

The Formation of the “Three Gorges Pivot Operation” Strategy of the National Army During the War of Resistance Against Japan

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Abstract

During the period of the War of Resistance Against Japan, the Nationalist Government moved westwards to Chongqing to defend the capital, and the national army established and always adhered to the “Three Gorges Pivotal Warfare” strategy. From the westward migration of the government to the Wuhan subjugation, the “Three Gorges Pivotal Combat” strategy has taken shape; after the fall of Yichang City, the National Army continued to counterattack, further strengthening the “Three Gorges Pivot Operation” strategic system. The “Three Gorges Pivotal Warfare” strategy in the Battle of Western Hubei has withstood severe tests and was further consolidated in the subsequent counterattack in Yichang. The national army’s strategy of insisting on the “Three Gorges Pivotal Operations” smashed the Japanese military’s attempt to continue westwards and defended the Chongqing’s safety as the capital.

Key words: Yichang; Three gorges pivot operation; National army; Western Hubei Campaign

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INTRODUCTION

The “Three Gorges Pivot Warfare” strategy of the national army was a defense system gradually formed after the Chinese government moved westwards to Chongqing,

following the Japanese invasion of the Yangtze River basin and the military intimidation of the Chongqing National Government to protect the capital. After the fall of Wuhan, the safety of the capital of Chongqing was further threatened. The Three Gorges area with Yichang at the starting point has become the last line of defense for the Chongqing city. Therefore, taking the Three Gorges as the operational pivot and sticking to the Three Gorges area, the strategy of defending the capital is highlighted. The relationship between the formation and implementation of the “Three Gorges Pivot Warfare” strategy and the safety of the capital, Chongqing, is of great historical significance. I intend to analyze the formation of the whole story.

1. THE INITIAL STAGE OF THE “THREE GORGES PIVOT WARFARE” STRATEGY

The westward migration of the Chinese government and the fall of Wuhan have become the initial reason for the formation of the “Three Gorges Pivotal Warfare” strategy. During this period, the “Three Gorges Pivot Warfare” strategy was initially formed. After the “813 Incident” broke out, the Nanjing National Government issued a declaration of self-defense and the Battle of Shanghai broke out. Although the military and civilians fought with loyalty and vowed to fight against the enemy, the Chinese defeat in the battle of Shanghai took place in mid-November 1937. The Japanese troops marched westwards, pressing hard against Nanjing. On November 20th, the National Government issued the *Declaration of Chongqing*: “The Nationalist Government is to adapt to the situation and to coordinate the overall situation. For the sake of long-term combat, it will move to Chongqing today.” (Zhang, 1997, p.27) The capital moved to Chongqing as a “central hub to the hinterland, and the heads of the people are stable.” (Ibid., pp.27-28) This has become the origin of the “Government

of the Three Gorges Pivot” strategy of the Nationalist Government. Therefore, in February 1938, the National Army formulated *The Defensive Plan and the Fort Setting Between Yichang and a Battle Plan Near by Yichang*.¹ built a fortification from the Yichang to Wushan between the two sides of the Three Gorges. Not only that, but from July to October in 1938, the Military Commission issued *The Military Commission’s Work on the Deployment of Works in Yichang, Xiangyang, both in Northwest of Hubei Province, etc.* and *The Military Commission’s Position on the Site of the Western Hubei as Yichang, Jiangling, Shayang, etc. North Hunan and Western Hubei fortification deployment, etc.*² Repeatedly called for strengthening the defense system.

