

The Spanish Civil War and its Influence on Twentieth Century Europe

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I. Introduction

The Spanish Civil War was the bloodiest civil conflict in 20th century Europe and was viewed by many as an ideological struggle between communism and fascism. The Spanish Civil War was a result of the 1936 Military Insurrection and the subsequent failure of the Republic to suppress it. An influx of foreign aid—both military and economic—ensured a bloody, protracted conflict. However, due to better leadership and organization, the Nationalists ended up defeating the Republic. Women played an essential, oftentimes revolutionary role in the conflict, with women on the side of the Republic offered greater social mobility for their role in the war effort. Women were also key to the Nationalist war effort, but were often forced to occupy more traditional, domestic roles. The Spanish Civil War attracted vast amounts of critical reception abroad, in large part because of mass executions carried out by both sides. Such events elicited harsh artistic reception and fathered works like Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*, Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, and Picasso's *Guernica*. International intervention played a key role in extending the conflict and had implications which would impact the Second World War. These included the establishment of the Rome-Berlin axis and the testing of new technologies and strategies in the Spanish theatre.

It must be noted that the Spanish Civil War must be understood through the extreme hatred and violence it evoked. It was not a contest of a single issue, but a contest of control with the entirety of Spanish society at stake. This paved the way for savage repressions and brutality throughout the conflict. Combatants deployed arms not only against opposing forces, but against civilians—a sad reality only worsened by the influx of modern military equipment.

II. Overview of the Conflict

The Spanish Civil War is best categorized as a revolutionary civil war. According to the author of *The Spanish Civil War*, Stanley G. Payne, “A revolutionary civil war is not an ordinary political contest, but a conflict of ultimates about a society, religion, and culture.”¹ This was the case during the Spanish Civil War which spanned from 1936-1939. The Spanish Conflict, fought between nationalist insurgents and the Second Republic’s People’s Army, was “a low intensity conflict punctuated by a number of high intensity battles.”² Meaning, offensives were typically unimaginative and fairly limited in scope. Payne provides further description of the revolutionary nature of the Civil War, saying, “These were conflicts of the transition to ‘classical modernity’, a process of massive cultural and social transformation that in some countries generated unprecedented tensions and hatreds.”³ In Spain, these hatreds formed between the political left (Socialists, Communists, and Anarchists) and the moderate right (Catholics, Monarchists, and Fascists) and would ultimately result in the most broadly mobilized European Civil War of the twentieth century.⁴

The roots of the Spanish Civil war can be traced back to the early nineteenth century. As Spain’s political system advanced under the Constitution of 1812, its economy and society lagged behind, citing a traditional culture and weak education system incapable of sustaining advanced political idealism. After a conflict prone eighteenth century, the Constitutional Monarchy restored peace in 1875. This government paired order and progress with basic civil rights, accelerating economic growth and educational development. As a result, Spain was Europe’s leading neutral country during the first World War, sending both economic and

¹ Payne, “Spanish Civil War,” 103.

² Ibid, 183.

³ Ibid, 103.

⁴ Ibid 183.

humanitarian aid to the belligerents. However, Spain's success during the period led to a revolution of rising expectations. According to the Tocquevillian Theory of Revolution, revolution is more likely to occur after an improvement in living conditions, as opposed to a deterioration.⁵ Stymied by the worldwide effects of the great depression, Spain fell into a phenomenon known as the development trap. There had been sufficient growth to stimulate a demand for rapid improvement, but the means to achieve such growth would not be available until a later phase of modernization.⁶ The situation fomented radicalism within Spain, but the full impact of this phenomenon would not be realized until the outbreak of the Civil War.

In 1931 Spain agreed on a liberal, democratic, parliamentary Republic comprised of three main parties: left Republicans, Socialists, and centrist Radicals. The left Republicans saw the Republic as a type of revolution: "To them [left Republicans], 'the Republic' meant less a political system than a special cultural and institutional reform program, under which it was indispensable to exclude permanently Catholics and conservatives... from government."⁷ Briefly summarized, the Spanish Second Republic was, "a not very democratic democracy,"⁸ according to leading Spanish historian Javier Tusell. They frequently restricted civil rights and imposed sweeping censorship laws across Spain. Upon losing the 1933 election to the CEDA (Catholic Party), the left Republicans swiftly rejected the election outcome. Only a year later, Spanish Socialists, who had become radicalized, carried out the largest armed insurrection of the interwar period, murdering clergy and carrying out widespread looting and arson against Catholic communities. This led to a brief period of even-handed rule by moderates from 1934-1935. Having reorganized after their failed revolution, however, the Socialist party joined forces with

⁵ Ibid, 12.

⁶ Ibid, 13.

⁷ Ibid, 13.

⁸ Ibid, 14.

the left Republicans to form the Popular Front: a coalition of leftist parties unified under the mission of keeping the right excluded from government.

The Popular Front's total dismissal of the right would ultimately be its undoing. The 1936 elections, though it may be unfair to call them that, were, "a referendum of extremes in an unconsolidated new system."⁹ The Popular Front frequently used violence and intimidation to secure sixty percent of the popular vote. Because of this, they were completely unwilling to compromise with any centrist or rightist parties. Believing the Catholic Church a bastion of traditionalism and Spanish monarchical rule, the Republic set to burning Catholic schools and churches across Spain. In fact, Popular Front leaders allied themselves with revolutionaries so as to further isolate the center and right. After a series of back-and-forth political assassinations, leftist revolutionaries assassinated the leader of the Monarchist political party, Calvin Sotelo. The Republic did nothing in response, hardly acknowledging or investigating the crime.

