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## UNIT 8 THE FAILURE OF 1911 AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE GUOMINDANG 1911-12

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### 8.0 OBJECTIVES

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After reading this Unit, you will be able to explain the:

- main features of the political situation in China from World War-I to the 1920's;
- failure of the republican revolution of 1911 and the impact of warlordism on the political and social landscape of China;
- impact of the Treaty of Versailles that recognized Japan's rights in Shandong and ignored China's support for the allied forces and why Japan's Twenty One Demands provoked a violent reaction;
- May 4<sup>th</sup> movement that led to the rise of nationalism and communism; and
- rise of the nationalist party, the Guomindang.

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## 8.1 INTRODUCTION

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In this Unit we will examine the political situation of China from the failure of the 1911 revolution to the emergence of the Guomindang. The 1911 revolution lacked the military power to control Yuan Shikai who used his military base to undermine the efforts to establish parliamentary government. Yuan ushered in a period called 'warlordism' marked by a weak central authority and local governors and strongmen who commanded armies. The failure of 1911 underlined for the Chinese the need for a strong military base to create a strong political centre, each political party built its own army. The Chinese sent labour to help the allies in World War I but France and Britain ignored their interests in the Versailles Peace Conference and supported Japan's seizure of German rights in Shandong. This sparked outrage and led to the May Fourth Incident of 1919, which was one major event in a larger intellectual and cultural movement. This Unit also discusses the rise of the nationalist party, the Guomindang.

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## 8.2 CHINA AND WORLD WAR-I

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The 1911 Revolution did not resolve some fundamental problems facing China: foreign imperial presence was entrenched. There was endemic economic instability, and the revolution did not create a stable political centre. Almost as soon as the revolution was completed its basic principles were subverted.

The leaders of the Guomindang(GMD), which had given up its secret society characteristics and had participated actively in the overthrow of the Manchu regime, realized that to build a strong political centre they would need a powerful army to support their political objectives. In this period they worked to reduce the power of warlords sometimes even allying with the Communists. The weakening of the political centre and the emergence of regional powers each vying for control created economic and social turmoil, outlying regions such as Tibet and Mongolia declared their independence.

Modern education had created a class of intellectuals who looked for ways to strengthen China by overturning old customs that seemed to hold China back and by creating a new modern culture. These ideas were the bases for the May 4 Movement that began about 1915 and reached a high point in the May 4, 1919 incident. This movement was inspired by Western thinkers such as Montesquieu, Adam Smith, and J.S.Mill as well as by the Bolshevik victory in Russia. Russia's renunciation of the unequal treaties signed by Tsarist Russia won widespread admiration. The ideas of the May 4<sup>th</sup> movement or the New Culture movement as it is also called led to the birth of the Chinese Communist Party in 1921.

### 8.2.1 The Changing Economic Scene

While the period of World War-I coincided with a deteriorating political situation in China, it provided a boost to Chinese industry. As a result of the war, the pressure of Western competition was reduced. Chinese entrepreneurs seized this opportunity. The industrial spurt was, however, in the foreign administered treaty ports, protected by the treaty system from warlordism.

A new merchant class had been in the making for some time. After 1901, they had been fostered by government policies. By 1914 there were over 1000 chambers of commerce with more than 200,000 members. Large scale enterprises continued to be dominated by foreign firms. By 1914, a modern Chinese administrative and entrepreneurial class had begun to emerge.

### 8.2.2 Warlordism

Local strongmen had also begun to form their own private militias as the power of the empire weakened. Yuan Shikai, who may be called the real founder of 'warlordism', emerged as a powerful leader when he reorganized the army of the Manchu government into a modern force. Yuan's New Army built from Manchu forces was used against them. The growth of private armies resulted in the deep involvement of the military in Chinese politics, a trend that has continued. Both the GMD and the Communist Party built their own armies and these were a crucial element in their control of political power.

