disarmament order, which ultimately became successful, was bitterly resisted by the Moros in Sulu. Few people turned in their firearms (those that were usually old and non-functional), and those who did, used the money to buy new firearms. Compliance with bladed weapons was almost negligible. Resistance also manifested in a drastic rise in juramentado attacks, while the Islamic clergy called for a jihad against the U.S. forces.

One of the most violent confrontations occurred after negotiations broke down between U.S. authorities and Tausog Moros at Taglibi, located east of the capital town of Jolo. Taglibi also was the stronghold of the most defiant Moros on the island. In December 1911, some 800 Taglibi Moros, including women and children, retreated to their cota fortifications at the crater of Bud Dajo, the site of an earlier battle between Americans and Moros five years ago. General Pershing planned to use overwhelming force against the defiant Taglibi Moros, but the U.S. government in Washington, D.C. was determined to prevent a repeat of the first battle that had caused heavy Moro casualties.

Instead, General Pershing laid a siege of Bud Dajo and held talks with the rebellious Taglibi Moros. By December 25, 1911, with their food supplies running low, most of the Taglibi Moros descended from the mountain and returned to their homes. Some 75 Moros remained, however, and in a U.S. Army attack where General Pershing utilized a force consisting mainly of the locally formed 52nd Moro Scout Company (an all-Moro unit), the encounter being known as the Second Battle of Bud Dajo, the Taglibi Moro cotas were destroyed.

Resistance to disarmament in Jolo also was led by Datu Naquib Amil, supported by Datus Jami and Sahipa. In June 1913, they gathered some 300 – 400 followers at Bud Bagsak, another extinct volcano, where they set up fortifications. Some time earlier, Amil had assembled a much larger force (some 6,000 men, women, and children) in Bud Bagsak, but mediation efforts led by the Sultan of Sulu on behalf of the U.S. authorities, persuaded Amil and his followers to descend from the mountain.

This time, General Pershing was determined to use force. On June 15, 1913, Pershing, assembling a force consisting of 90% Philippine Scouts (both Moro and Christian soldiers), attacked and overwhelmed Amil’s force in five days of bitter fighting (the Battle of Bud Bagsak). Datu Amil and 300 other fighters were killed; U.S. Army-Philippine Scout casualties were 15 dead and 25 wounded.
By the second half of 1913, General Pershing was convinced that Moro Province was thoroughly pacified to transition to civilian rule. The Moros had been disarmed, Moro resistance had been broken, and peace was being brought to the province.

The social and economic advancement of the Moro people, General Pershing’s other top priority, also had produced results. Schools and hospitals had been built, agricultural infrastructures improved, and public works projects undertaken. The province’s main export products, i.e. hemp, copra, and lumber, brought in much needed revenues. Many more Moro communities were being integrated into the local civil governance, and reforms to the justice system that were more attuned to traditional Moro customs were widely accepted by the local communities.

Even then, some parts of Moro Province were not yet fully pacified, particularly Jolo. Shortly after Bud Bagsak, two major battles had taken place there. In October 1913, hundreds of Tausog warriors built fortifications on Mount Talipao. The Philippine Scouts and Philippine Constabulary overwhelmed these cotas after some intense fighting. However, the ten-year U.S. military rule (1903-1913) had laid down the framework of local governance in preparation for the transition to civilian rule. In November 1913, General Pershing stepped down as civilian-military governor, and was the last leader of Moro Province and Mindanao-Sulu Department. A fully civilian government took over authority of the province. The war was over. Figures on Moro casualties are unknown, but certainly high; on the American-Christian Filipino side, over 2,000 were killed and wounded.

Aftermath The Moro Province’s transition to civilian rule fit within the priority programs of F. B. Harrison, the new Governor-General of the Philippines (as of October 1913), who wanted most of the functions of the American-dominated Insular government (i.e. colonial government) be transferred to (Christian) Filipinos. This policy, called “Filipinization”, subsequently was carried out. In 1916, the reorganized bicameral Philippine legislature, now consisting of the Senate and House of Representatives, was composed entirely of elected Filipinos. Many national, provincial, and local positions also were filled by Filipinos.

In Mindanao and Sulu, the political-military government of Moro Province and Mindanao-Sulu Department was abolished. In its place, a civilian government led by an American, Frank Carpenter (who had served in various positions in the Insular government since 1899), was formed under the newly created Department of Mindanao and Sulu (DMS). DMS was divided into six provinces, four of which were part of the former Moro Province, i.e. Sulu, Zamboanga, Cotabato, and Davao, and the non-Moro provinces of Agusan and Surigao, both located in eastern Mindanao. Lanao, originally a district of Moro Province, was not part of DMS.

Carpenter was an efficient administrator, and his tenure as governor did much to strengthen the Insular government’s relations with the Moros, and further integrate them into mainstream society. Furthermore, he advanced the political and socio-economic conditions in the region, and carried out a number of infrastructure development projects. The Insular government also implemented measures to integrate DMS into the mainstream political and administrative system of the Philippines. To some degree, this was in response to the pressure exerted by Christian Filipino political leaders who long desired to have a part in governing Mindanao. At this time, some sectors of the Insular government, both civilian and military, were worried about the political future of the Moro people. Some were concerned that Christian Filipinos governing Mindanao would lead to a resurgence of the Moro-Christian conflict, particularly since Moro leaders had expressed disapproval of being administered by Christian Filipinos.
DMS soon became assimilated into the main body politic, with the Insular government appointing Christian Filipinos to many key provincial and local positions to implement the so-called “policy of attraction” toward Moros, i.e. for Christian Filipinos to lead and train their Muslim Filipino brothers in self-government. Muslim Filipinos soon began to fill a number of important provincial and regional positions, and also were elected to the Philippine legislature. Moro society also was integrated, with the mandatory public school system, health services, and other social programs, and public works projects, greatly expanding across DMS.  

In May 1920, the DMS and its transitional government under Governor Carpenter, was terminated, the Insular government deeming that the integration of the Moro and other non-Christian people was accomplished, and administrative powers with regards to Moro affairs were transferred to the Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes.  

In terms of population, in the early 1900s, Moros constituted the overwhelming majority in Mindanao and nearly exclusively in Sulu. However, with the formation of DMS and the urging of the Insular and succeeding governments, large numbers of Christian Filipinos from Luzon and the Visayas settled in Mindanao, where they not only gained political and economic hegemony, but also became dominant demographically, and their numbers soon constituted a clear majority in the region.  

In November 1935, the United States granted self-rule to Filipinos in the form of the Philippine Commonwealth. In July 1946, under the Treaty of Manila, the Philippines gained full independence as a sovereign state.  

**Continued Moro Resistance** Until the end of American rule in Moroland, radical Moros continued to resist the U.S. government, and Moro revolts, albeit on a smaller scale, continued to break out. Moreover, Muslim leaders who had integrated into the mainstream political system also resisted both the integration of Mindanao and Sulu into the Philippine body politic, and the continued influx of Christian Filipinos to Mindanao, and pressed the Insular government for the Moro people to remain under American tutelage until the formation of an independent Moro state separate from the Philippines. They also complained that the Christian settlers were taking over vast tracts of land and exploiting the natural resources of Mindanao which, being the ancestral homeland of Moros and other tribal groups, they believed did not belong to the non-indigenous population.  

In 1910, Moro datus expressed their concern to the U.S. Secretary of War that Christian Filipinos were filling key administrative positions in Mindanao. Then in 1935, Moro leaders in Lanao declared their opposition to their lands being included in the Philippine Commonwealth, and instead demanded that they remain under U.S. rule.  

In the modern era, frustrations by militant nationalist Muslims over perceived injustices committed by Filipino Christians in general, and the Philippine government in particular, led in 1969 to a full-blown uprising led by the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), a militia organization. After years of fighting, a ceasefire, known as the Tripoli Agreement, was signed in 1976. Hard-line Moro fighters who opposed negotiating with the Philippine government, broke away from the MNLF, forming another guerilla group, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), which sought to establish an independent Moro state. In 1989, the Philippine government granted limited self-rule to Muslim regions under the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), whose territorial jurisdiction was expanded in later years. However, the Muslim Insurgency, as the modern conflict is known, remains unresolved and
has continued into the 21st century, with the Philippine government opposed to secession, and Muslim separatists/nationalists desiring to establish an independent “BangsaMoro” (Moro nation state).
HUKBALAHAP REBELLION

**Background** In 1565, Spain began its colonization of the Philippines. In the 1570s, it established Manila, located on the main northern island of Luzon, as the colonial capital. Thereafter, Spanish authorities set up the encomienda system across much of Luzon and the Visayas, where vast tracts of agricultural lands were placed under the authority of Spanish nationals.

Many encomiendas also came under the Spanish Catholic orders (Franciscans, Augustinians, and Dominicans), whose friars controlled large agricultural landholdings that were transformed into virtually small autonomous states. Friars also held full authority over the political, economic, and social aspects of a rural population in a system sometimes called “friarocracy”. Many such friar estates arose in the region near Manila, where food was produced for the capital. The pre-colonial native ruling class (the so-called principia or noble class) was co-opted to positions of encomienda estate overseers, while the common people were relegated to working the fields in a slave labor-like feudalistic system.

The appalling living and working conditions in the encomiendas triggered many local uprisings, which led Spain to end the system by the mid-17th century. The vast agricultural estates were retained, and although the most exploitative aspects of the encomienda system were discontinued, the natives’ conditions remained dire.

Spanish rule in the Philippines lasted for three centuries until near the end of the 19th century. By the second half of the 1800s, a small native middle class had emerged, comprising low-level public officials, professionals, and a few landowners, all of whom had acquired some wealth. In 1898, after its defeat in the Spanish-American War, Spain ceded the Philippines to the United States. American interests in the Philippines centered on regional strategic and economic factors, that is, to gain a foothold in the Asia-Pacific. The United States had as its aim not the colonization of its new Asian possession, but instead to teach democracy to Filipinos and train them in the ways of good governance.

The Spanish-era stratified Filipino society of a few rich and masses of poor was retained during the American period, and the Filipino upper and middle class now occupied the positions of authority formerly held by Spanish nationals. The friars’ domination of rural society was ended, and U.S. authorities seized the friar estates, which they sold to the general public. These lands were purchased by the existing Filipino landowners (increasing the size of their landholdings), and not by the masses of landless tenants and peasants who worked these lands.

During this time, some 70% of the rural population did not own land. The disproportionate ratio of land and wealth held by the upper and lower classes was exacerbated, in some cases reaching levels they had been under Spain. Furthermore, the wealthy and landowning classes, whom U.S. Insular authorities wished to pass on governmental powers in an independent Philippines, gained a stranglehold on Philippine politics and public administration. Thus, the few landowning Filipinos not only possessed wealth, but also gained political power, while landless Filipinos, which comprised the vast majority of the population, remained poor and disenfranchised.
In many of the more developed areas, particularly in the rich rice-growing region of Central Luzon located north of Manila, agriculture was based on the sharecropping system, where the landowner provided seed and capital, and the tenant-farmer furnished labor, tools, and farm animals. Each party shared in the harvest after all expenses had been deducted. Traditionally in the Spanish colonial era, landowner-tenant relationship was that of a master and protégé, and these close ties led to a lifetime bond of affinity and intimacy. Subsequently with the growth of urban areas under the American Insular government, these bonds deteriorated and became impersonal and business-like, as landowners moved away from the countryside to the major towns and cities, where they appropriated the new urban lifestyle, introduced mechanization to their farms, and entrusted the care of their rural landholdings to overseers.

Furthermore, tenants and farm workers often were mired perpetually in debt due to their taking loans in the form of cash advances from their landowners, who charged arbitrary (usually high) rates of interest for these loans. In this way, some 80% of tenant-farmers owed money to landowners. The landowners’ abandoning rural life, the growing impersonal landlord-tenant relationship, and rising tenant poverty and indebtedness greatly strained and increased landowner-tenant tensions in the countryside.

