The Spanish Civil War began on July 17, 1936, with the revolt of elite units of the Spanish army in the Moroccan Protectorate against the left Republican government of Azaña and Casares Quiroga. In accordance with the ill-coordinated conspiracy organized by General Mola, they were joined within the next seventy-two hours by something more than half the units of the Spanish army, primarily in the north, west, and extreme south of the peninsula. Subsequent propaganda presented the rising as a move to prevent an imminent Communist seizure of power that was supposed to have begun only a few weeks later. Some rebel officers did indeed believe that a leftist coup was about to occur, but their leaders did not assume any such timetable. Rather, their goal was simply to put an end to extreme political, social, and economic disorder and quash leftist power in Spain.

Up to the last minute the Azaña-Casares Quiroga government refused to believe that any sizable portion of the army would rebel. Azaña knew that nearly all the senior commanders appointed after the Popular Front victory were reliable. Moreover, he had switched around scores of less reliable officers during the late winter and spring of 1936, but had hesitated to make further moves against the military for fear of antagonizing them still more and of leaving the government completely defenseless vis-à-vis the revolutionary left. Azaña was essentially correct in his judgment of senior commanders; the
rebellion was not a "generals' revolt" but a rising by the active nationalistic middle strata of the officer corps that in some cases swept reluctant generals along with it or simply deposed them and seized their commands.

Finally, on the night of July 18-19, Azaña did what he had hitherto refused to do since the beginning of the Republic: attempt a compromise with non-liberals. The Casares Quiroga cabinet was hastily replaced by a more moderate ministry led by Diego Martínez Barrio, the most temperate middle class leader within the Popular Front coalition. Martínez Barrio offered major concessions to the rebels, including the ministry of defense for Mola, the leader of the conspiracy. Thirty days earlier some such arrangement might have worked, but by July 19 it was too late. Polarization was almost complete, and Mola refused to go back on the pledges the conspirators had made among themselves not to rest until the present system was overthrown.

From that point the lines were drawn. The Martínez Barrio ministry gave way to an all-left Republican cabinet under José Giral that immediately acceded to leftist demands for the "arming of the people," meaning not of course the "people" but the organized leftist groups. This completed the division of Spain: before midday on July 19 fewer than half the units in the army had come out in direct rebellion. By July 20 a slight majority had done so. The insurgents occupied Spanish Morocco and the Canaries, all of north-central Spain save the Basque country, Santander and Asturias, all the west, and an edge of the extreme south. In most cases, these were the more conservative areas of the country which had voted for the right in the February elections and which more or less supported the revolt. In the largest cities (save Seville and Zaragoza) and throughout the center, east, and southeast, the revolutionary parties assisted loyal police and military forces in smothering revolts by those army units which tried to resist the Giral government.

The Spanish Revolution

The leftist zone has been variously designated "Republican," "loyalist," and "Popular Front." Of those terms, the adjective "loyalist" is somewhat misleading, for there was no attempt to remain loyal to the constitutional Republican regime. If that had been the scrupulous policy of the left, there would have been no revolt and civil war in the first place. Instead, the long-threatened revolution finally erupted in almost every part of Spain that was not occupied by the rebellious military. The great irony was thus that the revolution was not instigated by the revolutionaries' own planning but in response to and as a result of the opportunity provided by the counterrevolutionary revolt of the military.

The Giral government exercised authority only in the greater Madrid district, and even there it was highly limited. In Catalonia an Anti-Fascist Militia Committee exercised de facto power in a system of revolutionary dualism parallel to the merely nominal authority of the Catalan Generalitat. The committee was made up of representatives of all the leftist parties but was largely dominated by the anarchists of the FAI-CNT, who played a major role in quashing the attempted military revolt in Barcelona. Regional coalition revolutionary committees of the leftist parties and movements also seized de facto, sometimes temporarily de jure, control of the regions of Valencia, Asturias, and Santander. Militia columns of Catalan anarchists soon occupied eastern Aragón and set up their separate regional Council of Aragón in September. The moderate, Catholic Basque Nationalists remained loyal to the nominal Republican government in return for the passage of a Basque autonomy statute, similar to that of Catalonia, at the beginning of October. A regional government of "Euzkadi" (a Basque nationalist neologism referring to the Basque country) was then established over Vizcaya and western Guipúzcoa. Provincial revolutionary committees held de facto power in most other provinces of the leftist zone. Thus after July 1936 what remained of the constitutional Republic gave way to the "revolutionary Republican confederation" of 1936-1937.

