

**“Sin Rusia, la Republica Española no hubiera podido resistir ;
con Rusia, no fue capaz de vencer.”¹**

¹ “Without Russia, the Spanish Republic would have never been able to resist ; with Russia, it was not able to win.”

Fernando Schwartz. *La Internacionalización de la Guerra Civil Española. Julio de 1936- Marzo de 1937*. (Barcelona: Ediciones Ariel, 1971), 79.

This thesis is dedicated to

My late grandfather, Joaquin José Fernández Sanchez

&

My parents, Joaquin Fernández Gutierrez & Hendrika Rietveld

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ABSTRACT

The passions aroused by the Spanish Civil War have yet to recede. The extensive literature that has been produced and continues to be published testifies to this fact. From the outset of the war in Spain, numerous European countries actively participated in the Spanish conflict. However, Soviet military "aid" to the Republican government "has provoked more questions, mystification and bitter controversy than any other subject in the history of the Spanish Civil War."¹ Although the Spanish Civil War took place almost 70 years ago, and the intervention or non-intervention of many countries in Spain is well documented, Soviet involvement remains an "enigma". Little is known of Stalin's motives in Spain and even less information has emerged on the Spanish gold reserves that were sent to the USSR. This dissertation attempts to come to terms with both of these questions and, with the help of new documentation, challenge previously-held assumptions regarding Soviet foreign policy in Spain.

ABRÉGÉ

La Guerre civile espagnole a suscité des passions qui, encore aujourd'hui, sont toujours bien vivantes. La littérature qui fut produite et qui continue à être publiée le confirme. Dès les débuts de la guerre, de nombreux pays européens s'impliquèrent activement dans ce conflit opposant Nationalistes et Républicains. Cependant, Howson est d'avis que c'est l'aide militaire soviétique envers le gouvernement républicain qui a soulevé le plus grand nombre de questions, de mystifications et de controverses par rapport à tout autre sujet concernant l'histoire de la Guerre civile espagnole.² Près de 70 ans se sont écoulées depuis le début de cette guerre et les raisons pour lesquelles certains pays ont décidé d'intervenir, ou non, sont bien connues; à l'exception des motivations qui ont poussé les Soviétiques à agir. Les motifs de la participation de Staline dans le conflit en Espagne demeurent encore énigmatiques, mais le sont encore plus, les circonstances dans lesquelles des réserves d'or espagnoles ont été envoyées vers l'URSS. Cette thèse essaye de clarifier ces deux faits. S'appuyant sur de nouveaux documents, cet ouvrage remet en cause la politique étrangère de l'URSS à l'égard de l'Espagne au cours de cette période.

¹ Gerald Howson. *Arms for Spain: The Untold Story of the Spanish Civil War*. (New York: St Martins Press, 1998), 119.

² Ibid., 119.

FOREWORD

The Spanish Civil War that broke out on 17-18 July 1936 was by no means an unexpected event. The Spanish conflict had long roots in the agitated and confused manner in which Spanish politics were shaped and were being shaped. Spain had long been struggling between the dual forces of conservatism and liberalism. These two opposing camps were further divided by the existence of influential Left and Right-wing forces. In 1931, the King of Spain, Alfonso XIII, abdicated and a Second Republic was proclaimed. The new government was comprised of liberals and Socialists, which were, in turn, supported by trade unions and Anarchists. The Republican leaders created a constitution which called for a multiparty system, a decrease of the officer corps and curtailment of the power traditionally held by the Catholic Church. The provinces of Catalonia and the Basque Country were granted autonomous rights and there was much discussion over land reforms. These proposed reforms angered military officials, the Church, the landed aristocracy and all of the Conservative forces which sought to ensure the survival of a strong, centralized government. Revolutionary forces were pitted against those angered over their loss of traditional privileges.¹ In 1933, elections were held and a Right-wing coalition government was victorious and governed the country until 1936. Political intolerance grew as neither camp wanted to come to a peaceful understanding.

