

General Joseph Stilwell's Mission to China and Supervision of the Lend-Lease Program, 1942.

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Abstract:

The dispatch of General Stilwell's American military mission to China represented a major turning point in the history of Sino-American relations. Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and the entry of the United States into the Second World War, General Stilwell was sent to China in early 1942 to occupy several sensitive posts: he assumed the position of Chief of Staff to the Chinese President Chiang Kai-shek and command of the Chinese armies in Burma, while also supervising the American Lend-Lease program, overseeing the delivery of weapons and equipment to China, and devising means of transporting these arms. He subsequently took up command of the forces in the China-Burma-India theater until his dismissal in 1944. The principal objective of the mission was to keep China in the war, reform the Chinese army, and open supply lines through Burma. The period of the mission witnessed difficult episodes, among them the first Burma disaster (1942) and the establishment of Chinese forces, as well as the second Burma campaign (1943–1944). The mission ended for a number of reasons, foremost among them the severe rift between Stilwell and the Chinese leader Chiang Kai-shek, which culminated in Stilwell's dismissal in October 1944..

Keywords: Stilwell, Chiang Kai-shek, China, General...

INTRODUCTION

In February 1942, amid mounting German and Japanese expansion, the United States judged it necessary to support Chinese resistance so as to tie down a million and a half Japanese soldiers. Driven by popular sympathy for the victims of the "Nanjing Massacre" and by pressure from the Chinese leadership, the American administration agreed to send the American general Stilwell at the head of a military mission to China. The mission's role went well beyond mere technical advice, as it took on weighty responsibilities that included:

First: command of American and Chinese forces in the China-Burma-India theater of operations, with General Stilwell appointed Chief of Staff to the Chinese Commander-in-Chief Chiang Kai-shek. Second: coordinating Lend-Lease supplies and supervising their use. Third: supporting the American Volunteer Group (the "Flying Tigers"). Fourth: building and developing alternative supply routes and railways to offset the fall of Rangoon and Burma. Fifth: establishing an air bridge for supplies from India to China.

For its part, the mission faced complicated challenges owing to the conflicting outlooks of the Chinese commander Chiang Kai-shek and the mission's own commander, General Stilwell, which produced confusion in the chain of command..

The mission's objectives comprised several points, among them keeping China an effective force against Japan, securing China as a political ally and a consumer market for American goods after the war, and using diplomatic promises (such as the relinquishment of extraterritorial rights) to sustain Chinese morale at the lowest possible military cost.

General Stilwell's mission represented the first direct American involvement in American military command on the Asian mainland. Despite the logistical and political challenges it encountered, it laid the foundation for Sino-American military and wartime relations and paved the way for larger undertakings such as the mission of American intelligence officers to Communist-held territory (the "Dixie Mission") and General Patrick Hurley's later mission.

First: The Selection of General Stilwell (Joseph Stilwell) as Military Envoy to China, 2 January 1942

The appointment of General Joseph Stilwell to command the United States military mission to China in 1942 constitutes an important turning point in Sino-American relations during the Second World War. This decision came within the context of Washington's attempt to reorganize the joint command of Allied forces in the Far East and to ensure the optimal use of the Lend-Lease program allocated to China.

Difficulties and problems had already arisen in the administration of the Chinese Lend-Lease program and in military operations as a result of disagreements between General Magruder and, on one side, the Chinese leadership, and, on the other, the British. Chiang Kai-shek¹ wished to confine military operations strictly within Chinese territory, while the Americans insisted on the participation of Chinese forces in repelling Japanese expansion in Burma². The British, for their part, wanted Chinese forces placed under the command of the British commander of the southern front, General Archibald Wavell³, on the grounds that this was territory under British control, whereas Chiang Kai-shek insisted that the forces remain under his direct command and operate within Chinese territory as far as possible. This divergence of positions led to strained relations among the parties, prompting General Magruder to describe the British as having no respect whatsoever for the fighting capacity of Chinese forces. The British further provoked Chinese resentment by diverting some Lend-Lease materials to their own benefit. As a result, Magruder found himself unable to cope with these interlocking challenges. For its part, the American administration was pursuing two principal aims within the framework of reordering priorities and linking strategic tracks⁴.

¹Chiang Kai-shek: born on 31 October 1887, a Chinese political and military leader who met Sun Yat-sen in 1911 and commanded one of the regiments in the 1912 revolution in China. In 1924 he took command of the Whampoa Military Academy, then assumed the presidency of the Kuomintang after Sun Yat-sen's death in 1925, and led the National Government of the Republic of China from 1928, becoming President of the Republic of China that same year. He declared China's entry into the Second World War on the side of the Allies in 1941, remaining so until 1945; he declared civil war on the Communist Party's forces in 1947; and he was driven from China to Taiwan in 1949 following the Chinese Communist Party's victory in the civil war. He died on 5 April 1975. Sean Dolan, *World Leaders Past & Present: Chiang Kai-shek*, Chelsea House Publishers, New York, 1991, p. 12; Muhammad Muhsin Badiwi al-Kilabi, *Chiang Kai-shek and His Political Role in China up to 1949*, unpublished master's thesis, College of Education for Humanities, University of Babylon, 2018, p. [n.p.].

²Samuel B. Griffith, *The Art of War*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1963, p. 122.

³Archibald Wavell: born in Colchester in 1882, he took part in the First World War and was noted in particular as an aide to the commander in the Palestine campaign of 1918. In 1939 he was appointed commander of British forces in the Middle East, and in 1941 he occupied Bardia, Tobruk, and Benghazi, after which he was appointed Supreme Commander of Allied forces in India and Viceroy. He died in London in 1950. For more, see Bahij Buhaylis, *Events of the Twentieth Century: Leaders Who Emerged During the Second World War*, vol. 4, 1st ed., Dar Noblesse, Beirut, 2004, pp. 90–91.