In the global stage, as a result of the victory of the Bolsheviks in the Russian Revolution in 1918, communism found many adherents around the world, and the concept of “class struggle” found relevance in many socio-economically disproportionate capitalist and industrialized countries, particularly in Europe.

In the Philippines, in 1924, a small group of local communists/socialists formed the National Peasants’ Union (KPMP; Tagalog: Kapisanang Pambansa ng mga Magbubukid sa Pilipinas) and in 1930, communists led by Crisanto Evangelista organized the Communist Party of the Philippines (PKP; Tagalog: Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas). These two organizations called for social reform, land distribution, and improved rural labor conditions. At this time, the U.S. Insular government still ruled the Philippines, but local administrative functions had been turned over to Filipinos.

In 1932, the PKP was outlawed and its leaders jailed, which generated a flurry of violence in the farmlands of Central Luzon, where armed PKP bands roamed the countryside killing landowners and destroying farms. Government forces, led by the Philippine Constabulary, quelled the unrest. With the PKP banned, in October 1932, local socialists, led by Pedro Abad Santos, formed the Philippine Socialist Party, which gained a large following and included PKP communists who had gone underground following the outlawing of their party.

By the mid-1930s, the fascist regimes in Germany and Italy, and their ally, the military government in Japan, posed the greatest threat to the democracies of Europe and the United States, as well as to the Soviet Union. In this period of global uncertainty, Western democracies formed tentative alliances with the Soviet Union in common opposition to fascist Germany and Italy. Local communist parties, particularly in France and Spain, also sought alliances with non-communist political parties to form a “popular front” against fascism.

In the Philippines, the PKP had been perceived as seeking to gain power through violent revolution. However, because of the growing fear that Japan would extend its territorial ambitions across Asia, the Philippine Commonwealth (the U.S.-sponsored semi-autonomous Filipino government led by President Manuel Quezon), freed Evangelista and other communist leaders, who pledged allegiance to the Philippines and the United States. In November 1938, Filipino communists and socialists formally merged their organizations under PKP leadership.
In September 1939, World War II broke out in Europe, and in December 1941, in the Asia-Pacific. Japanese forces invaded Southeast Asia, at their peak gaining control of Siam (present-day Thailand), French Indochina (now Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia), British Burma (Myanmar), British Malaya (Malaysia and Singapore), Dutch East Indies (Indonesia), and the Philippine Islands. In the Philippines, the United States Armed Forces in the Far East (USAFFE) were defeated and its commander, General Douglas MacArthur, was forced to leave and transfer his headquarters to Australia. President Quezon and other leaders of the Philippine Commonwealth government went into exile in the United States.

As a result of the Japanese occupation of the Philippines, many anti-Japanese resistance groups sprung up across the archipelago, many led by American military or civilian personnel who had escaped capture, and some also led by Filipino fighters. Many such partisan groups also operated in Central Luzon.

The PKP communists/socialists also fled to Central Luzon, where they reorganized as a guerilla militia headquartered at Mount Arayat. To obtain weapons for its fighters, the PKP sought to form alliances with the other anti-Japanese, American-aligned resistance groups, which were receiving military support from the U.S. military. These offers to form alliances were rejected by the other partisan groups. Thus, during the war, the PKP operated separately, and acquired its weapons in various ways, either by appropriating weapons during raids on Japanese patrols and outposts, or by scouring the battlefields, or through Filipino soldiers who joined its ranks.

In January 1942, high-ranking PKP leaders were arrested by Japanese authorities; subsequently, Evangelista was executed and Abad Santos and others were imprisoned. In March 1942, the PKP military wing was established as the “National Army against the Japanese” (Tagalog: “Hukbong Bayan laban sa mga Hapon”, often shortened to Hukbalahap), with the militia and its fighters being commonly referred to simply as “Huks”. The Huks were led by Luis Taruc, who would play a central role in the Huk rebellion against the Philippine government in the post-war period.

Huk operations against the Japanese were so effective that large areas of Central Luzon, particularly the provinces of Bulacan, Nueva Ecija, Pampanga, and Tarlac, came under Huk control. At their peak during the war, the Huks also established a strong presence in Rizal and southern Luzon, and in the outlying areas of Manila. Much of this success was achieved after the Huks gained the trust and loyalty of the rural population who also opposed the Japanese, and because the PKP/Huk movement promised to implement land reform.

The PKP/Huk organization also formed local militias called “Barrio Unified Defense Corps (BUDC), which acted as conduits through which the Huks gained recruits, food, and information. Also though the BUDC, the PKP-Huks established a local government in the towns and villages. By war’s end, these Huk-aligned local quasi-governments controlled much of Bulacan, Pampanga, Tarlac, and Nueva Ecija.

The PKP advocated Marxism-Leninism, and its organizational hierarchy (consisting of a National Congress, Central Committee, and Secretariat) was patterned after the Soviet model. PKP mentors indoctrinated the local people, and new recruits received political and military training at “Stalin University”, located in the Sierra Madre Mountains. The U.S.-aligned anti-Japanese partisan groups were hostile, although not violent, toward the Huks, viewing them as mere bandits. However, by 1944, this antagonism grew when ultimate Japanese defeat in World War II became certain.

In October 1944, U.S. forces led by General MacArthur began the reconquest of the Philippines, and by April 1945, all organized Japanese resistance in the islands had ended. By early 1945, the Philippine Commonwealth government, now led by President Sergio Osmeña, had returned from exile and was restored to power. But World War II had left the Philippines devastated. Hundreds of thousands
of Filipinos had lost their lives due to war, violence, and disease; millions of others were missing or faced hunger, and were without work; infrastructures, public services, and the economy were destroyed; and food shortages were rampant as a result of poor agricultural production due to the devastated or abandoned farmlands.

In Central Luzon and elsewhere, the countryside permeated with lawlessness, as Huk bands killed landowners who were returning to reclaim their farms, which they had abandoned during the war. Tenants and farm workers now openly aligned with the Huks against the landowners. The Philippine Commonwealth government passed a law that gave tenants a larger share of the harvest, but these laws could not be implemented because of the charged, anarchic state of the rural countryside.

The U.S. government appropriated a sum of money for Philippine reconstruction which, apart from falling short of the total amount that was actually needed, also was subject to theft by corrupt Filipino officials. Also in the immediate post-war period, the Philippines faced the matter of the collaborators, as thousands of pre-war Filipino Commonwealth officials had served during the Japanese occupation. U.S. military officials jailed thousands of these collaborationist officials, only later to release them as their services were needed by the restored Commonwealth government.

General MacArthur also ordered the Huks and other armed groups across the islands to disband and surrender their weapons. The Huks ignored the order, which led to U.S. and Philippine forces forcibly disarming several Huk commands at gunpoint. Some incidents of violence also took place. For instance, in Malolos, Bulacan, over 100 Huks were killed by security forces. Huk-aligned local quasi-governments in Central Luzon also were disbanded. In February 1945, Taruc and other Huk leaders were arrested and imprisoned. Three weeks later, they were released. But returning to organize more subversive actions, in April 1945, they were again arrested and then imprisoned in remote Palawan Island. But a resurgence of violence in Central Luzon forced the government to release the Huk leaders.

Then by July 1945, the PKP joined ranks with two large trade unions to form a political party, the Democratic Alliance (DA), in order to participate in electoral politics, with the ultimate aim of turning the Philippines into a communist state through the legal process. In the run-up to the general elections which were set for April 1946, the DA campaigned for social reforms. It also condemned the war-time collaborators, and opposed the U.S.-sponsored Philippine Trade Act and the proposed continuation of U.S. military bases in the Philippines. The DA believed that the United States wanted to continue its domination of the Philippines, and relegate the latter to a neo-colony under U.S. sovereignty.

In the April 1946 elections for the Philippine presidency, Manuel Roxas emerged victorious, becoming the last Commonwealth president before the Philippines gained its independence four months later, on July 4, 1946. Thereafter, President Roxas became the first head of state of a sovereign Philippines.

The DA ran for six congressional seats in Central Luzon in the April 1946 elections, with all six candidates winning, including Taruc, who like the others, was elected to the House of Representatives. However, President Roxas, a staunch anti-communist, had promised in his election campaign to eradicate the PKP/Huk movement once he became president. His political party, which dominated both houses of Congress, barred the elected DA legislators from taking their congressional seats. Then in August 1946, a prominent PKP leader, Juan Feleo, was kidnapped and later was found dead. This event is cited by historians as the breaking point that led the Huks to launch their rebellion. The PKP went underground, and Taruc and other Huk leaders retreated to Mount Arayat to restart hostilities, this time against the Philippine government.
War In Central Luzon, rural support for the PKP/Huk remained strong despite the government’s anti-Huk suppression campaign in the post-war period. Shortly after its return to Central Luzon, the PKP/Huk restored its war-time organization in Nueva Ecija, Pampanga, Tarlac, and Bulacan. As in World War II, the Huks suffered from a lack of firearms, and thus avoided open combat with government forces. Instead the Huks used guerilla tactics to attack army patrols and outposts, and police stations. To raise funds, the Huks resorted to armed robberies (of banks, trains, etc.) and extortion (of landowners, businessmen, etc.).

President Roxas implemented a “mailed-fist” policy against the Huks, sending government forces on “search and destroy” operations against the guerillas. These offensives were supported by local right-wing militias, called “Civil Guards”, which were organized by the provincial governments. These operations not only failed to find the rebels, but were moral defeats for the government, as the soldiers and militias themselves committed atrocities against the rural population. Philippine troops and rightist-sponsored militias seized farmers’ crops, terrorized the countryside, and operated as an occupying force against a hostile people. After World War II, the Philippine Armed Forces experienced many problems: its size was reduced to 30,000 troops; units suffered from low morale and poor discipline; soldiers were underpaid and under-supplied, and officers were corrupt, unmotivated, and lacked proper training.

These problems were symptomatic of the post-war Philippine bureaucratic system as a whole. The Roxas administration was plagued with corruption. In the War Surplus Property scandal, a criminal syndicate, which may have been led by high-ranking public officials, sold surplus U.S. military supplies in the black market at a cost higher than their market value, and in the process enriched themselves at the expense of the Philippine government.

In April 1948, President Roxas died of a heart attack and was succeeded by Elpidio Quirino, his vice-president. President Quirino was more conciliatory than his predecessor, and opened peace talks with the Huks, which led to a ceasefire (April 1948) with and a grant of amnesty (June 1948) to the rebels. Taruc was allowed to take his congressional seat and his wages were paid retroactively. However, relations between the Quirino government and rebels soon deteriorated and negotiations held in August 1948 broke down. Taruc returned to the mountains and restarted the rebellion, leading to the most intense phase of the war, as Huks stepped up guerilla pressure, and Quirino discarded peace negotiations in favor of military action.

The Quirino government, like its predecessor, also became embroiled with accusations of corruption as well as of nepotism and favoring American interests over those of Filipinos. Furthermore, general elections held in November 1949 (where President Quirino prevailed in the presidential race) were characterized by massive violence and cheating, including ballot box tampering and the use of force. Government corruption and ineptitude, the widening gap between the rich and poor, and the non-implementation of meaningful reforms all served to undermine the government and increase support for the PKP/Huks.

However, the Huks suffered a major blow when in April 1949, Aurora Quezon, the widow of Manuel Quezon, the former president of the Philippine Commonwealth government, was killed in an ambush by Huk guerillas. National public outrage was directed at the Huks, although Taruc denied direct Huk involvement and deflected the blame on rogue elements of his organization. As a result, the Huks lost popular support, but were far from being defeated militarily. In November 1948, the PKP/Huk leadership renamed its military wing the “Hukbo Mapagpalaya ng Bayan” (English: People’s Liberation Army), although the group and its fighters continued to be widely known as “Huks”.
The Huks peaked in power in 1950, by which time they had 15,000 fighters, 100,000 active supporters, and some one million people under their areas of control. Huk influence also had extended from their stronghold in Central Luzon to sections of northern Luzon and southern Luzon, and even Panay Island. By now, Huk offensives were launched with large groups of up to several hundreds to a few thousand fighters in a single operation.

