A MILITARY HISTORY OF MODERN SPAIN

From the Napoleonic Era to the International War on Terror

Edited by Wayne H. Bowen and José E. Alvarez

Foreword by Stanley G. Payne

PRAEGER SECURITY INTERNATIONAL
Westport, Connecticut • London.

2007
When a group of dissident senior officers declared a state of war (estado de guerra) against the Republic in July 1936, it was not the first time that the Army had intruded upon Spain's political stage. The tradition of military intervention in domestic affairs began in the early part of the nineteenth century and continued with only brief periods of interruption up to the time of the Second Spanish Republic (1931–36). Spain's experiment in democracy was short-lived above all because both left- and right-wing political parties proved incapable of reining in on the numerous centrifugal forces which were daily undermining the stability of the regime. It was against this background that a group of high-ranking military figures decided that it was necessary for the Army to impose its will on the Spanish nation. Their decision to overthrow the civilian government and establish a military directory on July 17, 1936, unleashed a civil war that would last for nearly three years. The process by which certain segments of the Army became politicized during the Second Republic and the nature and function of the Nationalist army which these rebel leaders forged during the Civil War are the themes which will be examined in this chapter.

Historical Background

The emergence of the military as a force for political change in Spain can be traced to the early decades of the nineteenth century. At that time, the army played a central role in establishing the character and content of liberal rule in Spain. The military continued to actively intervene in politics until 1876, when the main architect of the Restoration system, Antonio Cánovas del Castillo, sought to prevent the army from interfering with national affairs by greatly reducing their role in politics. During the early years of the Restoration (1876–96), the provisions of the Constitution of 1876 that were aimed at excluding the military from the public sphere were largely effective. However, the persistence of electoral corruption (caciquismo); the failure of Spanish liberalism to respond effectively to the destabilizing effects of social change (regionalism), economic modernization (industrialization), and imperialism (colonialism in Morocco); and the inability of successive governments to develop the basis for professionalism among the officer corps, all contributed to a revival of the army's political activism.

The tensions between the military and the Spanish liberal system did not diminish with time, but rather were increasingly brought into sharper relief by a number of domestic and foreign issues. Perhaps more than any other, however, it was the government's disastrous colonial policy in Morocco that produced the greatest strains on civil-military relations. Though it had maintained a presence there since 1497, Spain's relationship with Morocco did not become a major concern until the early years of the twentieth century. Spurred on by the belief that Spain needed to recover its national prestige following its humiliating defeat by the United States in 1898 and partly to protect its own meager holdings against native rebellions and the intrusions of foreign powers, the government steadily expanded its involvement in Morocco. After 1904, the army was engaged in intermittent warfare in its occupied zones. This proved to be unpopular, not only because it stirred the anti-conscription feelings of the general population, but also because many liberal writers and politicians believed that such military action was a waste of money.

As far as the military was concerned, one of the most significant consequences of this imperial policy was the rapid expansion of the Spanish colonial forces. Between 1909 and 1926, the Army of Africa (as it came to be known) became the largest and most dynamic branch of the military. In addition to regular Spanish units, the army was composed of indigenous Moroccan troops (organized into four distinct groups), as well as foreign soldiers and Spanish volunteers who belonged to the legendary Tercio de Extranjeros or Foreign Legion.

Despite its robust growth and despite some structural modifications which improved military operations on the battlefield, the Spanish Army's main problems—a bloated command structure, poorly trained and equipped military personnel, and low morale among the vast majority of troops sent to fight in Morocco—continued to fester. Moreover, this same period saw a dramatic increase in the resentment and dissatisfaction among junior and middle-ranking officers. Their efforts to address their economic and other grievances by forming pressure groups in 1916–17 known as Junas de Defensa (military syndicates) not only undermined the unity of the army but also blurred the lines separating military and political activities.
The problems of the kind referred to here finally came to a head in 1923. A series of military disasters in Morocco between 1919 and 1921 gave rise to the widespread belief within the army that the civilian government was largely responsible for these failures. After the highly publicized Annual catastrophe of 1921, when some 8,600 Spaniards were killed during a confused and disorganized military campaign, the army was ready to save its own reputation by turning on the politicians in Madrid. Led by one of their own generals, Miguel Primo de Rivera, the army decided in September 1923 to revert to its nineteenth-century role as a vehicle for regime change.

Though he promised the Spanish people that his rule represented only a "brief parenthesis" in the constitutional life of his country, Primo de Rivera remained in power for the next six-and-a-half years (1923–30). Initially Primo de Rivera proved to be a popular dictator. After reining in on the centrifugal forces (regionalism and working-class radicalism) which had been gaining momentum up to this time, he turned his attention to the thorny Moroccan question. In contrast to the Africanistas, who were committed to a forward policy in the Protectorate, Primo de Rivera decided to pursue a strategy of retrenchment. Over time this cautious approach paid off. By 1927, Primo de Rivera had managed to reduce Spain's military operations in Morocco to a minimum.

One of the ironies of Primo de Rivera's rule was that, though he relied on the military's backing, his dictatorship eventually lost the support of key elements of the officer corps. His plan to modernize and professionalize the armed forces was one reason why this was the case. Rather than improving relations among the different branches, his reform policies—such as those aimed at standardizing promotions—nourished old rivalries and even drove some dissident officers to join the civilian opposition to his regime. The latter development eventually cost Primo de Rivera his post.

The reforming phase of the Republic effectively ended with the Sanjurjada. For example, the pro-Republican, General José Sanjurjo, led an abortive coup attempt against the Azaña regime. Though it ended in failure, the Sanjurjada inspired disenchanted elements of the military to engage in further conspiracies against the Republic. The following year saw the creation of the clandestine Unión Militar Española, UME. While its nominal goal was to protect the constitutional government from being overthrown by left-wing revolutionaries, some of its leading members increasingly saw the quasi-political organization as an instrument that could be used to spearhead a right-wing coup.

Within days after the Republic had been established, the new Minister of War, Manuel Azaña, set about drafting decrees aimed primarily at democratizing the army and keeping it out of politics. In order to diminish the size and influence of Spain's top-heavy command structures, he offered generous retirement terms to generals and officers. The result was that the officer corps was reduced by more than half in the first year of the Republic. In an attempt to create a new group of second echelon leaders and to reinforce the infrastructure of army leadership, Azaña's Ministry also established a special Corps of Sub-Officers composed of four ranks: first sergeant, brigade sergeant, sub-aide, and sub-lieutenant. Azaña also sought to "Republicanize" the military by fomenting a more progressive intellectual climate within the army. To this end, he ordered the closure of anti-Republican military institutions—such as the General Military Academy in Zaragoza—and military journals such as La Correspondencia Militar.