The revolutionary committees, the syndicates, and the militia groups began at once to in some cases requisition and in other cases expropriate whatever they considered most important to their needs or
their work. Franz Borkenau estimated that something like 70 percent of the industrial establishments in Barcelona were taken over by workers, 50 percent of those in Valencia, and 30 percent of those in Madrid. Certainly the urban socio-economic revolution went farther in Catalonia than in any other part of the leftist zone. For two months the Catalan Generalitat accepted a system of revolutionary dualism in which real power was held by the Anti-Fascist Militia Committee. Yet, though the CNT had become the major power in Catalonia, it found itself unable to carry out the complete revolution of "libertarian communism" that it postulated. The revolution was occurring in conditions of total civil war, and even though CNT syndicates had seized large sectors of Catalan industry, they lacked the resources to operate these alone. For the first time in the movement's history, the CNT agreed to regular collaboration in a formal government, their representatives joining a reorganized Catalan cabinet at the close of September 1936. The new Catalan government [648] then set to work to legitimize the economic revolution. Its counselor of economics, a CNT economist named Juan Fàbregas, prepared a decree in October establishing the compulsory collectivization of all factories with more than one hundred employees, as well as for those with between fifty and one hundred employees if a majority of the employees demanded it. Moreover, provisions were made for "industrial concentrations" that would bring small shops in some sectors under the control of large collectives.

In the main part of the leftist zone, particularly in areas where Socialists rather than anarcho-syndicalists predominated, there was much less interest in de jure collectivization. Most important businesses were requisitioned or in one way or another taken under syndical control, but the process was never systematized and many firms were operated in much the same way as before. In the autonomous Basque country, there was no real economic revolution at all. The Basque government requisitioned the use of war-related and other industries, but there were no basic changes in ownership or structure.

Acceleration of the agrarian reform was sustained in the main part of the leftist zone, thanks in part to Communist concern. The problem was to rally the support of landless peasants against "fascism," while avoiding alienation of smallholders through reckless expropriation. Lands of all overt supporters of the Nationalists were soon seized, as were all larger properties. The expropriations were progressively extended, until by August 1938 the following number of hectares had been expropriated in the main part of the leftist zone:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Expropriation</th>
<th>Number of Hectares</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confiscated for political reasons</td>
<td>2,162,402</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expropriated for reasons of &quot;social utility&quot;</td>
<td>2,008,470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupied directly by peasants under provisional title</td>
<td>1,252,340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5,423,212</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This amounted to nearly 35 percent of the arable land in the leftist zone. A total of 316,777 peasants received land, and 2,213 cooperatives were formed, though under wartime conditions most were not especially successful.

In the anarchist fief of eastern Aragón, the CNT collectivized most of the land, forming several hundred cooperatives. Some of these were later broken up when government control was restored in this area in the summer of 1937. In Catalonia there was much less expropriation than in most other areas, largely because land was better distributed and peasant smallholders often supported the left Catalanists. Only a small number of rural cooperatives were created, but Catalan legislation later provided for comprehensive reforms, reducing all holdings to limited size and even guaranteeing 20 percent shares of small-farm profits for each hired laborer.

The revolution of 1936-1937 had a sweeping effect on economic structure in much of the leftist zone, but the social effects were somewhat less drastic. Save in some of the larger urban areas, there was no
abrupt change in mores. In Barcelona and certain key centers there was great emphasis on "proletarian style," and in Catalonia inexpensive abortion facilities were set up, but the personal behavior of very many of the Spanish lower classes remained surprisingly conservative, and there was comparatively little emulation of Russian-style "revolutionary morality."

The Terror

During the first months of the fighting most of the deaths did not come from combat on the battlefield but from political executions in the rear—the "Red" and "White" terrors. In some cases the murder of political opponents began more or less spontaneously, but from the very beginning there was always a certain degree of organization, and nearly all the killings after the first few days were carried out by organized groups. Murder of the political opposition was an almost inevitable result of conditions of revolutionary civil war and the constant incitement to violence, particularly by the left, in the years leading up to it. Fear was also a major ingredient. Both sides knew that they had reached a showdown and were eager to eliminate potential opposition before it was too late.

The Red terror began with the murder of some of the rebels as they attempted to surrender after their revolt had failed in several of the key cities. From there it broadened out to wholesale arrests, and sometimes wholesale executions, of people associated with right-wing groups or the Catholic church. In general, this was not an irrepressible outpouring of hatred by the man in the street for his "oppressors," as it has sometimes been painted, but a semi-organized activity carried out by sections of nearly all the leftist groups. In the entire leftist zone the only organized political party that eschewed involvement in such activity were the Basque Nationalists.