The turning point in the war came in September 1950 when President Quirino appointed Ramon Magsaysay, a legislator and a World War II resistance fighter, as his Defense Secretary. Upon taking office, Magsaysay launched a major restructuring of the armed forces: heads were fired or reassigned, competent officers were promoted, army commands were reshuffled, military strategy was changed from defensive to offensive. Magsaysay, who already was a national figure known for his honesty and integrity, curbed military corruption and increased soldiers’ salaries.

Magsaysay’s tenure as defense secretary also coincided with the United States increasing its military presence in the Far East. With the start of the Cold War in 1947, American foreign policy was directed at stopping what U.S. President Harry Truman believed was the plan of the Soviet Union to spread communism in Europe. In October 1949, with the communist victory in China, and then in June 1950, the outbreak of the Korean War, the U.S. military changed its policy in the Far East from withdrawing from the region to reasserting its military presence there.

Subsequently in the early 1950s, the United States became directly involved in combat action in the Korean War, and provided military assistance to France’s anti-communist war in Indochina. The United States also backed the pro-West countries of Thailand, Taiwan (Republic of China), and the Philippines.

In the Philippines, U.S. assistance, which was brought about by the increasing threat of a Huk (i.e. communist) victory, was facilitated by the Joint U.S. Military Assistance Group (JUSMAG) and consisted of providing weapons, advice, training, and intelligence to the Philippine Armed Forces. The American military equipment and weapons delivered consisted of planes, gunboats, tanks, armored personnel
carriers, trucks, heavy artillery pieces, mortars, small firearms, and ammunitions. U.S. assistance proved vital in defeating the Huks.

The Philippine Army, which had been conducting operations using large, unwieldy formations, was reorganized into Battalion Combat Teams (BCTs), each comprising 1,100 troops, which greatly enhanced speed, maneuverability, and unit distribution. Reconnaissance operations, which had patrols passing through the same areas using known paths every time, and then returned to their camps before nightfall, were replaced with specially trained Scout Rangers that conducted intelligence missions deep in Huk territory for up to several weeks at a time before returning to their bases.

Intelligence gathering also relied primarily on gaining the trust and confidence of the rural population, which was the other major objective of the Philippine military. This “hearts and minds” policy included army units going to the villages to carry out medical, humanitarian, public works, and technical assistance programs. Furthermore, the soldiers, now with high morale and motivation, better pay, and a people-oriented mindset, did not and were strictly prohibited from preying on the local population. As a result of gaining the people’s trust, the Philippine military more easily encouraged certain individuals, particularly those with known connections to identified Huk members (e.g. family and friends), to provide information on the Huks. Valuable information also were gained from the indigenous Negritos, a highland-dwelling people who were subject to abuse and atrocities by the Huks, and thus whom they detested. Peasant support for the Huks gradually diminished, as a result of a combination of the increased professionalism of the Philippine military, the “hearts and minds” policy, and later, also because the Huks themselves began to commit atrocities on the rural population.

The Philippine government also implemented a rural resettlement program, called the Economic Development Corps (EDCOR), for surrendered or captured Huks. In this program, the ex-rebels were given farmlands in Mindanao. Thousands of Huks surrendered in order to join the EDCOR program, greatly undermining the Huk organization’s reason for existence (i.e. to implement land reform), as well as its much-touted slogan of “Land for the Masses”.

At the height of the rebellion in the early 1950s, the PKP had made preparations to overthrow the government, which was to be carried out using a concentrated attack by 65,000 Huks and a general uprising of 2.5 million people. The plan was thwarted in October 1950 (with Magsaysay now National Defense secretary) when security forces captured the PKP Secretariat, coming right after the earlier arrest of the PKP Politburo. These reversals dealt the PKP a serious blow, although it eventually organized a new leadership.

Over the years, the alliance between the PKP and Huks had never been smooth because of ideological and strategic differences: the Huks advocated Maoist communism or a peasant uprising in a long-term struggle, while the PKP espoused classic Marxism-Leninism, or an urban working class (proletariat) revolution against the capitalist system. Despite these differences, the Huk organization continued to be part of the PKP infrastructure.

By 1951, Huk-controlled areas had been reduced. In September of that year, Huk leaders in Panay Island, led by Guillermo Capadocia, were killed, while the PKP leadership announced a policy of “preservation and conservation”. By this time, the rural population was avoiding being associated with the Huks, and farmers refused to provide the Huks with food and provisions, which led to violent reprisals by Huks, which in turn further undermined the rebel cause. In 1952, a series of army offensives overran Huk commands in Nueva Ecija and Zambales, while another operation against the Huks’ main headquarters in Mount Arayat, although not successful in destroying the Huk organization, dealt a psychological blow to the rebels, as the Huk stronghold at Mount Arayat had been considered
impregnable to attack. Another government offensive on Mount Arayat in April 1953 also destroyed a number of smaller Huk camps.

In February 1953, Magsaysay resigned as National Defense secretary, and later joined the race for the Philippine presidency in the November 1953 elections. He prevailed in a landslide victory and succeeded as the country’s new head of state. Now Philippine president, Magsaysay placed great emphasis on reforming the agrarian sector. Lands were distributed to landless farmers, agricultural infrastructures were built, and social services to the rural population, including education, health care, and water and sanitation facilities, were increased. These programs further eroded legitimacy to the PKP-Huk movement, which by then, was suffering from widespread desertions and defections in the ranks, which the Huk leaders attributed to “battle weariness and exhaustion”.

By 1953, even Huk leaders were unable to stop their fighters from giving up the struggle. By 1954, only 2,000 Huks remained, which consisted of small bands of hungry, desperate men, a shadow of the once formidable 16,000-strong force that had reigned over the countryside. Also by then, many Huk bands were avoiding the towns and villages, and hid in the mountains where they suffered from hunger, diseases, and the elements.

In February 1954, government forces launched a major air and ground assault in the mountains west of Mount Arayat. The eight-month operation, which ended in September, destroyed the Huks’ military and operational infrastructures in the region. More important, it forced the surrender of Taruc, the Huk leader, on May 17, 1954, which practically brought the war to an end. More offensives conducted west in the Sierra Madre mountains further broke the Huk resolve to continue hostilities. In the aftermath of Taruc’s surrender, hundreds of rebel commanders and fighters laid down their arms and returned to the fold of the law. The Huk rebellion had come to an end.

War casualties include, on the Huk side: 6,000 killed, 1,600 wounded, 4,000 captured, and 16,000 surrendered; on the military side: 642 killed and 710 wounded.

Aftermath A number of small Huk bands continued to operate until the 1960s, but posed no serious threat to the government. The PKP subsequently spurned violence and revolution in its agenda, and instead worked within the legal framework and with the Philippine government to advance reforms for the rural population.

In 1968, PKP Maoists broke ranks over disagreements with the party leadership and formed a new organization, the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). The following year, the CPP formed a military wing, the New Peoples’ Army (Tagalog: “Bagong Hukbong Bayan”), with the core of its cadres being former members of the former Huk movement. In 1971, the CPP-NPA launched a rebellion with the aim of overthrowing the Philippine government and setting up a communist state. Over the years, successive Philippine governments have failed to quell the insurgency, and a low-intensity conflict continues up to the present time.
Background Britain established its first permanent presence in the Malay Peninsula in 1786. Further territorial acquisitions in the ensuing period led to the signing of the Anglo-Dutch Treaty in 1824, which delineated the areas of control between Britain and the Netherlands in the Malay Archipelago, with the British gaining the territories the comprise present-day Peninsular Malaysia and Singapore, and the Dutch acquiring territories that later formed the Dutch East Indies (present-day Indonesia). During the last quarter of the 19th century, British acquisitions and control of the Malay Peninsula expanded rapidly, and by the early 20th century, Britain had gained full control of these territories, turning the nominally independent Malayan Sultanates of the region into virtual colonial administrations.

British interests in Malaya were centered on exploiting the region’s vast tin resources and profiting from the production of rubber, which was extracted in trees grown in large plantations. By the 1930s, Malayan tin and rubber exports dominated the world market and brought in huge revenues. In both industries, the British imported laborers from southern India and southern China, with the Indians mainly working in the rubber plantations and the Chinese in the tin mines. This influx of outside workers, especially the Chinese which comprised the majority of foreign labor, was so extensive that some areas, such as Singapore and Penang, soon had Chinese-majority populations. A number of Chinese also became very wealthy, acquiring tin mines and rubber plantations, and gaining control of the Malayan economy. At this time, the British viewed Malays, Chinese, and Indians as British subjects, but that Malays were the indigenous population of the Peninsula, and ethnic Chinese and Indians were merely temporary workers.

The British generally did not seek laborers among Malays, viewing them as unreliable workers in these industries. But the colonists reserved to Malays certain governmental and police functions, and Malays soon occupied many low-level civil service positions and were hired in police and military units. By the 1930s, a fledging Malayan nationalist movement had emerged.

The Chinese workers were influenced by communist ideology (prevalent in China at that time), subsequently leading in 1930 to the formation of the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM). Much of the CPM membership was Chinese, with the communist organization attracting relatively few Malays and Indians, and the general perception that it was essentially a Chinese movement would factor heavily during its existence. The CPM had as its main objectives the end of British colonial rule, seize power, and then establish independent Malaya as a communist state. As such, the CPM was forced to operate clandestinely and carried out subversive actions mainly through militant trade unions by way of strikes and job actions, intended to undermine British control of the economy. British authorities responded by breaking up the strikes, arresting and jailing union leaders, and deporting communist Chinese to China. Also worth noting is that many other Chinese in Malaya were anti-communist, and opposed the CMP and communism, and were aligned with the then ruling Kuomintang Republican government in China.

World War II broke out in Europe in September 1939 and in the Asia-Pacific in December 1941. In the lead-up to World War II, and then after Germany invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, rapprochement and alliances were formed between the Western democracies and the Soviet Union in
common opposition to the Fascist regimes of Germany and Italy and the military government of Japan. In late 1941, with the threat of war by expansionist Japan looming in Asia, tensions calmed between British authorities and the CMP.

On December 7, 1941, with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, World War II broke out in the Asia-Pacific. Simultaneously, Japan launched an invasion of Southeast Asia. In Malaya, the British government and the CPM formed a tactical alliance, with the British military training over 150 CPM fighters who subsequently formed the core of the anti-Japanese resistance movement. In Europe, Britain itself was fighting for its own survival and consequently was unable to adequately defend Malaya and Singapore, which fell to the Japanese in January-February 1942. Some 130,000 British and other allied troops were taken prisoner.

However, several British soldiers in Malaya who escaped capture retreated to the jungles (some 80% of Malaya was covered in dense mountainous rainforests) where they reorganized as an anti-Japanese resistance group that carried out guerilla operations against the Japanese occupation. Similarly, the CPM, led by its British Army-trained fighters, fled to the jungles, and formed a militia, the Malayan Peoples’ Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA), which conducted guerilla warfare, attacking Japanese patrols and outposts and sabotaging militarily important infrastructures.

The MPAJA became a large, potent fighting force that spread all across the Malayan Peninsula. It achieved success primarily because it drew great support from the ethnic Chinese population, which was being subjected by the Japanese to severe cruelty. During the war, tens of Chinese were killed by the Japanese, their properties and businesses seized, and hundreds of thousands of others forced to flee from their homes. By contrast, Malays and ethnic Indians were spared abuse, and Malays in particular were co-opted by the Japanese authorities into carrying out civilian, police and security functions. The Japanese also stoked the nationalist aspirations of Malays, promising them some form of Malayan self-rule.