Although the National Government moved to Chongqing, the main government departments moved to Wuhan. Therefore, the “Three Gorges Pivot Warfare” strategy began to show itself after the fall of Wuhan. After the fall of Wuhan, although the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression entered the phase of stalemate, the Japanese army did not stop the pace of Westward invasion. The security of the capital Chongqing needs to be further consolidated and strengthened. Yichang is the starting point of the “Three Gorges Pivot Warfare” strategy. It is located at the entrance of the Three Gorges. To defend Yichang is to defend the Three Gorges and to defend the Three Gorges is to defend Chongqing. In view of this, in 1939, *The National Army Formulated the “Yichang Garrison Headquarters 28-Year Winter Defense Implementation Plan”*³ This detailed plan reflected that the national army attaches great importance to the defense of the “Three Gorges Pivot Strategy” fulcrum Yichang City. In order to prevent the Japanese army from attacking the river and threaten the capital city of Chongqing, the Military Commission also strengthened the guarding of Yichang on the deployment of the army. In January 1939, the commander of the Second Fleet of the Chinese Navy had stationed Yichang with the Second Fleet; in April, the upper Yangtze River defense headquarters was established in Yichang, where Guo Wei was the commander of the defense force. About 100,000 people belonged to the fifth

theater. At the same time, from the Second Historical Archives in China, “*The Commander of the Yangtze River in the upper reaches of the Yangtze River, Guo Yan, in Yichang Military Texts*” (January 1939 - May 1939), “*The Five Warzone Guo Yan in Yichang Military Textbook*” (1939) February of February - April 1940, “Chairman of Hubei Province Yan Lisan in Yichang Military Texts” (April 1939 - July 1939), “*Military Commander Liu Fei reported to adjust the Yangtze defense strategy in the upper reaches of the Yangtze River*” (In 1939, etc., from the “787” series of archival materials, the Jianghu Command in the upper reaches of the Yangtze River and Hubei Province carried out careful military planning to strengthen the guards in the Yichang area. In April 1939, Feng Yuxiang, vice chairman of the Nationalist Military Committee, personally came to Yichang to inspect and supervise the military to check on the fortress. Yichang’s military deployment and defensive and Feng Yuxiang’s inspections further demonstrated that the status of the “Three Gorges Pivot Operation” strategy has gradually emerged after the fall of Wuhan.

2. “THREE GORGES PIVOT OPERATION” STRATEGIC CONSTRUCTION STRENGTHENING PERIOD

The “Three Gorges Pivot Warfare” strategy is fully highlighted after the fall of Yichang City and further strengthening of the strategic system. In May 1940, the Japanese army gathered six divisions, and was accompanied by the fleet of the Chinese demobilized fleet and the aviation forces. It suddenly launched Yichang operations, namely the “ZaoYi battle.” Due to strategic misjudgments in the previous period and misguided commands in the course of the ZaoYi battle, the Chinese army was defeated Yichang was occupied by the Japanese. The fall of Yichang has severely impacted the “Three Gorges Pivotal Operations” strategy of the Chinese military. Regarding the grim situation caused by the fall of Yichang, the Japanese has described it like this: “In the 8 years of the Sino-Japanese War, the time when President Chiang Kai-shek most felt the crisis was when Yichang was fighting.”⁴ Chiang Kai-shek also wrote in his diary: “The events in the Western Hubei Province and Annan are out of order. Since the end of the War of Resistance, there have been no such hardships and hardships.... Annan’s suspension has been painful. However, the key to the success of Yichang was better than that of Annan’s” (Wu & Cao, 2011, p. 314) Under this circumstance, in order to adhere to the Three Gorges, arches, and defend the

¹ Department of Defense’s Bureau of History and Political Affairs and History of Warfare Committee. (Ed.). (1938). *The defensive plan and the fort setting between Yichang and a battle plan near by Yichang* (pp.787-3360). China Second Historical Archives Collection.

² Department of Defense’s Bureau of History and Political Affairs and History of Warfare Committee. *The Military Commission of the People’s Republic of China in Hubei Province, Yichang, Xiangyang, and other places for the deployment of telecommunications, The Military Commission on the Western Hubei Yichang Jiangling Shayang “Positions and other sites for the construction of text and electricity, Northern Hunan and Western Hubei fortification deployment text* (pp.787-3361, 3362, 3372).