Within a matter of weeks Socialist and anarcho-syndicalist leaders tried to bring such killings under control. "Control patrols" were organized in many areas and a series of revolutionary "people's courts," that in most cases imposed much lighter penalties, were formed to channel the repression of anti-leftists. After about six months, when a reorganized Popular Front government began to reassert authority, most of the random executions were ended, but [650] under more centralized control, political killings continued throughout the leftist zone until the end of the war.

The repression in the Nationalist zone was more centralized and much more effective. Though often carried out by right-wing civilian groups, the White terror was almost from the beginning nominally institutionalized under military courts-martial. It was also more efficient, for, being under more coordinated direction, it was concentrated against the most dangerous opposition elements. By contrast, particularly during the first six months, each Red terror group operated on its own in a frequently irrational fashion, murdering innocent people and letting some of the more dangerous go free. Moreover, one of the main targets of the Red terror was the clergy, most of whom were not engaged in overt opposition.

The toll taken by the respective terrors may never be known exactly. The left slaughtered more in the first months, but the Nationalist repression probably reached its height only after the war had ended, when punishment was exacted and vengeance wreaked on the vanquished left. The White terror may have slain 50,000, perhaps fewer, during the war. The Franco government now gives the names of 61,000 victims of the Red terror, but this is not subject to objective verification. The number of victims of the Nationalist repression, during and after the war, was undoubtedly greater than that.

Grim as the reality was, it was immediately exaggerated by both sides, eager to deepen the guilt of their adversaries and underline the sufferings of their own people. Thus the legend of the millón de muertos, which exaggerated both terrorist and battlefield deaths by approximately 200 percent, was widely accepted after the war and gave rise to a contemporary variant of the Black Legend that stressed the supposedly uniquely sanguinary propensities of the Spanish.
In fact, compared with other revolutionary civil wars of twentieth century Europe, the Spanish Civil War was not remarkably lethal, either on the battlefield or behind the lines. In Finland, in 1918, approximately 1 percent of the population was killed during and in the aftermath of a four-month civil war.\(^1\) It took the Spanish nearly three years to destroy proportionately as many of themselves, but when this occurred in Spain it was put down by foreign observers to the "innate savagery" of the Spanish.

In addition to the deaths that resulted, the twin terrors in Spain left another, equally fateful, legacy. They left a gulf of enduring hatred between opposing sectors of society that made a final resolution of the conflict much more difficult.

**International Reaction to the Civil War**

Outbreak of the civil war caught all the great powers by surprise. Spain had not been involved in major international disputes since the partition of Morocco early in the century. The Republic can hardly be said to have had a foreign policy, and refused to take an independent stand on major international issues, save to blandly endorse the League of Nations. Both sides immediately looked for outside military support when the war began. The Republican government turned to France, which was also ruled by a Popular Front coalition--though in the case of France nonrevolutionary--and which held official contracts to supply the Spanish military. The initial French response was positive, and small numbers of planes and supplies were dispatched, but after indication of German and Italian support to the rebels, and mounting opposition among moderate and conservative opinion in France, the French government grew more cautious. It feared conflict with the central European fascist powers and followed the British policy of noninvolvement. During the month of August 1936 agreements were worked out for a nonintervention pact signed by all the great powers, implemented by an official committee sitting in London. This theoretically would deny arms support for both sides. Republican authorities protested that theirs was the legitimate government, and hence entitled under recognized rules of international law to purchase arms in all countries with which Spain had diplomatic relations. The reality of the revolution, however, discouraged other states from taking this claim too seriously.

The rebel military leaders sent representatives to both the German and Italian governments at the end of the first week of fighting. Neither Hitler nor Mussolini could gain a clear picture of the situation in Spain, but both were eventually attracted by the idea of helping establish a right-wing government in Spain favorable to them, while throttling the efforts of the revolutionary left. At the end of July both fascist governments sent small quantities of planes and material, but at first neither would commit itself to a major investment in the Spanish conflict.

