

Casualty of the Cold War: The Cairo Declaration and Its Historical Legacy in Northeast Asia

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This paper describes the origins of the Cairo Declaration that United States President Franklin D. Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and Generalissimo Jiang Jieshi of the Republic of China issued on December 1, 1943. It focuses particularly on explaining how this statement summarized Roosevelt's plan for the maintenance of peace and security in East Asia after World War II. The paper advances two major conclusions. First, Roosevelt became concerned at the Cairo Conference about Jiang Jieshi's ambitions to impose Chinese hegemony on its neighbors in the postwar period. Therefore, he decided to propose issuance of the Cairo Declaration to commit Jiang to support national self-determination for those nations the Allies liberated from Japanese domination. Second, the emergence of the Cold War was responsible for creating circumstances that prevented the United States from achieving after World War II the goals it had identified in the Cairo Declaration.

Keywords: Cairo Declaration, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, Jiang Jieshi, Korea, China-Burma-India Theater, T. V. Soong, Madam Chiang, Operation BUCCANEER, "Four Policemen," Harry Hopkins, Joseph Stalin, Teheran Conference

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During World War II, the Cairo Conference, code-named SEXTANT, took place in Egypt in two phases, first from November 23 to 26 and then from December 3 to 7 in 1943. The United States President Franklin D. Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and Generalissimo Jiang Jieshi of the Republic of China (ROC) met to discuss military strategy for the defeat of Japan and the reconstruction of postwar East Asia. It was the high point of collaboration among the three Allied leaders. Discussions at the Cairo Conference focused primarily on determining future military operations in the China-Burma-India (CBI) Theater, specifically giving consideration to Jiang's desire for the Western allies to launch amphibious attacks in the Bay of Bengal against Japan to coincide with a Chinese military offensive in Burma. There also was discussion about increasing the amount of economic and military assistance that Anglo-American aircraft delivered to China "over the Hump" from India. More memorable, however, Roosevelt, Churchill, and Jiang issued a press release seventy years ago that sought to cement China's status as one of the four great powers who after their victory in World War II would act in concert to preserve peace and stability in the

postwar world. Regrettably, the Soviet-American Cold War emerged as a barrier to implementation of the Cairo Declaration, leaving unfulfilled the idealistic vision Roosevelt imagined for the future of East Asia.

Overshadowing discussions at Cairo about the Pacific war were Anglo-American preparations for a cross-channel invasion of France that would initiate the final offensives leading to the defeat of Nazi Germany. Reflecting the higher Allied priority on achieving victory in Europe, in the middle of the Cairo Conference, Roosevelt and Churchill left for Teheran, Iran, where they met with Soviet leader Joseph Stalin from November 27 to December 2, 1943, while Jiang returned to Chongqing. In Cairo, before their return, the press received copies of the following public communiqué:

The several military missions have agreed upon future military operations against Japan. The Three Great Allies expressed their resolve to bring unrelenting pressure against their brutal enemies by sea, land, and air. This pressure is already rising.

The Three Great Allies are fighting this war to restrain and punish the aggression of Japan. They covet no gain for themselves and have no thought of territorial expansion. It is their purpose that Japan shall be stripped of all the islands in the Pacific which she has seized or occupied since the beginning of the first World War in 1914, and that all the territories Japan has stolen from the Chinese, such as Manchuria, Formosa, and The Pescadores, shall be restored to the Republic of China. Japan will also be expelled from all other territories which she has taken by violence and greed. The aforesaid three great powers, mindful of the enslavement of the people of Korea, are determined that in due course Korea shall become free and independent.

With these objects in view the three Allies, in harmony with those of the United Nations at war with Japan, will continue to persevere in the serious and prolonged operations necessary to procure the unconditional

surrender of Japan.¹

Jiang also wanted control over the Ryukyu islands to revert to China, but the Cairo Declaration did not mention the future status of these islands.

Court historian Herbert Feis provided the traditional interpretation in 1957, explaining the reasons for enunciation of the Cairo Declaration:

In sum, ... China was deeded vast areas, great potential influence, and top responsibilities. This was done, the record indicates, because it was deemed morally fair, and because it was thought to be helpful in the war. But this attitude and purpose might not have eventuated in these conclusive decisions so easily and so early in the war had it not been for the hold which two general beliefs had on the American official mind. One was that the Chinese people had the latent qualities to become a great nation, and would, in recognition of the chance being conferred upon them, prove to be reliable and friendly partners of the West. The other was that China would have a sufficiently unified and capable government to control and properly administer its great domain. On these, Roosevelt and Churchill and their advisers, civil and military, risked the whole future of the Far East, and the position and security of their countries in the Far East.²

For Tang Tsou, issuance of the Cairo Declaration was no surprise, since it merely reaffirmed the unconditional surrender formula that Roosevelt and Churchill enunciated at the Casablanca Conference the prior January as

¹ U.S. Department of State, "The Communiqué and Its Release," in *Diplomatic Papers: The Conferences at Cairo and Tehran, 1943*, Foreign Relations of the United States (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1961), 448-449.