⁴Samuel J. Cox, *The China Theater, 1944–1945: Failure of Joint and Combined Operations Strategy*, thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Military Art and Science,

First, the objective was to secure China as a base for early operations against Japan; second, to ensure that China remained in the war. On that basis, the United States saw the need for an American officer possessing strong authority in China, capable of dealing with the British so as to redirect their attitudes toward the Chinese forces, as well as of finding urgent solutions to guarantee the effective delivery of Lend-Lease materials⁵.

Accordingly, on 15 January 1942 Chiang Kai-shek sent a message to the American Secretary of War, Henry L. Stimson⁶, expressing his wish to appoint a senior American general to the post of Chief of Staff of the Allies in China, and voicing his dissatisfaction with the performance of General John Magruder, who then headed the American Military Mission (AMMISCA) in the Chinese capital, Chongqing⁷. Accordingly, Lieutenant General Hugh A. Drum, one of the distinguished officers of the American army, was Secretary of War Stimson's first choice to take command of the mission. Drum, however, objected to the nature of the proposed command, given the insufficient American combat formations available to help secure the vital line of communication through Burma; these obstacles combined to dampen Drum's enthusiasm for the post⁸.

Upon his arrival in Washington, General Hugh A. Drum held a series of important meetings with a number of senior officials, among them Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson, General George Marshall, General Henry H. Arnold, commander of the air forces, together with Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy, and General Dwight D. Eisenhower, who at the time held the post of Deputy Chief of the War Plans Division in the War Department. Through these discussions it soon became clear that the War Department did not hold a unified view on the policy to be pursued toward China. In that context, General Drum expressed his refusal to entrust the mission to General John Magruder, citing his leniency in dealing with the Chinese leadership, particularly in the administration of the Lend-Lease program. At the same time, generals within the military establishment such as Marshall and Eisenhower began to float the idea of establishing an independent American theater of operations in China, to be used as a strategic platform for launching operations against Japan. In light of these discussions, Stimson explained to General Drum that China was passing through a deteriorating situation, both politically and militarily⁹, suffering from weak infrastructure,

1993, p. 22.

⁵The disagreement between China and the United States over supplies had begun long before Stilwell's arrival, and although Magruder's analyses and recommendations did not always receive great appreciation from the War Department, the Department recognized that Magruder's reports on the lack of proper use of Lend-Lease supplies were accurate, particularly when many of these reports were corroborated by Ambassador Gauss and General Latimore, the naval attaché in China. There is no doubt that these reports, which were usually couched in strong terms, helped persuade Marshall and Stilwell of the need to adopt a firmer position on Lend-Lease supplies, this being the only way by which the Chinese could be compelled to yield to American political proposals. For more, see Barbara Tuchman, *Stilwell and the American Experience in China: 1911–1945*, New York: Macmillan and Co., 1970, p. 283.

⁶Henry L. Stimson: American statesman, born on 11 September 1867 in New York; he held important posts in the United States, among them Secretary of War (1911–1913) under President William Taft, Secretary of State (1929–1933) under President Herbert Hoover, and again Secretary of War (1940–1945) under Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman. He was among the most prominent officials overseeing the Chinese Lend-Lease program during the Second World War. He died in 1950. For more, see Elting E. Morison, *Turmoil and Tradition: A Study of the Life and Times of Henry L. Stimson*, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1960, pp. 6–20; Ahmad Sarih al-Mansirawi, "Henry L. Stimson (1867–1950) and His Political Role in the United States," *Journal of Studies in History and Archaeology*, no. 84, January 2023, pp. 180–181.

⁷Romanus and Sunderland, *Stilwell's Mission*, op. cit., pp. 64–65.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁹Before and during the Second World War, China was among the countries suffering under

a shortage of supplies, and declining morale—developments that raised fears she might conclude a separate peace with Japan. Nevertheless, the American administration continued to view China as the best strategic location from which to establish military bases to launch operations against Japan, which made the question of settling the nature of military command there a matter of the utmost importance—precisely because China might otherwise accept a separate peace with Japan. On the other hand, the American administration regarded China as a theater for directing American military operations in East Asia through which Japanese expansion could be resisted¹⁰.

The division within the War Department over how to handle the situation in China gave rise to a need to review the leadership options on the table. Although General Hugh A. Drum had been Stimson's candidate, he did not receive President Franklin Roosevelt's approval for the post, because General George Marshall, Army Chief of Staff and the President's chief military adviser, submitted a recommendation on 14 January 1942 against sending Drum to China. That recommendation rested on several factors, foremost among them that organizing and unifying Allied command across the various theaters of war required an officer possessing greater flexibility, together with experience of China, its geography, and its political and military complexities—qualities Marshall did not see as available in Drum¹¹. Moreover, the nature of the challenges facing the Lend-Lease program in China—including its rugged terrain, the difficulty of its supply lines, and the multiplicity of political and military actors—demanded a leadership adapted to that particular environment¹². On this basis, Marshall proposed the appointment of Lieutenant General Joseph Stilwell in Drum's place, regarding him as the most suitable commander to lead American operations in China, especially given the American orientation toward using China as a strategic platform for establishing military bases from which strikes could be directed against Japan¹³, benefiting from its geographic proximity

Japanese occupation, Japan having occupied a vast expanse of Chinese territory, including important cities such as Nanjing (then the Chinese capital), Shanghai, and Wuhan. In addition, tensions persisted between the ruling Kuomintang Party, led by Chiang Kai-shek, and the Communist Party led by Mao Zedong. China also depended on external support, particularly from the United States and the Soviet Union, yet the relief materials were limited compared to the well-equipped and well-trained Japanese army; moreover, the war destroyed China's infrastructure and caused famine and mass displacement. For more, see Mark Peattie, Edward J. Drea, and Hans van de Ven, *The Battle for China: Essays on the Military History of the Sino-Japanese War of 1937–1945*, Stanford University Press, 2011, pp. 6–11, <https://www.sup.org/books/title?id=21497>.