Although the Spanish Army was long overdue for reforms, Azaña's ambitious attempts to streamline the military bureaucracy and liberalize its culture by promoting a pro-Republican orientation of the officer corps were met with hostility by right-wing politicians and conservative military figures. They argued that Azaña's efforts to modernize and rationalize the organizational infrastructure of the armed forces only served to undermine morale and reduce the power and importance of military institutions. Not surprisingly, then, the army's loyalty to the new form of government was constantly being monitored, not least because the question as to whether the Republic was the same as the Spanish nation was answered in different ways by different sections of the military. For generals like Franco, who was representative of the old guard that was being targeted by Azaña's reforms, it was not.

Pro-monarchist figures like Franco were not alone in opposing the leftward direction the government took after 1932. In August 1932, for example, the pro-Republican, General José Sanjurjo, led an abortive coup attempt against the Azaña regime. Though it ended in failure, the Sanjurjada inspired disenchanted elements of the military to engage in further conspiracies against the Republic. The following year saw the creation of the clandestine Unión Militar Española, UME. While its nominal goal was to protect the constitutional government from being overthrown by left-wing revolutionaries, some of its leading members increasingly saw the quasi-political organization as an instrument that could be used to spearhead a right-wing coup.

The reforming phase of the Republic effectively ended with the elections of November 1933, when a center-right led by the Radicals came into power. In May 1935, the leader of the right-wing CEDA (Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas), José María Gil Robles, was appointed as Minister of War. During his brief tenure, relations between
the government and the military improved. Besides rolling back the reform measures adopted during Azaña’s tenure as Minister of War, Gil Robles was intent on reorganizing the military along more traditional lines. With this in mind, he made a series of personnel reassignments that placed known anti-Republican figures in the military hierarchy into key positions. Francisco Franco was recalled from Morocco and appointed Chief of the General Staff. General Emilio Mola replaced Franco in Morocco, while General Manuel Goded was elevated to several key posts, including Director General of the Customs Guards or carabineros.

Civil-Military Relations

During the so-called bienio negro or antiprogressive years of the Republic, two events, the Asturian uprising of October 1934 and the February national elections of 1936, served to reinforce the anti-Republican trajectory of the right-wing elements in the military. In October 1934, the country was convulsed by the most serious challenge to government rule since the establishment of the Republic. This was precipitated by President Niceto Alcalá Zamora’s invitation to several members of the right-wing CEDA to participate in the national government. Confirmed in the belief that the CEDA’s sole reason for entering the Cabinet was to lay the groundwork for a fascist regime, the Left responded on October 4–5 by launching a series of general strikes and protest movements. Nearly all of these, including the Esquerra’s ill-conceived plan to establish an independent republic in Catalonia, were so poorly coordinated and supported that they had little chance of success. In fact, apart from a working-class uprising in Asturias, all of the leftist-inspired outbursts collapsed within a few days. United by a broadly based revolutionary pact or Alianza Obrera, some 20,000 anarchist, communist, and socialist workers from the Asturian mining areas managed to sustain their revolt for nearly two weeks.

Their initial successes—which included their occupation of the provincial capital of Oviedo—so alarmed the government that drastic measures were adopted to bring the revolutionary movement to an end. After placing the country under martial law, the Minister of War called on General Francisco Franco to use the might of the military to crush the rebellion. Showing no mercy to their adversaries, the expeditionary troops—accompanied by two banderas (battalions) of the Spanish Legion and one tabor (battalion) of Mobbish Regulars under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Juan Yagüe Blanco—sent into the region quickly conquered the areas briefly dominated by revolutionary working-class committees. By the middle of October, the Asturian crisis had ended. As a result of the fighting, an estimated 1,000 civilians had been killed, while, according to an official government report issued at the end of October, the death toll among the army and various police forces was around 450.

A final blow against the radicalized working-class movement was dealt in the weeks following the uprising: some 30,000 workers were arrested and thrown into prison.

On the Left, the Asturian rising quickly passed into legend as an example of the Spanish working-class movement’s resolve to combat the oppression of the reactionary ruling classes. In the months to come, the initials of the Asturian workers’ alliance, UHP (United Proletarian Brothers), became a rallying cry for the entire spectrum of Spain’s left-wing radicals, most of who were now convinced that the day of all-out confrontation with their class enemies was rapidly approaching. For the Right, the Asturian episode testified to the inherent weaknesses of the Republic. And despite the fact that the rebellion had been brutally suppressed, rightists were more fearful than ever that the government was losing its struggle to rein in the revolutionary Left.

The impact of the revolt and its aftermath on the military was no less profound. The incident not only served to strengthen the anti-Republican convictions of officers already convinced of the need to intervene in politics but also reinforced the belief held by Francisco Franco and other right-wing generals that parliamentary democracy was not an effective barrier against the threat of communist revolution. Without committing themselves to joining the circle of conspirators plotting to overthrow the government, this segment of the military was no longer content to stand by idly while the Republic unraveled under the pressures being brought to bear by the centrifugal forces in Spanish society.

Immediately following the leftist electoral victory in February 1936, Colonel José Varela and other senior officers of the UME sought to broaden the circle of their conspiracy by liaising with anti-Republican civilian organizations scattered across the country. They found a receptive audience among the three most important antigovernment forces on the Right, the Alfonsine Monarchists, the Falange, and the Carlists. Of the three, the Carlists were the most advanced in their preparations for overthrowing the Republic. Intractably opposed to the progressive politics of the 1931–36 period, the Carlists adopted a variety of tactics in pursuing their goal of overthrowing the Republic. They used their official organization, the Traditional Communion, as a vehicle for disseminating their ideas and forging alliances among right-wing parties that were equally determined to obstruct Republican policies. After 1934, Carlist leaders and their supporters began doubting the efficacy of legalist tactics and thus increasingly embraced violence as a means of achieving their goals. As a result, emphasis was placed on developing the size and effectiveness of the Carlist Youth organization, as well as the movement’s armed militia, the Requetes. Under the guidance of José Varela, who by the end of the Civil War was promoted to general, the militia grew into a credible military organization which some saw as being capable of supporting a Carlist-led rebellion.
But while they were seen as allies in their movement to overthrow the Republic, Mola and other ranking officers did not want to see their own troops being unduly influenced by the zealous adherents of a reactionary monarchist movement. They therefore insisted that these civilian militias play a subordinate role in the army's plans to establish a military-dominated Directorate.

Up to this point, the fascist Falange party had been neither a powerful nor a numerous body. Yet, the defeat of the legalist Right in the February elections attracted an ever-increasing number of recruits to their cause. In view of the movement's growing popularity, Mola and his fellow conspirators decided in June to inform José Antonio Primo de Rivera and other Falangist leaders that the decisive moment for their planned insurrection was rapidly approaching.

**From Popular Front to Civil War**

After becoming aware of the intrigues of the anti-Republican conspirators, the newly established Popular Front government took steps to break up the circle of plotters. High-ranking officers who were known to be hostile to the Republic were reassigned to command posts far away from the capital and other strategic locations. Franco was posted to the Canaries, Goded was moved to the Balearic Islands, and Mola was relieved of his duties as commander in chief of the Army of Africa in Morocco and transferred to Navarre, where he assumed command of the Pamplona garrison. On a more fundamental level, the government pursued a policy of neutralizing anti-Republican agitation among the rank-and-file by splitting up and transferring units from one garrison to another.

