

# REPUBLICANS



## SPANISH CIVIL WAR BACKGROUND GUIDE

MVLAMUN 2016

## **A Brief Side Note**

The characters in this simulation have been chosen largely based on the events following the September 4th government created by Francisco Largo Caballero. This crisis falls under Prime Minister Giral, but because his ministers are largely unknown and served for a limited period with restricted powers, we have opted to use the more powerful positions of the government of September 4th but under Giral. When researching, it will become apparent some of your characters did not play a direct role in the crises of July, but from your research you'll be able to get a general sense of their character. It'll let you make your own decisions as your character had they been in that situation.

### **I. Significance of the Civil War**

The Spanish Civil War, from an outside perspective, was a reaction to a steady buildup of divisive forces and groups in post-World War I Spain. This clash of ideals is most easily seen by the military coup d'etat of 1936 that pushed the elected Republican government out of power and brought in the Nationalist-lead military regime under the right-winged Francisco Franco. But while this civil war would be overshadowed by the devastation faced just a years later during World War II, the Spanish Civil War would become an early preview between the clash of Soviet Russian communism and German Fascism.

This Republican council composed of political leaders, military commanders, and prominent social figures will seek to quell and defeat the Nationalist uprising. And while this committee will deal with many physical battles and focus on occupying strategic positions, this war is not just about controlling land. As Miguel de Unamuno wrote in dissent, "You [The Nationalists] may conquer, but you will never convince." This committee will be engage in more than what is on the surface of a war. We will be dealing with civilian groups and public opinions as we do our best to keep our country intact. It is of utmost importance that we keep the support of the people behind our Republican government, failure to do so will certainly result in an unsuccessful campaign to hold the country together.

## **Origins**

After the conclusion of World War I, Spain's economy saw a steady growth as trade across Europe picked itself up again. The Spanish society, however, remained divided between workers involved in unions, most notably the Confederación Nacional de Trabajo (CNT), and the monarchist government which pushed forth a traditional and corrupted agenda. Slowly, economic prosperity and the national unionization of workers during the booming 1920s planted the seeds for social and political change that would follow for the next 20 years.

Starting in the early 1920's, the corrupt King Alfonso XIII faced increasing pressure from protests pushing for constitutional reform. In 1923, a "soft" coup was allowed, which saw the rise of General Miguel Primo de Rivera. The military dictatorship did not seek the constitutional solution that people wished for but instead attempted overall reforms in infrastructure and agriculture, most of which was rejected by the military and the Spanish elite.

In 1930, 7 years after the coup, King Alfonso XIII returned to power following Primo de Rivera's resignation. Upon the throne, Alfonso found a disenfranchised public and a discontent populace. In 1931, Spain officially held national elections which led to the fundamental eradication of the Spanish monarchy. The elections were dominated by the Republicans, bringing leftist Republican leader Manuel Anzaña to power.

The new Spanish Republican Government sought to make sweeping reforms to stimulate economic and cultural modernization. This reform was pushed for by both the progressive Republicans, contributed with reform ideas but lacked the electoral muscle, and the Spanish socialists who remained intact as the largest group after the shift to republican government.

The reforms brought forth by the Republic alienated organizations loyal to the monarchy and damaged the power and influence of the Catholic Church in government. Under the new government, the church lost its monopoly on things such as education and came under great scrutiny of both urban and rural populations. In the urban centers in the northeast, the Church was seen as an institution that stalled political progress and manipulated lifestyle and beliefs. In the South of Spain, landless peasants were fed up with the clergy. The peasants would hear the clergy preach a pious life in poverty but see them live lavish lifestyles.

The new authority also cut down the size of the Spanish Army and placed the army under civilian control cutting out to fund social welfare programs. The army in particular, did not take

this lightly. Many officers were forced into early retirement as the overall authority of the army was weakened.

The regions of Catalonia and Basque, the industrial regions of Spain, protested these socialist reforms and demanded for independence from this strong central government. Many local leaders supported the idea of Anarchism, despite initially supporting the Republican cause. While the government loosened its grip on the regions and granted them a degree of autonomy, this was not nearly enough to please the Catalans and Basques.

