

Ningxia-Yinchuan Campaign (1936)

by Ah Xiang

[Excerpts from "Campaigns: 1927-1937"]

On Jan 14th 1936, Zhang Fakui assumed the post of general director for banditry quelling in Fujian-Zhejiang-Anhui-Jiangxi border area, while Li Zongren took charge of quelling communist insurgents in Hunan-Guangxi-Guizhou border area. In March 1936, Hu Zongnan led his troops eastward to Tongguan on the pretext that Wang Jun's 3rd Corps and Yang Bufei's 61st Division were enough for Gansu Prov. In northern Shenxi Prov, Mao Tse-tung's "Central Red Army" [about 7000 or less, widely believed to be 5000 remnants] already converged with Liu Zhidan's Shenxi Red Army [close to 6000 ?]. (Xu Zhen claimed that Mao Tse-tung, after conversion with Liu Zhidan, would change the banditry den approach, pacify local gentry-organized forces in various counties, and develop into 10000 force within one year.) Back in Nov 1935, Mao Tse-tung dispatched a top cadre to Yang Hucheng's Northwestern Army for striking a non-aggression pact. Chen Yongfa pointed out that General Wang Yizhe's 67th Corps and Red Army reached a non-aggression pact in March 1936. On the afternoon of April 9th 1936, Zhang Xueliang, Liu Ding, Wang Yizhe, and bodyguard chief Sun Mingjiu flew to Fushi [Yan'an] where they held a secret meeting with Zhou Enlai & Li Kenong inside a catholic church under the foot of Yan'an Bao-ta [treasured pagoda]. Meeting lasted through to 4:00 am the next day. Zhang Xueliang gave the CCP a new color map of China as a gift, while CCP promised to i) help train Northeastern Army officers, ii) establish joint army for resisting Japanese invasion, iii) organize "Northwestern National Defense Government", and vi) ally with USSR for military assistance. (See Wu Tianyao's "Liu Ding & Xi'an Incident".) At the same time, communists actively pursued "peace talks" with Chiang Kai-shek. Xu Zhen stated that Zhou Enlai contacted KMT special agent in HK, i.e., Zeng Yangfu as well as wrote direct to the two Chen brothers.

To solve the financial bankruptcy, Mao Tse-tung personally led a campaign against Shanxi Prov by crossing the Yellow River in the spring of 1936 [Feb 20th]. Red Army looted equivalent to 550000 yuan "fa [legalized] bi [currency]" and returned to Shenxi from Shanxi when Chen Cheng's KMT Central Army relief to Yan Xishan entered Shanxi Prov on March 25th 1936. (Red Army looted Yan Xishan's Shanxi Prov money when they initiated an eastern campaign across the East Yellow River Bend on Feb 20th 1936 and captured 4000 soldiers and guns from Yan Xishan. Chen Yongfa stated money looted was equivalent to 550000 yuan "fa [legalized] bi [currency]". In addition, 7000-8000 new recruits were brought back to Shenxi from Shanxi when CCP retreated in face of Chen Cheng's KMT Central Army relief to Yan Xishan on March 25th 1936. Hu Zongnan sent one regiment to Chen Cheng for driving communists out of Shanxi.) Xu Xiangqian, however, hinted an internal documentation about Suiyuan-Mongolia linkage.

Thereafter, Mao Tse-tung ordered that Zhang Guotao's Red Army Fourth Front attack "Western Corridor" for sake of opening up the transportation line to the west, and that Red Armies converged in Ningxia for sake of opening up the transportation line between Inner Mongolia and Outer Mongolia. At the same time, Mao Tse-tung launched "united front" campaigns for winning over Northeastern Army & Northwestern Army.