² Herbert Feis, *Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin: The War They Waged And The Peace They Sought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), 532.

the Allied goal in the Pacific war.³ Arnold Xiangze Jiang, however, speaks for numerous historians when he describes the communiqué as “the most striking demonstration of the international acceptance of China as a great power” to that point in modern history.⁴ Advancing another reason for its significance, Gaddis Smith designates it as the “climax of Roosevelt’s anti-imperialism and his efforts to flatter” Jiang.⁵ Many historians agree with Charles M. Dobbs that the primary purpose of the Cairo Declaration was “to prop up the prestige of Chiang’s faltering regime.”⁶

By contrast, Bruce Cumings adds hegemonic intent to Roosevelt’s motivations in promoting the Cairo Declaration. Its guiding principle, he contends, was the president’s “desire to build up China as one of the Big Four Powers, partially as a means of invigorating China’s resistance to Japan, but also as an essential part of his own vision of postwar East Asian power relationships.” Allegedly, “Roosevelt’s constituting a weak and divided China as a great power” was “shrewd pursuit of American interests” since this would provide the United States with another vote in postwar disputes and therefore “would emerge as the most powerful nation in the world and could well expect to dominate multilateral arrangements.”⁷ Stephen E. Pelz has elaborated on this argument:

Roosevelt’s underlying plan for the postwar world envisioned drawing

³ Tang Tsou, *America’s Failure in China, 1941-50*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 58.

⁴ Arnold Xiangze Jiang, *The United States and China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 109.

⁵ Gaddis Smith, *American Diplomacy During the Second World War, 1941-1945*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1985), 90.

⁶ Charles M. Dobbs, *The Unwanted Symbol: American Foreign Policy, the Cold War, and Korea, 1945-1950* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1981), 12.

⁷ Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes, 1945-1947*, vol. 1 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 106-108. See also Warren I. Cohen, *America’s Response to China: A History of Sino-American Relations*, 2nd ed. (New York: Wiley, 1980), 156; Roland Ian Heiferman, *The Cairo Conference of 1943: Roosevelt, Churchill, Chiang Kai-Shek and Madame Chiang* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2011), 141.

Britain and Russia into a condominium to police the world through the United Nations, and in former colonial areas where the interest of the great powers overlapped he proposed to establish multipower trusteeships, which would prepare the colonial peoples for self government, while providing forums for continued great power cooperation.

Postponing discussion of explosive issues related to territorial borders until after winning the Pacific war, the president promised independence to Asian nations under prewar colonial rule to motivate anti-Japanese resistance. To encourage Jiang to keep fighting, Roosevelt treated China formally as an equal and promised return of lost land after the war.⁸

All of these interpretations contain an element of truth. However, historians have not given enough attention to another central explanation for the Cairo Declaration. Roosevelt had expected Jiang to be his partner in ending colonialism in postwar Asia until the first day of the conference when the generalissimo strongly endorsed the issuance of an immediate statement promising Korean independence. The next day, he conveyed fears regarding China's "wide aspirations" for dominance in postwar Asia to Churchill.⁹ Suddenly, Jiang emerged as an opponent of trusteeship and international accountability that were the main features of Roosevelt's new order in Asia. Worse, the generalissimo's apparent quest for regional hegemony was the outcome that the United States had sought to prevent in fighting Japan. With his "great power condominium" plan in jeopardy, Warren F. Kimball asserts, Roosevelt proposed the Cairo Declaration as a way to massage Jiang's ego and keep China in the

⁸ Stephen E. Pelz, "U.S. Decisions on Korean Policy, 1943-1950: Some Hypotheses," in *Child of Conflict: The Korean-American Relationship, 1945-1953*, ed. Bruce Cumings (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1983), 98.

⁹ James I. Matray, *The Reluctant Crusade: American Foreign Policy in Korea, 1941-1950* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985), 20.

war, but he hoped that the ROC soon would find a new leader. When Chiang “hung on,” Kimball explains, the president was forced “to move to prevent exchanging British, French, and Dutch imperialism in East and Southeast Asia for that of the Chinese.” Compelling Jiang and then Churchill to accept the declaration, Roosevelt achieved “his quid pro quo, for the document included a specific renunciation by the Chinese of any intentions to expand in Asia.”¹⁰

That Jiang Jieshi in late 1943 expected the restoration of Chinese hegemony in postwar East Asia was remarkable, given the Guomindang’s abysmal military performance against Japan to that point in World War II. Historians have documented how the Sino-Japanese War had reached a stalemate in September 1939 when World War II began in Europe. Nazi Germany’s defeat of France and air assault on Great Britain allowed Japan to cut off all land supply routes to Guomindang headquarters at Chongqing. Jiang sent frequent messages to Roosevelt appealing for assistance, but only small amounts of military and economic support arrived and by late 1941, Guomindang surrender seemed a distinct possibility.¹¹ For Jiang, Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor came as a godsend because he anticipated a huge US commitment of support to achieve military victory in China. Instead, Japanese territorial advances quickly left the Guomindang more isolated, while the US war effort concentrated on Europe. “The fight to liberate China,” Warren I. Cohen observes, “was merely a sideshow in the war against the Axis—not an important American priority.”¹² In the most recent study of the Cairo Conference, Ronald Ian Heiferman emphasizes how once the

¹⁰ Warren F. Kimball, *The Juggler: Franklin Roosevelt as Wartime Statesman* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 140-142.