This paralleled the attitude of the Soviet Union. The Comintern had encouraged the overthrow of the Spanish Republic from its very inception, and after the Popular Front elections the Communist party called for a rapid transition to a "worker-peasant" dictatorship, but this line changed abruptly as soon as the civil war began. The Communists were more keenly aware than were anarchists and revolutionary Socialists that the support of liberal and moderate middle class people would be needed to win the struggle. Moreover, Stalin was eager to strengthen the Soviet Union's position vis-à-vis Britain and France in opposition to Nazi Germany, and a regime of the extreme left in Spain would alienate moderate and conservative opinion in the western countries. Hence the Communists immediately announced that the goal of the civil war was not to establish a proletarian revolutionary regime but simply to defend a middle class parliamentary republic (though that had already ceased to exist). During the first two months of the civil war the Soviet government sent very little military equipment to the leftist zone, and, like Germany and Italy, signed the nonintervention agreement. However, at the very same time, the first official Soviet ambassador was dispatched to Madrid, a special military advisory commission was sent, and an NKVD section for intelligence activities was installed in the erstwhile Republican capital. All Communist assistance was eagerly received--save by
the anarchists--for this seemed to be the only significant source of foreign support for the left.

**Franco's Nationalist Government**

The military revolt began with only a vague, general political plan. The rebel chiefs realized that a brief civil war could hardly be avoided, but Mola proposed to bring enough forces from northern Spain and from Morocco within two or three weeks to choke off resistance and capture Madrid. He planned to establish an all-military government which would create joint military-civilian local governing bodies staffed by officers and conservative leaders. The strength of the leftist reaction and the failure of the revolt in the navy, which made it impossible at first to move large numbers of troops from Morocco, upset much of this plan. However, a National Defense Junta was set up at Burgos on July 22, 1936, composed of senior army officers and nominally led by a mere, figurehead, General Miguel Cabanellas, the senior active general in the army.

The real leaders were Mola, in command of rebel forces in the north, and General Francisco Franco, who led the elite Moroccan units. Franco had been a hero of the earlier Moroccan campaigns and the youngest general in the Spanish army. He had been director of [653] the national military academy from 1928 to 1931, demoted by Azaña and then made chief of the general staff in 1935. He had more prestige than any officer in the army but had never before played an active role in politics. In reputation and authority he stood above all the other leaders, and it was his representatives who negotiated the first arrangements for German and Italian assistance. By September, it was clear that the civil war had become a bitter struggle that was likely to continue for some time and that a strong unified command was needed. Once the principle of the *mando único* was decided upon, it was almost a foregone conclusion that Franco would become commander in chief and head of government. When formation of a Nationalist government under Franco was announced on October 1, 1936, he assumed the title of head of state as well.

The main support for the Nationalist counterrevolutionary movement came from the middle classes, the conservative peasant smallholders of the north, and Catholic opinion in general. The Catholic clergy had little to do with the genesis of the antileftist insurgence, and during the first year of the Civil War the church hierarchy maintained an officially neutral stance for fear of being compromised should the Nationalists collapse. In fact, it was inevitable that nearly all Catholic opinion would rally to Franco after the orgy of church-burning and priest murder that wracked most of the leftist zone during the first six months of the war. The main exceptions were the Catholic Basque Nationalists, but even in the Basque country one-third of the people backed Franco. Finally in mid-1937, the Catholic Church gave its official blessing to the Franco regime; a joint pastoral letter of Spanish bishops denounced the left and proclaimed the Nationalist struggle to be a crusade. Religious fervor was probably the major source of emotional support for the Nationalists in the Civil War.

The Franco government began as a rather simple and uncertain military dictatorship. It had no clear doctrine or program other than national unity and the defeat of the left. Franco was a cautious, thoroughly professional soldier with no training in politics or economics. He had to devote most of his time to military leadership, and the real political architect of the first phase of the Franco regime was his brother-in-law, Ramón Serrano Súñer, former secretary of the CEDA youth movement.

The new political ideas of antileftist dynamism in the European air were those of fascism and the totalitarian state. The catastrophe of the Republic and the disaster of all-out civil war completely discredited the CEDA's conservative tactic of parliamentarianism. Serrano Súñer and certain other government collaborators embraced the idea of a Spanish fascism, though its content was vague. The only real [654] Spanish fascist movement, the Falange, had achieved no importance whatever before the spring of 1936. All its main leaders were killed by the left in the first months of the civil war. However, it enjoyed an enormous influx of membership from frightened and disillusioned middle class people and by the beginning of 1937 had several hundred thousand affiliates. It was helping to organize
scores of thousands of militiamen and auxiliaries and playing a major role in bolstering the Nationalist rear guard. The only other organized political group providing significant support were the Carlists, who volunteered en masse and contributed some of the Nationalists' most effective shock troops. After preparations by Serrano, on April 19, 1937, Franco established an organized political front for the regime by decreeing the fusion of the Falange and the Carlists' "Traditionalist Communion" in a new entity to be called the Falange Española Tradicionalista, henceforth declared the official state party (partido único) of the Nationalist regime.