On July 27th 1936, CCP Central established CCP Northwestern Bureau, with Zhang Guotao and Ren Bishi acting as secretary and deputy secretary. On Aug 5th 1936, Red Army 4th Front and Red Army 2nd Front mounted the Campaign of Mingzhou-Taozhou-Xigu. While Chen Changhao's Red Army 9th & 5th Corps failed to take Mingzhou, Red Army 4th Corps sacked Weiyuan and 30th Corps posed threat to Lanzhou the Gansu provincial city. Seeing that Zhang Xueliang's Northeastern Army fail to echo Red Army, CCP Central inquired with Zhang Guotao's Red Army 4th Front as to its capability to penetrate into Gansu and Qinghai provinces on its own. Xu Xiangqian memoirs stated that he had assured Zhang Guotao that there should be no problem for 4th Front to cross the Yellow River via boats prior to the winter freeze. In late August 1936, CCP Central changed plan after Chiang Kai-shek resolved the Guangxi-Guangdong rebellion and dispatched Hu Zongnan back to Gansu Prov. CCP issued a call for solidifying control over southern Shenxi Prov and northern Shenxi-Gansu provinces, with a delayed linkage with USSR till the winter.

Historical facts supported the claim that Mao Tse-tung, in Sept 1936, had assembled Red Army First Front, Second Front & Fourth Front for attacking Ningxia for sake of opening up the transportation line between Inner Mongolia and Outer Mongolia. Ningxia-Yinchuan Campaign was called off as a result of KMT forces penetrating to eastern side of Yinchuan city shortly afterward. Prof Chen Yung-fa, hinting that Zhang Guotao intended to obtain Soviet military supplies for strengthening himself, pointed out that Zhang Guotao was said to have ambition for eastern Gansu Prov and subsequently New Dominion Prov. The later quarrels between Mao Tse-tung and Zhang Guotao had shrouded this campaign in mystery. Zhang Guotao's frequent mentioning of an original CCP roadmap of "Western Expedition" pointed to a sanctified campaign, rather than an individual action on the part of Zhang Guotao. The occupation of Yongdeng & Gulang by Zhang Guotao's 20000 Red Army soldiers pointed to a large-scale campaign stretching from Gansu Prov's "Western Corridor" to Ningxia-Shenxi provinces.

Revised CCP plan in Sept 1936 called for Red Army 4th Front to take control of southern Gansu. Red Army 2nd Front was to attack eastward for impeding Hu Zongnan's army which returned from Zhengzhou of Henan Prov and sacked Lixian on Sept 1st. 93rd Division of Red Army 31st Corps took over Tongwei on Sept 7th. Partial of Red Army 1st Front, led by Nie Rongzhen, Zuo Quan & Chen Geng, attacked Jingning & Rongde to the south to pose threat to Xi'an-Lanzhou Highway. On Sept 11th 1936, Red Army 2nd Front marched towards Shenxi-Gansu borderline and took over the counties of Chengxian, Weixian, Liangdang, and Kangxian. On Sept 13th 1936, Red Army 1st Front came southward towards Xi-Lan [Xi'an-Lanzhou] Highway and encircled Xu Kexiang's KMT forces near Shipu area. Pu Yuehuo & Xu Sangmi's "Iron Flow 25000 li Distance" claimed that Zhang Guotao's Red Army 4th Front refused to join the encirclement campaign against Xu Kexiang, and moreover "relocated" westward towards the direction

of "Xining" the provincial city of Qinghai Prov. Zhang Guotao cited a plan termed "Lintao-xi [western area of Lintao city] Campaign" where 'tao' was meant for the Tao-he River that flowed northwestward into the upstream of the Yellow River.

Xu Xiangqian memoirs stated that CCP Central advised against Red Army 4th Front competing for limited resources in Shenxi Prov, and Xu Xiangqian himself received a telegraph from Peng Dehuai about the resource constraint. CCP Central, which had just dispatched Deng Fa to Moscow for presenting two options, advised Zhang Guotao's Red Army 4th Front as to the choice of going to He-xi Corridor area of Gansu-Ningxia-Qinghai or going southward towards Sichuan-Henan-Hubei provinces. Chen Changhao returned to Sanshilipu's frontline headquarter from Mingzhou siege for a meeting with Zhu De and Zhang Guotao, and on Sept 13th, 4th Front proposed a campaign to exterminate part of Hu Zongnan's KMT forces on the highway. Xu Xiangqian opposed this plan in vain and mentioned a plan to cross the Yellow River for taking Gulang-Yongdeng-Hongchengzi. Xu Xiangqian advocated control over two banks of the Yellow River in cooperation with Northeastern Army which already stationed in Lanzhou [i.e., east bank of the Yellow River].