On 16 February 1936, a coalition of Republican, Communist, Anarchist, POUMist and Catalanian and Basque nationalists, known as the Popular Front, narrowly won the elections. These various political parties and organizations were far from united. After the February elections, violence escalated and prominent political leaders on both sides were randomly assassinated. Ever since the February elections, the Spanish officer corps had been planning an uprising against the legally elected Republican government. The revolt was scheduled to begin on 18 July, upon the delivery of a telegram sent to

¹ The "revolutionary" camp was comprised of: the POUM: Partido Obrero de Unificacion Marxista: anti-Stalinist Communist dissidents and/or Trotskyites; the CNT: Confederation Nacional del Trabajo: Anarcho-syndicalist trade union and the FAI: Federacion Anarchista Iberica: an extreme Anarchist group. The "Conservative" camp included the Church, the army, the rich landlords, small land and business owners, the Falange (the Spanish Fascist Party), Alfonsine Monarchists and the Carlists, who also wanted a return of a Monarchy but from a different dynastic line.

various garrison commanders across Spain.² The planned uprising began one day earlier in Spanish Morocco. The following day, revolts in the Southern province of Spain, Andalusia, were reported and the head of the Republican government, Santiago Casares Quiroga, refused to arm Left-wing organizations in order to contain the situation. As the rebellion spread across Andalusian cities, Casares Quiroga resigned in the evening of 18 July.³ On the 19th, Manuel Azaña, the Republican president, appointed José Giral as Prime Minister. Giral immediately issued arms to various trade unions, which consequently saved numerous cities from turning against the Republic. On that same day, the rebels had made significant gains in the more conservative provinces of Spain.⁴ By 20 July, the northern provinces of Asturias, Santander and the Basque country remained loyal to the government but they were cut off from the main Republican zone. At the end of the first three days, one third of Spain was under Nationalist control. On 24 July, the north-western province of Galicia also fell to the Insurgents. The main obstacle faced by the Nationalists was the inability of General Franco's Moroccan troops to be transferred onto the mainland, since the Republican fleet had remained loyal to the government. Republican officials worried that the situation in Spain would be aggravated should Franco and his troops, which consisted of both Moorish troops and the Foreign Legion, cross into Spain. These troops had valuable combat experience and were the best trained soldiers in the Spanish army.

Franco sent delegates to both Berlin and Rome and Italian and German transport planes soon landed in Morocco. However bleak the situation may have seemed by 21 July, the Republican government still held all of the industrial cities and if the rebel advances could be successfully checked, the Republican government still had a fair chance at containing and controlling the situation. By 29 July, German planes began to transport Moroccan troops into Spain. The Spanish government was not only faced with the mounting Rebel threat, but also found the political situation in Republican-held zones quickly eroding. The uprisings in both Madrid and Barcelona had failed largely due to

² Ironically, this coded telegram would state: "nothing to report". This was the "signal" for the revolt.

³ The Rebels called themselves Nationalists while those supporting the Spanish government called themselves the Republicans or the Loyalists.

⁴ Most notably the provinces of Navarra and Aragon.

the efforts of the UGT (a Socialist trade union in Madrid) and the CNT (Anarchist trade union in Barcelona). Even though President Azaña theoretically held power in Republican Spain, real power was possessed by revolutionary Left-wing organizations. Once the initial threat against Madrid and Barcelona was averted, the Republican government realized that it needed to create properly-led armies from the disorganized militiamen and troops still loyal to the government since it was evident that the initial revolt was rapidly escalating into a war. Both sides perpetrated excesses and sought to “hunt down” supporters of the enemy camp.

The Rebels sought to devise a plan to quickly conquer the rest of Spain: “since Madrid was seen as the hub of Republican resistance, their strategy was to take the form of drives on the Spanish capital by Mola’s northern army and Franco’s African forces.”⁵ By September, Franco began marching north, towards Madrid. The terror which surrounded the advancing Moors greatly contributed to Franco’s initial success while moving towards Madrid: Republican forces would reportedly desert their positions when rumours of approaching Moorish troops were heard. Instead of attacking Madrid right away, Franco chose to relieve Toledo, where Nationalist troops had barricaded themselves, under the leadership of Colonel Moscadó, in the Alcázar fortress.⁶ Although disunity among the various factions within the Republican camp was rampant and significantly contributed to its military failures throughout the war, a less obvious power struggle was also emerging on the Nationalist side. At the end of July, a military Junta was established in Burgos under General Caballenas. However, Nationalist Spain was divided into three dominant spheres from which General Franco emerged as the effective leader by October.⁷ General Franco had merged the various Catholic Right-wing parties, the Falange and the Carlists into one strong party, with himself as the Caudillo.⁸

⁵ Paul Preston, *The Spanish Civil War: 1936-1936*. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986), 59.