Despite these anticipatory measures, however, Mola and his fellow conspirators pressed forward with their plans. In April, the nominal head of the plot, General José Sanjurjo, appointed Mola as the “director” of the uprising. Given his aptitude for detailed planning and in view of his cautious temperament, Mola seemed a logical choice to act as the general coordinator of the conspiracy. His task was made that much easier by the fact that he was now based in Pamplona, the headquarters of the Carlist movement, where he could count on the assistance of fellow conspirators like the well-connected Lieutenant Colonel Valentin Galarza, and other Falangist leaders that the decisive moment for their planned insurrection was rapidly approaching.

Underscoring this point, Mola made it clear in his dealings with the Carlists and similar groups that all civilian militias would be placed under military control and that, once the rebellion had achieved its goals, a Directorate dominated by Mola and his fellow officers would initially run the country. Yet, the defeat of the legalist Right in the February elections attracted an ever-increasing number of recruits to their cause. In view of the movement's growing popularity, Mola and his fellow conspirators decided in June to inform José Antonio Primo de Rivera and other Falangist leaders that the decisive moment for their planned insurrection was rapidly approaching.

Against the background of mounting violent public demonstrations, strikes, and skirmishes between rival ideological groups, politics was increasingly played out in the streets rather than in Parliament (Cortes). That the government was unable to rein in on the escalating incidents of violence was illustrated by the startling number of political killings (estimated to be around 270) and industrial disturbances (some 341 strikes and partial shutdowns), which occurred in the space of less than six months. When, on the night of July 12-13, leftist police officers working in collusion with socialist gunmen murdered the right-wing politician José Calvo Sotelo, the final countdown to the military insurrection began. Now convinced that the Republic was rapidly descending into chaos, the conspirators, who were joined by Franco, scheduled the rising to begin on July 18.

**Military Rising**

The military rising that was launched in Morocco during the night of July 17 (a day earlier than planned) unleashed a series of similar actions on the mainland. Over the next forty-eight hours, garrisons scattered throughout the country rose up against the government and rebel leaders moved quickly to secure control of the provincial capitals and the major cities. By the 21st, however, it had become clear that the insurgents had failed to achieve their goal of seizing power quickly and painlessly. While the rebellion met little or no resistance in garrisons located in Spanish Morocco, the Navarre, and other conservative regions in the north and northwest, it was successful in only about one-third of the country. Apart from Seville, Valladolid, and Zaragoza, where enterprising rebel leaders
overcame overwhelming odds, the revolt was put down in Spain’s other major cities, Madrid, Barcelona, and Valencia. It was also apparent that, rather than being united in its opposition to the liberal Republic, the army was divided in its loyalties. The fact that most senior officers refused to join the insurrection demonstrated the extent to which Mola and his fellow conspirators had been exceedingly optimistic about the support they would receive from key segments of the military once the rebellion was underway. After the initial fighting died down, the insurgents (or Nationalists as they referred to themselves) controlled only 53% of the army—approximately 30,000 troops on the mainland and another 34,000 battle-trained officers and soldiers belonging to the Army of Africa—and around 35% of Spain’s air force and navy. The rebels’ failure to secure the latter proved to be a major setback in their effort to link up the combat-ready forces in Morocco with the insurgency on the mainland.

Aware that the forward momentum of the insurrection depended on the support of the troops under his command, Francisco Franco wasted no time in appealing for outside assistance. Just a few days after the rebellion had begun, he dispatched emissaries to Hitler and Mussolini with requests for bomber-transports and fighter aircraft. Their willingness to send planes to help Franco ferry his Moroccan troops across the straits would have far-reaching consequences. Besides preventing the revolt from grinding to a standstill, this foreign assistance inevitably widened the dimensions of a conflict that had started out as a purely domestic affair. No less significant was the fact that German and Italian aid greatly enhanced Franco’s status within the insurgent camp. From that point on, he saw himself, and was seen by others, as playing a leadership role in the anti-Republican struggle.

In addition to the men and officers drawn from the traditional military forces, the Nationalists could count on around 30,000 men coming out of Spain’s three major national security organizations, the Customs Guards (cabineros), the Assault Guards (Guardia de Asalto), and the Civil Guard (Guardia Civil). The Nationalist army also drew strength in the first months of fighting from the support it received from the rapidly expanding para-militia formations of the Falange Española and the Carlists (Requetés). The latter, for example, were largely responsible for the rapid gains Mola’s Army of the North achieved in the Basque region during the opening phases of the insurrection. While the ideological enthusiasm and independent spirit of these civilian forces posed a potential challenge to their authority, military leaders came to rely on the Falangists and Carlists to perform essential support tasks. Besides securing lines of communication and imposing Nationalist rule in conquered areas by “cleaning up” (i.e., executing or sequestering) opponents of the Nationalists’ movimiento, it fell to these civilian groups to maintain public order and security in the rearguard.

Nationalists at War

After Franco succeeded in transporting the bulk of his military units—Moorish Regulares, the Tercio or Foreign Legion, and select units of the army—over from Africa, the Nationalists relentlessly pursued their initial goal of linking up their northern and southern armies. Advancing rapidly northward from Seville, Franco’s forces under the command of Colonel Yagüe attacked Badajoz, the last town of any size separating the Nationalists’ two military zones. Their hard-fought victory there on August 14–15, which was overshadowed by widely reported accounts of atrocities committed against unarmed civilians, was followed up by further advances into the Tagus Valley west of Madrid. Meanwhile, at the other end of the country, communications between the Republic’s northwestern region and France had been cut off when Mola’s troops captured the border town of Irún on September 4.

The Nationalists’ early and relatively easy victories in these regions owed a great deal to the fact that their military formations met little resistance from the opposing side. Poorly armed and unregimented, the medley of popular militias (columns) and patchwork of regular army units fighting on the Republican side during the first weeks of the conflict were no match for the professional and disciplined paramilitary soldiers confronting them. Moreover, in contrast to the Republican forces, the Nationalist command structure was unified and generally supported by well-trained lower-ranking (alféres provisionales) and noncommissioned officers.

It was not until the formation of a government-controlled Popular or People’s Army in late September that these major defects in the Republican war effort were seriously addressed. The arrival of fresh shipments of war materiel—rifles, planes, artillery, antiaircraft guns, and tanks—from Russia and Mexico in this same period (late September) also dramatically improved the Republicans’ fighting capacity.