The murder of Calvo Sotelo and a complete lack of response by the Popular Front initiated the Military Insurrection of 1936. In reality, the Spanish military was just as divided as Spain and revolution remained unpopular among the majority of military leadership. However, as it became clear Sotelo's kidnapping and murder was condoned by the Spanish government, General Emilio Mola put into action a plan for revolt. The insurrection was to begin in the Spanish Protectorate of Morocco on July 17-18 and spread to garrisons across the Iberian Peninsula over the next forty-eight hours. Though Popular Front leaders now sought compromise, it was too late; civil war had broken out in Spain. In addition to Mola, the insurrection was led by the most famous Spanish General of the time, Francisco Franco. As the most important rebel general, and only general with an international profile, Franco was chosen

⁹ Ibid, 29.

as the leader of the insurgent forces. By the end of July 1936, the insurgents, now branded Nationalists, controlled large parts of Northern Spain, key cities in Andalucía, and the Moroccan Protectorate. However, the bulk of the elite nationalist forces were in Morocco, with the Republican Navy blockading the Strait of Gibraltar. To circumvent this, Franco sought assistance from abroad, receiving aircraft from both Rome and Berlin by late July. Using these planes, Franco conducted the first military airlift in history, moving over 15,000 troops and accompanying supplies to the Spanish mainland. This move supported Mola's forces in the Northern Nationalist Zone and allowed Franco to build up his forces around the southern city of Sevilla.¹⁰

With the Nationalist forces now on the Iberian Peninsula, Franco began a slow, calculated drive to Madrid. He took a route up the Western edge of the country, using the border with nationalist Portugal to prevent being outflanked. History has often criticized Franco's slow and unimaginative campaigns. However, Franco faced the complex situation of securing foreign aid, developing logistical supply lines from scratch, and providing aid to other nationalist forces simultaneously. As such, Payne states, "he dispersed his forces at the expense of strategic imagination and concentration of strength, his two principal limitations as commander."¹¹ Be that as it may, Nationalist forces were still able to reach the outskirts of Madrid by early November. As Nationalist forces reached the outskirts of Madrid, an influx of aid from the Soviet Union bolstered the People's Army. Namely, the far superior and heavily armed T-26 tank. Using this aid, which also included aircraft, they were able to force a stalemate on the central front, ensuring a bloody and protracted conflict.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid, 84.

As an influx of foreign military intervention ensured an elongated conflict, Franco turned his attention to the strategically vital Northern Republican Zone. These campaigns saw the first use of WWII style combined arms, with Franco coordinating artillery barrages, infantry, armor, and close air support on the offensive.¹² Under Franco, Nationalist units were better trained, more cohesive, better armed, and ultimately more combat effective than their Republican counterparts. Even more advanced Soviet arms did little in the disorganized, untrained hands of the People's Army. As Franco pushed northward with the bulk of his elite units, disorganization among the Republican ranks made for easy conquest. Looking to minimize territorial losses through new offensives, the Republicans counterattacked often. However, due to uncertainty and lack of initiative within the Republican command structure, Nationalists were able to hold defensive positions and stall offensives. With battlefield victories now few and far between, The Republican government created the Army of the Ebro to try and garner support from the democracies. While initially a success, Franco's counterattack left The Army of the Ebro combat ineffective due to lack of supplies and troops.¹³ With the defeat at Ebro, Franco pushed into Catalonia and drove the Republican government into exile, effectively ending the military conflict and bringing fascist rule to Spain.

¹² Ibid, 190.

¹³ Ibid, 201-202.

III. The Role of Women

The rise of the Second Spanish Republic offered new opportunities and upward social mobility for women. According to the historian Carmen Ayerra, “the Republic prompted women to have an autonomous presence in the public sphere... It pushed them to seek and find paid employment in order to make a living on their own, and it also tried to instill equality in early education.”¹⁴ In addition to these, the Republic granted women the right to vote in Spain for the first time in the December of 1931. These measures were considered progressive at the time, affording women newfound opportunities in the Republic’s economy and political sphere. As the war broke out the Republic increased rights for women even further:

“The Government’s need for women’s help, as well as their energy and disposition, contributed to the adoption of very progressive measures unconceivable just a few years earlier: legalization of free unions, including partisans’ widows, aviation instruction, access to professional training, incorporation of women into the war industry, etc. Moreover, abortion was decriminalized in 1937 by the Ministry of Health”¹⁵

Although catalyzed by the necessity of war, these rights were foundational to the Republic.

While it is unfair to speculate, there was every indication these newfound rights would have remained in place upon the conclusion of the war. Because of the Republic’s need for personnel and the subsequent formation of the People’s Army, many women were called upon to bare arms.

Many women fighting on the side of the Republic joined the fight against Franco: “Upon the outbreak of the war, many women joined the fight in the trenches as partisans.”¹⁶ As was seen in the Russian Revolution earlier in the twentieth century, women were relied upon to conduct combat operations and engage enemy combatants. While women did partake in the war

¹⁴ Ayerra, “The Open Window,” 247.

¹⁵ Ibid, 250-251.

¹⁶ Ibid, 250.

effort on the Nationalist side, female combatants were not utilized to the same extent. This is due to a combination of their professional army (which excluded women) and their subscription to more traditional gender roles. Conversely, the freedoms introduced by the Republic were designed to integrate women into the war effort for various purposes. As such, women were willing to fight for the Republic because of their newfound freedoms. Franco and the nationalists, on the other hand, viewed women's role in society as secondary to that of their male counterparts.

Women on the Nationalist side, while they still took part in the war effort, were generally forced into more supportive or domestic roles. Auxilio Azul was the earliest and most effective fifth column resistance network in Madrid. Formed by middle class Catholic women after the military coup, Auxilio Azul was comprised of various service divisions designed to support the nationalist war effort. These included the procurement, manufacturing, and sale of clothing for the nationalists. Additionally, they provided medical care, judicial services, and spiritual aid for nationalist soldiers. That being said, Auxilio Azul is best remembered for providing safe houses and escape routes for nationalist insurgents operating within Madrid.¹⁷ As historian BLANK Flynn states, "They [women] played the most important resistance roles through their provision of urgent and life-saving welfare-aid for fugitive anti-Republicans."¹⁸ During the early months of the war, as nationalists were being executed in Republican zones, the women of Auxilio Azul were critical in finding asylum for anti-Republicans. Furthermore, in defiance of traditional gender roles, some women of the nationalist side served in mixed-gender clandestine groups.