¹¹ For the most recent study summarizing the well known decline of Guomindang military fortunes after the outbreak of World War II in Europe, see Heiferman, *The Cairo Conference of 1943*, 3-4.

¹² Cohen, *America’s Response to China*, 162. See also, Michael H. Hunt, *The Making of a Special Relationship: The United States and China to 1914* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 306.

United States and China became wartime allies, “both sides pursued contradictory courses which would ultimately result in hostility, recriminations, and a legacy of bitterness and frustration.”¹³

On December 30, 1941, Jiang requested a \$500 million loan from the United States. Initiating a pattern, he warned Roosevelt that rejection would force him to negotiate an accommodation with Japan and leave the war. In March 1942, the US president approved the payment contingent on a government bond sale to check inflation. This decision had the opposite effect after Jiang took the money without selling any bonds. Six months later, Jiang raised the ante, demanding deployment of three US divisions to fight in China, 500 warplanes, and shipment of 5,000 tons of supplies per month. Lieutenant General Joseph W. Stilwell, a US military advisor to Jiang, opposed approval, reporting that the generalissimo was hoarding resources in preparation for a postwar showdown with the Communists. Furthermore, Guomindang forces lacked the training, organization, and leadership necessary to contest the Japanese effectively. He urged using aid as leverage to force Jiang to implement reforms and undertake serious military operations against Japan. Roosevelt ignored this advice because, Heiferman argues, he feared that doing so “would drive the generalissimo into the arms of the Japanese.”¹⁴ Roosevelt instead sent Lauchlin Currie on a fact-finding trip to China in July 1942. He recommended recalling Stilwell and maximizing support for Jiang, as well as becoming the first to suggest a personal meeting between Roosevelt and the generalissimo.¹⁵

Gary May has argued that Roosevelt was determined to keep Jiang’s forces fighting because of the catastrophic vision that if China fell, Japan would occupy India and then possibly the Middle East,

¹³ Heiferman, *The Cairo Conference of 1943*, 4.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 13-15.

linking up with the Nazi military machine and cutting off the Soviet Union. He was aware of the generalissimo's flaws, but thought there was no other leader.¹⁶ Late in October 1942, Roosevelt approved an increase in assistance to China to 5,000 tons monthly and delivery of 500 combat planes.¹⁷ In March 1943, the president chided United States Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall for criticizing Jiang, emphasizing that the United States had to provide aid and support to the "undisputed" leader of China.¹⁸ But demands on US resources were so great that paltry US assistance reached China. In what Cohen describes as a constant Sino-American wartime dance, US leaders made increased aid contingent on aggressive military action, but Jiang responded that he could not do so without more help.¹⁹ Chinese leaders reacted with shock and anger to what they considered American neglect. They believed, Heiferman explains, that after Pearl Harbor, "China would become the main battleground in the struggle against Japan." To force a change in US China policy, Foreign Minister T. V. Soong started a publicity campaign in the United States to build support in Congress and among the public to make "China a first priority theater of the war."²⁰

In January 1943, Roosevelt and Churchill met at Casablanca. Not receiving an invitation to participate in this summit infuriated Jiang. T. V. Soong met with several US officials to complain that the generalissimo's absence showed Allied leaders did not consider China a great power. In February, Soong and his sister Madame Jiang at a meeting with Secretary of War Henry Stimson insisted on equal treatment for the leader of

¹⁶ Gary May, *China Scapegoat: The Diplomatic Ordeal of John Carter Vincent* (Washington, D.C.: New Republic Books, 1979), 128.

¹⁷ Jiang, *The United States and China*, 105-108; Heiferman, *The Cairo Conference of 1943*, 96; Cohen, *America's Response to China*, 159-162.

¹⁸ Jiang, *The United States and China*, 108-109.

¹⁹ Cohen, *America's Response to China*, 159-162.

²⁰ Heiferman, *The Cairo Conference of 1943*, 21.

China. That month, Madame Jiang opened a barnstorming campaign in New York City that would end in Los Angeles. Consistently conveying the message that her husband's government was fighting for democracy and therefore deserved unlimited US assistance, Jiang's wife accomplished her goal of building popular support for the ROC. Concerned about rising Sino-US friction, Roosevelt sought advice from Pearl Buck, who explained why the Chinese were so sensitive to diplomatic sleights of any kind. She thought a personal meeting with Jiang might improve his sense of security. Acting on this advice, in May, the president invited T. V. Soong to represent Jiang at the Washington Conference. Also, Roosevelt met with Madame Jiang before she left the United States in late June. Although non-committal in response to her requests for increased American assistance to China and a greater emphasis on the CBI Theater in the war effort, the president did recommend a personal meeting with Jiang for that autumn.²¹

Roosevelt therefore remained committed to the achievement of what biographer James MacGregor Burns defines as his "two aims in China: to strengthen it as a central base for the final attack on Japan, and to treat it as a great power that would be a bulwark of Asian stability and democracy after the war and a focus of American co-operation with Asia."²² Secretary of State Cordell Hull, in his memoirs, explains how Roosevelt considered it essential to establish China as an equal of the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union in the Grand Alliance to ensure the success of the United Nations and realization of postwar peace and prosperity in East Asia.²³ To this end, early in 1943, the United States and Great Britain signed new treaties with the ROC relinquishing

²¹ Ibid., 39-41.