Franco was not, however, turning his government into a Falangist state. Rather, he was simply making the revamped Falange the fascist state party of his eclectic military dictatorship. In his unification speech he emphasized that the new party would constitute a broad national front of people from disparate moderate and conservative (and sometimes leftist) backgrounds, and that its program and ideology would be subject to change and elaboration. The formation of a Spanish fascist state party was naturally pleasing to the German and Italian governments, but Franco did not plan the Falange as an imitation of the Nazi or Fascist parties. The "totalitarian" state that he spoke of would, he said, derive its norms from Spanish tradition, going back to the authoritarian monarchy of Fernando and Isabel. It did provide his government with a vague ideology and a bureaucratic following.

Franco's first regular government was not organized until 1938, and even then half its members were army officers. Plans were drawn up for corporate economic organization, elaborating on Primo de Rivera's system under the rubric of Falangist "national syndicalism." So long as the war lasted, however, the Franco government paid little attention to domestic changes. Having rallied the support of much of the middle classes, it devoted itself to maintaining unity and order and to winning the military struggle.

The Spanish People's Republic

The only leftist group that had a policy for prosecuting the leftist revolution in terms that might make possible both military and political victory was the Communist party. The essence of the Communist program was the reestablishment of central government authority in the leftist zone and the formation of an organized army to win the war. Abroad, the Comintern usually advertised the struggle as one of basic parliamentary democracy against fascism. This line was too conservative to be effective within the leftist zone, where the Communist policy tried to channel the revolution within limits compatible with the political and economic demands of the war. While encouraging government control and a certain degree of nationalization of industry, the Communists discouraged all-out collectivization to avoid frightening the lower middle classes and driving them completely into the arms of Franco.

Communist influence, still only secondary before the fighting started, increased enormously during the first months of the civil war. Only the Communists had a united party with a consistent program. The Socialists were divided and the CNT incapable of concerted, organized action. Communist emphasis on paramilitary activity enabled them to exert influence on military organization in the Madrid district far exceeding their party membership. Moreover, the diplomatic and military support of the Soviet Union gave Spanish Communism a decisive voice that it could never otherwise have achieved. Communist party membership increased more rapidly than that of any other group in the leftist zone.

The revolutionary Socialists also admitted the need for a more representative and organized government, after the disastrous military defeats of the left in the second month of the civil war. Consequently the first all-Popular Front government was organized under Largo Caballero in September 1936. This cabinet included two officially Communist ministers and one crypto-Communist, as well as one Catalanist and one Basque Nationalist. Four CNT representatives joined in November.
Over a period of six months, from the fall of 1936 to the spring of 1937, there developed an increasingly tense struggle between the forces of centralization and state control, led by the Communists, moderate Socialists, and middle class left on the one hand, and the supporters of continuing revolutionary dualism and local autonomy, led by the CNT and the small independent revolutionary Marxist POUM in Catalonia on the other. One of the main bones of contention was the organization of the new People's Army. Largo Caballero was the head of the Popular Front government that was reestablishing authority, yet his personal attitude was ambiguous. His own military appointees began organization of the People's Army, but he was reluctant to repress the local revolutionary committees completely, as the Communists and others demanded. Indeed, by April [656] 1937 Largo Caballero, the nominal leader of the "bolshevizing" Socialists, had become bitterly anti-Communist. He feared the growing influence of the Communist party and the Soviet Union in the leftist zone. In 1936 the Communists had stolen most of the Socialist youth movement to form their own JSU (United Socialist Youth), and had taken over the Catalan section of the Socialist party to form their own new Catalan Communist party (PSUC). They dominated military organization in the main zone of operations and tried by every means to impose their views on the government. In April 1937 Largo rebelled, attempted to reduce the number of Communist military appointees, and began secret negotiations with representatives of the four leading west European powers to try to reach a compromise that would end the war and force the Soviet presence out of Spain.

The climax of the struggle between the revolutionary extreme left and neo-Republican Popular Front state occurred in Barcelona in May 1937. Communist-led police tried to reoccupy the Barcelona telephone center in the name of the Catalan Generalitat. This led to full-scale resistance by the CNT and POUM, who soon occupied most of Barcelona. The government had to move in reinforcements, and the CNT leaders, already collaborating with the state, were eager to avoid conflict. Republican troops occupied Barcelona and the extreme left acquiesced.