Although successful on every front, the Nationalists were convinced that if they captured the capital city of Madrid the war would soon be over. Their lightening quick and decisive victories during the summer of 1936 strengthened both their confidence as a fighting force and their resolve to march on Madrid as soon as possible. By mid-September, they were at the point of mounting such an offensive when Franco’s attention was diverted by a drama that was being played out in the Republican-held city of Toledo. Shortly after the military rebellion had begun there, some 1,100 insurgents (mostly members of the Civil Guard and a few cadets) had, along with several hundred women and children and approximately 100 Republican hostages, retreated to the Alcázar, a formidable structure towering over the Tagus River which also served as training facility for Spanish officers. Led by the indomitable Colonel José Moscardó, the
Nationalists demonstrated remarkable perseverance in the face of repeated Republican attempts to blast through the thick walls of the ancient fortress. By September, news of the siege had spread far and wide, and it was this publicity which convinced Franco of the need to send relief forces to the region.

This proved to be a calculated gamble on Franco's part. On the one hand, he must have known that such a diversionary move would inevitably dissipate the momentum of the Nationalists' advance on Madrid, thus allowing the Republicans more time to organize a proper defense of the capital. This is why Colonel Yagüe Blanco, Franco's most successful field commander up to this point, adamantly opposed the decision. On the other hand, the political capital that could be gained from a dramatic rescue of the beleaguered insurgents in Toledo was too great to be ignored. At the time, the Junta de Defensa Nacional based in Burgos was at the point of selecting a supreme military leader of the Nationalist cause. A spectacular rescue operation in Toledo would therefore go a long way toward confirming Franco's chances of being chosen for this post. In the event, Franco's strategy produced both results. By diverting troops from the Madrid front, Franco had allowed the mostly pro-Republican madrileños the time they needed to shore up their defenses before the city was placed under siege. As we shall see, this meant that the Battle of Madrid would take a very different course than either side had anticipated. From a political standpoint, however, Franco's gamble had paid off. The troops he had dispatched to Toledo liberated the fortress on September 26, and their dramatic rescue efforts provided an enormous boost for the morale and image of the Nationalists in general, and of Franco in particular.

Franco's Rise to Power

The siege of the Alcázar did more than just expose Franco's pretensions to power, for it also revealed the extent to which politics was bound up with the Nationalists' military affairs. It will be remembered that Mola and his fellow conspirators lacked a blueprint for the government that would emerge following their insurrection. While all agreed that a military directory would be established to oversee the transition to another regime, they held differing views about the precise form and content of the new state system. For example, generals like Mola and Queipo de Llano were rebelling against what they saw as a dysfunctional liberal government, which had, through its misguided reforms, led the Spanish nation "to ruin." They were thus not opposed to the Republic as a form of government. For monarchists like Generals Varela and Kindelán, on the other hand, any type of Republican rule was unacceptable. They therefore promoted the idea of establishing a monarchical state organized along authoritarian lines.

Notwithstanding his own pro-monarchist sympathies, Franco rarely publicly revealed his political views. His strict military training had taught him to respect authority as long as it was legitimate, and, throughout the 1931-36 period, he chose to obey the laws of the legally constituted government. By joining the insurrection in July, however, Franco had taken sides with Mola and the others who felt that "indiscipline" against a failing government was justified. During the insurrectionary phase of the Civil War, Franco preferred to concentrate on military matters—particularly on his role as the leader of the Army of Africa—rather than on the political future of the movimiento. But when the rebellion gave way to a more protracted struggle, Franco and other military figures recognized that a more coherent and concentrated form of authority was needed to coordinate and control the Nationalists' war effort.

By September, the military-directed governing body that Mola had set up in Burgos at the outset of the war (Junta de Defensa Nacional) sought to unify the disparate elements of their movement by selecting a commander in chief. Of those who would be considered for such a post, Franco stood out as the favorite candidate. This was true in part because of his superior military rank and well-established reputation as a battlefield commander and in part because Franco did not appear to be harboring any clearly defined political ambitions. Fate also intervened on Franco's behalf. General Sanjurjo, whom the chief conspirators had initially designated as the primary leader of the revolt, was killed in an airplane crash on July 20. His death opened the way for Franco to rise to the head of the rebel movement. The string of swift and resounding triumphs credited to Franco up to this point in the fighting (culminating with the widely publicized liberation of the Alcázar fortress) also helped to confirm his position as the first among equals within the military hierarchy.

Not surprisingly, then, when the rebel junta met for a second time in late September, it elevated Franco as commander (Generallísimo) of all rebel forces. What had not been anticipated by the members of the junta, however, was Franco's insistence that he also be granted supreme political authority. Despite some opposition to this daring political maneuver, on September 29 Franco was proclaimed as the new head of the Spanish state (El Caudillo). A Junta Técnica (Technica Junta), which became the nucleus of Franco's regime, then replaced the Generals' Junta. In this way, Franco became more than just the person in charge of the Army's command structure, for he was now invested with the power to define and control the social and economic institutions of the new Spanish state.

While primarily preoccupied with winning the war, Franco's dual status fed his ambitions to exercise greater political power. Urged on by his more politically astute elder brother, Nicolás, and his pro-fascist brother-in-law, Ramón Serrano Suñer, Franco set about constructing the basis for a corporatist-authoritarian state system (nuevo estado), which he...
intended to rule after the war had ended. The Decree of Unification issued in April 1937—which abolished the fascist Falange and other political parties on the Right—was the first concrete step in this direction. Henceforth, only one party under Franco’s control would represent the Nationalists: the Falange España Tradicionalista de las Jons (FET).

The social and economic structures underpinning the emerging Francoist state were also modeled along fascist-corporatist lines. From 1937, all working-class groups in the Nationalist zone were forcibly consolidated into one monolithic organization, the Organización Sindical Española, which was to be completely subordinated to the FET. By so doing, Franco believed that it was possible to create the basis for a harmonious relationship between employers and employees. Finally, to foster social cohesion in the new state, Franco turned to the Catholic Church, whose tacit support of the Nationalist cause supplied his regime with a certain degree of legitimacy, as well as a much-needed moral basis of authority.

Early Military Engagements: 1936-37

When Franco’s troops reached the outskirts of the capital in early November, everyone, including the Republican government, believed that the city would soon fall to the Nationalists. On November 6, Prime Minister Francisco Largo Caballero and his Cabinet transferred the Republican seat of government to Valencia, leaving the administration of the defense of the city in the hands of a provisional ruling body known as the Defense Council (Junta de Defensa). Meanwhile, the citizens of Madrid readied themselves for the inevitable attack. Overnight civilian groups were mobilized into work battalions used for digging trenches and fortifying the city’s defenses. While the Nationalists attempted to undermine the morale of madrileños by circulating the rumor that a “fifth column” of their supporters would be waiting for Franco’s troops to enter the city, the largely pro-Republican citizens thumbed back with defiant slogans such as “Madrid will be the tomb of fascism” and “They shall not pass.” The arrival on November 8 of the first shipments of Soviet arms and the newly formed units of the International Brigades reinforced the spirit of defiance among the besieged Republicans. The battle itself began a few days later. In their initial assault, the Nationalists sent some 4,500 troops that could be used for more concentrated offensives in the city.