²² James MacGregor Burns, *Roosevelt: The Soldier of Freedom, 1940-1945* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970), 544.

²³ Cordell Hull and Andrew Henry Thomas Berding, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull*, vol. 2 (New York: Macmillan, 1948), 1583.

all of their extraterritorial rights in China. In addition, the United States Congress later that year repealed the Chinese Exclusion Act.²⁴ Another US goal was to persuade the Chinese Communists to join with the Guomindang in forming a united postwar government that would receive Soviet support.²⁵ “In theory,” May writes, “Roosevelt’s China policy promised to help China achieve unity and democracy; in reality, the president’s course meant the support of a failing dictatorship whose survival depended upon American intervention and assistance.”²⁶

Churchill rejected the argument that China deserved treatment as a great power. As Cumings observes, he “thought it naïve and illusory, even whimsical,” to expect China to play a positive role in postwar East Asia.²⁷ But the president continued to press the British to accept his position. In March 1943, for example, Feis relates how he pressed his case during a discussion with Foreign Minister Anthony Eden in Washington:

The President ... told Eden [he was] sorry that Churchill, in a speech which he had made the day before, had not mentioned China as among the great powers. The President said that he thought that since China might be of use in policing Japan, he wanted to strengthen it in every possible way. But Eden said he was doubtful whether China could stabilize itself and that it might have to go through a revolution after the war. Moreover, he remarked, “he did not much like the idea of the Chinese running up and down the Pacific.”

Sweeping aside these concerns, Roosevelt then explained the central role

²⁴ Jiang, *The United States and China*, 107; Cohen, *America’s Response to China*, 159. See also Tsou, *America’s Failure in China, 1941-50*, vol. 1, 35-36.

²⁵ Tsou, *America’s Failure in China, 1941-50*, vol. 1, 34.

²⁶ May, *China Scapegoat*, 131.

²⁷ Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, vol. 1, 106.

that he thought China would have in postwar Asia, suggesting as well,

that Manchuria and Formosa be returned to China; that Indochina be placed in trusteeship; that Korea also be put under at trusteeship to be directed jointly by China, the United States, and one or two other powers; and that the Japanese mandated islands be internationalized.

Britain thus had several months to consider provisions that Roosevelt would propose for inclusion in the Cairo Declaration.

Even as Roosevelt lobbied Great Britain on behalf of China, the president became increasingly concerned about the survival of Jiang's government. He received regular reports from US diplomats in China about declining morale in the Guomindang bureaucracy and military. Rampant inflation and widespread corruption was fueling rising popular criticism of Jiang's government, leading to concerns that the country could give up its fight or fall to the continuous Japanese onslaught.²⁸ Moreover, Stilwell privately and in his messages to Washington ridiculed Jiang's abilities and charged him with selfish motives. His pressure to end what he viewed as China's "phony war" against Japan exacerbated their personal quarrel, seeming to foreshadow unwanted cracks in the Sino-American alliance. Contributing as well to growing tensions were difficulties in transporting much-needed supplies to Lieutenant General Claire Chennault, the commander of US air forces in China, thereby precluding the broad air assault the United States had promised. On October 27, Roosevelt proposed to Jiang that they address these problems at a personal meeting including Churchill at a location in the Middle East. His purpose, Feis reports, was "to explain global strategy to which [his] needs were being subordinated, to improve Chinese morale, and to plan military operations which could bring relief to China." Jiang

²⁸ Feis, *Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin*, 247; Heiferman, *The Cairo Conference of 1943*, 163.

quickly agreed, but insisted that his wife accompany him, not least because he spoke no English and needed her to translate.²⁹

Roosevelt's decision to meet with Jiang at Cairo was connected to his already scheduled and more important summit in Teheran with Stalin and Churchill. The president hoped to gain the support of his colleagues in establishing the ROC as one of his "Four Policemen." He envisioned the emergence of a cooperative world order in which a dominant power in each major region would be responsible for ensuring peace and stability in that part of the globe. Despite his increasing awareness of the likelihood that the ROC would be weak after World War II, Roosevelt remained convinced that it still would be the most influential nation in postwar East Asia and could provide protection against a renewal of Japanese imperialism and promote decolonization under a trusteeship system. Roosevelt also hoped the ROC would assist the United States in deterring Great Britain and the Soviet Union from exploiting postwar instability to expand their presence in Asia after Japan's defeat.³⁰ To prepare Jiang for his discussion of these issues at Cairo, Roosevelt sent Patrick J. Hurley to Chongqing as his personal envoy to describe to the generalissimo the president's vision. In his report evaluating Jiang's reactions, Hurley urged support for the ROC's strategy of conserving strength "for maintenance of its postwar internal supremacy as against the more immediate objective of defeating Japan."³¹

On October 5, 1943, Roosevelt summarized his postwar expectations for Asia during an informal discussion with Hull and his State Department staff before his secretary of state left for Moscow to

²⁹ Feis, *Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin*, 247; Heiferman, *The Cairo Conference of 1943*, 11, 51; Gary R. Hess, *The United States at War, 1941-45*, 3rd ed. (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, 2011), 100.