¹⁰The China-Burma-India (CBI) theater played an important role in overall Allied strategy; the United States provided support to China in order to tie down Japanese forces there and prevent their use elsewhere, since the European theater remained the principal American theater. Once German expansion in Europe had been dealt with, the United States would turn toward East Asia to check Japanese expansion. For more, see Romanus and Riley Sunderland, *Stilwell's Mission to China*, Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 1953, p. 66.

¹¹The American army possessed an integrated system for evaluating its officers, with periodic assessments known as "efficiency reports" written by commanders on all officers under their direct command. A relatively small number of negative efficiency reports could have a major effect on an officer's career. It was on this basis that the American administration began, toward the end of 1941, to consider sending a more flexible American general, both physically and professionally fit, to repel the Japanese assault on Kunming; Marshall may have felt that Drum should not be sent to China owing to his advanced age. For more, see "U.S. List of Papers," War Department, Washington, Stilwell, RG165, NA.

¹²John K. Fairbank, *The United States and China*, New York: Viking Press, 1958, p. 264.

¹³F.O., War Cabinet, Chiefs of Staff Committee, Note by the Secretary, Appointment of U.S. Representative in China, C.O.S. (42) 92, File NS 1316, 1942, Far Eastern, China, 5th February, Copy No. 36, 1942, p. 7; 梁敬鐔, 《史迪威事件》, Commercial Press, 1973 ed., p. 22.

to the Pacific theater of operations. That decision came as a result of Stilwell's deep knowledge of Chinese affairs, his direct experience in dealing with the Chinese, and his command of the Chinese language, which set him apart from other candidates. Nor were his qualifications limited to this alone; he was also well versed in the structures and tactics of both the Chinese and Japanese armies, which qualified him to command operations in a theater as complex as China—one that required a dual understanding of the nature of both enemy and ally alike¹⁴.

Here it may be said that Stilwell was not merely a military commander but possessed a comprehensive grasp of the political, social, and cultural situation in China—a matter of paramount importance when dealing with so complex an environment. The ability to communicate directly in the local language removed major barriers, allowing for a deeper understanding of intentions and motives and for the building of better relations with allies; this feature alone was enough to distinguish him from many other candidates. On the technical military side, Stilwell was an expert in operational matters: his simultaneous understanding of the enemy (Japan) and the ally (China) qualified him to devise effective strategies in a theater of war that demanded precisely this dual understanding. On this basis he became the optimal choice for a complex command role in a sensitive region such as China during a critical historical period.

In line with this orientation, the American administration officially appointed Stilwell on 2 January 1942 to lead a military mission to China¹⁵. On this basis a series of discussions took place between 14 and 23 January 1942. During the discussions, on 16 January, General Marshall summoned General Stilwell and informed him verbally of his wish to entrust him with command of the mission¹⁶. On this basis, a special meeting was held on the 19th bringing together Secretary of War Henry Stimson, General George Marshall, and Lieutenant General Joseph Stilwell, centered on assigning the latter a military mission in China and Burma¹⁷. According to Stilwell's own account, the essence of the mission consisted in "coordinating efforts, paving the way for unified action, and unifying the various factions under an effective military command, with special attention to the management of funds and materials under the American Lend-Lease program, so as to ensure their efficient use in supporting the Chinese war effort and strengthening its capacity to withstand Japan."

Continuing these discussions, on 23 January of the same year Secretary of War Henry Stimson opened by raising concerns regarding the Chinese leadership's position, asking: "Will the Chinese army accept an American command?" The reply came that the Chinese leadership had no objection. In the same vein, Stilwell was asked whether he was prepared to take up the post of senior American officer in the China theater of operations, without explicit reference to the post of "Chief of Staff to Chiang Kai-shek." His answer came clearly and in a spirit of committed military service, stating that he was prepared to go wherever he was sent—a response reflecting his complete readiness to shoulder responsibility and to work within the framework of the mission entrusted to him¹⁸. On the strength of this agreement and readiness, General Stilwell received formal instructions to proceed to the Far East, where, upon reaching Chongqing, he was to assume the post of Chief of Staff to the Supreme Commander, China Theater, working alongside General Ho Ying-chin, Chief of Staff of the Chinese army, so as to achieve the required coordination between the two sides and strengthen the effectiveness of joint military efforts against Japan¹⁹. In defining Stilwell's duties in light of his assignment, his responsibilities were set out as follows: first, oversight and full control of all matters relating to American defense assistance provided to China, including direct supervision of the Lend-Lease program; second, command of all American forces operating in China, in addition to any Chinese forces he might be assigned to command within the framework of joint operations; third, representing the

¹⁴Joseph W. Stilwell, *The Stilwell Papers*, New York: arranged and edited by Theodore H. White, William Sloane Associates, Inc., Publishers, 1948, p. 24; Fred Eldredge, *Wrath in Burma*, Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1946, p. 48.

¹⁵U.S. War Department, Washington, Note by the Joint Staff Mission in Washington, to: Instructions to British on China, on the Appointment of General Stilwell as U.S. Representative in China, 5 February 1942, FO 371/31675, Fol. 1316, No. 36.

¹⁶Joseph W. Stilwell, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹⁸Quoted in Romanus and Sunderland, *Stilwell's Mission*, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 72.