During the Spanish Civil War, clandestine activity was prevalent in both Republican and Nationalist zones. In Republican zones, mixed-gender clandestine groups were often composed

¹⁷ Flynn, "Falangist and National Catholic Women," 29.

¹⁸ Ibid, 16.

of 10%-15% women. Flynn states, “The women who joined the mixed-gender groups were committed political dissidents who knowingly engaged in crimes of treason, rebellion and espionage.”¹⁹ Rather than assume a domestic role, these women were committed to actively fighting against the Republic. That being said, the main responsibility of women in these groups was recruiting. While still a more supportive role, it was necessary to organize clandestine operations within the Republican zones. Flynn goes on to say, “It demonstrates how fifth-column women were more able to mobilize a clandestine resistance than their male counterparts who were physically and symbolically excluded from the public space at this time.”²⁰ Because Republicans shunned the center and right, the women of these movements were responsible for representing their male counterparts in the public sphere. Oftentimes, this was a newfound independence for women of the nationalist movement. It must be noted that while these women represented the cause during the conflict, upon Franco’s victory, only female combatants, of which there were very few, were permitted to seek employment or partake in the public sphere.²¹

Although the Spanish Second Republic was by no means perfect, the nationalist victory saw women once again excluded from the public sphere. The “long forty years,” as Franco’s dictatorship is oft referred to, saw the repeal of many of the Republic’s progressive reforms.²² Of the few that remained, women’s suffrage was most notable, but because of the nature of Franco’s dictatorship, national elections were never held. As such, Franco’s regime caused a drastic backslide for women’s rights in Spain. Of this, Ayerra states, “women were doubly repressed during those long forty years: on the one side, for their commitment with the Republic; on the other, for challenging the role to which they had been traditionally confined by the conservative

¹⁹ Ibid, 104.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ López, “Blue Angels,” 711.

²² Ayerra, “The Open Window,” 253.

forces.”²³ Because of their participation in the Republic’s public sphere, Franco ensured examples were made of these women. The savage repressions mentioned by Ayerra took the form of imprisonment, torture, and murder. Known as the “White Terror,” in the immediate postwar period Franco was responsible for killing supporters and sympathizers of the Republic, women included.²⁴

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Beevor, “Battle for Spain,” 94.

IV. Reception Abroad

Reception of the Spanish Civil War abroad is best categorized as a “political mirror.”²⁵ Meaning, people tended to view the conflict through the lens of whatever political ideology they feared most. For example, some saw the conflict as necessary to stopping the spread of fascism, while others feared that allowing the Republic legitimacy would open the floodgates for Marxism in Western Europe. As such, all three major democracies (France, Great Britain, and the United States) struggled to provide consistent aid to any one side. At the outset, France’s popular front government was able to supply the Republic with some military aid, but this soon ceased following Great Britain’s lead. Furthermore, the nonintervention pact, signed by the Soviet Union, Germany, France, Italy, and Britain, curtailed aid from the major democracies, while the other three nations blatantly ignored it. This ultimately hurt the Republic, who sought aid from all three of the major democracies by way of extensive propaganda campaigns. For these campaigns they often relied upon the brutality of the “White Terror,” killings carried out by the nationalists in newly liberated Republican zones.

The violent nature of the revolutionary Civil War led to extensive terror killings carried out by both sides. The “Red Terror,” carried out by communists and anarchists on the left, was responsible for 40,000 deaths primarily at the outset of the conflict.²⁶ Subsequently and in response, Franco and the nationalists carried out the “White Terror,” responsible for 200,000 deaths during and immediately following the conflict.²⁷ “Spain is the second country—only after Cambodia—in terms of disappeared persons. Around 13,000 unidentified people are still in mass graves by and under the roads across the country,”²⁸ a haunting reminder of the violence and

²⁵ Payne, “The Spanish Civil War,” 143.

²⁶ Beevor, “Battle for Spain,” 84.

²⁷ Ibid, 94.

²⁸ Ayerra, “The Open Window,” 253.

bloodshed caused by both the Red and White Terror. Recall that the process of a revolutionary civil war creates “unprecedented tensions and hatreds,”²⁹ resulting in the widespread violence so characteristic of the Spanish conflict.

The most famous piece of literature to emerge from the conflict was Ernest Hemingway’s 1940 novel, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. During the Spanish Civil War, Hemingway worked as a field reporter for the North American Newspaper Alliance in Spain. While reporting there, he was vehemently opposed to Franco’s fascism and wrote pieces supporting the Republic’s cause.³⁰ Told from the point of view of an American guerilla fighter working for the Republic, the novel captures the violence, love, hatred, and heartbreak of the conflict. Through a variety of scenes and settings, Hemingway introduces us to Soviet military advisors, nationalist Catholic priests, and female partisans fighting for the Republic. One chapter in particular even alludes to a massacre in the Andalusian village of Ronda, citing the cruelty and violence of the Republic’s Red Terror. Moreover, the novel centers around the La Granja offensive, a failed attempt by the People’s Army to counterattack fascist positions in the Extremadura, Spain, northwest of Madrid.³¹ Written after the conclusion of the conflict, Hemingway’s inclusion of the Red Terror and the People’s Army’s ineptitude shows greater perspective having learned from the conflict. Rather than try and sway the reader towards any one position, he chooses to capture the damage and devastation warfare has on individuals. As such, Hemingway’s treatment of the conflict in hindsight indicts the repressions and killings carried out by both sides.

In his work *Homage to Catalonia*, author George Orwell shares his first-hand experiences serving in the international brigades. Organized by the Comintern (short for the

²⁹ Payne, “The Spanish Civil War,” 103.