⁶ Republican troops had laid siege to the Alcázar since July but the Nationalists held strong.

⁷ The other two were General Mola in the North and General Quiapo del Llano in the South.

⁸ The equivalent to Führer.

General Franco's military strategy during the Civil War has been much discussed since, in September 1936, he chose to divert his troops from the advance on Madrid in order to relieve the Alcázar. By doing so, Franco effectively "lost an unrepeatable chance to sweep on to the Spanish capital before its defences were ready."⁹ The delay in attacking Madrid allowed the Republic time to prepare and concentrate troops in the city. Since Toledo was not strategically important, Franco's decision to delay the attack on Madrid has been questioned. When the Nationalist troops seized Toledo, Franco's political position as head of Nationalist Spain was assured. He became the "symbol", the figure-head of the Nationalist struggle. By mid-October, Madrid was severely threatened. Nationalist troops held most of the towns within 20 kilometres of the capital. However, on 15 October, the "much-anticipated" Rebel victory would be delayed for almost another two years with the arrival of the first Soviet arms. The situation in Madrid was so bleak, in fact, that on 6 November, the Republican government evacuated from the capital and moved to Valencia. The defence of Madrid was conferred onto General Miaja, who successfully fought the Nationalist onslaught.

On 8 November, the first units of the International Brigades arrived in Madrid. The almost "mythical" International Brigades were recruited by the Comintern and met in Paris, where they would be transported across the French border, into Spain, and trained at a military base in Albacete under André Marty. The International Brigades were composed of a motley group of anti-fascists, from all over the world, who volunteered, without their government's knowledge or consent, to fight Fascism in Spain. These men, however, were not all Communists although most belonged to Left-wing political parties. In light of their bravery and sacrifice, their military role in Spain has been subsequently exaggerated. The International Brigades' contribution lay mostly in boosting the morale of the Spanish population, for many Spaniards came to believe that their cause was embraced throughout the world. Furthermore, the Brigades contributed militarily, serving as the "shock troops" and subsequently suffered heavy casualties.

⁹ Paul Preston, *The Spanish Civil War: 1936-1936*. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986), 66.

The Republicans were faced with numerous obstacles. Political rivalries between the various factions contributed to a growing loss of morale among the troops. The PCE, the Spanish Communist Party, was one of the only parties which fought for discipline and order among Republican forces. Anarchist notions of a free and “rank-less” army, which had been haphazardly thrown together in an improvised fashion, proved, from the outset, to be no match against the well-trained, better-led and disciplined Nationalist armies. Likewise, the Republicans faced another serious problem in military leadership. Most of the officers who had remained loyal to the Republic were not trusted since the government feared that these officers were “feigning” loyalty until they could “escape” to the Nationalist camp, with Republican battle plans.

Furthermore, the situation was aggravated in the Republican zone during the first months of the war since the government experienced a break-down of law and order in various regions: most of those who traditionally “guaranteed” the peace, the Civil Guard, had joined the Insurgents and the few who remained loyal to the government were stripped of their authority due to the historic animosity of the general populace towards the “Guardias”.¹⁰ “Revolutionary” tribunals were set up and widespread terrorism was rampant in the Republican zone. The main victims of these spontaneous attacks included members of the traditional elite, of Right-wing political parties or members of religious orders. However, this “terrorism” was not sanctioned nor supported by the Republican government and, by September 1936, the “radicals” were suppressed and order restored. After autumn 1936, largely due to the PCE, the “terror” against Rightists was re-directed against “revolutionaries”. In Andalusia, landless agricultural workers did initially collectivize the lands once held by the few, but powerful, landlords. With the onslaught of Nationalist victories across the agrarian south, the “revolutionary” zeal which had once prevailed at the outset of the war was quickly crushed and the *status quo* reinstated, albeit with numerous and fierce reprisals.