³ Ministry of Defense history and political history compilation committee. (1940). *Yichang garrison headquarters winter defense implementation plan* (pp.787-1372). China Second Historical Archives Collection.

⁴ Defense Agency History and Defense Office of the Japanese Defense Agency. (1979). *History of China’s incident army operation* (Q. Z. Tian, Trans. volume 3, second volume, p.28). Zhonghua Book Company.

city, the sixth battle area was reset. Its main jurisdiction is the Three Gorges area in western Hubei, southern Hubei, central Hubei, northern Hunan, western Hunan, and eastern Sichuan.” After the re-establishment of the Sixth War Zone, its importance is greatly behind the trend. It is the general view that the focus of the Anti-Japanese War was at that time was the Sixth War Zone. In a major gathering place, the chairman of the committee proposed publicly the “Military Division”. The slogans of “First, Sixth War Zone” can imagine the general situation of the overall situation of the Anti-Japanese War at that time (Chen, 2009, p.103). At the same time, in July 1940, the Military Command of the National Armed Forces Military Commission formulated the *Armed Guardian Operation Plan*. The plan’s policy states:

The national army should always ensure the Three Gorges project to prevent the enemy from entering Sichuan. It should be considered as the axis of warfare. It should be based on the Three Gorges and its mountains in the north and south, breaking the roads, clearing the terrain, strengthening the terrain, and using frontal tough resistance. In addition, they attacked the enemy’s supply lines and annihilated the enemies of the Three Gorges in the north and south mountains.⁵

The geostrategic axis of the Three Gorges region during the Anti-Japanese War was formally put forward in this plan. The plan proposes to actively call for a decisive battle with the enemy, and the decisive battle zone is expected to be on both sides of the Qingjiang River in the southern region of the Three Gorges. This area became the main battlefield for the future battle of Hubei. However, at this time, the sixth theater, which is directly responsible for this zone, is still adhering to a defensive strategy and is supplemented by attacks: “Ninth, sixth and fifth war zones temporarily took the defensive, but each part took part in guerrillas, hindered the enemy from rest and searched for enemy situations, and covered the main forces to build fortifications and actively trained.”⁶

After the fall of Yichang, the national army had planned to recover Yichang several times. As in May 1941, the military headquarters drafted the “National Offensive Operation Plan” with the main purpose of “recovering Yisha”. In the military aspect, the Japanese army launched a fierce battle, hoping to recapture Yichang by military means. From November 1940 to November 1941, the National Army and the Japanese Army successively took place the battle of Nanjin Pass, the second West Coast Battle of Yichang, the four Yuanan Battles, the second Fenxiang battle, the Haoxue Battle, Jing Yi in the vicinity of Yichang. Offensive operations and other 11 battles. Especially in September 1941, during the second Changsha battle, the highest commander

of the National Army wanted to seize the opportunity. When the main force of the Japanese army was attracted to North Hunan, it mobilized all the strength of the sixth theater to attack the Japanese troops stationed in Yichang and recover Yichang. However, due to the rapid return of aid from the Japanese army and the large-scale use of poisonous gas, the defeat of the national army was completed. In order to stabilize the Three Gorges defensive line in the west bank of Yichang, the national army formulated the “Operation Plan for the Sixth War Zone, Arches and Guards, Operation Plan, and Six-War Area Operational Contingency Plan”, heavily deployed in the Yichang Jiangnan area, and along Tianzhu Mountain, Muqiao Creek, Langping, and Shipai. At the frontline of the game, the key is to build a strong fortification and form a solid defense line for the Three Gorges. At this point, after the fall of Yichang City, the National Army formed the “Three Gorges Pivotal Warfare” strategy.