American administration in any international war council convened in China, alongside his post as Chief of Staff of the general command, and his responsibility for the improvement and maintenance of the vital Burma Road and for controlling it so as to ensure the delivery of necessary materials and supplies to China. Furthermore, the nature of his relationship with the British forces was determined through the deliberations of the Combined Chiefs of Staff meeting, which decided that Stilwell would be subject to the directives of the Allied command responsible for coordinating action among the allied forces, with emphasis placed on his direct cooperation with British forces under the command of General Archibald Wavell, so as to guarantee unity of military effort in confronting Japan in the Asian theater of operations²⁰. In keeping with this, a War Department memorandum of 2 February appointed Stilwell commander-in-chief of American forces in China, Burma, and India, and Chief of Staff of the Chinese army²¹. In the same context, Lieutenant General Stilwell was granted broad authority to establish and use military bases, road networks, and staging areas in both India and Burma in support of his military operations in the region. Particular emphasis was placed on the need to exert maximum effort to improve the efficiency of the Burma Road, which extended from Rangoon to Chongqing, as a vital artery for delivering supplies to China. To ensure that goal was met, instructions were given to the Burmese authorities to carry out all possible improvements to that road, and Stilwell was also authorized to build airfields on Burmese territory and to administer them in a manner serving military operations and facilitating the movement of supply and air support to China²². Organizationally, Lieutenant General Stilwell became the principal link between the American administration and General Chiang Kai-shek, given his position as commander-in-chief of the Chinese Chief of Staff²³, which made him the foremost representative of the United States in dealing with the Chinese military and political leadership. At the same time, he played a pivotal role in coordinating between the United States and the British, in his capacity as commander-in-chief of Chinese forces operating in Burma—a position that placed him in a strategic post requiring a delicate balancing act in managing relations among the Allies. As for his position regarding the Burmese forces, Stilwell voiced his view clearly immediately upon assuming his duties, stating: “The Burmese harbor hatred for both the British and the Chinese, and their attitude may be justified to some extent”—a statement reflecting his awareness of the sensitivity of local realities in Burma and of the importance of understanding the political and cultural backgrounds of the peoples engaged in the theater of operations²⁴.

Within that framework, General George Marshall, on 6 February 1942, sent a message to General John Magruder, head of the American Military Mission (AMMISCA) in Chongqing, clarifying the nature of the role that General Stilwell was to assume. Marshall affirmed in his message that “the American forces operating in China and Burma would fall under Stilwell’s supervision, though he would remain at all times under the supreme command of General Chiang Kai-shek”²⁵. Three days later, the War Department in Washington sought to clarify the position for Magruder, informing him that this measure did not stem from any loss of confidence in his abilities or any diminution of his standing, but was rather an organizational step within the broader restructuring of military command in the region. It was likewise affirmed that he was to retain direct responsibility for the administration of the Lend-Lease program, while the AMMISCA mission continued to perform its functions in coordination with the new command²⁶.

Here it may be said that this aspect was highly important in allaying Magruder’s personal concerns and in preserving his morale, confirming that the decision was neither a punishment nor a withdrawal of confidence in his abilities but rather an organizational step within the restructuring of military command—this being the official explanation of the decision, situating it within a wider framework of structural changes in the region rather than as a personal target. On this basis, retaining him with direct responsibility for the administration of the Lend-Lease program made clear that an important part of his duties and authority

²⁰Joseph W. Stilwell, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

²¹*Ibid.*

²²Romanus and Sunderland, *Stilwell's Mission*, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

²³Manal Abbas Kazim al-Khafaji, *op. cit.*, p. 296.

²⁴Quoted in Romanus and Sunderland, *Stilwell's Mission*, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

²⁵Graham Peck, *Two Kinds of Time*, 2008, originally published Seattle/Boston, 1950, p. 384.

²⁶U.S., The White House, Washington, Memo, Magruder to Stilwell, Washington, 18 May 1942, p. 1.

remained under his direct supervision, reinforcing the notion that his role had not been entirely marginalized. Likewise, the continuation of the AMMISCA mission in coordination with the new command confirmed the continuity of operations and objectives, while indicating that coordination with the new command was required—meaning there was a change in organizational structure, but not an abolition of prior duties. In this way, the War Department sought to balance the need for military restructuring with the preservation of the morale and effectiveness of an important commander, and the emphasis that the decision did not stem from any loss of confidence was a core message aimed at building trust and ensuring the continuity of cooperation among the American commands.

After a series of meetings General Stilwell held in Washington with President Franklin Roosevelt and Army Chief of Staff General George Marshall, he departed for the Far East, his aircraft landing in the Indian city of Karachi on 13 February 1942²⁷. On that same day the American State Department informed the American Embassy in China of Stilwell's mission, and the following day he arrived with his staff in the capital, New Delhi, where he held consultations with British commanders at Allied headquarters centered on coordinating joint military efforts in the theater of operations, especially regarding the defense of Burma²⁸. During these consultations Stilwell was informed that his share of British support would have to be limited to a single Indian infantry brigade, which he would be permitted to use to reinforce the Burma front, given the limited British resources and their preoccupation with other fronts²⁹.

Second: General Stilwell's Arrival in China and the Commencement of His Mission's Duties

Meanwhile, Stilwell arrived in China on 25 February 1942³⁰ and met with General Chiang Kai-shek on the 28th, conveying to him a message from President Franklin Roosevelt stating: "I attest with confidence that General Stilwell will be capable of command, and will be able to form and train your army." He also met with General John Magruder, and discussions were held regarding the situation in China and Burma, the continuation of the war, and assistance in improving the combat efficiency of the Chinese army³¹. As for the composition of the American mission that accompanied Lieutenant General Stilwell to China, the group included a number of American officers and enlisted men of varied experience who formed the nucleus of the American military command in the China theater of operations. Among the most prominent were Colonel Frank Dorn, who served as Stilwell's principal aide; staff officer Milton E. Miles, a specialist in guerrilla warfare who later played an important role in unconventional support operations; Colonel Frank Robert, who took charge of the intelligence section; Colonel Ballard Wyman; and Captain (pilot) Dick Young, an American officer of Chinese descent born in the state of Hawaii. The mission also included Colonel Frederick McCabe, who served as deputy head of the mission, and Brigadier General Haydon L. Boatner, alongside the prominent intelligence officer William J. Donovan, head of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS)—the office that would later form the original nucleus of the American Central Intelligence Agency. Also joining the team later in China was General John Paton Davies, representative of the American State Department, nominated to that post by the American ambassador to China, Gauss, who took charge of managing communications within the mission. Alongside these was Colonel William E. Bergin, an artillery officer, among the essential elements of the formation. It should be noted that Stilwell incorporated into his mission a number of officers from the AMMISCA mission, in an attempt to unify efforts and integrate

²⁷"Gen. Stilwell's Adventures: Interviewed in Delhi," *The Manchester Guardian* (1901–1959), 26 May 1942; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The Guardian and The Observer*, p. 6.