¹⁰ The Civil Guard had a history of cruelty and the population resented and mistrusted them even before 1936.

Political divisions in the Republican camp largely centered around the issue of the importance placed on the war effort versus the role that the Revolution played. Moderate Republicans and the PCE argued that the war in Spain must first be fought, and won, for a revolution to take place while the CNT, the POUM and radical Socialist factions argued that Revolution was in itself a necessary precondition to successfully defeat the Nationalists. Most Left-wing extremists were located in and around Barcelona. However, the Catalan capital was not representative of Republican Spain. These Left-wing radicals were pitted against the PCE, which eventually succeeded in consolidating political power and ousting all “deviants” to the Party line: “the crushing of the collectives and the use of secret police ensured that the last two years of the Civil War in the Republican zone were very different from the first. Without the sense of a new world to fight for, the sacrifices and the hunger were that much harder to bear.”¹¹

By October 1937, the Nationalists occupied the entire North, thus giving Franco control of the iron ore mines, and one of the most industrial areas in Spain. Franco also imposed conscription in the Northern provinces, which served to replenish his forces. The Nationalists were also aided by the air support offered by the German Condor Legion. The Condor Legion was used to practice combat techniques such as dive-bombing and saturation bombing, which would later be used in World War II. The Basque Country was a mountainous region with poor roads and the Nationalists found themselves bogged-down due to Basque guerrilla tactics and strategically positioned tank traps. On 26 April 1937, the historic city of the Basques, Guernika, was bombed by the Condor Legion in the middle of the day.¹² The Nationalists denied their involvement in the bombing to the international community and claimed that retreating Basque partisans (i.e. Communists) had destroyed the city. Nevertheless, eye-witness accounts could not completely be censored nor silenced and, with the help of Pablo Picasso, the senseless and savage bombing of Guernika would serve as an example of what numerous cities would soon experience during the Second World War. On 26 August, Santander was occupied by Italian troops, who paraded through the city with large posters of Mussolini,

¹¹ Paul Preston, *The Spanish Civil War: 1936-1936*. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986), 138.

¹² It was, in fact, a “market” day, which added to the large number of casualties. The timing of the raid was, no doubt, no “coincidence”.

leaving few doubts among the still “hopeful” Republicans that the Entente would at last realize the ineffectiveness of Non-Intervention.¹³ Throughout 1937-1938, the Loyalists repeatedly attempted to halt advancing Nationalist troops but could not offer much resistance. Republican forces were poorly equipped and demoralized by inter-party squabbles and rivalries. Numerically, Republican forces had more manpower than Franco’s forces, however they could not compete with the new military equipment which was continuously sent by Italy and Germany. Franco could afford to take his time, consolidate his power in the areas that he held, and force the Republicans in a long, drawn-out war of attrition because his troops and equipment were easily and quickly replenished. This was not the case in the Loyalist camp.

The Republicans sought to take pressure off Madrid and conceived an attack on the Aragonese city of Teruel. The city was already surrounded by Republican troops and in December 1937, a surprise attack was launched on the city. The initial advantages gained by the Republicans, due to the extreme cold weather which grounded German and Italian aeroplanes and delayed the arrival of Nationalist reinforcements, were quickly lost due to the inherent and continuous lack of Republican military equipment. Eventually, Franco’s troops, which had been meanwhile advancing towards Madrid, were diverted to Teruel. Franco regained the city and began a massive campaign through Aragon towards the Mediterranean. The objective was to cut the Republic in half and isolate Catalonia. On April 15, the Nationalists had successfully split the Republic in two. By this time, Negrin was already making overtures for a compromise peace with Nationalist forces but Franco refused all offers other than unconditional surrender. The Republic continued fighting for another year even though it was known that, barring the arrival of massive military aid, it was just a matter of time for the Nationalists to win. Franco’s slow but continuous advance could only be sporadically checked by Republican troops. Although one could argue that the Republicans continued to fight out of their desire to see “democracy” prevail in Spain, or out of their revolutionary “fervour”, it is more probable that, by 1937, they continued resisting out of fear of Franco’s reprisals.