³⁰ Smith, *American Diplomacy During the Second World War, 1941-1945*, 53, 55, 87-88; Hess, *The United States at War, 1941-45*, 98.

³¹ Jiang, *The United States and China*, 109; Heiferman, *The Cairo Conference of 1943*, 53; Michael Schaller, *The U.S. Crusade in China, 1938-1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 148.

attend a meeting of the Allied foreign ministers. The president instructed Hull to seek a definitive agreement favoring wide application of the American trusteeship proposal. Roosevelt hoped that through publicizing the plan, popular support would force British and Soviet compliance. Accordingly, at a meeting in Moscow on October 29, Hull raised the issue of dependent peoples and distributed his proposal. He expressed regret that there would not be enough time to discuss colonial policy in depth. Eden reminded Hull that Great Britain had registered its opposition to the American plan just three days earlier. By contrast, Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav M. Molotov agreed that the issue was of vital importance and deserved study and discussion.³² These exchanges alerted Britain and the Soviet Union that they could expect the United States to raise the issue of trusteeship at the upcoming summits at Cairo and Teheran. Of more immediate importance at the Moscow Foreign Ministers meeting, however, Hull secured inclusion of China in the public declaration issued following the conference that committed the four Allied powers to achieving unconditional surrender of the Axis and formation of a postwar international security organization.³³

Debate about future military strategy in the CBI Theater dominated the discussions at the Cairo Conference. By then, the US island-hopping tactic had achieved steady movement of Allied forces westward across the Pacific to positions that soon would allow for bombing raids against Japan in preparation for invasion of the home islands. As a result, the defeat of Japan was becoming increasingly less dependent on Guomindang military operations on the Chinese mainland. Churchill and his military advisors therefore opposed committing significant resources to the CBI Theater at the expense of maximum support for the cross-channel invasion of France (Operation OVERLORD). They also pressed

³² Feis, *Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin*, 251; Matray, *The Reluctant Crusade*, 20.

³³ Jiang, *The United States and China*, 109; Feis, *Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin*, 253; Schaller, *The U.S. Crusade in China, 1938-1945*, 147; Tsou, *America's Failure in China, 1941-50*, vol. 1, 58.

for an assault on Rhodes in the Mediterranean. Jiang, however, was demanding an offensive assault to reopen the Burma Road. Any Guomindang offensive would depend for success, he insisted, on Great Britain staging an amphibious assault on Burma in the Bay of Bengal. Eventually, he added US delivery of 10,000 tons of supplies a month as a condition for the Guomindang staging an offensive. At Cairo, British military leaders voiced immediate opposition to the plan, viewing discussion of the operation, code-named BUCCANEER, as a waste of time. Heiferman blames Churchill for British obduracy, observing that he agreed to “discuss the future of the CBI theater to humor Roosevelt and move the agenda along to more important issues,” mainly OVERLORD.³⁴

Roosevelt, however, strongly supported China’s plan, worrying that its rejection would shatter Guomindang morale and invite military defeat. With reluctance, US military leaders acted in accordance with his desires and strongly advocated for approval of Operation BUCCANEER. Vigorous Allied action to assist China in reopening its supply lines would show that the CBI Theater remained vital to the success of the war effort and the importance of the ROC in defeating Japan. Chinese military officials made it very difficult for the Americans because they could agree to nothing without consulting Jiang. The generalissimo himself, as Michael Schaller notes, “angered everyone by constantly reversing his position on what he favored.” Also, the British reminded their American counterparts that in October, Stalin had told Hull in Moscow that the Soviets would join the Pacific war after victory in Europe. Implementing BUCCANEER, they stressed, would delay the defeat of Germany. Both sides were so inflexible that ultimately, Schaller reports, British and US “military planners could hardly have a civil discussion about Asian

³⁴ Feis, Churchill, *Roosevelt, Stalin*, 248; Heiferman, *The Cairo Conference of 1943*, 59, 128.

strategy, preferring to trade accusations.”³⁵ Churchill considered BUCCANEER a political rather than military necessity and absolutely refused to endorse it. He was dismayed when Lord Mountbatten met Jiang after he had left Cairo and persuaded him to compromise, resulting in tentative approval of the operation.³⁶

Meanwhile, Roosevelt’s first meeting after his arrival was a reception he hosted for the Jiangs, which Heiferman claims was his way of giving to “them the ‘face’ they desired.”³⁷ During dinner with the generalissimo and his wife the next night, he sought from them a commitment of support for his vision of the future of East Asia. The president, Burns writes,

offered China the leading role in the postwar military occupation of Japan—a role Chiang declined—and extensive reparations; he agreed that the four northeast provinces, Taiwan, and the Pescadores should be restored to China, and that China and the United States would jointly occupy the Ryukyus under international trusteeship; he proposed a vague postwar security alliance between the two nations; as usual he took a strong line against colonialism, even raising the question of Hong Kong.