²⁸U.S. War Department Classified Message Center, Note by the Joint Staff Mission in Washington, to: Addressed Government of India, Arrival of the United States Military Mission to China, 29 March 1942, China, FO 371/31675, Fol. 1316, No. 936.

²⁹U.S. War Department Classified Message Center, Washington, Message from Franklin Roosevelt to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, China, 11 March 1942, p. 2; quoted in Romanus and Sunderland, *Stilwell's Mission*, p. 74.

³⁰Maochun Yu, *The Dragon's War: Allied Operations and the Fate of China, 1937–1947*, Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2006, pp. 110–112; Romanus and Sunderland, *Stilwell's Command Problems*, pp. 64–65.

³¹U.S. War Department Classified Message Center, Washington, Telegram from Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek to Dr. T. V. Soong, Chungking, 10 March 1942.

military and diplomatic work within a single structure serving the goals of the American administration in China and Burma during that critical phase of the war³².

The mission's arrival coincided with a serious deterioration in the military situation in Burma, as Japan had fully seized Rangoon on 10 March 1942—the city that constituted the main port and vital supply line for Allied forces in Burma—forcing British forces to retreat northward³³. Faced with this setback, Stilwell on 20 March 1942 put forward a strategic proposal to mass nearly one hundred thousand Chinese soldiers within Indian territory, to be equipped and trained by American instructors—a proposal that was welcomed and approved by General Chiang Kai-shek, who was eager to rebuild Chinese military strength following the series of setbacks against the Japanese advance. On 17 April, Stilwell formally submitted the proposal to the War Department³⁴. Moreover, it became clear that upon his arrival in China, Stilwell immediately raised the question of his relationship to the AMMISCA command; the War Department resolved the matter by cancelling Magruder's directives and placing all members of the mission at Stilwell's disposal in May 1942, including its officers and men, together with personnel who had arrived in the China-Burma-India region, in order to join the mission (the American Task Force in China)³⁵. On this basis, Stilwell merged all forces and administrators at the main headquarters in Chongqing and issued an order relieving Magruder on 22 June 1942 of all Lend-Lease responsibilities, so that he himself became sole decision-maker, while directing him to head the Office of Public Affairs established to support his mission, in order to make use of his experience³⁶.

Here it may be said that Stilwell broke Marshall's promises to Magruder and sought to impose his authority immediately upon his arrival in China, resolving the problem of overlapping authority with the AMMISCA command. In this way Stilwell emerged as a decisive figure who did not hesitate to address problematic issues, reflecting a forceful leadership approach. The War Department's radical solution—cancelling Magruder's directives and placing all AMMISCA personnel at Stilwell's disposal—indicated the War Department's full backing for Stilwell and granted him absolute authority over all forces and personnel in the region, confirming that Stilwell's appointment aimed at unifying command. Likewise, Stilwell's consolidation of all forces and administrators at the main headquarters in Chongqing made clear his drive to unify efforts and resources under his direct command, minimizing any potential overlap or dispersion. By relieving Magruder of Lend-Lease responsibilities, this decision confirmed decisively that Stilwell had become the sole decision-maker regarding the Lend-Lease program—a vital responsibility in the context of logistical support for the Allies. Yet his utilization of Magruder's expertise in the Office of Public Affairs demonstrated his skill in preserving Magruder's usefulness and benefiting from his knowledge without allowing this to pose a threat to his own newly acquired authority. Here the researcher holds that this change was not merely a change of command but rather a radical transformation in the structure of authority in the China-Burma-India theater; the immediate and decisive measures Stilwell took, together with the War Department's backing of him, reflected a determination to manage complex operations so as to ensure the effectiveness of his mission.

It should be noted here that the military situation Stilwell faced upon his arrival in China and Burma was exceedingly dire, as Japan was advancing rapidly and dangerously toward Burma, threatening to sever China's lifeline and isolate it completely; Stilwell's arrival represented a decisive American attempt to salvage the situation and organize resistance against Japan in this vital region³⁷. For its part, the Chinese leadership showed no intention of undertaking broad offensive operations, owing to the weakness of its capabilities and its exhaustion over the long years of war. This defensive posture eroded the effectiveness of

³²U.S. War Department Classified Message Center, Telegram from Currie to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, WBRCA64KI198, 20 March 1942; U.S. War Department Classified Message Center, Telegram from Chungking to Adjutant General, No. 534, 17 April 1942, p. 32; Barbara Tuchman, *op. cit.*, p. 269.

³³*Ibid.*

³⁴Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, Washington, *Order of Battle of the United States Army Ground Forces in World War II*, 1959, p. 1.

³⁵Shayma Abd al-Wahid Ghadban al-Asadi, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

³⁶Romanus and Sunderland, *Stilwell's Mission to China*, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 75.

the Chinese army, making the continuation of American support a strategic necessity—not to increase Chinese combat capability, but to ensure that China remained in the equation as a theater of operations serving American objectives in confronting Japan³⁸.