¹³ See Chapter 3.

Once he had divided the Republic, instead of choosing to end the war by attacking Catalonia, the Republican's last industrial centre, he chose to attack Valencia, in the South. Again, Franco's "military" planning was questioned by both his leading military advisors and by a few historians. It would seem that Franco chose to allow Republican Spain to "bleed" for as long as possible, thus wearing down their forces and exacting a complete and unconditional surrender.

Franco's advance towards Valencia was slow. Republican forces managed to halt the Nationalists with well-constructed trenches and were able to inflict heavy casualties while receiving few themselves. Nevertheless, Negrin's hopes for a European conflict, which would greatly aid the Republic by gaining the Entente powers as allies, were soon destroyed with the West's silence over the Anschluss and later, its appeasement of Hitler in the Münich Crisis. A last great counter-offensive was planned by the Republicans with the objective of relieving pressure off Valencia. In an attempt to restore communications with Catalonia, Loyalist troops crossed the Ebro River. The Republic invested all of its remaining troops and military equipment in this offensive. Although the area was of no strategic importance to Franco, he refused to give up any territory which had been gained by his troops. The Republicans, overwhelmed by superior enemy fighting power, were pushed back to the original launching point of the attack. After the failure of the Ebro offensive, the Loyalist government had lost most of its army and military equipment, and would have called for a negotiated peace. However, the war effort was kept alive "only by the fear born of Franco's much publicized determination to annihilate liberalism, socialism and communism in Spain."¹⁴

The Republicans feared mass reprisals since it was well-known that the Nationalists had compiled extensive black lists of Spaniards belonging to Left-wing organizations. Franco's "Law of Responsibilities" declared that all Spaniards, who had not actively contributed to the Nationalist war-effort were guilty of a "crime" and would be punished accordingly. In March 1939, Franco's troops triumphantly entered the deserted city of Madrid and at the end of the month, all of Spain was effectively under

¹⁴ Paul Preston, *The Spanish Civil War: 1936-1936*. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986), 160.

Nationalist control. Most of the Spanish refugees who arrived in Southern France were herded into poorly-planned and spontaneously erected concentration camps with little or no shelter. Some Republican officials, who were subsequently captured by the Gestapo in Nazi-controlled France, were transferred to Nationalist Spain and promptly shot. Largo Caballero survived four years in Mauthausen, only to die soon after his release. Negrin died in exile in Mexico, as did many other Republicans. In 1939, the “war” may have been officially over in Spain, but many continued to suffer well into the 1940s and 1950s. At first, military tribunals were set up and many “Republican sympathisers” were shot. However, by the mid 1940s, Franco realized that these political prisoners would much better serve the state if they were kept alive. “Labour battalions” were formed with hundreds of thousands of prisoners, who were used as cheap labour in the reconstruction of post-war Spain. Franco remained in power until his death, in 1975. He had planned that the Spain which he had “re-created”, a traditional, conservative, autocratic, militaristic and highly religious Spain, should continue in the person of King Juan Carlos II. However much Franco had sought to ensure that “his” Spain should continue to be run by the same privileged minority, the King proclaimed, in 1977, that Spain was to be a democratic nation. Within five years, the Spanish Socialist Party would be elected to power by an overwhelming majority. Perhaps one could reinterpret Spanish history and argue that the Civil War did not decisively end in 1939, but, in fact, in 1977. Democracy was once again given to the Spanish people, as it had been briefly granted in the February elections of 1936.