Roosevelt’s rising concerns about Jiang’s hegemonic ambitions explain his desire to secure a pledge from the generalissimo supporting a trusteeship in postwar Korea. Jiang had no interest in discussing Roosevelt’s postwar geopolitical plans, concentrating instead on pressing for more military aid. He also stressed the importance of approval for BUCCANEER, cautioning Roosevelt against trusting any promise Stalin might give at Teheran about intervention in the Pacific war. After the

³⁵ Schaller, *The U.S. Crusade in China, 1938-1945*, 150; Heiferman, *The Cairo Conference of 1943*, 81-82.

³⁶ Heiferman, *The Cairo Conference of 1943*, 119, 128.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 69, 100.

Jiangs left, the president told his son Elliott that the generalissimo was not deploying his best forces against Japan, but against the Communists.³⁸ Roosevelt wanted China to emerge from the war with the ability to restrain Japan, but he feared that Jiang intended to use his power to seek dominance over East Asia.

Numerous historians have argued that Roosevelt proposed issuing the Cairo Declaration to boost Chinese morale with promises to Jiang of territorial recovery from the disposition of the Japanese empire after the achievement of victory. His motivation, Feis explains, was to end in China “any impulse to bring about a peace with Japan ... and ... invigorate its combat effort.”³⁹ Roosevelt also was trying to lessen the generalissimo’s anger over his refusal to satisfy Chinese requests for more military and economic assistance. All these factors influenced Roosevelt before he went to Cairo, yet there is no evidence that he had decided on the content of the declaration prior to his arrival. The record suggests that the president’s initial discussions with Jiang persuaded him of the need to secure from the generalissimo a public pledge of support for anti-colonialism. Indeed, as Cumings reports, “Roosevelt apparently did not consult with the State Department experts on East Asia before the Cairo Conference, for they played no part in composing the Cairo Declaration and in fact read it only when it was published”⁴⁰ How the declaration was drafted indicates that checking Jiang’s ambition was a prime reason for its proclamation.

On the evening of November 26, Roosevelt, Churchill, and Madame Chiang completed drafting of the Cairo Declaration in just one hour. The first section reporting discussions on future operations in the CBI Theater was very general, reflecting the deep disagreements existing

³⁸ Burns, *Roosevelt: The Soldier of Freedom, 1940-1945*, 404; Heiferman, *The Cairo Conference of 1943*, 79.

³⁹ Feis, *Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin*, 252.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*; Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, vol. 1, 107.

among Allied leaders about Operation BUCCANEER. US leaders already had spoken with the British about the return of territory Japan had seized in China, which also would be the natural outcome of unconditional surrender. At Cairo, Christopher Thorne reports, the British made a failed attempt to gain inclusion of a provision pledging restoration to European nations of colonial territories in Asia that Japan had captured. His claim, however, that as a substitute they gained the insertion of the pledge forswearing territorial expansion seems doubtful.⁴¹ Reflecting the improvisation of the Cairo Declaration, the clause regarding Korea manifested itself in different versions. On November 24, Harry Hopkins, Roosevelt's close advisor, had prepared the initial US version at the president's request, which stated that Korea should become free and independent "at the earliest possible moment." The next day, Roosevelt changed the wording, substituting the phrase "at the proper moment." The British proposed as an alternative "in due course," which would become the final verbiage.⁴² The last paragraph merely reiterated the commitment to Japan's unconditional surrender.

Roosevelt, Edward M. Bennett writes, "wanted desperately" to have a four-power meeting at Cairo, but Stalin did not attend because the Soviet Union was not at war with Japan.⁴³ He also was complying with

⁴¹ Heiferman, *The Cairo Conference of 1943*, 112-113. Christopher Thorne may be referring to the later sentence in the Cairo Declaration that read "Japan will also be expelled from all other territories which she has taken by violence and greed." Christopher G. Thorne, *Allies of a Kind: The United States, Britain and the War Against Japan, 1941-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 311.

⁴² U.S. Department of State, "American Draft of the Communiqué With Amendments by President Roosevelt," in *Diplomatic Papers: The Conferences at Cairo and Tehran, 1943*, Foreign Relations of the United States (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1961), 399-400; U.S. Department of State, "British Draft of the Communiqué," in *Diplomatic Papers: The Conferences at Cairo and Tehran, 1943*, Foreign Relations of the United States (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1961), 404.

⁴³ Edward M. Bennett, Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Search for Victory: *American-Soviet Relations, 1939-1945* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1990), 107; Pelz, "U.S. Decisions on Korean Policy, 1943-1950," 99.

the Japanese-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of April 13, 1941, that provided for the two nations to maintain “neutrality” if either entered into a conflict with a third power. At Teheran, Churchill asked Stalin if he had read the Cairo Declaration. The Soviet leader replied that while he could make no commitments, he approved of the statement and its contents. Stalin also said he supported trusteeship in postwar Korea.⁴⁴ Roosevelt raised the prospect of China serving as one of the “Four Policemen” to deter or fight aggression after World War II. Stalin did not object, but he voiced doubts about China’s power and predicted European leaders would object to its asserting governance in Asia.⁴⁵ Teheran would have an indirect negative impact on the Cairo Declaration. During lengthy discussion of Operation OVERLORD, the Allied leaders decided that there should be a landing in southern France, code-named Operation ANVIL. Churchill insisted that mounting ANVIL required cancellation of BUCCANEER because there were not enough landing craft for both operations. After returning to Cairo, the Anglo-American feud over BUCCANEER resumed. Ultimately, Roosevelt surrendered, cancelling the planned Sino-British operation in Burma.