On the basis of the conditions on the ground and the deteriorating military situation in both China and Burma, General Stilwell began drawing up a comprehensive study to determine his actual requirements in confronting the challenges facing China, foremost among them checking the rapid Japanese expansion. During that study he reviewed the earlier requests submitted by General Magruder, particularly those concerning the training and equipping of a number of Chinese divisions—requests that helped him crystallize his vision and assess his needs in terms of personnel and resources necessary to accomplish the mission. By gathering and analyzing this data, Stilwell was able to formulate an integrated conception of operational requirements, which he later discussed with the Chief of Staff of the American Army, General George Marshall. His demands included a set of essential elements he deemed necessary for the mission's success, as follows³⁹:

That his division, and all personnel subsequently joining it, be designated a "Task Force," so as to distinguish it clearly from the AMMISCA mission of smaller scope and limited role; that sufficient materials be shipped as soon as available to equip thirty Chinese divisions fully in terms of arms and equipment; that the American administration supply the fighter aircraft needed to support his ground forces when required, especially given the Japanese air threat—since, should Rangoon be lost (the main port and principal supply line to China), supplies should continue to flow through a new base in India, to be flown into China by American aircraft; the building of the Chinese army's combat efficiency through training and equipment, alongside the preparation of a ground base from which Chinese forces could confront the Japanese; and a request for the addition of an American corps of about 35,000 soldiers, equipped with armor and artillery, to join the mission as soon as it became available. The American administration approved most of these requests, with the exception of the final proposal concerning the dispatch of the American corps; this was refused owing to the unavailability of troops at that time, the United States being principally occupied with the European war against the Axis powers, which limited its ability to allocate additional ground forces to the Asian front. Nevertheless, Stilwell did not abandon his vision, and instead proceeded to organize his staff on the basis of forming a corps headquarters, using Chinese soldiers whom he sought to train and qualify to serve as the backbone of the ground forces cooperating with Washington in confronting Japanese expansion in China and Burma⁴⁰.

On the basis of the foregoing, the essential aim of Stilwell's demands lay in building the combat efficiency of the Chinese army and preparing a solid ground base for operations that would serve as the launching point for the final assault on Japan. In this context, it should be noted that Stilwell, from the moment of his arrival in China, clearly observed the existence of serious violations in the use of American

³⁸Hammada Muhammad al-Sayyid al-Shafi'i, *The American Position on the Sino-Japanese Conflict, 1931–1945*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, College of Arts, Cairo University, 2018, p. 147.

³⁹General Stilwell faced complex challenges in China during the Second World War that went beyond the mere provision of arms, as China preferred not to engage fully in combat, wishing to conserve its resources rather than expend them against Japan. China also suffered from factional divisions and the absence of a strong central authority with which Stilwell could deal effectively, while the army itself was marked by a lack of organization, political division, inefficiency, and corruption. As a result of these factors, Stilwell was unable to transform China into an effective offensive force against Japan simply by supplying it with arms. See U.S. War Department Classified Message Center, Washington, Memorandum for the Department of State, Division of Far Eastern Affairs, Subject: Use of American Gifts to China, 11 November 1942, p. 248.

⁴⁰U.S. War Department Classified Message Center, Washington, Message, from Chungking to AGWAR, Entry into Reverse Lend-Lease Agreement with China, 27 November 1942, p. 255.

assistance, especially in the country's northwestern regions⁴¹. In a report he submitted to the War Department, he recorded his observations, stating: "Numerous instances of misuse and embezzlement of relief materials sent by the United States to China have been recorded; cotton textiles and medicines provided by the American Red Cross were found being sold commercially in several regions instead of reaching those in need." His observations did not stop there: Stilwell noted that military jeeps that had been lent or leased were being used extensively for personal transport outside their designated military purpose, and American military equipment was found on sale in some Chinese shops—a clear indication of weak oversight and mismanagement, which reinforced Stilwell's conviction of the need to reorganize and activate controls over the use of assistance to ensure that it reached the fronts and the genuinely deserving⁴². On this basis, General Stilwell held that American assistance to China should rest on the principle of reciprocity, insisting that such assistance must be preceded by internal military reforms in China, and that Chinese military achievements should serve as the essential guarantee of that arrangement⁴³. This approach based on conditionality and reciprocity was not confined to Stilwell alone but received strong backing from within the American military establishment; it was supported by the Operations Division of the War Department, alongside prominent figures such as General George Marshall and Secretary of War Henry Stimson, both of whom recognized the importance of ensuring the effectiveness of assistance and its investment toward achieving Allied objectives in confronting Japanese expansion⁴⁴. On the basis of this vision, Stilwell requested that the Chinese leadership supply the raw materials needed for American war industries as a form of mutual assistance, taking into account the possibility that China might in future claim Lend-Lease goods from the United States once the supply route was reopened. He stressed, however, that it would be unreasonable to make such a request without something in return, explaining that Chinese exports to the United States could be regarded as repayment of the debt and its interest, represented by the assistance extended to China within that cooperative framework⁴⁵.

In this context came the recommendations of the War Department's Munitions Assignment Board, which recommended on 23 June 1942 a review of any arms shipment to China owing to the acute shortage of transport. Conversely, orders were issued to Major General Lewis Hyde Brereton to transfer a wing of heavy bombers and a transport wing from India to Egypt, while at the same time a squadron of A-29 light bombers, which had been due to be sent to China from Khartoum, was held back. This retreat from the American commitment angered the Chinese leader Chiang Kai-shek, who asked angrily whether the Allies truly intended to maintain the "China theater" as an active part of the war against Japan. For his part, President Roosevelt attempted to calm the situation, assuring Chiang of the "urgent necessity" of maintaining the Chinese front. Nevertheless, on 29 June of the same year, Chiang responded by issuing what later became known as his "Three Demands," which represented a clear ultimatum, including a request for the dispatch of three American military divisions, a Chinese air force to be maintained by the United States equipped with five hundred aircraft, and five thousand tons of supplies to be sent monthly, as a basic

⁴¹Romanus and Sunderland, *Stilwell's Mission*, op. cit., p. 180.

