

Battle of Xuzhou & Chiang Kai-shek's Stepdown

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[Excerpts from "Campaigns: 1927-1937"]

In northern China, after the relocation of nationalist 7th Corps, Zhi-Lu-jun armies [Xu Kun & Xu Yuanquan] and Sun Chuanfang army mounted a counter-attack. Nationalist 10th Corps incurred heavy loss at Lincheng. On July 27th, Xu Kun's northern army sacked Xuzhou. Wang Tianpei retreated to Suzhou of Anhui Province. Nationalist 2nd Route retreated to northern Jiangsu Province along Long-Hai Railroad. Chiang Kai-shek, against Li Zongren's advice, insisted on a re-capture of Xuzhou by taking advantage of Wuhan-CCP entanglements. Chiang Kai-shek then personally led a campaign against Xuzhou with two divisions from 1st Corps, with a swear that he would not return to Nanking should he fail to take Xuzhou. Li Zongren, being worried about Chiang Kai-shek's emotions, left for Wuhu area for defense against Wuhan "eastern expedition" forces. On July 25th, Chiang Kai-shek left for the north. In early August, Chiang Kai-shek initiated a counter-attack with 10th, 27th, 32nd, 40th & 1st corps, while Bai Chongxi fought against Xu Yuanquan & Sun Chuanfang around Huai-shui River with 37th & 44th corps. Chiang Kai-shek fell into a trap by pushing his armies to the city gate of Xuzhou. Northern armies dispatched a column for a surprise attack from the rightside, while launching an attack at the front. Chiang Kai-shek fled all the way southward with no time to sabotage the Jin-Pu Railway.

Wuhan government joined Nanking in purging communists and differentiated its action as "separating communists". By late July of 1927, Whang Jingwei already sensed an incoming uprising by the communists inside of the armies that Wuhan government controlled, and Whang Jingwei ordered a real-sense purge of communists that unfortunately came too late to stop the locomotive. On July 26th, Heh Long's 20th Corps arrived in Nanchang from Jiujiang after allowing Ye Ting's 24th division (subject to 11th Corps) board the train for Nanchang earlier. On the same day, Whang Jingwei officially expelled Mao Tse-tung, Li Lishan, Zhou Enlai and Peng Pai etc from KMT, and wired to Russian advisers as to the truth of a rumor about possible communist uprising. CCP, with Heh Long's 20th Corps and Ye Ting's 24th division, staged a coup d'etat on August 1st in Nanchang of Jiangxi Province. Xu Zhen claimed that altogether 8000 KMT officers and soldiers were killed by the communists, and Jiangxi provincial banks and finance agencies were pillaged. When Zhu Peide's troops in Ji'an counter-attacked, Zhu De & Chen Yi fled towards the Fujian-Guangdong border.

On Aug 6th, Chiang Kai-shek returned to Nanking and arrested Wang Tianpei as a scapegoat for the Xuzhou debacle. Li Zongren was called over to Chiang Kai-shek's vacation house in Tangshan as to the stepdown decision. While Li Zongren opposed Chiang's stepdown by citing possible effect on military morale, Chiang cited his

stepdown as a possible appeasement for Wuhan government.

On Aug 8th, Li Zongren, Bai Chongxi and Li Jishen etc proposed that Whang Jingwei's Wuhan government converge with Nanking government after sharing common ground on the matter of purging communists. Whang Jingwei stated that Chiang Kai-shek must step down before Wuhan government could come to Nanking. On Aug 8th, Whang Jingwei's Wuhan government passed resolution as to purge of communists and issued a most wanted list which would include 197 communist members.

Whang Jingwei' KMT central politics meeting issued a most wanted list issued at Wuhan KMT politics committee on Aug 8th 1927 which would include 197 communist members. Wuhan government then contacted Li Zongren of Nanking faction as well as Xu Chongzhi of KMT West Hill Faction for exploring the unification of Nanking-Wuhan governments. Tang Shengzhi continued the eastern campaign against the Nanking government. On Aug 12th, Chiang Kai-shek agreed to stepping down for party unity's sake, and then left Nanking for Shanghai and hometown Fenghua consecutively. In Shanghai, Chiang Kai-shek published his "resignation announcement", with a call for i) unity among KMT factions; ii) necessity of purging communists in Hunan, Hubei and Jiangxi provinces; and iii) heeding the communist sabotage, warlords' ravaging and imperialist nations' barbarity. Li Zongren memoirs stated that Chiang Kai-shek's personal emissary, ,, Chu Minyi, had shuttled between Wuhan and Nanking numerous times, with an understanding that Chiang must step down to appease the Wuhan government. However, rumor spread that Li Zongren, Bai Chongxi and Heh Yingqin had pressured Chiang into a stepdown. Writer Liu Feng adopted this rumor which Li Zongren, in his memoirs, had claimed to have disputed with Chiang Kai-shek few times whereas Chiang Kai-shek dissuaded it by refusing to pierce it publicly. After the stepdown, Chen Guofu, Dai Jitao & Chen Weifen established a "Central Club" in Shanghai for rallying pro-Chiang elements as a counter to Nanking's KMT special executory committee, with branches extending to multiple provinces. The name "Central Club" would later mutate into CC Clique as an abbreviation of Chen Lifu & Chen Guofu brothers. (Before the stepdown, Chiang Kai-shek visited Chen Jieru in her mother's house in Shanghai on Aug 1st, with a request that Chen Jieru go to America for five years so that he could marry with Soong Mei-ling. Per CJR, Chiang Kai-shek cursed himself by stating that he would be willing to be banished overseas should he fail to retrieve Chen Jieru within 10-20 years. Chen Jieru boarded ship President Jackson on Aug 19th. On the same day, Reuters reported that Chiang Kai-shek had agreed to step down for his dereliction in the continuous campaigns northward; that Chiang Kai-shek would depart for Germany soon; and that British dispatched 150 marines to Nanking for self-protection. In late September, Chiang Kai-shek traveled to Japan instead for finalizing his marriage with Soong Mei-ling.)