Meanwhile, the Chinese felt euphoric upon receiving word of the Cairo Declaration. At last, China had been accepted as a world power and assured an important role in the postwar international partnership. Press reports also expressed gratification that Jiang had gained recognition as a major leader in the world. The Cairo Conference gave the appearance of formalizing the framework of three-power collaboration.⁴⁶ But retraction of the Allied promise for British amphibious warfare operations in Burma made the Chinese feel betrayed

⁴⁴ Feis, *Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin*, 254; Bennett, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Search for Victory*, 113-114; Heiferman, *The Cairo Conference of 1943*, 118.

⁴⁵ Tsou, *America’s Failure in China, 1941-50*, vol. 1, 59; John K. Fairbank, *The United States and China*, 2nd ed. (New York: The Viking Press, 1962), 264.

⁴⁶ Heiferman, *The Cairo Conference of 1943*, 142.

and belittled. As for Korean exiles, at first they hailed the Cairo Declaration's independence pledge, but denounced any suggestion of delayed implementation. For the remainder of the war, Korean nationalists and their expatriate newspapers attacked the Cairo Declaration. Kim Ku, the president of the self-styled Korean Provisional Government located in exile in Chongqing, censured it, as did Syngman Rhee, his representative in Washington, D.C. In time, Korean associations in the United States and Hawaii complained to the US Congress. Korean exiles in China undermined the Cairo Declaration, sending reprints of it to Korea translating "in due course" as "immediately" or "within a few days," arousing the expectations of the Korean people. Some historians have claimed that there was no Korean language equivalent, but Cumings has emphasized that they knew the meaning of the phrase only too well.⁴⁷

During the Cairo Conference, Roosevelt's view of China under Jiang as a postwar great power evaporated.⁴⁸ Three reasons explain his decision to begin to disentangle the United States from the ROC. First, at Teheran, Stalin for the first time formally committed to join the fight against Japan after the war ended in Europe. Initial discussions at Cairo confirmed that the CBI would support the main thrust through the Pacific toward Japan. After Japan's Ichigo Offensive in 1944 overran US airbases and advanced on Chongqing, the China sector became isolated and irrelevant.⁴⁹ Second, Jiang's performance at Cairo had alienated Roosevelt. Robert Sherwood highlights the generalissimo's "hedging each statement [about the Burma campaign] with reservations and qualifications." Burns reports that the president "found him mercurial,

⁴⁷ Matray, *The Reluctant Crusade*, 21; Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, vol. 1, 486.

⁴⁸ Tsou, *America's Failure in China, 1941-50*, vol. 1, 123-124.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 69; Robert E. Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins: An Intimate History*, 1st ed. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1948), 394; Heiferman, *The Cairo Conference of 1943*, 164.

defensive, and heavily dependent on his wife.”⁵⁰ Third, Madame Jiang’s presence made most of the male delegates feel “uneasy.” Heiferman adds that her constant lobbying for aid negated “previous efforts to cultivate a favorable image of the Koumintang and its leaders.”⁵¹ When Jiang learned about the cancellation of BUCCANEER, he was furious. On December 9, he demanded that Roosevelt provide a one billion dollar loan and 20,000 tons of aid monthly. The president refused, advising that the Guomintang needed to stage military operations against Japan before the United States provided more assistance. Also, he began to seek military and economic liaison with the Chinese Communists.⁵²

Potential for failure to achieve the Cairo Declaration’s primary goals therefore surfaced even before the end of World War II. Roosevelt should have anticipated this eventuality, given that it was his strong promotion of China’s status as a “Great Power” that gave Jiang a seat at the negotiating table at Cairo, rather than its power as an Allied nation. Thereafter, US distrust of China’s ability to perform the role Roosevelt had envisioned for it in postwar East Asia signaled a weakening of China’s direct influence in international affairs, which significantly undercut prospects for achieving the outcome that the three Allies had defined at Cairo. Nevertheless, US leaders held out hope that China could emerge after the Pacific war as a united and central force for promoting peace and stability in postwar East Asia. Realistically, they had no other choice. Soon after Cairo, the China standing as one of the four “Great Powers” was actually an illusion on a world stage where the Soviets and Americans made the key moves.

By early 1945, Roosevelt no longer worried about Jiang’s hegemonic aspirations in postwar East Asia. Instead, Soviet territorial

⁵⁰ Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins*, 393; Burns, *Roosevelt*, 303-304.