³⁰ Ibid, 167.

³¹ Ibid, 194.

Communist International Party, responsible for supporting and exporting Soviet Communism abroad), the international brigades were comprised of men from around the world who had flocked to Spain to join the fight against fascism. Made up of 32,000-35,000 men from 52 countries, they were led by thirty Red Army Officers.³² In general, these brigades were poorly organized, and political clashes between leadership made matters worse. As such, the international brigades were typically used as shock troops and assigned the deadliest missions. Themes of disorganization and disillusion permeate Orwell's writing, who joined the Worker's Party of Marxist Unification (POUM) to fight against totalitarianism. Of his experience in the war, he writes, "The Spaniards are good at many things, but not at making war. All foreigners are alike appalled by their inefficiency, above all their maddening unpunctuality. The one word that no foreigner can avoid learning is *mañana* (tomorrow)."³³ While he is critical of his time spent in the People's Army, Orwell devoted the rest of his life to writing against totalitarianism in all its forms (including Franco's regime). As such, like Hemingway, Orwell's time in Spain left him seriously disillusioned with the innerworkings of both communism and fascism.

Picasso's famous painting, *Guernica* (Appendix A), serves as a stark reminder of the violent nature of the Spanish conflict. In late April 1927, The Condor Legion, a precursor to the Luftwaffe, dropped thirty to thirty-five tons of bombs on the Basque town of Guernica.³⁴ Historian Peter Elstob notes, "The wanton destruction of this undefended town and the slaughter of so many innocent women and children aroused a great outcry throughout the world."³⁵ As such, the Republican sought to capitalize on this and garner support from the democracies: "Guernica then turned into a huge propaganda triumph for the Republicans, presented as a

³² Ibid, 87-88.

³³ Orwell, "Homage to Catalonia," 8.

³⁴ Elstob, "Condor Legion," 135.

³⁵ Ibid, 136.

calculated act of terrorism.”³⁶ The painting supported this narrative, intended as a protest against the horrors of modern warfare. Picasso, who had already been working on his famed painting in the winter of 1937, adopted the name because of the Republican propaganda campaign. Despite international outrage against Germany and the fascist side, it has been argued that the bombing of Guernica actually worked in Hitler’s favor. The destruction of Guernica created immense fear of the Luftwaffe, and some scholars even credit the bombing of Guernica as the reasoning behind the appeasement of Germany.³⁷

As was elucidated through *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, *Homage to Catalonia*, and *Guernica*, the Spanish Civil War sparked an international outcry against the horrors of modern war. In all these works, the brutality and violence of the conflict is thrust to the forefront. In *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, Robert Jordan, the protagonist, is fixated by the violence of the Spaniards, even saying,

“We do it coldly [referring to killing] but they do not, nor ever have. It is their extra sacrament. Their old one that they had before the new religion came from the far end of the Mediterranean, the one they have never abandoned but only suppressed and hidden to bring it out again in wars and inquisitions”³⁸

Despite his overgeneralization of the Spanish people, Hemingway is hyperaware of the interpersonal violence caused by this conflict. Moreover, Orwell focuses on how violence impacted his time in Spain, even “describing in detail”³⁹ the experiences of being hit by a bullet in the throat. Finally, the power of Picasso’s *Guernica* comes from the violent, disturbing imagery found within. On the far left of the painting, a mother can be seen wailing as she holds her dead child in her arms. On the opposite side, a person can be seen crying out as they are

³⁶ Payne, “The Spanish Civil War,” 212.

³⁷ Ibid, 243.

³⁸ Hemingway, “For Whom the Bell Tolls,” 88.

³⁹ Orwell, “Homage to Catalonia,” 136.

engulfed in flame. As such, reception of the Spanish Civil war globally is oft defined by the brutal, violent nature of the conflict and its immediate aftermath.

V. International Intervention and its Implications

Foreign intervention played a critical role in escalating the 1936 Coup into the most broadly mobilized European civil war of the twentieth century. Without an influx of foreign military aid, Spain lacked sufficient military technology to conduct offensives on the scale seen in the civil war. That being said, the foreign powers at play, namely Germany, Italy, and the Soviet Union, had a lot at stake in Spain. Thus, all three countries brazenly broke the non-intervention pact in hopes of swaying the outcome in Spain to their favor. Italy sought a fascist sphere of influence within the Mediterranean, as Italian dictator Benito Mussolini readily backed Franco. The Soviet Union, since its inception in 1922, had been trying to foment communist uprisings in other countries throughout the world by way of the Comintern (Communist International Party). The Popular Front government of the Spanish Republic had a sizeable number of Communist members, and thus Civil War was disagreeable for the Soviet Union, as it risked breaking up this leftist coalition.⁴⁰ However, when the July Insurrection took place, Stalin backed the Republic so as to lend support to international communism. Finally, Hitler and the Nazi's actually favored a Civil War in Spain, as they believed it distracted from their imperialist aggression in Eastern Europe.

The Spanish Civil War provided a rising Germany the opportunity to test its forces and distract from its geopolitical activity in Central Europe. German leadership saw the war as an avenue to stop the spread of international communism, a chief tenant of the Nazi Party. They also saw it as a means to secure Spain's raw materials, thus increasing the industrial capacity of the German war machine. Thus, while Germany did supply Franco with the best weaponry available at the time, it came at a hefty cost. The German terms for military aid were far less

⁴⁰ Radosh, "Spain Betrayed," 2.

favorable than their Italian allies, a fact which can be attributed to German long-term planning for World War II. While German aid was critical to Franco's success on the battlefield, it came at a steep price. Not limiting themselves purely to military aid, Germany used the Spanish Civil War as an opportunity to test its forces and equipment. Nazi military leader Herman Göring described Spain as an "opportunity to test under fire whether [war] material has been adequately developed."⁴¹ The most famous example of this testing came in the deployment of the Condor Legion to the Iberian Peninsula.