A few warlords, however, after winning power tried to become reformers and tried to improve the life of the people but before they could make a dent they were caught in the power struggle. Describing the big warlords John Fairbank has commented that:

"In one sense the big warlords were symbols of the profound disintegration of the political order. They tried to sit on top of a thoroughly fragmented society in which local bullies, bandits, chieftains and petty warlords all represented a situation of increasing political chaos."

Factions grew up within the warlord cliques also. For example the Zhili clique split into two factions, one under Wu Peifu and one under Cao Kun. Cao's faction, in turn, was divided into two. These factions wrangled over control over offices and revenues. Factions also existed in the Fengtien (Feng Xi Junfa) clique which came to be known as the 'new' and 'old' factions as the clique had clear-cut differences between the young officers who had modern military training and those who had served the Qing army.

The wars between major cliques attracted more attention because they determined who controlled the national government in Beijing, the symbol of legitimacy. When one clique gave promise of becoming powerful enough to threaten other warlords and create a genuine centralized control, the other leading warlords temporarily combined their forces to bring it down. Thus, in 1920 the Zhili and Fengtien cliques cooperated to eliminate the power of the Anhui clique in the Beijing Government, and transferred most of the provinces to the victors

### 8.2.3 Warlordism and Foreign Powers

The chaos of Warlordism and the consistent weakness of the Beijing government rendered China particularly vulnerable to foreign pressures and encroachments. But at the same time, widespread disorder limited foreign activities and interfered with the economic exploitation of the country by foreign enterprises. Warlords, on occasion, arbitrarily increased taxation on foreign firms. Soldiers and bandits took a toll of foreign wealth and lives. For example in a period of seven years, in one district 153 American individuals or firms were looted. Banditry and war disrupted normal trade and business activities.

Foreign soldiers of fortune did play a role in Chinese wars. For example an Englishman ran one warlord's arsenal and three American pilots flew aircraft bombers, for a few months, for another. Much more important was the fact that foreigners responded to the insatiable Chinese demand for guns by importing weapons in spite of legal restrictions. Arms merchants sold weapons to anybody willing to buy without caring for its political ramifications. However, some foreign

governments virtually sponsored some selected warlords. Japan, for example, was conspicuously involved with Chinese militarists throughout the Warlord era.

In 1916 the Japanese government launched a policy of full support to the government of Duan Qirui, head of the Anhwei clique. This was done in order to establish close ties of political and economic co-operation, and financial obligation between China and Japan. During the following two years Japan supplied over 150 million yen to Yuan, ostensibly for the purpose of national development but these funds were used by Yuan for his own political and military purposes.

The two governments also concluded a military agreement whereby Japan would give aid and advisers to help China raise a War Participation Army to support the Allied cause in the First World War. This army never went to Europe but served to expand Yuan's military strength. This greatly helped Japan to make inroads, politically as well as economically, into China.

#### **8.2.4 Warlordism and Social Turmoil**

Warlordism nurtured famine also. In some province warlords forced the cultivation of opium as a cash crop, thus reducing the acreage devoted to food crops. They diminished government funds meant for irrigation and flood control facilities which caused several disastrous floods. Troops seized draught animals from peasants, not only imposing a direct economic loss but reducing the productivity of peasant farming. Devastating famines in North China during the warlord period were clearly the product of Warlord misgovernment.

The turmoil of the times drove thousands of individuals to leave their homes and travel to other parts of the country. Warlordism is said to have caused one of the largest internal migration of this century in China. Warlordism negatively influenced the shape of Chinese nationalism as it created internal disunity and chaos that left China vulnerable to foreign interference. The need to bring order out of this chaos was a powerful force shaping Chinese nationalism.

#### **Check Your Progress 1**

- 1) Write on the impact of Warlordism on China in about 100 words.