The pro-British guerilla groups and the MPAJA were tactical allies, but they generally operated separately of each other. By late 1943, a firmer alliance was established between them when the British military, using commandos who infiltrated Malaya and established contact with the MPAJA, promised to provide weapons to the Malayan communist guerillas in exchange for the MPAJA coming under British military authority. The promised weapons were delivered in 1945 as Japanese rule in Malaya was waning, and the MPAJA hid underground some of these arms shipments for future use.

On August 14, 1945, the Asia-Pacific theatre of World War II ended when Japan announced its decision to surrender. A formal ceremony of surrender was made three weeks later, on September 2, 1945. In Malaya, the Japanese Army surrendered to the returning British forces on September 4 (in Penang) and September 13 (in Kuala Lumpur), 1945. On September 12, the British installed a military government, the British Military Administration (BMA), to replace the pre-war civilian colonial government that had administered Malaya. British authorities were hard-pressed to restore normalcy in the immediate post-war period: the Malayan economy was devastated, the tin and rubber industries were inoperational, and poverty and unemployment were rampant. Agricultural infrastructures were export-oriented and not directed toward growing food for the local population, leading to widespread food shortages. Furthermore, banditry, criminality, and a general lawlessness ruled the countryside.

The British recognized the MPAJA’s war-time efforts, leading to joint celebratory parades and the British granting official status to the Malayan communists’ guerilla units. MPAJA fighters were paid a salary and given supplies and provisions. In the post-war period, the MPAJA exacted vengeance on war-time collaborators in the towns and villages. Also in response to the anarchic conditions, hard-line communist elements wanted to overthrow the colonial government, but the MCP leadership decided to
cooperate with the British, and acquiesced to an order by the British military to disband MPAJA guerilla units. However, some MPAJA units refused to disband, and although many weapons were turned in, many more were hidden in homes or buried in the ground.

By 1947, the British were making progress in Malaya’s post-war reconstruction: infrastructures were being restored or rebuilt, and the peninsula’s vital tin and rubber industries were rehabilitated. At this time, the CPM operated openly, tacitly tolerated by the British because of their war-time alliance. In March 1947, the CPM came under the leadership of Chin Peng, a hard-line communist who increased anti-British militant actions. Operating through the labor movement (which it controlled), the CPM organized strikes and labor actions aimed at disrupting the Malayan economy, and destabilizing British rule by fomenting local unrest. In this way, it was hoped that a general uprising would follow, leading to the end of British rule and its replacement with a CMP-led communist government. Under CPM instigation, hundreds of strikes were launched, and labor leaders and workers who refused to participate were killed.

**War** On June 12, 1948, three European plantation managers were killed by armed bands, forcing British authorities to declare a state of emergency throughout Malaya, which essentially was a declaration of war on the CPM. The British called the conflict, which lasted 12 years (1948-1960), an “emergency” so that business establishments that suffered material losses as a result of the fighting, could make insurance claims, which the same would be refused by insurance companies if Malaya were placed under a state of war.

The state of emergency, which was applied first to Perak State (where the murders of the three plantation managers occurred) and then throughout Malaya in July 1948, gave the police authorization to arrest and hold anyone, without the need for the judicial process. In this way, hundreds of CPM cadres were arrested and jailed, and the party itself was outlawed in July 1948. The murders of the three plantation managers are disputed: British authorities blamed the CPM, while Chin Peng denied CPM involvement, arguing that the CPM itself was caught by surprise by the events and was unprepared for war, and that he himself barely avoided arrest in the intensive government crackdown that followed the killings.

The CPM retreated into the Malayan jungles where it reconstituted its military wing under a new name, first the Malayan Peoples’ Anti-British Army (MPABA), and then in February 1949 as the Malayan National Liberation Army (MNLA). Combat units were hastily re-formed (from the wartime MPAJA units) and buried weapons caches were recovered from the ground. The MNLA combat strategy consisted of acquiring more weapons by raiding police stations and ambushing army and security patrols. The guerillas also attacked civilian and public infrastructures to upset the Malayan economy, thereby undermining the British government. Tin mine operations were disrupted, rubber plantations destroyed, and operations managers targeted for assassinations. As well, buses were ransacked, railway trains upturned, and public utilities sabotaged. These indiscriminate attacks soon were having a detrimental effect on the local workers and ordinary people, which forced the MNLA to end this strategy.

The MNLA obtained its support mainly from the ethnic Chinese population, which provided the rebels with recruits, food, supplies, and information. MNLA support particularly was strong among the so-called “squatter” population, the 600,000 people who lived in remote areas which typically were beyond the reach of British administrative and police control. Direct auxiliary support to the rebels was provided by ordinary civilians using the clandestine “Min Yuen” (Masses Movement) network. “Min Yuen” functioned in many ways, including being a link between the MNLA and the general population, providing the MNLA with logistical support, and being a courier and communications system across
Malaya, where messages (written in small slips of paper) were passed to and from the various rebel commands. For about three years from the start of the Emergency (1948-1951), the communist rebels held the initiative against government forces; at its peak, the MNLA launched over 6,000 armed incidents in 1951.

At the start of the war, the undermanned British forces in Malaya were unable to confront the rapidly expanding communist insurgency. Consequently, British military and police units were brought in from outside of Malaya, while local recruitment to the Malayan police force and privately-organized militias (by plantation and mine owners) increased government and anti-insurgency security strength to over 250,000 personnel by the early 1950s. Furthermore, the arrival of army contingents from Australia, New Zealand and Fiji, as well as Gurkha troops in the British Army and security forces from British East African territories, soon allowed the British to seize the initiative from the communist rebels by 1952.

Initially, the British sent large military formations to “search and destroy” operations against MNLA camps which were located deep in the Malayan mountains. British warplanes also launched thousands of bombing and strafing sorties. By 1950, these large-scale offensives, cumbersome and ineffective against a concealed enemy, were abandoned. Small-unit operations were adopted, which were better suited to the Malayan jungles. The British also saw that their air attack missions achieved only modest success, because of the dense forest cover, the absence of reliable maps, and the difficult high-altitude weather conditions.

![Figure 40. Malayan Emergency.](image)

Maneuverability of British Army ground units also was handicapped by the jungle terrain and the elements, and the difficulty in locating the enemy. British soldiers also were unable to distinguish between friend and foe, and therefore regarded all persons in remote settlements as potentially hostile. As a result of these difficulties, the British committed a number of atrocities on the local population, the most notable being the Batang Kali Massacre in December 1948, where 24 villagers were killed and their houses burned.

The British also built fortified camps deep in the jungles in areas that were inhabited by the indigenous Orang Asli tribal population, who previously had supported the MNLA, but were won over
by the British. From these jungle camps, the British sent out patrols to seek out and engage the rebels. Members of the Orang Asli also were organized into local militias to defend their villages.

Early on in the war, the British saw that warfare alone could not win the war, because of the difficulty of penetrating the thick Malayan jungles and the refusal of the enemy to engage in open combat. They therefore implemented a number of non-military approaches to confront the insurgency. Shortly after the state of emergency was declared, the British jailed hundreds of ethnic Malay communists in order to keep the insurgency from spreading to other Malays (as well as ethnic Indians), thereby reinforcing the perception that the MNLA was a mainly ethnic Chinese organization. For the same reason, in Pahang State where an ethnic Malay-led MNLA unit operated, British authorities expelled the Malay rebels and brought the region under their control.

Still unable to defeat the MNLA, the British turned to starving it into submission. The 600,000 rural squatters from whom the rebels derived much of their support were uprooted from their homes and moved to “New Villages”, which were guarded settlement camps where British authorities provided the new residents with basic necessities and public utilities, but also enforced strict restrictions on the residents’ personal movement, food allocations, and other civil rights. A curfew was imposed and violators were subjected to severe punishment. By the mid-1950s, some 450 “New Villages” had been built. To win over the local population, the British launched a “hearts and minds” campaign, where the “New Villages” were provided with educational and health care services, and primary utilities such as electricity and clean water.

British authorities also co-opted the large anti-communist ethnic Chinese population, forging friendly ties with the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA), which had been organized by moderate Chinese who sought to advance Malayan Chinese interests through peaceful, democratic means. Intelligence gathering operations also were greatly expanded during the Emergency, with emphasis placed on recruiting Malays, Chinese and Indians as intelligence operatives with the task of gaining information on the CPM’s organizational structure and courier and communications network. Working through deep cover agents, captured or surrendered rebels, seized CMP documents, and other sources, the government gained a large body of information on the CMP. British authorities also infiltrated the rebels’ courier and communications system, and thus succeeded in subverting MNLA and CPM operations.

The British also used psychological warfare, which were so effective in demoralizing the ranks of the MNLA. Propaganda leaflets were air-dropped in the mountains and jungles, anti-communist rallies were organized in towns and cities, and uncovered rebel weapons caches were left in place but sabotaged, for example, with self-exploding bullets and grenades.

Furthermore, the herbicides 2,4-D and 2,4,5-T were first used during the Malayan Emergency, with British planes spraying them to defoliate the forests and deprive the rebels of cover. Also targeted were the insurgents’ own crop fields located in jungle clearings, as well as the roadsides where the British were most vulnerable to rebel attack. A mixture of these two herbicides (called Agent Orange) was used extensively by U.S. forces during the Vietnam War.

The government’s multi-faceted approach to meet the Malayan Emergency was raised to a higher degree during the term of Gerald Templer as British High Commissioner in Malaya. Templer had been given broad powers by the British government following his predecessor’s assassination by MNLA guerillas in October 1951. Templer’s two-year tenure (1952-1954) did much to turn the tide of the war in favor of the British, even though upon his departure, the MNLA continued to be a threat. Of all the counter-insurgency methods that the British employed, the most successful was preparing Malaya for independence, a process that was accelerated under Templer’s tenure. The British reasoned that handing Malaya its independence would nullify the CMP’s reason for existence, which was to end colonial rule.
As it turned out, however, Malaya’s road to independence involved a long, tedious process, primarily because Malaya’s three main racial groups (Malays, Chinese, and Indians) were not integrated and even mutually hostile to each other; this difficulty initially convinced the British that Malaya’s independence was virtually impossible to achieve.

Earlier in April 1946, the British organized the Malayan states into a single polity, the Malayan Union, where the powers of the Sultans were restricted, and the Chinese and Indians were to be granted citizenship. However, Malay nationalists led a series of protests against granting citizenship to non-Malays. The British relented, and negotiations that followed led to a compromise – the Malayan Union was abolished and replaced in February 1948 with the Federation of Malaya. In the new polity, the Malayan sultans’ powers were restored; in exchange, ethnic Chinese and Indians were granted citizenship, and equality of all races was guaranteed. Furthermore, a Malay sultan would be the head of state, sovereignty over Malaya would rest with Malays, and Malay would be the official language. Conversely, the Chinese and Indians would be guaranteed representation at all levels of government and legislation, and their economic interests and social, cultural, and religious traditions would be protected.

In 1954, Malayan interracial integration was bolstered with the formation of the Alliance Party, a coalition of political parties comprising the three leading ethnic-based political parties, i.e. United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), Malayan Chinese Association (MCA), and Malayan Indian Congress (MIC). Then in general elections held in July 1955, the Alliance Party won decisively. Two years later (on August 31, 1957), the Federation of Malaya became a fully sovereign, independent state. These political developments denigrated the legitimacy of the CPM’s armed struggle, particularly since the 1955 election and Malaya’s independence received overwhelming support from the general population.