The most well-known case of German intervention was the deployment of the Condor Legion to Spain. Known as the precursor to the infamous Luftwaffe of the Second World War, the Condor Legion was composed of ninety planes (primarily Heinkel HE-51 bombers) with accompanying anti-aircraft guns, and an artillery component for airfield defense. Although strategic bombing was not seen on nearly the same scale as World War II, the Condor Legion learned many valuable lessons while fighting in Spain. These included loose formation fighter tactics, which made fighters more difficult to hit with anti-air fire. Sophisticated close air support operations, in which fighters were used to strike targets blocking the advance of soldiers on the ground. The integration and cooperation of air and ground commands, making sophisticated close air support a possibility. And finally, the importance of a mobile air force and the ability to make use of temporary landing fields, thus making the planes less susceptible to counterattack. Historian Peter Elstob credits these lessons with the fearsomeness of the Luftwaffe upon the outbreak of the second World War: "the new tactical use of air power which came out of the Condor Legion's experience in Spain was responsible for the swiftness of the German conquest of

⁴¹ Diehl, "Hitler's Destruction of Guernica."

Poland, Holland, Belgium, and France.”⁴² In addition to the Condor Legion, the most notable German aid came in the form of air power.

As Mola declared the July 1936 Insurrection in effect, Franco was in the Spanish Protectorate of Morocco with the bulk of the Elite Spanish forces. Reaching out to both Germany and Italy, Franco was able to secure planes from both countries, notably JU-52 Junker transport planes from Germany. Franco used these planes to conduct the first military airlift in history, providing much needed relief to Mola in the Northern Nationalist Zone. Elstob states, “In the next two weeks the Savoie’s and Junker’s carried 2,500 troops across the Straits as well as large quantities of artillery pieces, ammunition, and bombs.”⁴³ Moving this quantity of supplies by air was a logistical feat at the time and helped put Franco on even footing with the Republic at the war’s outset. Later in the war, utilizing Heinkel fighters and bombers, Franco’s forces would pioneer a number of new air tactics with their Condor Legion allies:

“The air forces evolved new methods of warfare... bombers were used tactically in the destruction of fortified positions, the breaking up of attack formations—particularly those supported by armor—while the fighters most effective role was to be found in close air support. The bombers were also used strategically to break civilian morale by heavy raids on towns and the destruction of factories”⁴⁴

These strategies are a direct precursor to the combined arms style of fighting seen in WWII.

Unfortunately, one lesson from the Spanish Civil War which went unlearned was the use of strategic bombing to break civilian morale. As was seen in the Basque town of Guernica, such actions only created resiliency for the opposing war effort. Thus, as the Luftwaffe raided London and the allies firebombed Dresden, they were ignorant to the failure of this strategy in the Spanish Civil War.

⁴² Elstob, “Condor Legion,” 159.

⁴³ Ibid, 58.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 142.

Among Franco's other allies were Italy, whose dictator, Benito Mussolini, sought to establish a fascist sphere of influence in the Mediterranean. As such, of all the foreign powers involved in the Spanish Civil War, Italy provided the most support relative to the size of its military. Additionally, Italy provided Franco with incredibly low interest loans, allowing Franco more financial freedom in the conflict. Among the most notable contributions from Italy's arsenal were its Fiat Ansaldo tanks, a lightweight precursor to Italy's WWII main battle tank. These tanks afforded Franco the advantage of armor, but combined arms strategy had yet to be fully developed, lessening the Ansaldo's impact on the battlefield. They also provided Franco with Caproni Cr-32 biplanes and Savoia-Marchetti 81 three motor bombers. Unfortunately for Italy, the success of the Caproni Cr-32's incorrectly convinced them of the biplane's viability in future conflicts. Thus, upon the outbreak of WWII, Italy had a largely outdated air force in comparison to the other belligerents. The Savoia-Marchetti 81's, on the other hand, provided Franco with, "One of the best performances of any bomber then in standard use."⁴⁵ Thus, Italy's contributions provided Franco with air superiority in the Spanish Civil War, but ultimately hamstrung Italian aviation through the Second World War. At sea, the Italian Navy sought to cripple the Republican economy by declaring covert submarine warfare against Republic shipping. With that in mind, Italy's submarine operations in the Mediterranean allowed them to refine their doctrine while testing the new *Archimedes* class sub. As such, Italy entered the Second World War with one of the largest submarine fleets in the world.

Italy also sent the *Corpo di Truppe Volontarie*—a group of volunteers from the Italian Army totaling 70,000 men in four divisions.⁴⁶ These forces came to Spain with sixty-two shiploads of accompanying materials. These included 130 assorted planes (in addition to the X

⁴⁵ Ibid, 56.

⁴⁶ Coverdale, "Italian Intervention," 144.

sold to Franco), 500 artillery pieces, 700 mortars, 12,000 machine guns, and 3,800 motor vehicles.⁴⁷ While in Spain, the Corpo di Truppe Volontarie were a key component of Franco's war effort, winning the Battle of Malaga for the nationalists and conducting offensives against Madrid. While it may seem like Italy expended many of its forces in Spain, perhaps their biggest failure was the inability to glean the proper lessons from the conflict, including combined arms strategy and the use of air to ground support. As such, Italy entered the second world war with a reliance on outdated technologies and strategies, putting them on the backfoot from the outset of the conflict.