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### **8.3 JAPAN'S TWENTY ONE DEMANDS**

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Japan sought to make permanent her political and economic interests in the East Asian region and in China in particular at a time when the Western imperial powers were preoccupied with World War I. A fundamental problem in Sino-Japanese relations was Japan's growing dissatisfaction with her role and power in China as compared to that of the Western powers. The monopolistic character of most of the railway and mining concessions held by the American and European financial groups threatened to exclude Japan completely from these growing areas and thereby deny her potential profits. According to the Four Power Consortium (Great Britain, France, Germany and Russia) Agreement of April 15, 1911, China granted these four nations almost exclusive monopoly

to furnish China with funds and capital. Such agreements were perceived by the Japanese as further proof of Chinese and European attempts to curtail Japanese investment prospects in China. The political measures evolved by the Japanese to safeguard and expand their interests in China came in the form of Twenty One Demands.

The exigencies of Japanese politics too played a major role in shaping this aggressive policy. Though we need not go into the details of Japan's compulsions here, suffice is to say that the pressures to seek access to resources, markets, and outlets for a growing population and an ambition to be a leader in East Asia all propelled the Twenty One Demands. World War I provided the Japanese with an opportunity to remove all doubts and insecurities of their potential and capacity to safeguard their interests and acquire new ones. The Japanese Minister in China is reported to have stated somewhat picturesquely and bluntly Japan's intentions: "the present crisis throughout the world virtually forces my government to take far reaching action. When there is a fire in a jeweler's shop, the neighbours cannot be expected to refrain from helping themselves".

As already stated many of the Twenty One Demands sought to give Japan the same kind of rights in China that the European powers had long enjoyed. The immediate catalyst for the demands was Japan's successful defeat of Germany in Shandong. The question now was the disposal of the leasehold and economic rights enjoyed by Germany in Shandong and Japan was eager to acquire them.

Yuan Shikai, the Chinese president, was presented with an ultimatum in the form of the Twenty One Demands on May 7<sup>th</sup>, 1915, a day which Chinese students and nationalists commemorated as National Humiliation Day.

In fact there were several demands like:

- Influential Japanese political, financial and military advisers be engaged by the Chinese government.
- Japanese were to be accorded the right to construct hospitals, schools and temples in the interior of China.
- Japanese were to have a say in police administration, in the supply of arms and armaments and experts from Japan.
- Japan demanded the right to construct a railway connecting Wuchang with Chujiang Nanchang line.

### **8.3.1 The Peace Treaty of Versailles**

The China mission to the Versailles Peace Conference 1919 consisted of representatives from both the Republican South Chinese regime and the government at Beijing. The Chinese were optimistic that because of their support for the war their demands would be met but when news filtered back that the Peace Conference far from resolving Chinese territorial problems was on the contrary strengthening Japan's position by handing over German leased territory in the Shandong area to Japan, they were shocked. This move reaffirmed the commitment of the Western powers to safeguarding imperial interests in the face of all opposition.

What was further revealed was that Japan had been promised, through a series of secret agreements with Britain, France and the warlord governments, access to the German rights. In Paris, the Chinese negotiators found that their hands were tied by two factors. Firstly, Japan's claims to the Shandong area had been recognized by a secret treaty of February 1917 between Japan, Britain, France and Italy. This treaty had been concluded when the question of China entering the war was under discussion. A more damaging disclosure was the agreement between Japan and the government of Duan Qirui in connection with the Nishihara loans. In order to receive Japanese financial help Duan had promised that China would "gladly accept" Japanese proposals for the management of railways in Shandong. In short Duan had by this agreement recognized Japan's special interest in Shandong.

The underlying principles of the Treaty then were, in short, to maintain and sustain Imperialist interests.

### **8.3.2 Chinese Outrage against the Treaty**

Chinese hopes were betrayed. Spheres of influence, foreign troops, foreign post offices, telegraphs, consular jurisdiction, extraterritoriality, leased territories, foreign concessions and fixed tariffs were all there to stay. It seemed as if it was in vain that China had sent her huge labour force to the European front. All seemed lost. The sense of despair is perhaps best captured in a student's lament at that time:

"We have been told that in the dispensation which is to be made after the war, nations like China would have an opportunity to develop their culture, industry, their civilization unhampered. We have been told that secret covenants and forced agreements would not be recognized. We looked for the dawn of this new era but no such sun rose for China. Even the cradle of the nation (Shandong, homeland of the Chinese philosopher, Confucius) was stolen."