Five members of KMT executive committee, including Hu Hanmin, Wu Jingheng, Zhang Renjie, Cai Yuanpei and Li Yuying, all resigned their posts on August 14th. On 15th, Wuhan's newspapers applauded Chiang Kai-shek's departure. However, Feng Yuxiang sent over a complaint wire about KMT internal dispute and demanded a convention of KMT 4th Plenary of 2nd Congress. On Aug 19th, military commissar committee was invoked. Li Zongren, Bai Chongxi & Heh Yingqin decided to withdraw the three routes

of northern expedition army back to the Yangtze defense, with 1st route [1st, 18th, 14th, 26th, 10th & 31st corps] defending east side of Mt Wulongshan [to the east of Nanking], 2nd route [37th, 27th, new 10th & temp 11th corps] in charge of upper stream Yangtze to the west, Chen Diaoyuan's army in charge of Wuhu, and 3rd route [7th, 19th, 40th and 44th corps] defending the middle segment. On Aug 20th, official announcement in regards to Chiang Kai-shek stepdown was issued. At this time, Sun Chuanfang's northern armies at Pukou already bombarded the southern bank for three days. North of the Yangtze, only 33rd Corps defended Liuhe & Hefei of Anhui Province. Li Zongren, together with Li Liejun, Heh Yingqin & Bai Chongxi, hosted a meeting attended by Xia Wei [7th Corps], Lai Shihuang [14th Corps], Cao Wanshun [17th Corps], Heh Yaozu [40th Corps], Ye Kaixin [44th Corps], Liu Zhi [1st Corps], and Bo Wenhui [37th Corps]. Meeting decided to withdraw all troops to the southern bank for defending Nanking. On Aug 21st, Li Zongren, for his prior experiences of two mediations in late 1926 and in May 1927, was dispatched to Mt Lushan for peace talks with Wuhan government.

For avoiding bombing from northern bank, Li Zongren took ride of a small boat for transfer to Juechuan Warship [i.e., Wu Peifu's former warship] at night. While sailing along Yangtze, Li Zongren spotted, near Anqing of Anhui Province, continuous flows of Wuhan armies towards the lower stream on the bank and ships carrying cannons and logistics. By noon of 22nd, Li arrived in Jiujiang and climbed Mt Lushan after a phonetalk with Whang Jingwei. Present on Mt Lushan would be Whang Jingwei, Tan Yankai, Sun Ke, Song Ziwen, Chen Gongbo, Gu Mengyu, Tang Shengzhi, Zhu Peide, Zhang Fakui and Deng Yanda. Li Zongren discovered that Whang Jingwei had been somewhat hijacked by Tang Shengzhi who refused to stop his troops at Jiujiang but demanded a continuous eastern campaign to Wuhu. On Aug 22nd, Whang Jingwei etc reached an agreement in Jiujiang for dispatching Sun Ke and Tan Yankai to Nanking. Li Zongren memoirs stated that two generals under Tang Shengzhi, i.e., Liao Lei & Ye Qi, later disclosed that Tang had secret negotiations with Sun Chuanfang & Jiang Baili for a joint attack at Nanking from west and north. However, Sun Chuanfang launched an attack at Nanking without waiting for Tang Shengzhi in the attempt of "being a king as the first who sacked the capital". Further, Li Zongren pointed out that Chiang Kai-shek had intentionally stepped down for sake of having Whang Jingwei exercise control over Tang Shengzhi because Tang Shengzhi's "Eastern Campaign" held a slogan of getting rid of Chiang Kai-shek only.

When Li Zongren returned with two senior KMT leaders, his warship was encircled by over hundred wooden boats of the northern armies on the morning of 24th. Chen Diaoyuan, i.e., commander of 2nd Corps-conglomerate of 1st Group Army, who rode on a small boat with one company of soldiers for meeting with Li Zongren, joined the warship in fending off the attackers. Tan Yankai grabbed a pistol and shot at enemy soldiers who attempted to climb on board. Li Zongren learnt from Chen Diaoyuan that Tang Shengzhi [i.e., Chen Diaoyuan's former student at Baoding Cadet] might have collusion with Sun Chuanfang, and asked Chen Diaoyuan to go back to Wuhu defense. After arriving in Nanking, Li Zongren immediately made arrangement for reinforced defense along the lower stream Yangtze bank by pointing out that Sun Chuanfang's crossing at upperstream was merely a fake attack.