Although the Spanish Civil War was seen as disagreeable in Moscow, the Republic would receive considerable military and economic aid from the Soviet Union. Stalin felt that civil war in Spain would ruin the best chance at a "new type" of communist republic led by the left. As historian Ronald Radosh states in his work *Spain Betrayed*, "the word from Moscow was that the party had at all costs to preserve the Popular Front."⁴⁸ Interestingly, Soviet doctrine had long preached civil war as the catalyst for revolution, but in the case of Spain they tried heavily to avoid it. Thus, when the 1936 insurrection occurred, Stalin sent the Republic military aid in direct defiance of the nonintervention pact. The Soviet plan to distribute aid to the Spanish Republic was codenamed Operation X. It included sending Tupolev Bombers, Polykarpov I-15 and I-16 Biplanes, BT-5 and T-26 tanks, various small arms, ammunition, and Red Army soldiers to man the equipment. At the time, this was the largest logistical undertaking in Soviet military history. They had transport sixty-four shiploads of wartime materials through the often mined and patrolled Mediterranean. The transfer of armaments and subsequent extraction of Spanish gold was considered the most successful Soviet undertaking of the Spanish Civil War.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Radosh, "Spain Betrayed," 2.

The quality of these armaments varied widely, though. While the T-26 crews were instrumental in defending Madrid, the small arms and artillery provided to the Republic were often in poor condition from prior usage. Furthermore, they were of varied origin, making providing spare parts and ammunition a logistical impossibility for the disorganized Republic.

With that in mind, Operation X is often cloaked in layers of controversy, as Radosh states, “Stalin in effect swindled the Republic out of several hundred million dollars in arms deals.”⁴⁹ He claims that Stalin did this through manipulated exchange rates, using the Republic as a means to fill the Soviet treasuries. For 600,000 tons of wartime material, the Republic transferred the Soviet Union 510 tons of gold stock that had been acquired during the height of Spanish imperialism in South America. This is a hefty price, especially since many of the small arms and artillery provided were old or defunct. That being said, the Republic got its money’s worth from the T-26 tanks and Soviet planes. These were manned by 1,000 Red Army crews sent to Spain to operate the equipment and oversaw by 600 Soviet military advisors in Spain. As such, it seems as though Stalin was not as interested in a Republican victory as he was in a testing ground for the Red Army and their new equipment.

The Comintern, or Communist International Party, played a key role in the Spanish Civil War. In order to garner domestic support for the Spanish Civil War, “the Comintern strategy was to present events in Spain as a direct threat to international Communism and by extension to collective security.”⁵⁰ This had popular appeal and helped mobilize the Soviet military machine in favor of the Republic, even attracting men to fight for the cause.⁵¹ Although, according to Radosh, “the Soviet Union, acting largely through the Comintern and secret police (NKVD,

⁴⁹ Ibid, xvii.

⁵⁰ Kowalsky, “Operation X,” 144.

⁵¹ Ibid.

GRU), manipulated the Second Spanish Republic.”⁵² This came in the form of expensive arms deals and defunct equipment, but also as the comintern worked to control the People’s Army from within. The majority of senior military personnel in Spain came from the Soviet military intelligence abroad (GRU). As such, Soviet advisors were responsible for planning a number of operations, including the defense of Madrid. Oftentimes these Soviet advisors were responsible for the distribution of Soviet aid. It should come as no surprise that they ensured the best aid was distributed to Communist divisions, oftentimes leaving non-communist divisions wanting for material. These politicized logistics would seriously hamper already disorganized Republican supply lines. That being said, the Comintern is best remembered for its formation of the International Brigades.

When civil war erupted in Spain, volunteers from around the world streamed into Spain to fight the nationalists. Radosh notes that the movement was largely spontaneous at first, but was, “soon taken over by Comintern officials, in communication with Moscow, who organized the men into international brigades.”⁵³ The international brigades were viewed as a mercenary force in Spain, and were “organized, funded, supplied, and often disciplined by the Comintern.”⁵⁴ However, because of their lower status, they were often ill-equipped and, according to Radosh, “were automatically assigned to attack the most heavily fortified centers of resistance.”⁵⁵ As such, the international brigades suffered much higher casualty rates than other Republican forces. The commander of Abraham Lincoln brigade wrote to his superiors after an especially brutal day of fighting, “This brigade has not been destroyed; it has been murdered.”⁵⁶

⁵² Radosh, “Spain Betrayed,” xix.

⁵³ Ibid, 103.

⁵⁴ Kowalsky, “Operation X,” 169.

⁵⁵ Radosh, “Spain Betrayed,” 242.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 243.

This harrowing statement shows the brutality the international brigades were subjected to in Spain. As was mentioned previously, these experiences are well documented in Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*.

VI. Conclusion

The Spanish Civil war was a contest of ultimates about Spanish society, which gave rise to the repression, brutality, violence, and of the conflict. The resulting long forty years saw women once again excluded from the public space and autocratic rule return to Spain until 1975. While it may be tempting to idealize the Republic in light of Franco's harsh rule, it must be remembered that in 1936 the Popular Front government had more attributes of a totalitarian regime than the fascists. They were able to make some social progress, but this often came at the expense of Catholics and the moderate Spanish right. As such, the Spanish conflict cannot be justified by the means of either side. Rather, it was a battle between the lesser of two evils as is exemplified through the art of the conflict.

The art born of the Spanish Civil war captures the violence of the conflict while simultaneously indicting the belligerents. Rather than tout the laurels of one side, they create awareness of the destructive power of modern war. Wolfram Von Richtofen, commander of the Condor Legion, wrote, "Guernica, a city with 5,000 residents has been literally razed to the ground. Bomb craters can be seen in the streets. Simply wonderful."⁵⁷ These horrid attacks on civilian centers foreshadowed events like Dresden and the Blitz, however, all onlookers failed to note the inefficacy of targeting civilian morale. Unfortunately, the warnings of these artists would go unheeded, as World War II was set to break out in the next decade.

One of the key international developments to stem from the Spanish Civil War was the establishment of the Rome-Berlin Axis. Because of their prior cooperation in Spain, Italy and Germany established an alliance that would eventually become the Axis Powers in World War II. Although many nations signed the non-intervention pact, there was more at stake in Spain for

⁵⁷ Diehl, "Hitler's Destruction of Guernica."