The Communists then forced Largo from office, and he was replaced by Juan Negrín, a pro-Communist Socialist who was willing to cooperate with them fully and pursue a policy of central authority and all-out resistance to the Spanish Nationalists. In October 1937 the seat of government was moved from Valencia (where it had been located in November 1936) to Barcelona; in the meantime government control had been extended over nearly all the local revolutionary committees. In Catalonia this process had begun months earlier by the Catalan Generalitat, yet under the Negrín regime the Catalanists saw their own sphere of autonomy shrink rapidly. During the first year of the civil war Catalonia had failed to provide its share of assistance to the military effort, and during the second half of the war Catalan autonomy was honored only in the breach. The whole experience was one of disillusion and bitterness for the Catalanists, who at one point walked out of the Negrín government.

In 1937-1938 the Communists exercised general hegemony in the politics, military affairs, and propaganda of the leftist zone, but the wartime Republican government never became a Communist regime. Soviet policy was eager to avoid giving the appearance of a Communist-controlled state in Spain. That would have completed the alienation of the lower middle classes in Spain and of most opinion in Britain and France at a time when support from all these elements [657] was vital to the international situation. The Republican government remained a multiparty regime (exclusively of the left) under general Communist tutelage but not complete Communist control.

The Communists and most other left groups hailed it as a "people's republic," a progressivist leftist regime that had eliminated all conservative influence and major capitalist economic power, as well as that of the church. This gave a new twist to the phrase República popular, used before the war by the middle class left to mean a "people's" or "popular" republic standing for constitutional democracy in the interests of the majority of the population. The Communists used "people's republic" to mean a left-wing transition regime that would lead to the worker-peasant dictatorship, the first such regime in
modern Europe. After 1945, when hybrid "people's democracies" were instituted in the east-central European countries occupied by the Red Army, they pointed to the Spanish regime of Negrín as their predecessor.

**The Military Struggle**

Militarily, the Spanish Civil War may be divided into eight phases: 1) the rebellion and taking up of positions, July 17-30, 1936; 2) the Nationalist march from the south, August-October 1936; 3) the battles around Madrid, November 1936-March 1937, which ended in stalemate; 4) the Nationalist conquest of the northern Republican zone, April-October 1937, which tilted the balance of power; 5) the Republican offensives in Aragón, October-December 1937, and the ensuing Nationalist counteroffensive of January-February 1938; 6) the Nationalist offensive in Aragón, March-June 1938, which divided the remaining leftist zone in two; 7) the Battle of the Ebro, July-November 1938; and 8) the Nationalist conquest of Catalonia, December 1938-February 1939, leading to the end of the war at the close of March 1939.

The beginning struggle gave the left control of most of the large cities, the center, the east, and most of the south, as well as the greater part of the northern coast. The rebels gained control of approximately one-third of peninsular Spain, mainly in the north-center and west, with a toehold in the extreme south from Córdoba to Cádiz. At first, nearly half the police and regular army remained with the nominal Republican authorities, and they were put to effective use against the rebels during the first days. Organized forces were all distrusted by the extreme left, however, and after two weeks most organized units had been dissolved in favor of untrained, poorly led, undisciplined militia units from the left groups.

[658] The main strength of the Nationalists lay in the elite 25,000-man Army of Africa, but leftist control of most of the navy and the Moroccan straits, as well as of three-quarters of the air force, at first made it impossible to move these forces across to the peninsula. The first Italian and German aerial assistance, some forty planes, facilitated the beginning of the aerial (and later the naval) convoy of troops to Spain at the close of July. Poor leadership and organization prevented the left from using its naval and air superiority effectively, some of the naval officers having been killed by revolutionary crewmen. Thus a march northward from Seville by the Army of Africa was begun on August 3.

During the next ninety days the Army of Africa, assisted by very small units from other sectors of the rebel army and by right-wing militia, conquered nearly all of southwestern Spain. Militia columns dispatched by the Socialist and Communist organizers of Madrid far outnumbered the forward units of the Nationalists and were in general at least as well equipped, but they were grossly deficient in military leadership, training, and organization. By the first week of November, Franco's small field force of little more than 25,000 combat troops was just outside the capital.