In the rural areas where peasants farmed land owned by nobles in a feudal-type system, the republic gained a solid foothold. Many peasants felt a surge of hope in the new government, but soon enough the government was unable to overcome the financial barriers in trying to acquire rural property to help the peasants maintain a decent standard of living.

Ultimately, the economy failed to improve under the Republican government. Industry fell by nearly 50% and the working class was beginning to lose hope in their newly elected regime. The socialist government had promised them reformation in the class system, but ended up forcing the majority of the workers in agriculture (which made up 70% of Spain's workforce at the time) to work for a small handful of landowners.

Finally with reform totally stalled, promises gone, and an angered populace, Prime Minister Manuel Anzaña fell from power following extremist demands from both the left and right during the 1933 elections. These elections saw a conservative takeover of the parliament, fueled by ex-military leaders, the Catholic Church, and the Spanish elite.

In response to the elections, the Spanish youth sparked uprisings in leftist regions of the country. In response to these leftist revolts, the now conservative government imprisoned many protesters, shut down leftist newspapers, overthrew local councils, and trade unions lost governmental support.

Just a year later in 1934, multiple leftist political groups formed a new coalition in parliament that would subsequently win the parliamentary elections in February of 1936 on a platform remarkably similar to that of the '31-'33 socialists.

## **Civil War**

On July 17, 1936, the Spanish Army in Morocco, first in the city of Melilla, rose in rebellion against the Republican government. The following day, the long planned coup started on the Spanish mainland led by General Sanjurjo. The military leaders, now united under the Nationalist coalition, would attempt overthrow of the Republican government.

Having been caught off guard, the Republic was slow to respond to the Nationalist threat. This created a power vacuum in conservative parts of Spain where nationalist civilians took control of their respective towns and welcomed overall rebellion.

Leftist activities rose with loyal police authorities to maintain order in most or urban industrial Spain. In the south, where landless peasants had supported government reform, the coup was nationalist coup was an utter failure unsuccessful.

While the Nationalists initially has some success, they failed to take key parts of Spain such as the capital (Madrid), the agrarian south, and the industrial regions (Barcelona and Bilbao) with the exception of Seville. As a result, the republic found itself with a sizable amount of industrial centers but a fractured military and police force that needed desperate reorganization before it could be effective.

The Republic, despite being heavily fractured and relatively paralyzed, found aid through a variety of feign volunteer brigades as well as soldiers and equipment from the Soviet Union. Supporters of the republic turned toward local governments and parties. Membership in political organizations such as the CNT, UGT, POUM and PCE all rose. These organizations were central in maintaining local order, running cities, and raising fighting forces in the early stages of the revolution. These regional temporary governments allowed Barcelona and other anarchist regions to thrive as a strong and independent entities.

### **The Nationalists**

While the Nationalists controlled relatively insignificant geographic locations, in military terms, the Nationalists had the upper hand. The vast majority of army officers defected to the Nationalist cause, and those that had declared support for the Republic were assassinated.

General Franco would quickly take charge of the Nationalist side and the Catholic Church stood out as the unifying factor of the rebellion.

## **Questions to Consider**

1. Will ideologies such as communism, lead to the alienation of others in the coalition? To what extent can a party seek dominance without sidelining others vital to the Republican cause?
2. How can you utilize the different regions and classes to your advantage? Should you try to broaden your appeal for wider support or keep it narrow and divided to take advantage of focused goals. In other words, should the coalition adopt a single and broad platform or focus the energies of different interest groups?
3. How can you appeal to international actors for aid against the Nationalist forces? How can you guarantee that supplies, provisions, and manpower will suffice to fight the fascists, who benefit from Italian and German sympathy?
4. How can you acquire international support without being overruled by the ambitions of that international actor? How will other international actors respond to such involvement?
5. How will you fight the war? What kind of image of yourself will you portray to the rest of the world? Does your image matter?