Germany, Italy, and the Soviet Union. As such, they blatantly disregarded the agreement in hopes of swaying the outcome in their favor. In the interwar period, the democracies were not interested in being dragged into another war, and thus abided by the non-intervention pact, afraid to test the limits of Hitler and Mussolini.

Because of their involvement in Spain, Germany was able to learn many valuable lessons from the conflict. One Nazi advisor serving in Spain wrote:

“[Warlimont’s] main criticism of the Nationalist’ air tactics was that they insisted on using all available air power to protect their land forces instead of using the JU-52s for strategic bombing of harbors and supply routes and the HE-51s to destroy the enemy bombers and fighters”⁵⁸

If the strategies suggested by Warlimont sound familiar, it is because they were widely employed by the Luftwaffe in the Second World War. Advancements in German strategy were responsible for the swiftness of the Luftwaffe in 1939, especially the integration of air and ground command, which allowed for far more effective use of close air support. Look no further than the Blitz, Poland, or the fall of France to see evidence of German strategy pioneered in Spain. Italy, on the other hand, was incorrectly convinced of the viability of its biplane technology and entered into World War II with a second-rate air force. The real problem with Italian intervention in Spain was not the number of troops it sent, but the amount of money it lent to Franco’s regime. The Spanish Civil War became a money pit for the Italian government and hampered their economy prior to World War II.

Had the Soviet Union not intervened in Spain, it would have missed a crucial opportunity to keep up with German military technology. Succinctly said by Peter Elstob, “The Spanish Civil war was responsible for Russia having bombers, reconnaissance planes, close support planes, ground attack planes, and fighters as good as or better than those of the Germans when Hitler

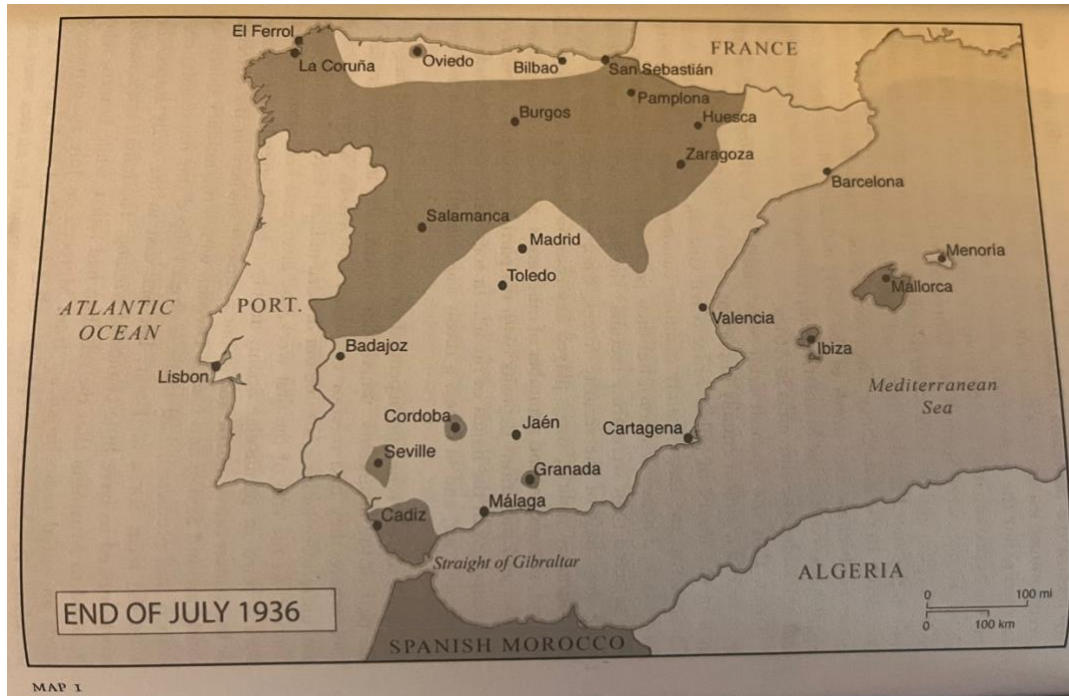
⁵⁸ Elstob, “Condor Legion,” 103.

turned on them in 1941.”⁵⁹ Thus, the Spanish conflict played a key role in the Soviet Union surviving Operation Barbarossa. In addition to aircraft, Soviet tanks also outclassed their German counterparts in both Spain and the Second World War. The success of the T-26 over the Panzer I can be seen as a direct precursor to the dominance of the T-34 during World War II. Despite these successes by the Soviet Union, many of the strategic lessons to be learned in Spain were missed because of Stalin’s purges: “Almost all the principal advisors sent to Spain at the beginning of the war were dead by... March 1939. None of them fell in combat, however; they were victims of the political intrigues so characteristic of Stalin’s Soviet Union.”⁶⁰ Thus, while Soviet intervention on behalf of the Republic was not enough to secure a victory, it still played a key role in Soviet position prior to World War II. While the Spanish Civil war was responsible for key innovations which changed the battlefield, it will best be remembered for its stark warnings against the ferocity and horror of modern warfare.