By 1955, the MNLA was on the decline, its combat strength weakened by combat deaths, desertions, and surrenders, morale was low, and its popular support was greatly reduced. In September 1955, some three months after his party won the general elections, Tunku Abdul Rahman, chief Minister of Malaya, offered amnesty to the MNLA. Government representatives and the CPM leadership held negotiations in October and November 1955, paving the way for the Baling Peace Talks (held in Baling, in present-day northern Peninsular Malaysia) in December 1955, where CPM leader Chin Peng met with Chief Minister Tunku. However, this meeting produced no settlement. Subsequent offers by Chin Peng to continue negotiations were spurned by Tunku, who insisted on unconditional surrender, i.e. that the MNLA must disarm and disband, and the CPM would not be granted official recognition. In February 1956, Tunku rescinded the amnesty offer.

By the second half of the 1950s, MNLA-controlled territory was rapidly shrinking, and the rebels were being pushed toward northern Malaya. By July 1957, the government declared some 60% of Malaya as “White Areas”, i.e., they had been freed of communist “Reds” and where Emergency regulations such as curfew and civilian, food, and mobility restrictions were lifted. Following Malaya’s independence in August 1957, British military authorities, including British officers who held important posts such as Malaya’s Defense Secretary and Director of Operations, continued to play a major role in Malaya’s defense affairs, generating a fair amount of local and foreign criticisms.

Nevertheless, the counter-insurgency campaign was brought to fruition: by 1959, the MNLA, now only consisting of small bands of hard-core fighters, had been pushed to the Thai border. Chin Peng himself had escaped to southern Thailand; by early 1961, he was given refuge in Beijing (where he also moved the CPM’s base of operations) by Mao Zedong, leader of the People’s Republic of China.

On July 31, 1960, the Malayan government lifted the state of emergency on Malaya—the (first phase of the) war was over. However, Emergency regulations persisted in the regions close to the Thai border. Casualties from the Malayan Emergency include, on the MNLA side: 6,700 killed, 1,300 captured,
and 3,200 surrendered; on the government side: 1,800 Malayan and Commonwealth soldiers and police personnel. Some 3,200 civilians also were killed or missing.

**Resumption of hostilities and conclusion** After being pushed out of Malaya, the MNLA established a number of bases in southern Thailand close to the Malayan border, where it began a campaign to recruit new fighters from the local population, both in southern Thailand and northern Malaya. Its ranks soon included some 30% Thai nationals. Also in an effort to widen its support base, the CPM formed the Islamic Brotherhood Party (Malay: *Parti Persaudaraan Islam*), aimed at attracting ethnic Malays by advocating that Islam and communism were not incompatible ideologies.

In September 1963, the Federation of Malaya was ended, and replaced by the Federation of Malaysia (or simply Malaysia), consisting of the former Federation of Malaya and the territories of North Borneo (Sabah), Sarawak, and Singapore (in August 1965, Singapore left the Federation and formed a separate independent state).

In the 1960s, with the growth of communist movements in Indo-China (North Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia as well as in Thailand), the CPM stepped up its activities: propaganda and indoctrination campaigns were launched, and recruitment and training accelerated. From some 500-600 fighters remaining by the end of the Emergency, by 1965, the MNLA ranks had increased to some 2,000.

From 1963 to 1966, Malaysia was embroiled in a low-intensity war with neighboring Indonesia. Then by the late 1960s, the Vietnam War was increasing in intensity. In May 1969, racial violence between Malays and Chinese broke out in Malaysia and Singapore, increasing racial tensions and forcing the Malaysian government to impose a state of emergency. Believing that the upsurge in local and regional unrest was playing in its favor, the CPM/MNLA decided to restart hostilities.

This second phase of the war (commonly known as the Communist Insurgency War) began on June 17, 1968 when the MNLA guerillas ambushed Malaysian Army soldiers at Kroh-Betong, in northern Malaysia. Fighting eventually spread to other parts of Peninsular Malaysia, but was much more concentrated in northern Malaysia, and also failed to achieve the degree of intensity and scope experienced during the Malayan Emergency. Furthermore, in 1970, the CPM became wracked in an internal power struggle, which led to the formation of two rival splinter groups, the CPM-Marxist Leninist and CPM-Revolutionary Faction, aside from the original CPM, which continued to have the largest membership. The CPM, which followed the Maoist branch of communism and received support from China, was dealt a major blow when in June 1974, Malaysia and China established diplomatic relations. Although the MNLA tried to maintain military pressure on the Malaysian government, by the early 1980s, the insurgency was experiencing an irrevocable decline.

Much of this decline was a result of the Malaysian government adopting the successful multi-faceted counter-insurgency approach used in the Malayan Emergency, this time carried out in the Security and Development Program (KESBAN, Malay: *Keselamatan dan Pembangunan*), which consisted of military and civilian measures. Military measures included directly confronting the rebels in combat, utilizing intelligence and psychological operations, and increasing the size and strength of security forces. The civilian component, while also involving resettling villages that were vulnerable to rebel influences and curtailing some civil liberties, focused on a “hearts and minds” approach in the affected communities, e.g. expanding social services and implementing public works programs. Neighborhood Watch and People’s Volunteer Group initiatives not only served security functions in local neighborhoods, but also fostered better interracial relations among Malays, Chinese, and Indians. Furthermore, by the 1980s, Malaysia was experiencing an extended period of dynamic economic growth.
The demise for the CPM also was brought about by the impending end of the Cold War. By 1989, communism was waning globally, communist regimes in Eastern Europe were collapsing, and the Soviet Union itself disintegrated in 1991. In southern Thailand, negotiations between the Malaysian government and CPM (mediated by the Thai government) led to the signing of the Hat Yai Peace Accord (in Hat Yai, Thailand) on December 2, 1989. As stipulated in the agreement, both the CPM and its military wing, the MNLA, were disbanded. The former rebels were allowed to return to Malaysia, an offer that was taken up by some members, while others chose to remain in southern Thailand. The peace agreement did not prohibit Chin Peng, the CPM leader, from returning to Malaysia. However, successive Malaysian governments refused to grant him entry into the country. He passed away in Bangkok, Thailand in September 2013.
INDONESIAN WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

**Background** In 1512, the Portuguese were the first Europeans to reach the Spice Islands (present-day Maluku Islands, or Moluccas), territories that would later form part of the modern-day country of Indonesia. In the 16th century, spices such as nutmeg, mace, and cloves were highly valued in Europe, and European explorations were undertaken to locate their source in the Far East. Soon after their discovery of the Spice Islands, the Portuguese set up trading posts in a number of islands, including Ambon and Ternate. In 1603, they were joined by the Spanish, who established a presence in Tidore. The Portuguese and Spanish shared the same objective of achieving a monopoly of the spice trade. However, by the 17th century, the Spanish had withdrawn from the region and the Portuguese were fading in influence, and regional control was seized by the Dutch, with their center of operations located in Batavia (present-day Jakarta). The Dutch government first controlled the islands through a chartered company, the Dutch East India Company (officially: United East India Company; Dutch: *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*) from 1602 to 1799, and then directly, naming the colony the Dutch East Indies. Over time, the Dutch gradually gained control of other islands. By the early 20th century, the Dutch East Indies comprised an archipelago containing over 17,000 islands that extended from Sumatra in the west to Dutch New Guinea in the east.

For much of the colonial period, Dutch interests in the islands were mainly economic, the Dutch East India Company with the spice trade in the Dutch East Indies, with the vast plantations of tea, coffee, cacao, tobacco, sugar, and rubber, achieving immense profits for the motherland. Then in the early 20th century, the Dutch government implemented the “Ethical Policy”, a body of reforms in education, agriculture, and regional migration aimed at benefitting the indigenous population. Education was expanded, allowing more native youths to enter the school system which previously was reserved only for Dutch and European children. Soon, a politically active native educated elite formed, which was imbued with the Western concepts of liberty, democracy, and equality.

Nationalism also emerged, with the first nationalist group forming in 1908, which was followed by many others. By the 1920s, these nationalists had adopted the words “Indonesians” to express a common identity for the hundreds of different ethnic groups of the Dutch East Indies, and “Indonesia”[8], to denote the totality of the region. Different nationalist groups advocated different ideologies, including democracy, Islamic theocracy, communism, socialism, etc and sought varying levels of autonomy or independence through peaceful or violent means. In 1928, the Indonesian National Party was co-founded and led by Sukarno (a nationalist who would play a major role in Indonesia’s independence war), which called for independence. For this reason, Sukarno and many other nationalists were arrested and imprisoned, and (usually) exiled in distant locations within the colony. At this time, Sukarno, Mohammad Hatta, and other nationalists viewed the growing power of Japan in the Far East as a possible means to achieve Indonesia’s independence.

On December 7, 1941, World War II broke out in the Asia-Pacific when Japanese forces attacked Pearl Harbor, and simultaneously launched their invasion of Southeast Asia. By March 1942, a Japanese task force, launching air, naval, and ground operations, had broken through the “Malay Barrier” (British
Malaya and the Dutch East Indies) and captured the Dutch East Indies, defeating the combined American, British, Dutch, and Australian forces (under ABDACOM, American-British-Dutch-Australian Command) and also taking prisoner some 80,000 Allied soldiers and 100,000 European civilians.

The indigenous population of the Dutch East Indies enthusiastically greeted the invaders, viewing the Japanese as liberators. The Japanese military took over the reins of government, but was quick to co-opt the local politicians and Indonesian nationalists, appointing them to civilian posts in regional and local positions. Japanese authorities also secured the support of Sukarno and Hatta, who were by now well-known public figures in the colony. Both the Japanese and Indonesian nationalists saw their alliance as essential and beneficial, with the Japanese viewing the nationalists as a means to advance the war effort, and the nationalists deeming their cooperation as a way to achieve the colony’s independence.

Thus, in April 1943, Japanese authorities formed the Center of People's Power (POETERA; Indonesian: Poesat Tenaga Rakjat), led by Sukarno, to support the Japanese military government, and which became the vehicle through which Japan implemented romusha (a Japanese word meaning “laborer”), a paid forced labor system where millions of civilians, mainly from Java, were conscripted to build Japanese military and public works infrastructures, including roads, railways, airfields, in various locations in the colony and in occupied territories in Southeast Asia. Also with the nationalists’ collaboration, Japanese authorities requisitioned agricultural harvests in the countryside and enforced the growing of commodities that were vital to the war effort. The colony’s rubber production, mining industry, and petroleum resources were particularly valued and utilized.

Later in the war, the Japanese military also organized a number of local civilian militias, including the “Defenders of the Homelands” (PETA; Indonesian: Pembela Tanah Air) and Indonesian auxiliary troops (“heilo”), which totaled some two million volunteers and were tasked as support formations to the Japanese Army in case of an Allied invasion. However, since the Dutch East Indies was not involved in the main theaters of fighting during the Allied offensive in 1944-1945, these militias did not see action in World War II, but would play a major role in the post-war Indonesian independence war.

Only few anti-Japanese underground resistance groups operated in the Dutch East Indies, and the Japanese Army imposed harsh measures in hostile areas. The general population also suffered greatly during the Japanese occupation – perhaps some four million people perished during the war, including over two million during a severe famine in Java in 1944-1945, while tens of thousands died from romusha labor.

By September 1944, with the tide of World War II having turned in favor of the Allies, the Japanese government in Tokyo softened its stance on Indonesian nationalism and gave overt assurances of the colony’s future independence. By April 1945, with the American island-hopping campaign rapidly advancing from the eastern Pacific, Japanese authorities in the Dutch East Indies helped organize the “Investigating Committee for Preparatory Work for Indonesian Independence” (BPUPKI; Indonesian: Badan Penyelidik Usaha Persiapan Kemerdekaan Indonesia), a multi-ethnic council tasked to establish a framework for an independent Indonesian state. Then on August 7, 1945, with the Allies now preparing to invade Japan, Japanese East Indies authorities allowed Indonesian leaders to form the “Preparatory Committee for Indonesian Independence” (PKKI; Indonesian: Panitia Persiapan Kemerdekaan Indonesia), a body tasked to prepare for the colony’s independence. Two days later, August 9, the Japanese command assured Indonesian leaders that Japan would not stand in the way if an independent Indonesian state was formed.