Comintern stamped the Campaign of Ningxia and western Gansu provinces. Inside of Zhang Guotao's camp, CCP Northwestern Bureau held a so-called Mingzhou Meeting at Mingxian county for 24 hours around the clock, with Zhu De & Ren Bishi purportedly overweighing Zhang Guotao with a Tongwei-Zhuanglang-Jingning-Huining Campaign by means of northward conversion with partial of Mao Tse-tung's Red Army 1st Front. Xu Xiangqian memoirs stated that this "highway" campaign was to become the sole responsibility of Red Army 4th Front since Red Army 1st Front merely dispatched its 1st Division as a nominal gesture instead of a joint operation.

On Sept 19th, Red Army 4th Front issued the order of march towards Jingning & Huining, two major cities to the east of Lanzhou the provincial city of Gansu Prov. However, per Pu Yuehuo & Xu Sangmi, on the morning of Sept 20th, Zhang Guotao brought his bodyguards to the frontline where he held a new meeting for carrying out the so-called original CCP roadmap of "Western Expedition". Xu Xiangqian memoirs stated that Zhang Guotao personally came to Zhangxian county and told his subordinates that he had better yield his 'chairman' position to Chen Changhao. Xu Xiangqian learnt that Zhang Guotao was also against "highway" campaign but advocated for crossing the Yellow River. Zhang Guotao was upset over Chen Changhao's advocacy for "highway" campaign. Hence, Xu Xiangqian and Zhang Guotao re-designed the campaign route and wired to Zhu De & Chen Changhao for an immediate meeting at Zhangxian. Pu Yuehuo & Xu Sangmi cited a purportedly Zhang Guotao telegraph dated Sept 22nd in stating that Zhang Guotao had observed the original roadmap of "Western Expedition" in lieu of having a duel with Hu Zongnan's well-equipped KMT forces in Jingning & Huining area. Zhu De was said to have divulged Zhang Guotao's new move to Mao Tse-tung's CCP Central via a telegraph. Xu Xiangqian memoirs, however, stated that Chen Changhao promptly came to Zhangxian the next morning and agreed with majority and that Zhu De also supported the new plan. With all nodding heads, Zhang Guotao wired to Mao Tse-tung's CCP Central, contradicting the common accusation that it was some private initiative by Zhu De in divulsion. Xu Xiangqian went ahead to Taozhou area to check out

the conditions for river crossing and returned to report the difficulty. At this time, CCP Central sent over a telegraph prohibiting the Yellow River crossing plan. On Sept 27th, Mao Tse-tung's CCP Central instructed an immediate northward march and ordered the recovery of Tongwei county, a place between Zhangxian and Huining. Xu Xiangqian stated that CCP Central instructed that Red Army 4th Front could cross the Yellow River at Jingyuan after completing the Tongwei-Zhuanglang-Jingning-Huining Campaign. A new CCP Northwestern Bureau meeting was promptly held in Zhangxian county, a place to the northeast of first meeting location of Mingxian county. On 29th, 4th Front followed through with the "highway" campaign.

Pu Yuehuo & Xu Sangmi claimed that Red Army 4th Front, with Xu Xiangqian and Zhang Guotao's personal guards included, opposed Zhang Guotao's western expedition and that on Sept 29th, Zhang Guotao finally agreed to go north. This claim is apparently fallacious in light of Xu Xiangqian memoirs. Zhang Guotao's Red Army 4th Front departed for the north by means of 5 echelons on Sept 30th. Xu Xiangqian stated that Red Army 4th Front still planned to cross the Yellow River at Jingyuan instead of Yongjing as Xu Xiangqian and Zhang Guotao had initially advocated. Red Army 2nd Front crossed the Wei-he River at Tianshui after Red Army 4th Front departed on Sept 30th. CCP records stated that Red Army 2nd Front suffered losses in the hands of KMT forces as a result of Zhang Guotao's "wavering" during this timeframe. On Oct 2nd, Red Army 1st Front took over Huining.