⁴²U.S. War Department Classified Message Center, Washington, Gen. Thomas T. Handy to Marshall, "Three Minimum Requirements for China Theater Submitted by the Generalissimo," 14 August 1942; Handy to Marshall, "Support of China," 4 September 1942, War Department Chief of Staff, Army (China), pp. 465–466; Romanus and Sunderland, *Stilwell's Mission*, op. cit., p. 223.

⁴³The request was discussed with the relevant officials in this Department, the Department of Defense, the Lend-Lease Administration, and the Export-Import Bank, as well as with Mr. Lauchlin Currie. Several months earlier the Department of Defense had obtained the views of General Stilwell, who insisted firmly on reversing Lend-Lease and on negotiating a mutual-assistance agreement with China. For more, see U.S. Department of State, Communication—Mr. Acheson, Division of Commercial Policy and Agreements, 21 November 1942, p. 77.

⁴⁴Romanus and Sunderland, *Stilwell's Mission to China*, op. cit., p. 168; Woodburn Kirby, *The War Against Japan*, vol. II, London, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1958, pp. 145–146; 陶文釗, 《中美關係史 (1911–1949)》, Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2004 ed., p. 207.

⁴⁵Muhammad Muhsin Badiwi al-Kilabi, op. cit., p. 153.

condition for the continuation of Chinese cooperation with the Allies⁴⁶.

As a consequence, these policies increased tension between China and Washington, which disturbed Chiang Kai-shek and prompted him to ask Stilwell to inform the American administration of the need to send a senior envoy from Washington—such as Harry Hopkins or a figure of comparable standing—to Chongqing to hold direct, personal consultations. At the same time, [T. V.] Soong hinted at the possibility of China taking an escalatory step, suggesting to Hopkins the possibility of cancelling the Lend-Lease agreement with the United States, and even opening the door to the possibility of peace talks with Japan—a veiled threat reflecting the depth of the crisis in relations between the two sides. This stance reflected the complex nature of the relationship between the American mission and the Chinese leadership, marked by conditional and cautious cooperation: Washington sought to support China militarily in confronting Japan, but made this conditional on internal reforms and clear guarantees, while the Chinese leadership considered American support insufficient and believed Washington was not giving the Chinese front the strategic attention it deserved. This tension surfaced at many junctures, despite the existence of channels for continuing understanding and coordination between the two sides⁴⁷.

In light of this escalation, President Franklin Roosevelt decided, at the start of July 1942, to entrust the diplomatic envoy Lauchlin Currie with a special mission to Chongqing. Currie worked to ease the tension between Chiang Kai-shek and Stilwell, and contributed to reaching understandings that allowed for the extension of the Lend-Lease program and established a mechanism for overcoming the disagreements that had emerged regarding the nature and priorities of American support. This crisis also led to an exchange of sharply worded messages between Roosevelt and Chiang, in which the latter expressed his displeasure at the marginalization of the Chinese front and the diminishing of its importance within Allied strategy, affirming that the continuation of such an approach might drive China to take fateful decisions at odds with Allied interests. For his part, Roosevelt tried to reassure Chiang, confirming—having informed the Chiefs of Staff at the start of October 1942 that he would consider Stilwell's case and transfer him to another theater of operations if necessary—the United States' commitment to supporting China, calling for greater coordination and the avoidance of misunderstanding between the two sides⁴⁸.

In an attempt to address the tensions and improve mechanisms of support, President Franklin Roosevelt asked the American War Department to form a special committee to study ways of strengthening the Lend-Lease program in China's favor. This committee was formed in Washington on 22 December 1942 and included a number of prominent figures: Herbert Feis as administrative assistant; George Atcheson representing the State Department; General Alger Hiss and Eugene Rostow as administrative assistants for the War Department; in addition to Colonel Eugene M. Foster as observer for the War Department, and the presidential envoy Lauchlin Currie, as well as Major William F. Gaud, head of the financial section of the Lend-Lease Administration (International Division), and Charles A. Bane, head of the Mutual Aid section⁴⁹. An expanded meeting was held on the basis of an inquiry raised by General Carter, chief financial official at the War Department, regarding the possibility of using what is known as "Reverse Lend-Lease" as a

⁴⁶U.S. War Department Classified Message Center, Washington, Telegram, Department of State, Washington, to Chungking (China), July 1942, p. 166; U.S., The White House, Washington, Memorandum, from F.D.R., for General Marshall, "What Is the Situation in Regard to Stilwell in China," 3 October 1942; 陶文釗, 《中美關係史 (1911–1949)》, Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2004 ed., p. 207.

⁴⁷The exchange rate of the Chinese yuan against the American dollar stood at \$0.270 per yuan in 1942, creating a gap in the exchange rate that adversely affected American expenditure in China; the Chinese government wished to unify the exchange rate, which conflicted with the American military expenditure balance in China. See Albert Pick, Colin R. Bruce II, and Neil Shafer (eds.), *Standard Catalog of World Paper Money*, 1994, pp. 207–209, <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special:BookSources/0-87341-207-9>.

⁴⁸U.S. Department of State, Washington, Memorandum of Conversation, 22 December 1942, p. 260.