At this crucial moment, when all seemed lost for the left, the defense of Madrid stiffened dramatically. Several factors were responsible: a) the numerical weakness of Franco's units, tired and overextended; b) the greater effectiveness of the Republican militia in fighting from defensive positions, along with the knowledge that there could be no more retreat; c) the arrival of the first sizable shipments of Russian material in October, which gave the left great superiority in armor and continued air control; and d) the appearance of the first two International Brigades of foreign volunteers recruited and organized by the Comintern. After the first attack on Madrid was blunted by mid-November, Franco attempted several flanking attacks to the north in December and January 1937, but these were stopped as well.

During the autumn of 1936 both sides devoted much energy to building up a mass army for what might be a long struggle. On the central front the militia columns began to give way to the first units of a new Republican People's Army, whose organization was extended to nearly all parts of the leftist zone by
the close of 1937. However, since the revolutionaries had made it impossible to use most of the thousands of professional army officers within the Republican zone, the People's Army never solved the problem of staffing and leadership, its organizational cohesion remaining distinctly inferior to that of the Nationalist forces.

Meanwhile, increased Russian intervention brought counterescalation from Germany and Italy. Early in November the first units of a new 100-plane German air corps began to arrive, together with more German equipment and military instructors. In December Mussolini began to dispatch regular ground forces to Spain, where 40,000 Italian troops were operating by the spring of 1937. Moreover, the bulk of the equipment of the Nationalist forces was provided by Italy.

The last of the battles in the Madrid region occurred in February and March 1937, when two more Nationalist offensives, one to the south across the Jarama, the other to the northeast in the Guadalajara region, were halted by the Republican defense.

Failure to conquer Madrid directly led Franco to open the fourth phase of the war--Nationalist conquest of the northern Republican zone in the spring and summer of 1937. Since July 1936 the provinces of Asturias, Santander, and Vizcaya (the latter, together with western Guipuzcoa, making up the newly autonomous Euzkadi) had been separated from the main Republican territory. They never formed a unified district but were governed by revolutionary committees in Asturias and Santander and by the Basque regime in Vizcaya. Vizcaya and Asturias contained the bulk of the heavy industry in the Republican zone and were a great prize. In the offensive that began in April 1937, Franco was able to conquer each of the three main regions of the northern Republican zone in isolation, concentrating his forces against them one at a time. Completion of their occupation in October 1937 greatly increased the economic and human resources of the Nationalist zone and shifted the balance of the war.

The major Republican offensives began in July 1937 with a full-scale assault at Brunete, northwest of Madrid, by the best units of the new People's Army. Its object was to relieve pressure on the north, but the Republican forces lacked leadership and cohesion in open offensive maneuvers. The attack was a failure, temporarily exhausted the People's Army, and left it without further means of support for the north.

The next Republican offensive was launched far to the northeast against the thinly held Nationalist lines in Aragón. After initial successes, it, too, ground to a halt. Nonetheless, following the loss of the north, the People's Army command tried to keep the initiative and throw Franco off balance before he could launch another major offensive on the central front. The result was the second Republican Aragonese offensive, this time against Teruel, in December 1937. It scored an initial success, knocked the Nationalists off balance, and seized Teruel, the only provincial capital conquered by the People's Army during the war. But Franco regrouped and opened a counteroffensive of his own in January-February 1938 that rewon all the lost territory and once more exhausted the Republican forces.

That opened the way for the great Nationalist offensive in Aragón in the spring of 1938. It cut the Republican zone in two, driving to the Mediterranean at Alcañiz, moving into western Catalonia, and pushing slowly but steadily southward down the coast toward Valencia. At this point, when the People's Army seemed nearly finished, it staged a major comeback. While Franco's strength was directed southward toward Valencia, the Republican forces regrouped and launched a new offensive southwestward across the Ebro. This caught the Nationalists in the rear, forced them to suspend offensive operations, and brought a four-month battle of attrition along the Ebro. When it was over, the last reserves of the People's Army were exhausted. Franco's conquest of Catalonia that began in December 1938 was a rather slow but simple and steady advance against increasingly weak opposition.
Franco’s Victory

Franco’s primary achievements in the Civil War were to maintain unity among the Nationalists, build an adequate mass military machine, and guarantee enough support from Germany and Italy to sustain his forces. Hitler never made a major commitment to the Spanish struggle. His concern was to use it as a focal point for rallying anti-Communist sentiment throughout western Europe and to divert attention from Germany’s own rearmament and expansion. By 1938 he considered withdrawing German support from Spain altogether and leaving the field to Mussolini, who had involved Italy much more deeply. The Italian government was committed as a matter of prestige, particularly after the military stalemate at Guadalajara in March 1937. The bulk of the material for the Nationalist forces was supplied by Italy. Yet, contrary to leftist propaganda, Franco was able to maintain this flow of support without compromising the independence of his regime. Mining concessions had to be made to Germany in 1938, but beyond that the large volume of material from both fascist powers was made essentially as a loan without binding strings attached.