When it became apparent in late December that he would have to abandon his frontal offensive, Franco sought to end the stalemate in Madrid by undertaking a series of flanking operations. On February 6, 1937, the Nationalists attempted to encircle the capital from the south by attacking Republican defenses along the Jarama River. But after only a few days of fierce fighting on the ground and in the air, this initiative had to be abandoned. The ferocity of the attack tested the mettle of the Republic’s new army and the International Brigades, whose units were seriously demoralized by the staggering number of casualties (2,800) they suffered in combat. Yet because they had halted the Nationalists’ advances and had for the first time in the war inflicted heavy casualties on their enemy (estimated to be between 6,400 and 10,500), the battle represented a “defensive victory” for the Republicans.

One month later, the Nationalists suffered another humiliating setback when Republican forces at Guadalajara repulsed an Italian-led offensive. This was the first major military operation involving the recently organized assault troops of the Corpo Truppe Volontarie (CTV), which was placed under the command of the inexperienced battlefield commander, Major General Mario Roatta. Partly because he was not ready to mount another offensive so soon after Jarama, Franco allowed the Italians to play a leading role in an attack aimed at cutting off Madrid from the northeast. However, far from becoming the guerra di rapido corso which he had hoped, Roatta’s mechanized infantry units of the much-vaunted Black Flamingo and Littorio Divisions were halted by a combination of bad weather and the constant strafing by squadrons of Russian Polikarpov I-15 Chaika fighter planes. The CTV’s slow and hesitant offensive also bought the Republicans enough time to launch a stunning counterattack. While they incurred as many if not more casualties than the Italians did during the two-week battle, the Republicans successfully blocked another one of Franco’s efforts to encircle Madrid. They thus viewed the Battle of Guadalajara as their first important victory against the Nationalists.

Above all, the difficulties the Nationalists experienced at Jarama and Guadalajara demonstrated that defeating the Republicans was not as easy as it had been during the first few months of the conflict. Better armed and organized than before, the formidable qualities of the Republican army forced Franco to reconsider his plans to cut short the war by conquering Madrid. Urged on by his German and Italian advisers (Generals Hugo Sperrle and Roatta), Franco decided to shift Nationalist military operations to the relatively quiet northern zone. Conquering this isolated sector of Republican territory would achieve two much-desired objectives: the Nationalists would gain control over the important coal and steel industries in the region, and Franco would be able to free up troops that could be used for more concentrated offensives in the Madrid area.
Backed by the Italians' esteemed Black Arrows Division, the German Condor Legion, four well-trained Carlist Navarrese Brigades (each numbering between 4,000 and 6,000 men), and some 50,000 Spanish troops, General Mola launched a major offensive in the Basque Country at the end of March. Warning the citizens of Vizcaya that he was prepared to conduct a total war against his enemies, Mola made full use of the foreign airpower at his disposal in the opening phases of the invasion. The undefended Basque towns of Elorrio and Durango were the first to be heavily bombarded by German Junkers Ju-52s and Italian Savoia-Marchetti SM.81s. Less than three weeks later one of the most politically controversial and emotionally stirring episodes of the war occurred. On the afternoon of April 26, a squadron of German bombers sent on orders of the Nationalist high command dropped high explosive and incendiary bombs over the small market town of Guernica.

In the space of a few hours, the ancient capital of the Basque homeland was reduced to a heap of smoldering rubble. Equally shocking was the fact that an estimated 800 innocent civilians had been either killed or injured during the raid. News of the atrocity was soon broadcast around the world. Because such a move challenged the supremacy of the army's control over military matters, Franco acted quickly to put a stop to this plan. He also sent a pointed message to anyone else with similar ambitions by banishing Fal Conde from the Nationalist camp.

Once it became apparent that the rebellion had evolved into a full-scale Civil War, Nationalist military leaders set about expanding their forces. Beginning in August 1936, conscription was imposed in the Nationalist zone, and, by the spring of 1937, the army had mobilized 350,000 recruits. Further call-ups in the following months added tens of thousands of more men to the Nationalists' rolls.

In response to its growing numbers, the army greatly expanded its training programs. Following the creation of the MIR (Mobilization, Instruction, and Recuperation) bureau in March 1937, the army increased the number of its training schools to twenty-two, making use of German advisers whom Franco and the supervisory head of the MIR, General Orgaz y Yoldi, heavily relied upon to assist in instructing officer candidate courses. After Franco was named as commander in chief of the Nationalist army, a special effort was made to train junior officers or alfereces provisionales, who were desperately needed to provide internal cohesion to the lower-level command structures of the rapidly expanding armed forces.

In the first phase of the Civil War, the Nationalists used the independent battle-column formations—ranging in size from 200 to 2,000 men—with the battalion as the major unit. By the spring of 1937, however, the ever-evolving conditions of the war demanded a transition from column formations to that of mass movement. As a result, the Nationalists began to reorganize their columns into tactical divisions, many of which were commanded by lieutenant colonels who had seen service in Morocco as junior officers.

**The Nationalist Army at War**

Nationalist successes in their northern campaign were in part the result of major operational and structural changes to the army that had occurred in the previous months of fighting. As we have seen, in the early days of the conflict, the Nationalist army relied on the support they received from a variety of civilian militias. Both the Carlists and the Falangists proved to be indispensable allies, not least because they provided the enthusiasm and sheer numbers needed to overwhelm Republican resistance. As soon as possible, the volunteers from both movements were organized into fighting units—sections, companies, and banderas (battalions)—and most of these were incorporated into the ranks of the regular army. Though it reared its head from time to time, civilian opposition to being placed under the military's chain of command never became a major issue. This was made clear at different points during the war, such as when, in December 1936, the turbulent Carlist leader Manuel Fal Conde sought to create a separate training facility for the Roquetes. Because such a move challenged the supremacy of the army's control over military matters, Franco acted quickly to put a stop to this plan. He also sent a pointed message to anyone else with similar ambitions by banishing Fal Conde from the Nationalist camp.
Iii; been introduced in the Spanish conflict attests to the extent to which the “be battle worthy.
both at home and abroad. A series of Italian bombing raids over Barcelona seen as butchering fellow Spaniards. 15
Germans and Italians, who were supplying him with aircraft that were in March 1938, for example, provoked a storm of international protests against Franco’s policy of bombing undefended cities. No less significant was the fact that growing numbers of Nationalists began to deeply resent the “foreigners” who, despite being under the command of Franco, were seen as butchering fellow Spaniards. 14

The quantity and quality of foreign assistance also deserves mention here. While the Italians sent some of their latest Fiat tanks and fighter planes, these were not always used to great effect during military operations. The former were considered too light compared to the more heavily armored Russian “Vickers” medium tanks—and too unreliable to be battle worthy. In terms of their performance characteristics, Italian aircraft (Fiat CR.32 fighters and Savoia-Marchetti SM.81 bombers) were also of good quality and comparable to their German counterparts in the early phases of the conflict. However, the Italians’ commitment to using bomber aircraft to terrorize the civilian population in the Republican camp proved to be a major miscalculation. This became apparent late in the war, when such bombing attacks stirred up negative publicity for the Nationalists both at home and abroad. A series of Italian bombing raids over Barcelona in March 1938, for example, provoked a storm of international protests against Franco’s policy of bombing undefended cities. No less significant was the fact that growing numbers of Nationalists began to deeply resent the “foreigners” who, despite being under the command of Franco, were seen as butchering fellow Spaniards. 15

Even though the Italians sent many more ground forces to fight for Franco (an estimated 72,000 over the course of the war) than the Germans did (approximately 19,000 military personnel), German contributions were viewed by both the Nationalists and the foreign observers as being of far greater value than that being offered by the Italians. This was partly because of the generally high quality of their military equipment—such as their state-of-the-art 88-mm guns—and partly because, unlike their Italian counterparts, German “instructors,” pilots, and other military personnel tended to be both respected and well received by their Spanish hosts.