In a massive outburst of patriotic and national outrage to what was seen as a betrayal of China, China witnessed the great demonstrations of May 4<sup>th</sup>, 1919 in Beijing. These demonstrations were directed against Japan, the Western imperial powers and the warlords of Beijing who had facilitated the strengthening of Japanese imperialism.

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## **8.4 THE MAY FOURTH MOVEMENT**

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While Yuan Shikai's outrageous ambitions, the emergence of warlords and political stratification marked the unpleasant consequences of the 1911 Revolution, during this period one also witnessed a great change that engulfed China in the realm of culture, philosophy, education and politics. Known as the May Fourth Movement, or the New Culture Movement, it has been described in many different ways, as China's "Cultural Revolution", "Literary Revolution" "China's Renaissance", "Enlightenment", "Resurgence" and so forth. This was not a uniform or well-organized movement but a combination of many activities. There were divergent ideas at work but all appeared to be parts of a consolidated phenomenon. In fact, most historians accept that the roots of the Chinese Revolution that brought the Chinese Communist Party to power in 1949 lie in the May Fourth Movement.

We must distinguish between the May Fourth Incident of 1919 and what is termed as the May Fourth Movement. The Movement which began around 1915, was retrospectively named so after the incident in 1919.

#### **8.4.1 The May 4<sup>th</sup> Incident**

The May Fourth Incident was a massive demonstration organized by students of Beijing University and a few other institutes of higher education at Tiananmen – (Gate of Heavenly Peace) square on that date in 1919. They protested against the prospective Treaty of Versailles which was being negotiated in Paris and was signed on June 28, 1919 to conclude World War I.

Reports were reaching China that Japan had demanded the automatic transfer of extraterritorial rights over Shandong which Germany had taken possession of under the unequal treaties system. These reports also indicated the willingness of other imperialist powers like Britain and France to acquiesce to the Japanese demand. Once again, nationalist sentiments in China were hurt. Whereas the Warlord regime in Beijing was prepared to sign the treaty over Shandong, anti-imperialist public sentiments were openly expressed and students took the most active part in the movement. Before we come to the detailed description of the May Fourth Incident where student political activism reached a zenith, it is important to keep in mind the backdrop against which such an unprecedented massive student movement, for nationalism and against imperialism, could emerge.

A well-known fact was that the Warlord government in Beijing had pro-Japanese elements. This was a reason for alarm in view of the Japanese Twenty-one Demands in 1915. Various groups protested against the secret diplomacy that was going on between the powers at the Paris Peace Conference. In 1918, a petition signed by students and merchants was handed over to the government expressing grave concern on the issue of transferring Germany's erstwhile hold over Shandong to Japan. When news came to China that China's proposals at the Paris Conference had been rejected, it aroused strong anti-imperialist sentiments. The Chinese became suspicious of all powers.

In a few days time several associations sprang up. Between May 1 to 3, 1919, students at Beijing University held meetings on the campus which were emotionally charged. They felt that they had to act or else China's subjugation would never end. On the afternoon of May 4<sup>th</sup>, a massive demonstration of unprecedented scale was held at Tiananmen square. Tens of thousands of students representing Beijing University and thirteen other colleges paraded on the streets for several hours. This demonstration was by and large, peaceful. One group of militant students, however, attacked some civilian and military officials who were believed to have pro-Japanese sentiments. As a response to this public outcry and popular appeal, the Chinese delegation walked out of the negotiations at Paris and then resigned. This was, however, not until June 28.

#### **8.4.2 The Emergence of New Political Organizations**

Between May Fourth to June 28, 1919, mass meetings and discussions in big numbers took place. Students were rallying and organizing the new intellectuals and trying to form coalitions with other groups. Demonstrations on streets continued for, another month. The government wanted to close down the Beijing University and dismiss Cai Yuanpei for instigating students. It had miscalculated the public support for the student demonstrations which spread to other cities. A Beijing Students Union was established and later a general strike with full working class participation was organized in big cities. Students formed alliances

with merchants, industrialists and workers. Agitations, strikes and demonstrations took place leading to mass arrests and crackdown by the government. The refusal of the Chinese delegation to be a part to the Treaty of Versailles was the first success of the mass protests.