On August 15, 1945, Japan announced its acceptance of the Allied terms of surrender, bringing World War II to an abrupt end. A power vacuum thus was suddenly created in the Dutch East Indies, leading Sukarno and Hatta to declare the colony’s independence on August 17, 1945 as the Republic of
Indonesia. The PPKI became the interim government, called the Central Indonesian National Committee (KNIP; Indonesian: Komite Nasional Indonesia Pusat) with Sukarno and Hatta named as the country’s first President and Vice-President, respectively, and a national charter which had been drafted earlier was ratified as the country’s constitution.

In the weeks that followed, eight provincial governments across the archipelago were formed, including in Java and Sumatra where support for the Republic was strongest. These actions by the Indonesian Republic to consolidate power were greatly assisted by the aggressive actions of the PETA and Heiho armed militias, which reorganized after having been disbanded by the Japanese Army. Subsequently, these ex-Japanese militias and the Dutch-era indigenous military units of the “Royal Netherlands East Indies Army” would form the core of the Indonesian Armed Forces. A campaign was launched to spread the news of the new Indonesian Republic to the other islands: public speeches were made in major cities, and print and broadcast media spread the word to more distant areas. Sukarno himself addressed crowds involving hundreds of thousands of people in Jakarta. However, apart from Java and Sumatra, the Republic established only limited revolutionary atmosphere in other areas, particularly in the “Great East” regions, including Maluku, Lesser Sunda Islands, and West New Guinea. Also shortly after the independence war had begun, Sukarno was concerned about his war-time collaboration with the Japanese. In November 1945, he reorganized his government into a parliamentary system, naming a non-collaborator, Sutan Sjahrir, as Prime Minister to run the government, while he remained as president in the background, ostensibly with limited authority.

**War** Sukarno’s proclamation of Indonesia’s independence *de facto* produced a state of war with the Allied powers, which were determined to gain control of the territory and reinstate the pre-war Dutch government. However, one month would pass before the Allied forces would arrive. Meanwhile, the Japanese East Indies command, awaiting the arrival of the Allies to repatriate Japanese forces back to Japan, was ordered by the Allied high command to stand down and carry out policing duties to maintain law and order in the islands. The Japanese stance toward the Indonesian Republic varied: disinterested Japanese commanders withdrew their units to avoid confrontation with Indonesian forces, while those sympathetic to or supportive of the revolution provided weapons to Indonesians, or allowed areas to be occupied by Indonesians. However, other Japanese commanders complied with the Allied orders and fought the Indonesian revolutionaries, thus becoming involved in the independence war.

![Figure 41. Indonesian War of Independence.](image)
In the chaotic period immediately after Indonesia’s independence and continuing for several months, widespread violence and anarchy prevailed (this period is known as “Bersiap”, an Indonesian word meaning “be prepared”), with armed bands called “Pemuda” (Indonesian meaning “youth”) carrying out murders, robberies, abductions, and other criminal acts against groups associated with the Dutch regime, i.e. local nobilities, civilian leaders, Christians such as Menadonese and Ambones, ethnic Chinese, Europeans, and Indo-Europeans. Other armed bands were composed of local communists or Islamists, who carried out attacks for the same reasons. Christian and nobility-aligned militias also were organized, which led to clashes between pro-Dutch and pro-Indonesian armed groups. These so-called “social revolutions” by anti-Dutch militias, which occurred mainly in Java and Sumatra, were motivated by various reasons, including political, economic, religious, social, and ethnic causes. Subsequently when the Indonesian government began to exert greater control, the number of violent incidents fell, and Bersiap soon came to an end. The number of fatalities during the Bersiap period runs into the tens of thousands, including some 3,600 identified and 20,000 missing Indo-Europeans.

The first major clashes of the war occurred in late August 1945, when Indonesian revolutionary forces clashed with Japanese Army units, when the latter tried to regain previously vacated areas. The Japanese would be involved in the early stages of Indonesia’s independence war, but were repatriated to Japan by the end of 1946.

In mid-September 1945, the first Allied forces consisting of Australian units arrived in the eastern regions of Indonesia (where revolutionary activity was minimal), peacefully taking over authority from the commander of the Japanese naval forces there. Allied control also was established in Sulawesi, with the provincial revolutionary government offering no resistance. These areas were then returned to Dutch colonial control.

In late September 1945, British forces also arrived in the islands, the following month taking control of key areas in Sumatra, including Medan, Padang, and Palembang, and in Java. The British also occupied Jakarta (then still known, until 1949, as Batavia), with Sukarno and his government moving the Republic’s capital to Yogyakarta in Central Java. In October 1945, Japanese forces also regained control of Bandung and Semarang for the Allies, which they turned over to the British. In Semarang, the intense fighting claimed the lives of some 500 Japanese and 2,000 Indonesian soldiers.

In late October 1945, the shooting death of British General Aubertin Mallaby in Surabaya prompted the British command to launch a land, air, and sea attack on the city. In this encounter, known as the Battle of Surabaya, the British met fierce resistance from Pemuda militias but gained control of the city after three days of fighting. Casualties on both sides were high, fatalities numbering 6,000-16,000 revolutionaries and 500-2,000 mostly British Indian soldiers.

In late 1945, the revolutionaries intensified their attacks in Bandung. Then in March 1946, forced by the British to withdraw from Bandung, the revolutionaries set fire to a large section of the city in what is known as the “Bandung Sea of Fire”. Also that month, communal violence broke out in East Sumatra, where elements supporting the revolutionaries attacked groups aligned with the old colonial order.

The Netherlands itself was greatly weakened by World War II, and was unable to quickly reestablish its presence in the Dutch East Indies. However, by April 1946, Dutch troops had begun to arrive in large numbers, ultimately peaking at 180,000 during the war (aside from another 60,000 predominantly native colonial troops of the Royal Dutch East Indies Army). The restored colonial government, called the Netherlands Indies Civil Administration, reclaimed Jakarta as its capital, while Dutch authority also was established in the other major cities in Java and Sumatra, and in the rest of the original Dutch East Indies.
By late 1946, the British military had completed its mission in the archipelago, that of repatriating Japanese forces to Japan and freeing the Allied prisoners of war. By December 1946, British forces had departed from the islands, but not before setting up mediation talks between the Dutch government and Indonesian revolutionaries, an initiative that led the two sides to agree to a ceasefire in October 1946. Earlier in June 1946, the Dutch government and representatives of ethnic and religious groups and the aristocracy from Sulawesi, Maluku, West New Guinea, and other eastern states met in South Sulawesi and agreed to form a federal-type government attached to the Netherlands. In talks held with the Indonesian revolutionaries, Dutch authorities presented a similar proposal which on November 12, 1946, produced the Linggadjati Agreement, where the two sides agreed to establish a federal system known as the United States of Indonesia (USI) by January 1, 1949. The Republic of Indonesia (consisting of Java, Madura, and Sumatra) would comprise one state under USI; in turn, USI and the Netherlands would form the Netherlands-Indonesian Union, with each polity being a fully sovereign state but under the symbolic authority of the Dutch monarchy.

This Agreement met strong opposition in the Indonesian government but eventually was ratified in February 1947 with strong pressure for its passage being exerted by Sukarno and Hatta. In December 1946 in South Sulawesi, Pemuda fighters who opposed the agreement restarted hostilities. Dutch forces, led by Captain Raymond Westerling, used brutal methods to quell the rebellion, killing some 3,000 Pemuda fighters. The Agreement also was resisted in the Netherlands, but in March 1947, a modified version was passed in the House of Representatives of the Dutch parliament.

Then in July 1947, declaring that the Indonesian government did not fully comply with the Agreement, Dutch forces launched Operation Product, a military offensive (which the Dutch government called a “police action”) in Java and Sumatra, seizing control of the vital economic regions, including sugar-producing areas in Java, and the rubber plantations in Medan, and petroleum and coal facilities in Palembang and Padang. Dutch ships also imposed a naval blockade of the ports, restricting the Indonesian Republic’s economic capacity.

In early 1947, acting on the diplomatic initiative of India and Australia, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) released Resolution 27, which called on the two sides to stop fighting and enter into peaceful negotiations. On August 5, 1947, a ceasefire came into effect. A stipulation in Resolution 27 established the Committee of Good Office (CGO), a three-person body consisting of representatives, one named by the Netherlands, another by Indonesia, and a third, mutually agreed by both sides. In subsequent negotiations, the two sides agreed to form the Van Mook Line to delineate their respective areas of control which, because of the fighting, the Dutch-held territories in Java and Sumatra increased, while those of the Indonesian Republic decreased.

In January 1948, the two sides signed the Renville Agreement (named after the USS Renville, a U.S. Navy ship where the negotiations were held), which confirmed their respective territories in the Van Mook Line, and in the Dutch-held areas, a referendum would be held to decide whether the residents there wanted to be under Indonesian or Dutch control. Furthermore, in exchange for Indonesian forces withdrawing from Dutch-held areas as stipulated in the Van Mook Line, the Dutch Navy would end its blockade of the ports.

The Indonesian Republic, already weakened politically and militarily, was undermined further when its Islamic supporters in now Dutch-controlled West Java objected to the Renville Agreement and broke away to form Darul Islam (“Islamic State”), with the ultimate aim of turning Indonesia into an Islamic country. It opposed both the Indonesian government and Dutch colonial authorities. Darul Islam subsequently would be defeated only in 1962, some 13 years after the war had ended.
The Indonesian Republic also faced opposition from its other erstwhile allies, the communists (of the Indonesian Communist Party) and the socialists (of the Indonesian Socialist Party), who in September 1948, seceded and formed the “Indonesian Soviet Republic” in Madiun, East Java. Fighting in September-October and continuing until December 1948 eventually led to the Indonesian Republic quelling the Madiun uprising, with tens of thousands of communists killed or imprisoned and their leaders executed or forced into exile. Furthermore, the Indonesian Army itself was plagued with internal problems, because the government, suffering from acute financial difficulties and unable to pay the soldiers’ salaries, had disbanded a number of military units.

With the Indonesian revolutionary government experiencing internal problems, on December 19, 1948, Dutch forces launched Operation Kraai (“Operation Crow”), another “police action” on the contention that Indonesian guerillas had infiltrated the Van Mook Line and were carrying out subversive actions inside Dutch-held areas in violation of the Renville Agreement. Operation Kraai caught the revolutionaries off guard, forcing the Indonesian Army to retreat to the countryside to avoid being annihilated. As a result, Dutch forces captured large sections of Indonesian-held areas, including the Republic’s capital, Yogyakarta. Sukarno, Hatta, and other Republican leaders were captured without resistance and exiled, this action being deliberate on their part, as they believed that this latest aggression by the Dutch military would be condemned by the international community. Before allowing himself to be captured, Sukarno activated a clandestine “emergency government” in West Sumatra (to act as a caretaker government), which he had arranged beforehand as a contingency measure.

On December 24, 1948, the UNSC passed Resolution 63 which demanded the end of hostilities and the immediate release of Sukarno and other Indonesian leaders. Also by this time, the international media had taken hold of the conflict. The United States also exerted pressure on the Dutch government, threatening to cut off Marshall Plan aid for the Netherlands’ post-World War II reconstruction. Operation Kraii also generated division within USI as the Cabinets of Dutch-controlled states of East Indonesia and Pasundan resigned in protest of the Dutch military actions. As a result of these pressures, a ceasefire was agreed by the two sides, which came into effect in Java (on December 31, 1948) and Sumatra (on January 5, 1949).