It should be emphasized that, however dependent he became on foreign assistance, Franco did not easily yield to German and Italian efforts to interfere with his command of Nationalist military operations. Thus, whenever it proved impossible for Franco and foreign military advisors to reach an agreement on planned operations—such as when he clashed with the Italians during the Nationalist offensive in the Basque region—the Generalissimo made certain he maintained the upper hand.

Foreign Volunteer Forces

In contrast to the men and women who enlisted in the International Brigades of the Republican army, foreign volunteers who went to fight for the Nationalist side have not received much publicity. This is partly due to the fact that the Nationalists themselves did not want to generate any diplomatic waves by drawing attention to outsiders who were fighting on their behalf. Because they wanted to avoid any “international complications,” the Germans also tended to downplay the full extent of their military contributions. 16 It was also true that, unlike the Republicans, the Nationalists were either unwilling or unable to capitalize on the propaganda value of having foreigners join what was, according to their own rhetoric, a national crusade. In the event, several thousand anticommunist volunteers hailing from Portugal (who provided the largest foreign contingent of volunteers known as the Virtatos), France, Romania, Russia, the United Kingdom, and Ireland joined Franco’s crusade against “red” Spain. The vast majority of these volunteers were organized into military units (banderas) that served in the Foreign Legion, though most did not see action throughout the war. Moreover, due in part to language and cultural barriers and in part to the uneven quality of their fighting abilities, most of the foreigners, like the some 700 blue shirts of Eoin O’Duffy’s Irish Brigade, saw themselves and were widely seen by the Nationalists as outsiders.

Nationalist Military Engagements, 1937-38

Although the Nationalist army had, by the summer of 1937, developed into a fighting force that was capable of defeating its enemies, Franco’s timetable for winning the war was no more definite than it had been at
the outset of the conflict. This was due in part to Franco’s belief that it was necessary to wage a war of attrition against the Republicans. In practice, this meant that Nationalist troops tended to move much more slowly and cautiously than they otherwise needed to given their superiority over the forces they were fighting. While this strategy caused his foreign military advisors to complain loudly that the Spaniards were squandering their many opportunities to defeat the Republicans, Franco himself was confident that, by taking its time, the Nationalist army would prepare the ground for an uncontested victory.\textsuperscript{17}

Political developments in the Nationalist zone during the spring and summer of 1936 also contributed to a slow down in the progress of the war. We saw earlier that, after having been designated as both the military and the political leader of the Nationalist cause, Franco began laying the foundations for his new regime. As we have also seen, however, his early efforts to establish his absolute rule did not go unchallenged. Franco faced a particularly thorny situation when the Falangist leader, Manuel Hedilla, refused to relinquish control over his party and movement. After a brief and tense confrontation with him, Franco made it clear that he was prepared to deal swiftly and summarily with anyone who opposed him and his government. By acting in this way, he effectively eliminated future challenges to his authority. Above all, Franco’s confrontations with Fal Conde and Hedilla illustrated that his role as commander in chief of the army could not be divorced from the political world to which he now belonged.

Meanwhile, Nationalist advances toward Santander and Asturias during the summer months were delayed by a series of unexpected Republican attacks along the Madrid front. In July 1937, the Republicans sought to relieve Nationalist pressure in the northern zone by mounting their first major offensive of the war. The Battle of Brunete, as this operation came to be known, began in the early hours of July 6 on a sparsely manned Nationalist front just fifteen miles west of Madrid. Unlike their ill-fated attacks at La Granja and Huéscar a few months earlier, the Republicans’ assault on Brunete was a well-guarded secret that enabled them to achieve complete surprise. Altogether, some 59,000 Republican troops organized into ten divisions and three army corps were thrown into the initial stage of fighting. Backed for the first time in the war by effective artillery, tank (Russian T-26), and aerial support, Republican forces were buoyed by the prospects of a great victory. After taking Brunete, Republican forces took only two days to occupy the nearby villages of Quijorna, Villanueva del Parillo, and Villanueva de la Cañada. The air superiority that the Republicans enjoyed during the opening phases of the assault helped to underscore their initial successes.

But it did not take long before the shortcomings of the Republican military organization were revealed. Their biggest challenge was how to exploit their early gains. Rather than pressing forward and broadening the scope of the offensive, field officers allowed their troops to be tied down by the vastly outnumbered Nationalists who were doggedly defending nearby villages. Above all, this allowed the defenders enough time to send in much-needed reinforcements.

From the beginning, the discipline and organization of the Republican troops were also put to the test. Apart from being exposed to the withering effects of a scorching summer heat, ground troops were subject day and night to unrelenting machine-gunning and shelling from artillery and air strikes. On top of all of this, Republican communications were so poor that soldiers often found themselves unable to communicate with each other or with their superior officers. In these appalling conditions, it was hardly surprising that many soldiers lost their will to fight and that the discipline of the frontline units began breaking down. Not surprisingly, the Republican offensive ground to a standstill.

Though initially caught off guard, the Nationalists moved rapidly and effectively to bring down reinforcements from the north. Bolstered by the arrival of a fresh shipment of German aircraft (including the formidable Messerschmitt Bf-109 fighters), the better-equipped and better-organized Nationalist forces took only a week to recover much of the territory that had been captured by the enemy. By July 25, the Republicans were in full retreat, and the battle itself ended a few days later.

Given the huge losses on both sides—some 25,000 Republican and 17,000 Nationalist casualties—neither side could claim victory. As far as the Republicans were concerned, the results of the campaign were not entirely negative. Primarily, the Republicans had forced Franco to transfer some of his best troops and most of his air units (Italian, German, and Spanish fighters, bombers, and reconnaissance aircraft) from the northern sector, which inevitably interrupted the Nationalists’ preparations for their assault on Santander. No less significant was the fact that the Brunete campaign demonstrated that the Republicans were capable of going on the offensive. And, though their territorial gains had been rather small—they had only succeeded in lengthening the front by some twenty square miles—the hope was that the newly reorganized Popular Army would inspire Spaniards and foreigners alike to have faith in the fighting capacity of the Republican side.