In the following period we see closer contacts between various social groups and emergence of the new intellectual, social and political organizations. The May Fourth Movement hence was a combined expression of nationalist and class interests. After the 1919 events too, the cultural transformation of the nation continued with greater vigour and intensity. The period until the early 1930s is called the May Fourth era in Chinese history as until then new ideas, views and beliefs were being constantly expressed and tested.

### **8.4.3 The Emergence of the Communist Party of China**

The victory of socialism in the Soviet Union along with the overthrowing of the despotic Tsarist regime inspired many young intellectuals in China. Debates and discussions were immediately carried out to reach a conclusion whether socialism was a solution to China's problems. Around that time the English philosopher Bertrand Russell was on a lecture tour of China. He advocated a liberal political system for the country as he thought that Bolshevism was irrelevant for the Chinese. This sparked off further debates. Marxian writings which had hardly been available to the Chinese earlier were gaining popularity. Translations of a Western writings of all political hues also started becoming available. Amongst the leading intellectuals Li Dazhao and Chen Duxiu gradually moved towards Marxism, whereas Hu Shi and others upheld liberalism. The Marxian group eventually went on to form the Chinese Communist Party in 1921. It is, therefore, correct to say that communism in China was directly the result of the May Fourth Movement.

#### **Check Your Progress 2**

- 1) Write a brief note on the Twenty One Demands.

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- 2) Discuss the May Fourth Incident in about 10 lines.

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## **8.5 EMERGENCE OF THE GUOMINDANG**

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Right from its birth, the history of the Guomindang has been an interplay of the personalities of its leaders, first Sun Yatsen and Huang Xing and then Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kaishek). The first two started their careers as leaders of secret societies which merged to become the Tongmenghui in 1905. Sun Yatsen became the unquestioned leader of the organization from then till his death in 1925. As the anti-Manchu movement led by the Tongmenghui spread people of many different political persuasions joined it including many former officials and traditional scholars who realised that it was necessary to think seriously about how to reform China and that the Manchus were incapable of bringing about

change. This made it difficult for the Tongmenhui to have a common policy for progress and development. The organization was adversely affected when Sun Yatsen gave up the presidency in favour of Yuan Shikai and ceasing to be politically active for a while. Huang Xing too was inactive: he disbanded his army hoping that other military leaders would do the same. Unfortunately, for China this exemplary conduct was not emulated.

### 8.5.1 Song Jiaoren and Parliamentary Democracy

Song Jiaoren, whose political ideas were different from Sun and Huang, was determined to introduce a cabinet form of government in China and he saw the role of the GMD as crucial role in bringing this about. Song was not a self-seeking person but was enthusiastic, idealistic and brilliant. He believed in parliamentary democracy, cabinet government and a party system. His hope was that through such a system China would achieve progress and stability. He thought that the best way to get military men out of politics was by establishing a parliamentary democracy. To enable the party to become an effective tool in the constitutional system Sun, in August 1912, reoriented the organization. It was organized with the Tongmenghui at its core and other newly risen minor parties were amalgamated. The elections of 1912-13 were a success for the GMD, as a party but also personally for Song Jiaoren. He was all set to form a government. Yuan Shikai fearing Song's success had him assassinated before the Parliament was convened.

GMD leaders realized that Song's murder and the Reorganization loan would be used to strengthen Yuan's power. Their political future seemed bleak and it was felt that the Revolution of 1911 was not finished as long as Yuan stayed in power. It was in this situation that the "second revolution" of 1913 took place. But by now the GMD had isolated itself from the broad mass of the people. Yuan Shikai was backed by the imperialists. In November that year Yuan dissolved and outlawed the GMD. All its dedicated members went underground.