⁴⁹U.S. War Department Classified Message Center, Washington, Incoming Message, 8 November 1942, from Chungking, FO 38, p. 255.

mechanism to overcome or ease the difficulties faced by American military forces in China. Reverse Lend-Lease refers to the recipient state providing support, services, or materials to American forces in return for the assistance it had received. These discussions concerned specifically the effect of monetary policies, particularly the “artificial levels” through which the official exchange rate of the American dollar against the Chinese national yuan had been fixed⁵⁰—a situation that produced financial imbalances adversely affecting American military operations in China. The committee also discussed the feasibility of proceeding to negotiate a new, more flexible and equitable mutual-assistance agreement that would take into account the field and economic conditions of both sides⁵¹. In keeping with the trend toward strengthening cooperation with China, General Stilwell asked the War Department to approve the conclusion of a Lend-Lease agreement with China similar to those concluded with Britain and the Soviet Union. The Department gave its preliminary approval, affirming there was no objection to signing a “Reverse Lend-Lease” agreement on preferential terms, provided the agreement did not impede local purchasing or contracting arrangements for supplies and services where these proved more efficient. The Department also stipulated acceptance of the purchase of security equipment and strategic materials within the program, and the transfer of Reverse Lend-Lease fees, without affecting the exchange rate or burdening the program with price differentials arising from its adjustments. It affirmed that infrastructure projects in which the Chinese participated—such as airfields, dams, and roads—were to be regarded as permanent improvements for China’s benefit, and their cost was not to be charged to the American government, whether under Reverse Lend-Lease or otherwise⁵².

Here it may be said that the Lend-Lease program for China during the Second World War faced considerable difficulties and problems in its administration, particularly in dealing with General Chiang Kai-shek, owing to his desire to keep these materials under his own control—a matter General Stilwell opposed, and his policy in this regard provoked Chiang Kai-shek’s displeasure. This in turn stirred the American administration’s fear that China might enter secret negotiations with Japan, which would lead to the loss of China as an ally in the Far East region—a prospect that prompted President Roosevelt to consider sending a representative of his own for consultations with the Chinese government, and led to an exchange of messages between Chiang and Roosevelt to discuss extending the Lend-Lease program. The American War Department also approved a Reverse Lend-Lease agreement with China on preferential terms⁵³.

On this basis, the conflict between Chiang Kai-shek and Stilwell reached its peak on 1 October 1944⁵⁴. For this reason President Roosevelt became convinced that the disagreements between the two stubborn military commanders could not be resolved and were blocking any further progress toward American

⁵⁰U.S. Department of State, Washington, Memorandum of Conversation, 22 December 1942, p. 260.

⁵¹<https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/people/gauss-clarence-edward>.

⁵²Romanus and Sunderland, *Stilwell's Command Problems*, Center of Military History, United States Army, 1956, p. 335.

⁵³U.S. War Department Classified Message Center, Washington, From the President, for General [Marshall]: General Stilwell has been relieved as Chief [of Staff], 24 October 1944; see also Carolle J. Carter, *Mission to Yen-an: American Liaison with the Chinese Communists, 1944–1947*, Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1997, pp. 20–45.

⁵⁴Albert C. Wedemeyer: American military commander, born in Nebraska in 1897; he entered the United States Military Academy at West Point and graduated in 1919. At the outbreak of the Second World War he held the rank of colonel and quickly rose through the ranks; he was assigned to the War Department to draw up military plans and was among those who helped plan the invasion of Normandy. He was recalled in 1944 to direct combat operations in East Asia. He was strongly anti-Communist and repeatedly urged his government to take firm measures to curb the spread of Communism. He died in 1989. For more, see Alexander H. von Plinsky, *General Albert C. Wedemeyer's Missions in China, 1944–1947: An Attempt to Achieve the Impossible*, thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Military Art and Science, 1991, pp. 7–11.

objectives. During the 1944 presidential election period, President Roosevelt attempted to reach a compromise with Chiang regarding General Stilwell; on this basis Roosevelt proposed replacing Stilwell as Chief of Staff of the Allies while retaining him as commander of Chinese forces in Burma, but Chiang rejected this solution, holding firm to his fixed position of not yielding on his decision⁵⁵. Roosevelt agreed to withdraw Stilwell, and on this basis summoned General Marshall on 18 October 1944 and asked him to relieve Stilwell; in turn, he instructed his personal representative in Chongqing to inform Chiang, on 24 October, of the order relieving Stilwell and recalling him to Washington, replacing him with General Albert C. Wedemeyer⁵⁶. Despite Stimson's warning of the "bad outcome" that would result from Stilwell's dismissal, several factors weighed on President Roosevelt and General Marshall. One was the recognition that the disaster in eastern China was already beyond salvage, as the Japanese had overrun thirteen American airfields that had been built at enormous cost; were Stilwell to be given command at that stage, he would inevitably face Chiang Kai-shek's opposition, which would weaken American military resistance, so that the American administration would bear the blame for the loss of eastern China. The second factor was the conviction, firmly held by army planners and increasingly held by military planners generally, that plans to use Chinese manpower and China's geographic position for the final defeat of Japan were necessary and could not be dispensed with⁵⁷.

It may be said that efforts to reconcile Stilwell and Chiang ultimately failed, achieving no measure of understanding or harmony between the two men because of the deep divergence in their personalities and outlooks—a divergence that contributed directly to the failure of Stilwell's mission. This personal conflict was reflected in the conduct of military operations and political coordination, weakening the effectiveness of the alliance between the two sides in confronting shared challenges.

Conclusion

The mission succeeded in keeping China standing firm against the Japanese armies, tying down Japanese forces throughout the Second World War, and diverting Japan's attention from the Allies on the Pacific front.

Stilwell failed to introduce reforms into the Chinese army, as the mission proved unable to bring about reform within the military establishment owing to the corruption present within that establishment and the army's loyalty to President Chiang Kai-shek.

The mission failed to succeed in opening alternative routes to air transport for delivering American assistance to China, owing to Stilwell's dismissal.

General Chiang Kai-shek opposed General Stilwell's plan to support and arm the Communists in order to secure their standing alongside the Allied armies in repelling Japanese expansion in Asia, owing to the Chinese president's opposition.

Stilwell's mission failed because of the conflict of interest between the United States and China: America's foremost concern was fighting Japan in China, while China's foremost concern was preserving its armies to eliminate the Communists after the war. The mission thus ended without achieving many of its objectives or what had been planned for it in China.

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⁵⁵Samuel Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*, vol. XII, New York: Little, Brown and Co., 1958, pp. 4–6.

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