With the return of some of their best troops to the northern zone, the Nationalists were able to renew their campaign to conquer Santander and Asturias. Commanded by General Fidel Dávila, who had replaced General Mola after he was killed in a plane crash in July, Nationalist forces began their attack on Santander in mid-August. Despite facing heavy resistance from around 80,000 Republican defenders, the Nationalists managed to take control of the city on August 24.
Defeating the remaining Republican strongholds in Asturias proved to be more problematic. Shielded by the natural defenses of the mountains of Asturias, Republican guerrilla forces scattered throughout the region were able to hold out against their enemies for several more months. Nationalist advances were also delayed by yet another spoiling offensive launched by the Republicans on the Aragon front in the northeast. Only two days before Santander fell to the Nationalists, some 75,000 Republican troops were sent into action on an 80-100 kilometer front. The heaviest fighting took place in and around the villages of Belchite and Quinto. In Belchite, fierce resistance from a small contingent of Nationalist troops (1,500) met Republican forces. The town fell on September 3, but at the cost of many casualties on both sides. Attacks in the direction of Zaragoza were even less successful. By early September, the campaign was already winding down, though sporadic fighting—including a concerted effort to take the town of Fuentes de Ebro—continued until October 24. In the meantime, the key Asturian cities of Gijón, Avilés, and Oviedo had fallen to the Nationalists. However, it was not until the end of October that the Nationalists could claim victory in their hard-fought seven-month campaign.

Though it had taken his army much longer to conquer the north than even he had anticipated, Franco was finally able to redeploy his troops to the main battlefronts in the center and the south. In addition to having built up his troop strength to the point that his army was now nearly equal in size to its Republican counterpart (approximately 600,000), Franco had successfully overseen both the reorganization of his forces into five army corps and the creation of the formidable Army of Maneuver. Confident that he could now take Madrid, Franco believed that the time had come to mount another major offensive.

Upon learning of the Nationalists' plan to attack in the Guadalajara region, the Republicans decided to undertake a preemptive strike in the provincial capital of Teruel. The surprise attack started on December 15, just as a particularly fierce winter storm began to blanket the region with a thick layer of snow. For the first week, the offensive went as planned, with the Republicans managing to capture the surrounding towns of Campillo, San Blas, and Muela de Teruel. Nevertheless, after having successfully navigated the harsh weather conditions and rocky terrain around Teruel itself, the Republicans faced stiff resistance from the contingent of Nationalists defending the town. It took nearly two weeks of heavy street fighting, from December 22 to January 7, before they finally conquered the city.

News of their sudden and unexpected victory immediately created a stir in both camps. From a political standpoint, the fall of Teruel caused Franco to lose face in front of his fascist allies. Overnight, their confidence in him and the Nationalists' fighting abilities had been badly shaken.

As one German diplomat put it at the time, "While before Teruel the end of the Spanish Civil War seemed to be in sight, today the end of the war seems once again to have moved into the far distant future." Mussolini in particular was now threatening to cut off aid to the Nationalists if they did not bring a quick end to the conflict.

The Republicans' successful attack on Teruel disturbed Franco so much that he decided to postpone his assault on Madrid in order to launch a counteroffensive aimed at recapturing the town. On December 29, 1937, he ordered Generals Varela and Antonio Aranda to relieve the defenders holed up in the city, but appalling weather conditions prevented them from aiding their besieged comrades. For the next two weeks, the Republicans were subjected to heavy shelling from artillery and bombers, the latter of which began flying sorties as soon as weather conditions permitted. Inside Teruel, conditions were rapidly deteriorating for the Republican troops, most of whom were cold and hungry and desperately short of supplies. By February 20, 1938, the Republicans faced certain encirclement and were thus forced to abandon the town. A few days later, their forces were in full retreat.

Undeterred by the humiliating setback he suffered at Teruel, Franco began massing his troops along the entire Aragon front in preparation for a major offensive. Just two weeks after reconquering Teruel, the Nationalists smashed through Republican lines as part of a large-scale operation along a sixty-mile front that involved over 100,000 troops, 200 tanks, and some 1,000 aircraft. Meeting only nominal resistance from the other side (disorganized and demoralized Republican forces had not anticipated such a sweeping attack), it took them only six weeks to reach the Mediterranean. Republican Spain was now split in two. For the Nationalists, it appeared as though the war would soon be over. However, as events would soon show, their hopes for an imminent victory were premature.

With the Nationalists closing in on Valencia, the Republicans decided that the only chance they had of forestalling their defeat was to mount another offensive. Hoping once again to achieve complete tactical surprise, Republican commandos crossed the Ebro River (between Mequinenza and Tortosa) on the night of July 24-25, 1938. Catching Yagüe's Moroccan army completely by surprise, the leading units of Juan Modesto's Army of the Ebro first cut Nationalist communication lines and then proceeded to occupy a wide bridgehead, which they used to drive deeper into Nationalist territory. By the end of the week, they had advanced nearly 40 kilometers and were at the point of taking Gandesa, the center of an important network of roads and communications. However, it was at this stage of the attack that the offensive began bogging down. Instead of moving forward and exploiting their initial successes, a small but determined group of Nationalists tied down Republican
forces. The defenders managed to hold on long enough for Yagüe's troops to stabilize their lines. In the following weeks, the battle was transformed, into a war of attrition.

The initial phase of the Ebro campaign had achieved its desired goal, namely, to take pressure off Franco's drive toward Valencia. The scale of the Republicans' early successes had also forced Franco to suspend his offensive operations in Estremadura. Furthermore, the offensive had once again undermined the confidence of the Nationalists, who, only a few weeks earlier, were convinced that the end of the war was in sight. Now it was the Republicans' turn to be lifted by a surge of optimism. Nevertheless, while Republican propagandists were declaring Ebro to be another turning point in the war, Franco began concentrating his forces for a major counterattack. As he had done throughout the war, Franco was prepared to abandon his own military objectives in order to prevent the Republicans from gaining ground in Nationalist territory.

From August until the end of October, the two sides were locked in a series of bloody confrontations. The tide of battle finally turned when the Nationalists launched an offensive into the Sierra de Pandols on October 30. By November 16, the Republicans had been driven back from all the territory they had conquered since July 25. The longest and most grueling contest of the war was finally over.

Dissension in the Nationalist Camp

In spite of the fact that few believed in the spring of 1938 that the Republic would survive another Nationalist offensive, victory continued to elude Franco. As we have seen, his slow and tedious conduct of the war was not popular among his fascist military advisers, who were critical of Franco's slavish commitment to a strategy of attrition. When, after the division of Republican Spain, it appeared to most senior military strategists on both sides as though the Republic could be defeated rapidly by an offensive in Catalonia, Franco once again defied conventional military logic by launching an attack toward Valencia. In this instance, however, his decision nearly provoked a minor rebellion among his own commanders.