⁵¹ Heiferman, *The Cairo Conference of 1943*, 89, 160.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 155-157, 162.

ambitions had emerged as a more serious threat to realization of his postwar vision. At the Yalta Conference, his efforts to fulfill the Cairo Declaration continued. Roosevelt gained Stalin's commitment of support for Jiang's government, although this was at the price of promising Soviet economic concessions in Manchuria. He also discussed Korea with the Soviet leader, resulting in an informal agreement for imposing a multinational trusteeship. Cumings has ridiculed Roosevelt's plan for Korea, arguing that it "reflected only the paternalistic, gradualist ... idea that deemed no colonial people fit to run their own affairs without a period of tutelage."⁵³ Roosevelt, however, was convinced that he needed Soviet entry into the Pacific war to defeat Japan, which resulted in his acceptance of Stalin's demands for Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands. Given that the United States could not prevent Soviet territorial aggrandizement after military intervention, Stalin's support for the ROC in China and trusteeship in Korea provided the best means for fulfillment of the Cairo Declaration. Six months later, the Allies issued the Potsdam Declaration, promising that "the terms of the Cairo Declaration shall be carried out."⁵⁴ Unfortunately, by then, Soviet-American discord already was raising barriers to the realization of Roosevelt's idealistic vision.

On April 12, 1945, Roosevelt's sudden death made Harry S. Truman president of the United States. At that time, Soviet expansion in Eastern Europe had begun to alarm US leaders. Almost from the outset, the new president expected Soviet actions in Korea to parallel Stalin's policies in Poland. Within a week after assuming office, he began to search for some way to eliminate any opportunity for a repetition of Soviet expansion. The atomic bomb seemed to provide him with an easy answer. Japan's prompt surrender after an atomic attack would preempt Soviet entrance into the Pacific war, thus permitting the United States to

⁵³ Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, vol. 1, 106.

⁵⁴ U.S. Department of State, "Proclamation Defining Terms for Japanese Surrender," *The Department of State Bulletin* 13, no. 318 (July 29, 1945): 137-138.

occupy Korea alone and removing any possibility for “sovietization.” Truman believed that this was the only way to ensure fulfillment of the Cairo Declaration. Implementing its provisions would promote realization of Roosevelt’s vision that the new president shared of a peaceful postwar East Asia. But Truman’s gamble failed. When Stalin declared war on Japan and sent the Red Army into Korea prematurely on August 12, the United States proposed division of Korea into Soviet and American zones of military occupation at the 38th parallel. Only Stalin’s acceptance of this desperate eleventh hour proposal saved the peninsula from unification under Communist rule. Thereafter, the Soviet-American dispute in Europe ruled out chances for a negotiated settlement and a divided Korea became a captive of the Cold War.⁵⁵

Soviet intervention in the Pacific war also threatened to nullify the Cairo Declaration’s promises regarding China, but Truman took prompt action to promote its fulfillment. Not only did the United States transport Jiang’s troops to Manchuria to accept the surrender of Japanese forces, Marc Gallicchio describes how the Truman administration rushed “troops onto the mainland of Asia,” most notably 40,000 US Marines to Beijing.⁵⁶ Ironically, these efforts to implement an important provision of the Cairo Declaration would result in the Guomindang suffering the first of a series of military defeats over the next four years climaxing in Communist victory in the Chinese Civil War and the flight of Jiang’s government to Taiwan. By late 1949, Truman was certain that the Chinese Communists would invade the island in the near future and destroy the ROC. Accordingly, on January 5, 1950, the president announced publicly that the United States would remain uninvolved in China’s conflict, explaining that US military aid and advice would cease.

⁵⁵ James I. Matray, “Captive of the Cold War: The Decision to Divide Korea at the 38th Parallel,” *Pacific Historical Review* 50, no. 2 (May 1981): 145-168.

⁵⁶ Marc S. Gallicchio, *The Scramble for Asia: U.S. Military Power in the Aftermath of the Pacific War* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008), 36, 47.

By early June, US military and diplomatic leaders were reconsidering this policy, urging privately the ouster of Jiang prior to a policy reversal. North Korea's invasion of South Korea on June 25 provided the impetus for action. Two days later, Truman deployed the US Seventh Fleet to prevent a Communist invasion of Taiwan. And so, another promise in the Cairo Declaration fell victim to the Cold War.

In his multi-volume history of World War II, Churchill complained that British and United States military discussions at the Cairo Conference “were sadly distracted by the Chinese story, which was lengthy, complicated, and minor.”⁵⁷ Sherwood, in his Harry Hopkins biography, is even more disparaging, arguing that the impact of Allied deliberations at Cairo “on the progress of the war or on history was negligible.”⁵⁸ The accuracy of such dismissive assessments receives support from a brief examination of the fate of the Cairo Declaration, which was the only substantive result of the summit. Although the Allies thereafter brought “unrelenting pressure against” Japan, this did not include Guomindang operations in Burma, let alone Mainland China. Japan would be “stripped of all the islands in the Pacific which she has seized or occupied” in the Japanese Peace Treaty of 1951, but “Formosa, and The Pescadores” were not exactly restored to the ROC, and Manchuria not at all. Two Koreas now have independence, but only one would appear to be free. Whether the Allies had “no thought of territorial expansion” remains debatable, but the Japanese definitely did not agree to unconditional surrender. After seven decades, it is clear that the legacy of the Cairo Declaration is not its implementation, but its value in teaching yet again the fundamental enduring lesson that world leaders have far less ability to determine the course of history than they think.

⁵⁷ Winston Churchill, *Closing the Ring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1951), 328.

⁵⁸ Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins*, 393.

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