After the fall of Yichang, China and Japan were basically in confrontation in Yichang. As the starting point for the “Three Gorges Pivot Warfare” strategy, not only does the national army want to defend itself and recover lost ground, the Japanese army also wants to break through the line of defense and continue westward. On March 11, 1942, *Xu Yongchang Was Drafted With Status Judgments and the Draft of the National Army’s Summer Offensive Strategy Report for the First Year of the Thirty-One Years*, which made Yichang one of the positive targets for the Yangtze River basin. The combat plan is based on the reduction in the strength of the Chinese battlefield on the Chinese battlefield following the launch of the Pacific War by the Japanese military, and in particular the significant decrease in aviation forces. The Japanese military’s strength is stretched, and it can only be developed under the premise of offensive and passive. In this case, the national army should take the initiative to attack, because “Huazhong is the heart of my heart, especially Yichang’s Sichuan portal and Yueyang’s throat is Sanxiang. We should take advantage of the Raiders and liberate the enemy’s shackles. It is easy to fight afterwards.”⁷ At the same time, he believed that “the United States and Britain have repeatedly suffered setbacks in the South Pacific, and it is even more necessary for me to urgently launch a powerful counterattack, with a view to alleviating the pressure from the enemy’s enemies. I also should attack the entire communist ally, attacking with a total counterattack by the Allied Army. “Preliminary.”⁸ In addition, he pointed out the main objective of the attack: “Only the military supplies of the national army are not easy to supplement, and the situation in North China is very special. It is difficult to fully counterattack, so it is only necessary to recapture Yichang for satisfaction.”⁹ Just

⁵ *The Republic of China History Archives Information Collection*. (2000). the fifth series, the second series of military (p.672). Phoenix Press.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., p. 694.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

on April 16 of the same year, Japanese military officials began to discuss the so-called “Sichuan Warfare.” This idea soon evolved into “Sichuan Offensive Operations”, referred to as 51 operations. Its main content is: “With an area from Xi’an and Baoji, a combat operation was carried out from Yichang to destroy the main force of Chongqing Army and to capture other important areas of Chongqing, Chengdu and Sichuan Province.”¹⁰ The plan was revised by the Japanese army and was renamed “Operation 5” on August 30th. “This battle is not the continuation of the 50th operation, but the two sides of the North China and Central China offensive operations in Sichuan.”¹¹ The battle plans of both sides have not been achieved in the end, but they fully demonstrate both the importance attached to the Three Gorges area and the strategic significance of the Three Gorges area on the battlefield between China and Japan.

3. “THREE GORGES PIVOT OPERATION” STRATEGY TEST AND CONSOLIDATION PERIOD

After the formation of the “Three Gorges Pivotal Warfare” strategy of the National Army, its important strategic significance was fully reflected in the battle in Western Hubei. The outbreak of the Battle of Western Hubei has become a concrete practice of the “Three Gorges Pivotal Operation” strategy of the National Army, and it is also a rigorous test of this strategy. In May 1943, the 11th Army Commander of the Japanese Army, Yokoyama Yoshiro, collected 100,000 Japanese troops in an awkward manner and attempted to wipe out the main force of the Chinese Army in the sixth battle zone on the southern bank of the Yangtze River from Yichang to Yuezhou, and to open up Yangtze River shipping from Yichang to Shashi. On May 5, the Japanese Army launched the “Destruction of War in the South of the Yangtze River,” that is, “The Battle of Western Hubei.” The Japanese army made large-scale attacks on the Changde region of northwestern Hunan. In less than half of a month, the soldiers’ fronts against the fortress of the first river in the Xiajiang River. On May 26, *The Operational Plan for Arches and Warners* of the Military Command of the Military Commission of the National Armed Forces once again followed the 1941 operational policy, that is,

The National Army has always made sure that the Three Gorges are the operational pivot, and that the Yiyi Three Gorges and its In the north-southern mountainous region, with frontal resistance

and side-behind tail-tail strikes, the enemies’ supply lines were cut off, and the enemies who invaded the enemy were ensconced in the south-north mountain range of the Three Gorges.¹²