Franco's questionable military decisions were not the only source of problems developing in the Nationalist camp. Ever since 1937, news of defection among Franco's troops—particularly among Carlists, Moorish, and Foreign Legionaries—began making their way into the foreign press reports and diplomatic dispatches emanating from Nationalist Spain. After 1937, there were also signs, if not of dissatisfaction, of growing war-weariness among the rank-and-file soldiers. This most likely accounted for the inconsistent performance of Nationalist units on the battlefield. While they were better-equipped and fed than their Republican counterparts, the morale of Franco's soldiers was daily being undermined by several factors. The unexpected setbacks they experienced when the Republicans struck an offensive blow was one source of declining morale as was the high casualty rates that invariably accompanied these bloody slogging matches. While there was no way of knowing for certain how far this particular malaise had advanced among Nationalist troops, there was the ever-present danger that it could spread as long as the war continued.

By the spring of 1938, the generally optimistic mood of the population in Nationalist territory was increasingly being tested. Ironically, this might have owed something to the triumphal rhetoric underpinning Franco's regime. The accuracy of the regime's indulgent predictions of the imminent demise of the Republic was called into question every time the Republican army forestalled defeat. As a result, disillusionment began to sink in among those who were beginning to believe that the end of the war was not forthcoming. The mounting number of civilian casualties late in the war also generated rumblings of discontent, particularly among the die-hard Nationalists. This was particularly evident in the period when the Nationalists were conducting heavy bombing attacks against the civilian populations on the other side. Though Nationalist censors suppressed accurate news of these raids, rumors of the carnage they were causing circulated more freely.

The fact that Franco's fascist allies (particularly the Italians) were largely responsible for these bombing missions caused a certain number of Falangists and Carlists to begin calling for "Spain for the Spaniards," a subversive refrain that echoed the Republican view that the Germans and Italians were acting like foreign invaders. The problems referred to were serious, but they were not major impediments to Franco's rule. For the most part, the authoritarian state apparatus he was constructing withstood the challenges of dissent and disillusionment. Franco himself managed to weather each crisis with characteristic aplomb—such as his clash with Yagüe over the Caudillo's decision not to advance on Catalonia—and his grip on power remained firm throughout his frustratingly slow and deliberate march to total victory.

The Fall of Barcelona and Madrid

The Republicans' defeat at Ebro paved the way for the Nationalists' final offensive. Toward the end of December, some 300,000 of Franco's troops attacked all along the Catalonia front. Although the tattered remains of the Republican defense forces put up a spirited fight, their resistance was in vain. By January 3, 1939, the Nationalists were well on their way to victory. Their primary target, Barcelona, held out until January 25 and was occupied by General Yagüe's troops the following
day. The collapse of the regional capital sparked off one of the greatest mass exoduses of modern times. Behind the fleeing members of the Republican government, who had just days before taken refuge near the French border in the small town of Figueras, there followed tens of thousands of civilians and soldiers.

With the fall of Catalonia, the last Republican stronghold, Madrid, was now surrounded by a sea of Nationalists. Short on ammunition and weapons and with their food supplies running out, it is hardly surprising that the Republicans' will to continue resisting was rapidly dissipating. The faint hope that Spain's conflict could be drawn out until the outbreak of a general European war was extinguished in early March, when a mini-Civil War between anti- and pro-communist elements erupted in the Republican zone. The establishment of an anticommunist junta (Defense Council) was seen by some as the only chance the Republicans had of negotiating a peace settlement with Franco. By this point, however, felt no need to reach an understanding with anyone or any group on the opposing side. A few days after the fighting between the communists and their leftist enemies ended, Franco gave the order for his troops to occupy Madrid. On March 27, Nationalist troops began slowly marching into the capital, and four days later, Franco declared that the war was over.

In the press of the wartime Republic, the Popular Army (the Spanish adjective popular means "of the people" but to call it "People's Army" would suggest a similarity to forces which did not exist at the time, as well as begging the question of communist influence) was often called the Spanish army, to underline that Franco's forces were foreign, as indeed they were to a greater extent than those of the Republic. The Popular Army consisted of the remains of those parts of the Spanish Army, its war materiel, and its professional and noncommissioned officers, who had not rebelled and in some cases had taken part in the crushing of the rebellion of their fellow officers on the weekend of July 18-19, 1936. From these the Republic created a military force that fought the war that arose from the coup launched by the larger part of the officers and the garrisons and led by General Francisco Franco. The Popular Army became a full-size force of several hundred thousand men, who fought for two years and eight months in particular conditions of inferiority.

Its interest for historians and Hispanists in general lies in the issues that arose during the Civil War from arguments about the nature of the army and from the political tensions suffered at the time as they affected the character of a national army fighting a civil war, together with questions of armament and politico-military issues regarding appropriate strategy. For military, social, and political historians, the significant questions lie in the area of the extent to which an army can be "revolutionary," how this term is interpreted, and how far discussion of the nature of the Spanish Popular Army can be understood and assessed against the criteria of successful forces created in comparable situations elsewhere. The Soviet Russian advisers of the Popular Army inevitably thought in terms of their experience of the Russian Civil War of 1918-20. In historical terms, references were made to the armies of the French Revolution of the late eighteenth century and even to the New Model Army in the English
Chapter 4

1. The best overview of civil-military relations during the Restoration era can be found in Boyd, *Prataorion Politics in Liberal Spain*. See also, Seco Serrano, *Militarismo y civilismo*.

2. Led by battle-hardened officers like José Millán Astray and Francisco Franco, the latter quickly gained notoriety for its discipline, ruthlessness, and efficient fighting abilities.


4. By early 1936, there were an estimated 30,000 members throughout Spain as a whole. Carlist efforts to overthrow the government also received financial support from Mussolini's government. Martin Blinkhorn, *Carlism and Crisis in Spain*, 1925-1939 (New York and London: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 136-57.

5. Though the clandestine *Unión Militar Española* (UME)—composed of around one-fourth of the active officer corps (3,436)—played a role in the early planning of the uprising, the organization itself lacked the kind of cohesive organization and forceful leadership which would have made it, in the words of Stanley Payne, an "effective instrument of conspiracy." See his, *Spain’s First Democracy* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 290.

6. In addition, to ensure that there would not be any organized effort to resist the rebellion, Mola’s directive called for the violent suppression of all groups and individuals who were deemed enemies of the insurrectionary movement.


11. Both Italy and Germany deepened their commitment to Franco over time. The first organized Italian troops arrived in Spain in early 1937, while Germany formalized its military support to the Nationalists by organizing the Condor Legion in October 1936.

Chapter 5

1. See, for example, ABC (Madrid), passim.


4. For a close study of Soviet aid to the Republic, see D. Kowalsky, *La Unión Soviética y la guerra civil española: una revisión crítica* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2004), 197-220.


9. Ibid. on militia, 130-75.


12. Ibid., 48-54.


