

Reasons for the First United Front (1924-1927)

Topic

- From 1924-1927, the GMD and CCP united **under Comintern's influence** to form the First United Front to defeat the warlords and unify China under a single government
- However, their cooperation was short-lived, and the United Front collapsed when the **GMD under Jiang turned on the communists through the 1927 White Terror**

Basis of Comparison	Guomindang (GMD)	Chinese Communist Party (CCP)
Unification of China	<p>Similarity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A common aim of both parties was to defeat the warlords and drive out foreigners to unify China under a central government • The period of warlordism was marked by severe internal strife and political upheaval; had dire consequences for China • There were 9 Presidents and 26 Premiers who declared themselves leaders of China, with differing visions and goals • The amorphous foreign policy of the era was dictated by warlords who controlled Beijing or key treaty ports • Made international trade difficult • The role of Parliament had diminished; was seen as a rubber stamp • Marked a period of strong foreign influence over China • Duan Qirui was supported by the Japanese, particularly to extend their concessions made during the 21 Demands • Assert their influence over Shandong and Manchuria for their resources • GMD forces comprised 6,000 Whampoa Military Academy cadets and 85,000 troops under Jiang • Was able to capture much of southern China in nine months and a significant portion of the north from 1926-1928 <p>Difference</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GMD wanted a very different government from that of the CCP • Intended to create a republican government based on Sun's Three People's Principles: Nationalism, Democracy and People's livelihood • Majority of the GMD backers were the elite: bankers, financiers, businessmen who opposed communism • Was in favour of maintaining a capitalist, private enterprise system in China • Hence from the onset, the viability of the partnership in the United Front 	<p>Similarity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopted guerrilla tactics, encouraging workers to rebel, strike and sabotage to make it easier for the impending GMD attack <p>Difference</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The CCP wanted to use its alliance with the GMD to create a nation largely based on Marxist principles, which had argued for a classless society and a socialist economy • Its long-term aim was for a revolutionary overthrow of the bourgeoisie followed by the confiscation of private property

	was always tenuous	
Strengthening of the Individual Parties	<p>Similarity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> GMD was severely weakened by Yuan Shikai's crackdown in 1913 and was in a state of disunity and disarray in 1919 Sun knew that he would not have received the support of other Western nations due to the GMD's anti-imperialist rhetoric The GMD desired Soviet aid in revitalising the party This could only be possible if he agreed with Maring's proposal to allow the CCP to join the GMD <p>Difference</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> GMD recognized the need to establish a strong army to defeat the warlords and the CCP Used the alliance as a manner to achieve Soviet military aid to develop a party army Sun sent Jiang to the USSR to study the Soviet military system and on return, he established the Whampoa military academy in 1924 The organisation of a strong party army was what enabled Jiang to launch the White Terror against the communists in 1927 	<p>Similarity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alliance was to the benefit for the communist cause CCP was a relatively new party comparative to the GMD Attracted mainly intellectuals and students; founded in 1921 as a result of the New Culture Movement Only had 300 members, wanted to expand itself through the alliance with the GMD Sought to build up worker and peasant support to launch a proletarian revolution, but the Soviets were convinced that it would not have been possible without a national revolution first; needed GMD support for this Once warlordism and imperialism were overthrown, communism could then be spread Even though Jiang restricted CCP privileges following the 1926 Zhongshan warship incident, Stalin was eager to prevent a split and ordered the CCP to be tolerant <p>Difference</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Did not build up a significant military force during the United Front Possibly due to small size Was thus vulnerable to Jiang's purge in 1927
Seeking to Undermine the Other Party	<p>Similarity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sun recognized that the growth of an independent CCP would represent a threat to his national revolution due to its commitment to class struggle and conflict It was therefore logical to absorb and assimilate them eventually Sun was aware that the CCP would be committed to the Marxist doctrine and therefore believed that the United Front would have been able to keep CCP's power in check <p>Difference</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Both parties recognized the mutual threat, but the GMD was the one who acted more quickly to remove the CCP The party's true intentions never surfaced during Sun's lifetime, but Jiang's ascent to power saw rising tensions Jiang had no intention to sustain the United Front beyond its functional purpose; believed that the communist threat needed to be crushed in order for China to be truly unified under the GMD With the capture of Shanghai, Jiang gained access to the wealth and 	<p>Similarity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CCP leaders were reluctant to join the GMD, but eventually did The dual membership offered them the opportunity to subvert the GMD from within; adopted a "bloc within" approach within the GMD Comintern had hoped for the CCP to infiltrate the GMD and seize power through the United Front The CCP therefore intended to form a communist bloc within the GMD and continue to take orders from Moscow in hopes of being able to take over the GMD eventually <p>Difference</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The CCP had assumed that the alliance would last; was not prepared for the split Jiang's launch of the White Terror caught the CCP off-guard and Moscow still pressured the CCP into maintaining the United Front for fear of embarrassment to Stalin

	<p>influence of the powerful business elite</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Launched a pre-emptive strike against the communists through the 1927 White Terror Jiang killed over 5,000 Communists during the White Terror 	
Building Support	<p>Similarity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> GMD was dominated by landlords, industrialists and merchants who formed only a small portion of the Chinese population Sun wanted to use the CCP's ties with the labour and agrarian movements to gain greater support <p>Difference</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Both parties wanted to use the alliance to gain support, but the GMD under Jiang was not concerned with obtaining mass support from the lower classes Had the strong support of the wealthy elite who were opposed to trade union movements With their support, Jiang was able to turn on the communists in 1927 	<p>Similarity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The CCP saw the United Front as an alliance to expand their support base and encourage mass movements among the peasants and workers to win supporters over They saw the GMD as being able to help the CCP spread communism to a greater audience During the First United Front, Stalin continually called on the CCP to mobilise the masses; was seen most evident in CCP-controlled areas such as Wuhan Was able to expand membership from 300 to 20,000

Conclusion

- By observing the similarities and differences between the ideologies, aims and policies of the two parties to the First United Front, it is apparent that while both parties shared common immediate purpose, they differed greatly as to their ultimate vision of government in China
- In forming the United Front, both parties achieved a compromise in order to use the opportunity to make individual gains; was a "marriage of convenience"
- However, once the warlords were defeated and the common goal of both parties achieved, peaceful co-existence was out of the question
- Even without Jiang's launching of the White Terror in 1927, it is unlikely that the partnership would have lasted
- Eventually triggered the civil war

Political reason for the collapse of the First United Front

The death of Sun Yixian in 1925 and the rise to power of his successor, Jiang Jieshi, greatly strained relations between the GMD and the CCP and led to the 1927 White Terror.

- Sun had been more tolerant of the communists since the proposal of the United Front
- Idealistically hoped that the communists would be effectively submerged within the substantially larger GMD ranks in due course
- Believed that Comintern approval of the partnership would mean that he would be able to control the communists
- **Hsu:** Sun's stature and prestige were decisive factors in holding the GMD and CCP together
- His death in 1925 thus released the anti-communist elements within the GMD which Sun had held in check
- Led to the political polarisation and tension between the left and right factions of the GMD
- Sun's successor Jiang had not shared Sun's belief that the CCP could be easily absorbed into the GMD and was suspicious of the communists' intentions
- Once he had captured Shanghai and gained the support of the wealthy elites, Jiang was convinced that the communist threat needed to be crushed in order for China to be truly unified under the GMD