This is a manifestation of the strategy of the National Army to consistently adhere to the “Three Gorges Pivotal Warfare” strategy. Around the 26th, the Japanese army broke through the Qingjiang defense line.¹³ The striker reached the forefront of the fortress of the Shipai fortress.¹⁴ Because the PLA has always adhered to the “Three Gorges Pivotal Warfare” strategy, it has established sturdy fortifications in the Three Gorges area and deployed a total of seventeenth, 32nd, 86th, 87th, 94th, 79th, and 74th forces. The army’s strength, plus the combat forces of the 44th and 77th forces, was as much as 140,000. They swear to guard the stone fortress to protect the capital. From 29th to 30th, Japanese troops stormed Shipai fortresses at the perimeter of Shipai. I defended the army tenaciously. At the same time, the United States and China’s joint air force took the initiative to fight with the army to smash the Japanese military’s attempt to break through the stone fortress. The Japanese attack did not take place, and his own casualties were heavy. The offensive was drastically reduced. He was forced to withdraw eastward on the evening of the 31st. I escorted the various troops to counterattack and pursued the Japanese army. By June 3, all fronts had returned to their pre-war status. The victory in the Western Hubei Campaign can be said to be closely related to the PLA’s strategy of always adhering to the “Three Gorges Pivotal Combat” strategy, and at the same time, it also validates the correctness and importance of the “Three Gorges Pivotal Operation” strategy of the national army.

After the battle in western Hubei, the national army continued to adhere to the “Three Gorges Pivotal Warfare” strategy. To further consolidate the “Three Gorges Pivotal Warfare” strategy, it repeatedly launched a campaign to recover Yichang. From 1943 to 1944, the national army formulated the *Reconstructing the Yisha Battle Plan for the Sixth Battlefield and The Sixth Battlefield Recaptures the Yisha Defence Division Wuhan Operation Plan*. “After the attack on the sixth theater zone, it focused on the east side of Yichang and the enemy’s bridgehead position on the west bank of Yichang. In combat deployment, the main group 26 armies of the sixth theater point to the area east of Yichang, and the 33 group armor points to Jing’an and nearby areas. , and prepare to enter and leave the Shayang. The main armies of the armed forces to attack Yichang on the other side of the bridgehead. With the 10 group army, 24 group army attack the right enemy, the 10group army

¹⁰ Japanese War Department history] Institute of the War History Office. (1987). *The history of Japanese Militarism invading China* (Tianjin Municipal CPPCC Compilation Committee Trans., p.365). Chinese Book, Sichuan People’s Publishing House.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² ROC History Archives. (2000). *Series 5, No. Section II, Military* (I) (p.706). Phoenix Press.

¹³ Qingjiang defense line combat area is mainly in today’s Changyang County, Yichang.

¹⁴ Shipai fortress frontier main battle area in this point of the Yichang City Military District.

support Dujiang, the strategy of Yichang.”¹⁵ By launching the summer offensive, the second counterattack on the West Bank of Yichang, fighting against the South of the Shonan and the joint air force of the China-U.S. Joint Air Force, the outfield positions of the Yichang Japanese were severely hit. By counterattacking Yichang, the “Three Gorges Pivotal Operation” strategy has been further stabilized.

CONCLUSION

Since the fall of Nanjing, the government moved westwards. In order to consolidate the safety of the capital, Chongqing has gradually formed the “Three Gorges Pivotal Warfare” strategy to build a solid defense system in the Three Gorges region. The “Three Gorges Pivot Warfare” strategy has been continuously strengthened with the changes in the war situation. After the fall of

Yichang, the “Three Gorges Pivot Warfare” strategy has always been the strategic thinking for the national army to resist the Japanese army and ensure the safety of Chongqing. It was precisely because of the formation and practice of this strategic ideology that the victory in the Battle of Western Hubei was achieved, the Three Gorges area was firmly controlled, the attempt of the Japanese army to enter Chongqing in the west was crushed, and the security of the capital was guarded.

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¹⁵ Republic of China history file Information Collection. (2000). *Series 5, Part Two, Military (I)* (p.712). Phoenix Press.