Figure 42. Indonesian- and Dutch-controlled territories.
In April 1947, the Dutch government declared its intention of transferring sovereignty of Dutch-held USI states to Indonesia. In meetings held on May 7 and June 22, 1949, the Dutch and Indonesian negotiators signed the Roem-van Roijen Agreement (named after Mohammad Roem and Jan Herman van Roijen, Indonesian and Dutch diplomats, respectively), which stipulated an end to hostilities and the release of war prisoners. Furthermore, the government of the Indonesian Republic was to be restored, USI would be granted independence, and a Commonwealth-type Netherlands-Indonesian Union would be formed.

On July 6, 1949, upon their release, Sukarno and Hatta restored the Indonesian government in Yogyakarta, and one week later, they ratified the Roem-van Roijen Agreement. In mid-August 1949, a ceasefire came into effect. In a series of meetings, called the Dutch-Indonesian Round Table Conference held at The Hague, Netherlands in August-November 1949, the Netherlands, the Indonesian Republic, and the Federal Consultative Assembly (Dutch: *Bijeenkomst voor Federaal Overleg*, which represented the six states and nine autonomous territories created by the Dutch under USI) agreed that USI be granted independence under the Indonesian government, with Sukarno and Hatta as its President and Vice-President, respectively. The Netherlands and USI would form a loose association called the Netherlands-Indonesian Union under the Dutch monarchy. A stipulation was that the Dutch military would leave USI, with security functions to be turned over to the Indonesian Armed Forces. Two other difficult issues were settled: 1. the responsibility for paying off the Dutch East Indies debt totaling 4.3 billion guilders was to be borne by USI, and 2. that West New Guinea, which formed part of the Dutch East Indies and claimed by the Indonesian Republic as belonging to USI by way of state succession, was agreed to remain with the Netherlands until future negotiations regarding its future could be held within one year after USI’s independence. On December 27, 1949, the Netherlands formally relinquished authority over USI, which also became a fully sovereign, independent state.

Indonesia’s independence war caused some 50,000-100,000 Indonesian deaths. The Dutch military lost over 5,000 soldiers killed. Some 1,200 British soldiers (mainly British Indians) also were killed in action. Several million people were displaced. Also in the 1950s, a diaspora of took place, with some 300,000 Dutch nationals leaving Indonesia for the Netherlands.

**Aftermath** From the outset, USI was confronted with many problems. Just one month after its independence, Westerling, the Dutch officer known for his brutality in South Sulawesi, led a force consisting of Dutch and anti-Republic fighters that attacked Bandung and Jakarta, which failed to overthrow Sukarno’s government. In the aftermath, Westering fled from Indonesia, while Indonesian collaborators in the plot, which included the Sultan of Pontianak who also headed the West Kalimantan State, were arrested and imprisoned. The coup attempt heightened the already widespread perception that USI was a Dutch machination. In the following months and with pressure exerted by President Sukarno, the federal structure disintegrated, with USI states dissolving and subsuming under the authority of the Indonesian Republic. On August 17, 1950, USI’s disintegration was complete, and Sukarno declared Indonesia a unitary state. Then in 1956, Sukarno dissolved the Netherlands-Indonesian Union, mainly because of the stalled talks regarding the future of West New Guinea.

In April 1950 in South Maluku where pro-Dutch sentiment remained high, Indonesian militias from the former colonial army launched a rebellion and established the Republic of South Maluku in Ambon. Indonesian forces went on the offensive in the islands, quelling the revolt by November 1950. In 1956-1957, rebellions led by military and civilian leaders were launched in Sumatra and North Sulawesi, and insurgent governments were formed there that threatened Indonesia’s integrity. However, government offensives in March-June 1958 pacified these regions, with the last insurgent
groups surrendering by 1961. Also in the first half of the 1960s, the government finally brought the decade-long Darul Islam rebellion in West Java, as well as in South Sulawesi and Aceh, to an end.

World War II and the independence war also had taken their toll on Indonesia’s economy: infrastructures were destroyed, agriculture and industries were ruined, poverty was widespread, inflation soared, and the new government struggled to provide basic public services. The country’s archipelagic nature and the hundreds of ethnic groups also fostered disunity because of differences in languages, customs, traditions, religions, and ideologies. Domination by politically dominant Java particularly was a source of mistrust among the other ethnic groups. The national government also was divided by dissent because of rival ideologies of the various leading political parties: communists under the Indonesian Communist Party, nationalists under Sukarno’s Indonesian National Party, and Islamists under Nahdlatul Ulama and the Masyumi Party. Between 1945 and 1958, the Indonesian government experienced 17 Cabinet changes.

By the second half of the 1950s, President Sukarno made steps to dissolve the country’s parliamentary system. In February 1957, he implemented “Guided Democracy”, where national policies would be decided through consensus among the various political parties under the guidance of the president. In July 1959, he replaced the USI-era constitution with the 1945 Constitution which provided for strong presidential powers. Then in March 1960, he dissolved parliament and installed a rubber-stamp legislature in its place. Sukarno soon gained broad powers, causing a split in relations with the Islamic parties, which were soon banned, and closer ties with the communist PKI and the Indonesian military, both of which supported Guided Democracy. At this time also, Indonesia experienced worsening relations with the United States and other western countries, and improving ties with the Soviet Union and other communist countries.

Meanwhile during the 1950s, Indonesian-Dutch relations continued to deteriorate because of the unresolved issue of West New Guinea. In reprisal for the stalled talks, in December 1957, the Indonesian government nationalized some 250 Dutch corporations in Indonesia and expelled 40,000 Dutch nationals. Diplomatic relations between the two countries were cut in 1960. While continuing diplomatic pressure to gain West New Guinea, Indonesia also launched infiltration attacks on the territory, which were repulsed by the Dutch Army. However, by 1962, the Dutch government had acquiesced and turned over West New Guinea’s authority to the United Nations under UNTEA (United Nations Temporary Executive Authority). In May 1963, UNTEA handed authority of the region to Indonesia with the provision that a plebiscite would be held to determine the political aspirations of West Papuans.

In July-August 1969, a referendum was held involving 1,000 tribal leaders (but not the 800,000 Papuans of the territory), who voted unanimously to join Indonesia. Thereafter, the Indonesian government[9] declared West New Guinea as its 26th province, ending the 350 years of Dutch presence in the Dutch East Indies.
SINO-INDIAN WAR

**Background** In the 19th century, the British and Russian Empires were locked in a political and territorial rivalry known as the Great Game, where the two powers sought to control and dominate Central Asia. The Russians advanced southward into territories that ultimately would form the present-day countries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, while the British advanced northward across the Indian subcontinent. By the mid-1800s, Britain had established full control over territories of British India and the Princely States (present-day India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh). Just as it did with the Russians regarding British territories in northwest India, the British government sought to establish its territorial limits in the east with the other great regional power, China. British authorities particularly wanted to delineate British India’s boundaries in Kashmir in the north with China’s Xinjiang Province, as well as British India’s borders in the east with Tibet (a semi-autonomous state under Chinese suzerainty), thereby establishing a common British India-China border across the towering Himalaya Mountains.

In 1865, the Survey of India published a boundary for Kashmir that included the 37,000 square-kilometer Aksai Chin region (Figure 43), a barren, uninhabited high-altitude (22,000 feet) desert containing salt and soda flats. However, this delineation, called the Johnson Line (named after William Johnson, a British surveyor), was rejected by the British government.

In 1893, a Chinese official in Kashgar proposed to the British that the Laktsang Range serve as the British India-China border, with the Lingzi Tang Plains to its south to become part of Kashmir and Aksai Chin to its north to become part of China. The proposal found favor with the British, who in 1899, drew the Macartney-MacDonald Line (named after George Macartney, the British consul-general in Kashgar and Claude MacDonald, a British diplomat), which was presented to the Chinese government. The latter did not respond, which the British took to mean that the Chinese agreed with the Line. Thereafter, up until about 1908, British maps of India featured the Macartney-MacDonald Line (Figure 44) as the China-India border. However, by the 1920s, the British published new maps using the Johnson Line as the Kashmir-Xinjiang border.

Similarly, British authorities took steps to establish British India’s boundaries with Tibet and China. For this purpose, in 1913-1914, in a series of negotiations held in Simla (present-day Shimla in northern India), representatives from China, Tibet, and British India agreed on the territorial limits between “Outer Tibet” and British India. Outer Tibet was to be formed as an autonomous Tibetan polity under Chinese suzerainty. However, the Chinese delegate objected to the proposed border between “Outer Tibet” and “Inner Tibet”, and walked out of the conference. Tibetan and British representatives continued with the conference, leading to the Simla Accord (1914) which established the McMahon Line (named after Henry McMahon, the Foreign Secretary of British India). In particular, some 80,000 square kilometers became part of British India, which later was administered as the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA). The Tawang area, located near the Bhutan-Tibet-India junction, also was ceded to British India and would become a major battleground in the Sino-Indian War.

The Chinese government rejected the Simla Accord, stating that Tibet, as a political subordinate of China, could not enter into treaties with foreign governments. The British also initially were averse
to implementing the Simla Accord, as it ran contrary to the 1907 Anglo-Russian Convention which recognized China’s suzerainty over Tibet. But with Russia and Britain agreeing to void the 1907 Convention, the British established the McMahon Line (Figure 44) as the Tibet-India border. By the 1930s, the British government had begun to use the McMahon Line in its British Indian maps.

In August 1947, British rule in India ended with the partition of British India into the independent countries of India and Pakistan. Meanwhile, for much of the first half of the 20th century, China convulsed in a multitude of conflicts: the Revolution of 1911 which ended 2,000 years of imperial rule; the fracturing of China during the warlord era (1916-1928); the Japanese invasion and occupation of Manchuria in 1931, and then of other parts of China in 1937-1945; and the Chinese Civil War (1927-1949) between Communist and Nationalist forces. By 1949, communist forces had prevailed in the civil war and in October of that year, Mao Zedong, Chairman of the Communist Party of China, proclaimed the formation of the People’s Republic of China (PRC).

The government of Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was among the first in the international community to recognize the PRC, and in the years that followed, sought to cultivate strong Indian-Chinese relations.

In the early 1950s, a series of diplomatic and cultural exchanges between India and China led in April 1954 to an eight-year agreement called the Panchsheel Treaty (Sanskrit, panch, meaning five, and sheel, meaning virtues), otherwise known as the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, which was meant to form the basis for good relations between India and China. The Panscheel five principles are: mutual respect for each other’s territorial integrity and sovereignty; mutual non-aggression; mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs; equality and cooperation for mutual benefit; and peaceful coexistence. The slogan “Indians and Chinese are brothers” (Hindi: Hindi China bhai bhai) was popular and Prime Minister Nehru advocated a Sino-Indian “Asian Axis” to serve as a counter-balance to the American-Soviet Cold War rivalry.

However, the poorly defined India-China border would overcome these attempts to establish warm bilateral relations. From the outset, India and China claimed ownership over Aksai Chin and NEFA. India released maps that essentially duplicated the British-era maps which showed both areas as part of India. China likewise claimed sovereignty over these areas, but also stated that as it had not signed any border treaties with the former British Indian government, the India-China border must be resolved through new negotiations.
India and China have disputed territorial claims on the border regions of Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh (formerly North-East Frontier Agency), as well as other smaller areas, in their common border.
Two events caused Sino-Indian relations to deteriorate further. First, in the 1950s, China built a road through Aksai Chin that linked Xinjiang and Tibet. Second, in 1959, in the aftermath of a failed Tibetan uprising against the Chinese occupation forces in Tibet, the Indian government provided refuge in India for the Dalai Lama, Tibet’s political and spiritual leader. Earlier in 1950, China had invaded and annexed Tibet. The Indian government had hoped that Tibet would remain an independent state (and a buffer zone between India and China, as it had been in the colonial era), but in the early 1950s period of friendly Sino-Indian relations, India did not oppose Chinese military action in Tibet.