### 8.5.2 The Three Principles of Sun Yatsen

As an underground organization it renamed itself the Chinese Revolutionary Party (Guomindang). The political philosophy of Sun Yatsen, the leader of the organization was the ideology of the party. Sun emphasized the three people's principles and three stages of government.

The Three People's Principles included:

- People's nationalism
- People's democracy
- People's livelihood.

His concept of government by stages implied that China should progress from one form of government to another higher form in stages:

- the first stage would be a military government,
- in the second stage China would be under the political tutelage of the GMD, and finally it would have a constitutional government.

These views, first expressed by Sun in 1905, became the official ideology of the Chinese Revolutionary Party.

From the members of this party, Sun required an oath of loyalty with their fingerprints. The members were divided into three categories:

- i) the founding members,
- ii) active members
- iii) ordinary members.

Huang Xing, Sun's closest comrade apparently objected to this kind of stratification of members and their fingerprinting. The differences increased and they parted company. In his place Chen Qimei, a military governor with revolutionary credentials, was appointed Sun's chief lieutenant. However, this party could not become a mass-based organization as many people saw it as no different from a secret society.

Some intellectuals, who had earlier thrown in their lot with Sun now refused to join this party. Instead they formed the European Affairs Research Society. This was supposedly a discussion group but it actually acted like a political party.

The Chinese Revolutionary Party had very few accomplishments to their credit. Except for one or two unsuccessful uprisings, the only other significant role it played was in the campaign against Yuan Shikai. By and large, this party failed to capture the leadership of the masses and was in no position to lead a mass movement against the emerging military elite.

### 8.5.3 Yuan Shikai's Death and Political Divisions

After Yuan Shikai's death, factions within the Guomintang divided into various groups and factions. In 1916-17, the former GMD members were grouped from right to left as follows: Political Study Society, Good Friends Society, Political Club and Friends of the People Society. The Political Study Society wanted to bargain with the Northern militarists whereas the Friends of the People, most of whom were followers of Sun and members of the Revolutionary Party, were fiercely opposed to DuanQirui. During these years the Southern government in Canton insisted on restoration of the old constitution and old Parliament. The Political Study Group while remaining allied to the Southern militarists also had links with the Northern militarists. This caused Sun Yatsen endless difficulties.

In late 1917 after FengGuozhang assumed the post of President in Beijing, the GMD groups of the Parliament began a special session in Canton and elected Sun as Generalissimo. The Political Study Group and Good Friends groups who were keen to have peace with the Beijing government abolished the generalissimo-ship and made him a position that did not have much power. Sun resigned in August, 1919. This experience of Sun Yatsen made him develop a contempt not only for some of his former followers but also towards party politics and the parliamentary system. He began to think differently. He was, on the one hand, determined to establish a firm revolutionary base in Canton which led him to enter into alliance with other military groups and on the other hand he began contemplating the idea of a rejuvenated GMD, an organization to meet the new challenges of a different era. He began consultations with emissaries of the new Soviet Government. The end result of this change in his thinking brought about the reorganization.

### Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Discuss the role of Guomintang in China's politics in 100 words.

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- 2) List the reasons for Sun Yatsen's disillusionment with parliamentary politics in about five lines.

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## 8.6 LET US SUM UP

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To sum up, the period between 1911 to 1919 saw far reaching changes in Chinese society. The end of the Qing imperial dynasty in 1911 did not immediately result in a better political system. Militarism, authoritarianism, factionalism and power struggles dominated the political scene on the one hand, and on the other, imperial powers exploited the internal turmoil to further their interests. Japan in particular tried to gain as much control as the Western powers exercised in China. The political turmoil galvanized all sections of society to think about how to make China a modern society leading to new social and intellectual movements and an outpouring of creative activities in all spheres of society.

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## 8.7 KEY WORDS

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**Mandarin** : High ranking officials

**Militarists** : Word is used for warlords

**Warlords** : Regional military men with private armies.

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## 8.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

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### Check your Progress 1

- 1) See Section 8.2

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See Section 8.3
- 2) See Section 8.4

### Check Your Progress 3

- 1) See Section 8.5
- 2) See Section 8.5.