By comparison, Russian assistance to the Republican side began to wane after about nine months, that is, in mid-1937. Stalin’s goal was to brace the Republican war effort, increase Communist influence to the point of general hegemony, and through the struggle in Spain hold at bay Germany and Italy while winning support from France for the new Russian policy of collective security. Communist policy within the leftist zone was generally successful. The aim was not to set up an outright Communist regime, which would have been difficult to achieve and would have alienated the western powers, but to make of Republican Spain a loyal satellite. This had been largely if not completely achieved under the People’s Republic of Negrín, but the larger design of Russian policy had been a failure. France and other western countries had not rallied to the so-called anti-fascist struggle in Spain. Hence after mid-1937 Stalin found it imprudent to maintain a significant commitment under parlous circumstances at the opposite end of the continent. The Russian effort was reduced but not altogether ended, for, as in the case of Hitler, it suited Stalin’s calculations to keep the Spanish war going as long as possible. Continued leftist resistance in Spain might prove a useful bargaining point for Stalin should direct negotiations with Hitler ever materialize, and conversely, might be a useful lever should war with Germany ever break out.

During 1938, morale in the Republican zone steadily sagged. Those of moderate opinion no longer supported the struggle (if they ever did), while the anarchist extreme left felt that the achievements of the revolution were being sacrificed to the demands of the war and the policies of the Negrín regime. Concessions were made to the moderate middle classes on one hand while controls increased on the other. Similarly, the CNT officially began to give up its traditional revolutionary apoliticism and took steps during 1938 to convert itself into a Spanish Libertarian Movement (MLE) that would function as a regular political party. All the while, anarchists sought an alternative to the Negrín regime.

Military defeat and lack of supplies ground down the Republican troops. Communist hegemony in politics and propaganda increased the malaise of leftists on the home front, many of whom saw no reason to continue to fight for the Negrín government. After the loss of all Catalonia in the winter of 1939 resistance became hopeless, yet the government and Communist leaders insisted on a struggle to the last, their only real hope being that a broader European war might soon break out and rally foreign powers to their aid.

One of the great ironies of the Spanish Civil War was that it ended almost the same way it began, with a rebellion by a minority of the nominally Republican army against the Republican government on the grounds that it was in the process of becoming a Communist dictatorship. In March 1939, leaders of the non-Communist leftist parties in Madrid formed a National Defense Council (almost the same title used by Mola’s first rebel council in July 1936) under the anti-Communist commander of the Republic’s Madrid garrison, Col. Segismundo Casado. It declared that Negrín had been deposed and it hoped to
start negotiations with Franco. While the prime minister and top Communist leaders fled Spain by air, a bitter battle ensued between Communist and non-Communist Republican units in Madrid. The latter won control of the capital, only to surrender unconditionally to Franco at the close of March 1939.

The Nationalists thus won a complete military victory in the most bitter civil war in Spanish history, a war that reflected the major ideological and spiritual conflicts of the twentieth century. Though both sides had relied on foreign material, it had been a war fought essentially by Spaniards. Approximately 2,000,000 men were mobilized by the rival regimes out of a total Spanish population of 25,000,000. Few more than 200,000 were killed as a result of the fighting (some 70,000 Nationalists, 100,000 or more Republicans), but about 100,000 more were killed in political executions. Altogether there had been at least 300,000 violent deaths in Spain, and a great chasm of fear, hatred, and bitterness, as well as of persecution and oppression, had been opened in the country.

Bibliography for Chapter 26


Note for Chapter 26

1. The principal study of the killings in the Finnish Civil War is Jaakko Paavolainen, *Poliittiset väkivalvaisuus Suomessa 1918*, 2 vols. (Helsinki, 1967). It concludes that approximately 31,000 deaths resulted, or about 1 percent of the Finnish population of 3,200,000. The bulk of these were direct or indirect victims of the White terror, which killed about 8,400 outright. Another 11,800 (included in the general totals) died afterward in camps. (I am indebted for this source to my colleague Prof. Pekka Hamalainen.)