

Observation no: 45

Country-year: 1936* *This coding is from the perspective of the Chinese National Forces and not the CCP or the United Front*

1. Did the current regime come to power in a military coup?

Yes.

Chiang Kai-shek took over the nationalist forces after the previous leader, Sun Yat-Sen, died in 1925. In 1926, as both the military and political commander of these forces, he led a northern expedition to defeat competing warlord factions and unite China under one regime. In March of 1926, Chiang Kai-shek initiated a coup d'état to consolidate power from the Communists and instituted himself as dictator.¹

2. Has the country ever experienced a military coup?

Yes.

The period leading up to the rise of Chiang Kai-shek was one of constant conflict between warlords for control of China and exchanges of power during this time were often accomplished through a series of small-scale coups.²

3. Is the country's top leader a former military officer?

Yes.

Chiang Kai-shek was a career military officer and the commandant of the officer candidate training school before ascending to head the Republic of China. While serving as head of state, he also acted as supreme commander of the military.

4. Is the military officer corps largely closed to those who do not share the leader's ethnic or sectarian background?

No.

I found no evidence of ethnic or sectarian preferences. In fact, as the war against the Japanese and against the Maoist forces progressed, there was a substantial deficit in available and competent individuals to serve in the officer corps.

¹ Tien-We Wu, "Chiang Kai-shek's March Twentieth Coup d'état of 1926," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (1968): 585-602; Jay Taylor, *The Generalissimo: Chiang Kai-shek and the struggle for Modern China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

² James Flath and Norman Smith, eds. *Beyond Suffering: Recounting War in Modern China*. (UBC Press, 2011).

Standards for entry into the officer corps were relaxed and a significant portion of the lower and middle officer corps were promoted from the ranks (enlisted).³ Simply put, the nationalist forces didn't have the luxury of creating standards that excluded large swathes of the population.⁴

5. Are there strict ideological requirements for entry into the senior officer corps?

Yes.

These ideological requirements were generally loyalty to Chiang Kai-Shek and officers were generally rewarded with command strictly based on this loyalty.⁵ In addition, those who were not loyal to Chiang Kai-shek were not given the best training, weaponry, or supplies.⁶ Despite this favoritism towards individuals within the party, Chiang Kai-shek was often stuck with non-party senior officers in command of the regional units.⁷ However, these commanders were not so much selected for command as they were default remnants of the warlord era and alliances of convenience for the Nationalist Forces against both the Japanese and the rising Maoist forces.

6. Is party membership required for entry into the senior officer corps?

Yes.

The military under KMT rule was highly politicized and all senior officer corps (with the exception of the aforementioned regional commanders) members were also members of the Chiang Kai-Shek's party.⁸

7. Does military training involve extensive political education or ideological indoctrination?

Yes.

The KMT formed Whampoa military academy in 1924 with a heavy emphasis on political education. In fact, the military academy was run by political administrators who had the final say on any military initiated change in curriculum.⁹

3 Chang Jui-Te. "Nationalist Army Officers during the Sino-Japanese War, 1937-1945," *Modern Asian Studies* Vol.3, No.4 (2006): 1033-1056.

4 David Andrew Graff and Robin Higham, eds. *A military history of China* (Louisville: University Press of Kentucky, 2012).

5 Lloyd Eastman. *Seeds of destruction: Nationalist China in war and revolution, 1937-1949* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1984).

6 Philip Jowett, *Soldiers of the White Sun* (Atglen: Schiffer Military History Press, 2011).

7 Hsi-sheng Chi. *Nationalist China at war: military defeats and political collapse, 1937-45*. Vol. 16 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1982).

8 Graff and Higham 2012.

8. Has the military been used to repress internal dissent in the last five years?

Yes.

The Nationalist army was used to defeat rival warlord factions and to unify the country under one regime. Though the Northern Expedition occurred decades prior, the army was often called upon against potential rising factions.

9. Has the military been used to govern the country in the last five years.

Yes.

The military was used as an arm of government in the Nationalist Republic.

10. Is there a paramilitary organization separate from the regular military, used to provide regime or leader security?

Yes.

There were three Nationalist “paramilitary” organizations: the Railway Police, the Traffic Police, and the Peace Preservation Corps. The Peace Preservation Corps was designed to bring together local militias and place them under Chiang Kai-Shek’s control. They were meant to defend local areas and sometimes filled in among the regular national forces.¹⁰

11. Is there an internal intelligence apparatus dedicated to watching the regular military?

Yes.

A collective security system was integrated at the unit level in which at least one KMT loyalist would spy on the rest of the unit.¹¹

12. Has a purge of the officer corps occurred in the last five years?

Yes.

9 Graff and Higham 2012.

¹⁰ Philip Jowett. *The Chinese Army 1937-1949: World War II and Civil War* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2005); Hans Van de Ven, “New States of War: Communist and Nationalist warfare and state building,” Hans Van de Ven, Ed. *Warfare in Chinese History* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2000).

¹¹ Chi 1982, pg. 96.

Significant purges of communist officials occurred in the early 1930s.¹²

13. Is there an institutionalized forum through which civilian leaders and military officers regularly exchange information?

Yes.

The National Military Council, which was comprised of the commanders of the naval, land, and air forces was headed by the chairman (Chiang Kai-Shek). As such, it was the formal organization through which the military heads communicated with Chiang Kai Shek.¹³ A supreme national defense council was formed in 1937 with Chiang Kai-Shek as its chairman and members taken from both the political and military spheres of influence.¹⁴

¹² Hu Pu-yu, *A Brief History of the Chinese National Revolutionary Forces* (Taipei: Chung Wu Publishing Co, 1971).

¹³ Hollington Tong, ed. *China Handbook: 1937-1943* (Chinese News Service, 1943).

¹⁴ Liu, 119.