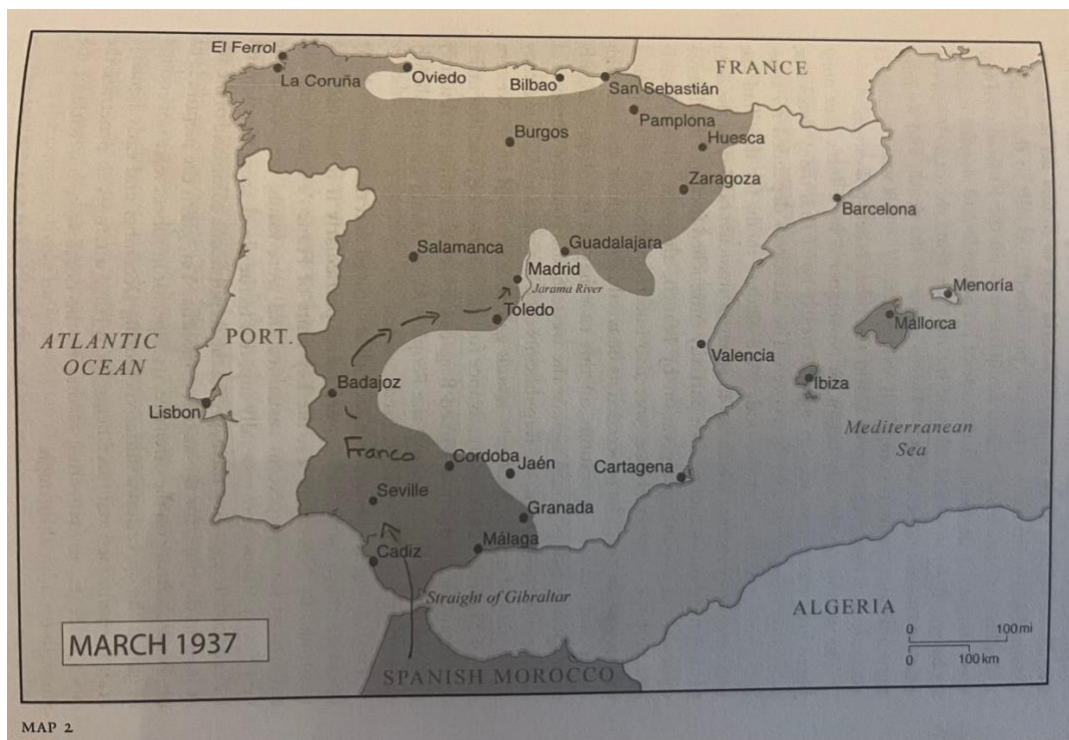
⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Radosh, “Spain Betrayed,” 93.

VII. Appendix A- Maps and Figures



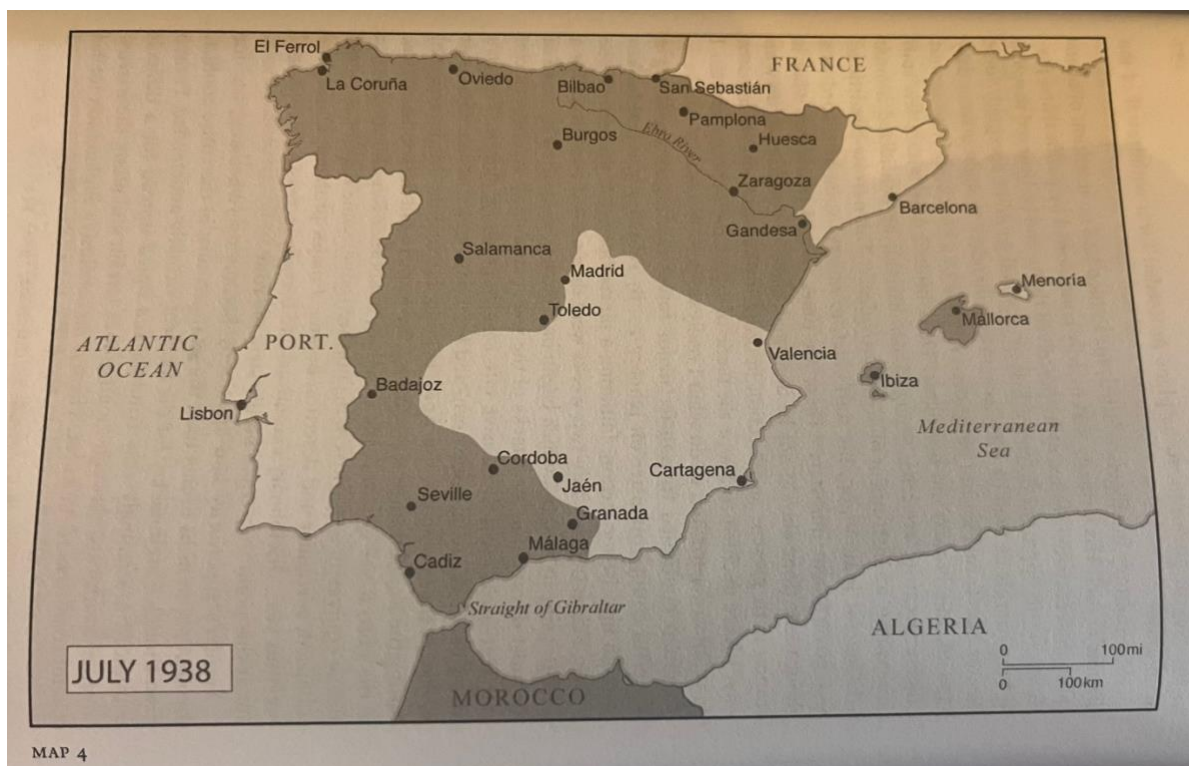
Map 1: July 1936, The initial Nationalist Zones are shown in grey, with the Republican Zones in white.



Map 2: March 1937, Map depicts Franco's push up the western half of the country and subsequent Siege of Madrid.



Map 3: October 1937, Franco diverts forces from Madrid to capture the strategically vital Northern Republican Zone.



Map 4: July 1938, Franco pushes into Catalonia, driving the Republic into exile.



Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*, oil on canvas, 11' 6" x 25' 6", 1937.



General Francisco Franco.



Ernest Hemingway, center, smoking a cigarette with members of the People's Army.



George Orwell, the tallest member of the photo, is seen standing with other members of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade near Huelva Spain.



Pablo Picasso working on his 1937 mural, *Guernica*.



Hemingway, standing to the left of the man using the binoculars, can be seen in a frontline trench dug by the People's Army.



Nationalist infantry moves closely behind purchased German Panzer I tanks; an early example of combined arms strategy being implemented.



The Basque town of Guernica after being bombed by the Condor Legion on April 26, 1937.



Guernica today.

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