But with bilateral relations deteriorating, the Chinese government offered to negotiate, with the Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai proposing that in exchange for China dropping its claim to NEFA, India would do the same for Aksai Chin. However, Prime Minister Nehru was unwilling to negotiate on the basis of ceding territory. By 1959 and into the early 1960s, the emerging crisis turned confrontational: in Aksai Chin, the PLA established military outposts, which was countered by the Indian Army also setting up forward outposts in unoccupied areas. This Indian response, called the Forward Policy, was purposed not to provoke armed confrontation but rather to disrupt PLA logistical lines and thus force the Chinese to fall back. The tactic proved successful (initially), as the PLA was forced to abandon a number of forward outposts after running low on supplies.

In September 1962, the Indian Army at NEFA set up positions north of the McMahon Line, following earlier patrols that discovered that the Thag La Ridge lay north of the Line. This action ran contrary to the 1914 Simla Accord which created the McMahon Line. However, the Indian government believed that the Accord had as its original intent setting the region’s natural barrier (which was the Thag La Ridge) as the
border between Tibet and British India. Ultimately, by September 1962, several Indian Army outposts had been set up north of the McMahon Line, which would be a major trigger for the coming war.

By mid-1962, with Aksai Chin and the areas north of the McMahon Line in NEFA now bristling with fortified outposts, skirmishes began to break out, as the PLA adopted measures to counter the Indian Army’s Forward Policy. In June 1962, fighting led to dozens of Chinese soldiers being killed, and the following month, a large Chinese force nearly squared off with an Indian Army unit near Chushul, which lay north of the McMahon Line. By this time, Indian units, which previously were ordered to avoid provoking firefights, were given authorization to engage in battle if threatened.

By the third week of September 1962, tensions south of the Thag La Ridge had intensified that skirmishes were breaking out along the Namka Chu River. On October 10, 1962, Indian and Chinese units clashed at Yumtso La, located north of the McMahon Line, killing 25 Indian and 33 Chinese soldiers.

By early October 1962, China, unbeknownst to India, had begun preparing for war. Historians point to two reasons for China’s decision to go to war: the Chinese government viewed India as a threat against Chinese rule in Tibet, as evidenced by the Indian government giving the Dalai Lama refuge in India; and China was seeking reprisal for India’s Forward Policy, which the Chinese government said was “nibbling” away at Chinese territory. Furthermore, India’s then friendly relations with the United States and Soviet Union (as well as China’s broken ties with the USSR following the Sino-Soviet Split) were viewed by the Mao government as a plot to encircle and isolate China.

The Chinese war plan involved concentrated offensive operations consisting of large numbers of troops, particularly at NEFA (which would form the eastern sector) and to a lesser extent at Aksai Chin (the western sector). On October 18, 1962, the Mao government approved the battle plans and gave the order to go to war, set for October 20. Troops, weapons, and military equipment were brought in; some 80,000 PLA troops would take part in the war. By contrast, the Indian military was unprepared for war, with some generals even stating that a war with China was highly unlikely; some 15,000 – 20,000 Indian soldiers would be involved in the war.

War Fighting broke out on October 20, 1962, with Chinese forces launching offensives in two main sectors: in the eastern sector (NEFA) north of the McMahon Line, and in the western sector in Aksai Chin. Some fighting also occurred in the Nathu La Pass, Sikkim near the China-India border. The Chinese government called the operation a “self-defensive counterattack”, implying that India had started the war by crossing north of the McMahon Line.
In the eastern sector, preceding an artillery barrage of Indian positions, three regiments of Chinese troops swept down on the one battalion of the Indian Army defending southern Thag La, and gained control of the south side of the Namka Chu River. To avoid encirclement, the Indians retreated across the McMahon Line. In this attack, the Indian Seventh Brigade commander, Brigadier General John Dalvi, was captured by the Chinese. The PLA then crossed south into NEFA and captured Tawang, which was also evacuated by the Indian forces that retreated south to Se La and Bombdi La. On October 26, 1962, the Chinese also began an artillery barrage of Walong, a town located at the eastern end of NEFA near the Indian-Burmese border, but the Indian defense held. Another PLA assault on November 8 also was repulsed.

In the western sector, at the start of the war, the PLA already controlled a greater portion of Aksai Chin. The Chinese military action therefore focused on overrunning the many scattered Indian outposts across Aksai Chin. By October 22, 1962, the PLA had gained full control of Aksai Chin, overcoming Indian resistance in the Chip Chap Valley, Galwan Valley, and Pangong Lake. Fears of the Chinese offensive spilling into eastern Kashmir forced the Indian military to evacuate border positions, including Daulet Beg Oldi.
On October 24, 1962, or four days into the war, the Chinese government ordered the PLA to stop advancing. In a message to Prime Minister Nehru, Premier Zhou proposed an end to the fighting, with a disengagement and mutual withdrawal of both forces to a distance of 20 kilometers from their present positions, a Chinese withdrawal from NEFA, and a negotiated settlement of the border dispute. In response, Prime Minister Nehru stated his desire for peace but objected to the mutual 20-kilometer withdrawal of forces, stating that the PLA had advanced “40 to 60 kilometers”, and proposed that both sides retreat to positions before September 8, 1962 (i.e. pre-war positions). On November 4, 1962, Premier Zhou replied stating that China would relinquish its claim on NEFA in exchange for India doing the same on Aksai Chin, as previously offered by China. On November 14, Prime Minister Nehru rejected the offer. Also in mid-November, the Indian government declared a state of emergency throughout the country.

On November 14, 1962 and coming after a three-week lull in the fighting, the war resumed. In the eastern sector, the PLA advanced toward Se La and Bomdii La, and bypassed strong Indian positions at Se La to take Bomdii La and Thembang. Chinese forces then advanced south toward Assam and came to within 30 kilometers of Tezpur, whose residents were forced to evacuate the area and move further south.
On November 16, PLA forces finally captured Walong when the Indian defenders ran out of ammunition. In the western sector, the PLA cleared Aksai Chin of the remaining Indian Army units, attacking and taking Gurung Hill and Spanggur Gap, as well as Rezang La, where an Indian platoon unit resisted before being overrun by overwhelming force.

By this time, the Indian Army’s defenses at NEFA and Aksai Chin had practically ceased to exist. On November 19, 1962, Premier Zhou declared a unilateral ceasefire, which took effect two days later, November 21, when Chinese forces withdrew 20 kilometers from their most advanced positions. The 32-day war was over, although skirmishes continued for a short time thereafter. War casualties included, on the Indian Army side, some 1,300 killed, 1,000 wounded, 1,700 missing, and 4,000 captured; and on the Chinese side, some 700 killed and 1,700 wounded.

**Aftermath** The war was a resounding victory for the PLA, which it achieved using speed and surprise, concentration of force, innovative and flexible tactics, efficient logistics, and mastery of terrain and weather conditions. By contrast, the Indian Army suffered from poor military leadership, insufficient logistics, inadequate defense, and bad strategy. As a result, the PLA gained full control of Aksai Chin, but withdrew from NEFA, where it allowed the Indian Army and the Indian civilian government to reestablish their authority there.

For India, the war had a profound effect. Prime Minister Nehru was severely criticized for his pacifist attitude toward China, while Defense Minister V.K. Krishna Menon was forced to resign. India-China relations deteriorated, and in India, a rise of nationalism and anti-Chinese sentiment came upon the general population.

The Indian government launched a full review of its military infrastructure and capability, starting with a fact-finding commission led by two Indian Army generals, T.B. Henderson Brooks and Premindra Singh Bhagat, who subsequently compiled the Henderson Brooks-Bhagat Report, which assessed the Indian Army’s performance in the war. Although the report has remained classified, in the period that followed, the Indian Armed Forces underwent major improvements: manpower strength was increased, military doctrine and organizational structure were revised, modern weapons were purchased, etc.

The India-China border issue has since remained unresolved, with the Line of Actual Control (LAC), serving as the de facto India-China border in Aksai Chin and NEFA; at NEFA, the LAC is equivalent to the McMahon Line. Before the war, Pakistan also shared a disputed border with China in the Gilgit-Baltistan – Aksai Chin regions. On October 13, 1962, one week before the Sino-Indian War began, Pakistani and Chinese representatives met to negotiate a border settlement, which was achieved with a border agreement between the two countries on March 2, 1963.

In the years following the war, a number of border incidents have occurred between Indian and Chinese forces. In 1967, fighting broke out twice in Sikkim, an Indian protectorate not recognized by China. In both cases, PLA units which launched the attacks were beaten back. Sikkim subsequently (in 1975) was incorporated as an Indian state and later (in 2003) recognized as such by China.

Then in 1986-1987, in India-controlled NEFA (also claimed by China), PLA units occupied the Sumdorong Chu Valley, triggering a build-up of forces by both sides in late 1986 until early 1987. Tensions increased further when in December 1986, India declared NEFA as an Indian state, named Arunachal Pradesh. In May 1987, tensions eased when the Indian External Affairs Minister visited China. The following year, Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi also visited China.
Over the years, security along the India-China border has remained tight, with occasional reports of small infiltration operations and other border violations taking place. India and China have established four Border Personnel Meeting (BPM) points (at Chushul in Ladakh, Nathu La in Sikkim, Bum La Pass in Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh, and Lipulekh Pass in Uttarakhand) where Indian and Chinese military representatives meet regularly to discuss and resolve border incidents. Furthermore, India and China have signed a number of agreements aimed at preventing another war, including the 1993 and 1996 treaties called the Sino-Indian Bilateral Peace and Tranquility Accords.
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VIETNAM WAR


CAMBODIAN CIVIL WAR


CAMBODIAN GENOCIDE

CAMBODIAN-VIETNAMESE WAR


SINO-VIETNAMESE WAR


LAOTIAN CIVIL WAR


KOREAN WAR


SINO-SOVIET BORDER CONFLICT


RUSSO-JAPANESE WAR


**BOXER REBELLION**


**CHINA (1911): XINHAI REVOLUTION, FRAGMENTATION, AND THE STRUGGLE FOR REUNIFICATION**


**JAPANESE INVASION OF MANCHURIA**


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**MORO REBELLION**


**HUKBALAHAP REBELLION**

MALAYAN EMERGENCY


INDONESIAN WAR OF INDEPENDENCE


SINO-INDIAN WAR


[1] Officially and by extension, French Indochina was now aligned with Japan through the German-sponsored Vichy France.
[2] France had granted Laos its independence in February 1950 but continued to control the Laotian state, which was necessary because of the ongoing war in Vietnam.
[3] In this context, the Vietnam War is also known as the Second Indochina War.
[4] Sihanouk coined the term “Khmer rouges” (red, i.e. communist, Khmers, later adopted in the West as “Khmer Rouge”) as a general term for communist Cambodians. During the Cambodian Civil War and thereafter, the name became appropriated to the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) and its armed wing, the Revolutionary Army of Kampuchea (RAK).
[5] During Spanish colonization, the term “Filipino” referred to Spanish nationals born in the Philippines, and not to the native population. Philippine-born Spaniards were called “insulares” while those born in Spain (who occupied the highest social stratification and held the highest government positions) were called “peninsulares”.
[6] Captain John Pershing later led a distinguished military career, serving as commander of the American Expeditionary Force during World War I and Chief of Staff of the United States Army (1921-1924), and General of the Armies of the United States (a position that only he and George Washington, the first U.S. President, have held).
[7] General Wood would have a distinguished military career and would serve as Chief of Staff of the United States Army from 1910 to 1914.
[8] In 1850, the word “Indonesia” was first used by George Earl and James Logan, two British lawyers, to refer to approximately the region comprising the present-day Malay Archipelago.
By this time, Sukarno had fallen from power following a period of decline in popular support resulting from the armed conflict with Malaysia in 1963-1966 and the failed coup of the “30 September Movement” in October 1965. Sukarno’s decline coincided with the rise of General Suharto, who succeeded as president in March 1967.