CHRONOLOGY¹⁵

1935

- 2 May 1935 Franco-Russian Pact
- 18 June 1935 Anglo-German Naval Treaty
- July- August 1935 Popular Front tactic applied by USSR
- 3 October 1935 Italy invades Abyssinia
- December 1935 Hoare-Laval Agreement (give Italy 2/3rds of Abyssinia)

1936

- February 1936 Popular Front victory in Spain
- 7 March 1936 Germany sends troops to Rhineland
- April 1936 Soviet spies reported preparations for rebellion by high ranking Spanish commanders
- End of May 1936 General Goded led a secret mission to London and warned the British that a military coup would come soon but that it had no connections with Italy.
- June 1936 Election of French Popular Front
- July 17-18 1936 Spanish Civil War begins
- 2nd half of July Russian workers collect donations for the Spanish Republic
- 17 July 1936 French border open
- 21 July 1936 Comintern meeting on how to help the Republic.
- 21 July 1936 Blum first agrees to aid Republican Spain
- 23 July 1936 French Ambassador to Great Britain, Charles Corbin, reported that there was a strong pro-Rebel feeling in the British Cabinet.
- 23 July 1936 Franco asks for German help
- 23 July 1936 Report from Berardis (Italian ambassador in Moscow) stating that the Soviet Union refuses to get involved in Spain.
- 24 July 1936 Spanish Republic begins sending its gold reserves to France
- 24 July 1936 Comintern sends first directives to PCE
- 25 July 1936 USSR refuses Republican requests for military aid
- 26 July 1936 Comintern meeting in Prague
- 26 July 1936 German and Italian planes arrive in Morocco
- 27 July 1936 Republican government turns to USA to buy arms.
- 29 July 1936 First German aircraft lands in Morocco
- 30 July 1936 First Italian aircraft lands in Spanish Morocco
- Entire month of August 1936 the USSR remained neutral
- 1 August 1936 French government appeals for Non-Intervention
- 4 August 1936 German Battleship *Deutschland* called on Franco in Ceuta
- 4 August 1936 Definite joint German and Italian effort to intervene in Spain
- 5 August 1936 France approaches Soviet Union with proposal for Non-Intervention
- 6 August 1936 USSR accepts the principles of Non-Intervention
- 8 August 1936 France suspends all arms deliveries to Spain (border closes)
- 10 August 1936 Chilston has evidence of Italian and German aid to Franco

¹⁵ The departure and arrival dates of Soviet shipments are quoted from: Gerald Howson. *Arms for Spain: The Untold Story of the Spanish Civil War*. (New York: St Martins Press, 1998).

- 11 August 1936 American "Moral Embargo"
- 15 August 1936 France abides by Non-Intervention Agreement
- 15 August 1936 Great Britain abides by Non-Intervention Agreement
- 17 August 1936 Germany declares agreement to the principles of Non-Intervention
- 19 August 1936 Nikolai Kuznetsov recalled to Moscow for a special secret assignment, would result in his active command of the Republican Navy.
- 19 August 1936 Krivitsky recalled to Moscow to inform his government on the events taking place in Spain.
- 19 August 1936 First Soviet show trial begins (Kamenev and Zinoviev)
- 21 (or 22) August 1936 Italy agrees to principles of Non-Intervention
- 23 August 1936 USSR agrees to the principles of Non-Intervention
- 25 August 1936 Germany and USSR formally sign the Non-Intervention Agreement
- 27 August 1936 Marcel Rozenberg arrives in Spain
- 28 August 1936 Stalin decrees ban on the exports of war *matériel* to Spain
- 28 August 1936 Italy formally signs Non-Intervention Agreement
- 29 August 1936 Soviet agents and military advisors begin to arrive in Spain
- Late August (no date) 3 High Spanish officials in Odessa come to buy war supplies in exchange for gold.
- 2 September 1936 Krivitsky ordered to organize firms to buy and ship arms to Spain.
- 4 September 1936 execution of Kamenev and Zinoviev
- 4 September 1936 Largo Caballero government
- Until 6 September, Stalin imposed strict ban on all exports to Spain
- 6 September 1936 Rozenberg warns USSR that the Republic will lose the war if Soviet military aid is not immediately sent
- 9 September 1936 first meeting of the Non-Intervention Committee
- 13 September 1936 Negrin gets authority from his Cabinet to move gold to safer place in Spain
- 14 September 1936 Stalin allows secret organizations to buy arms. Agreed that Orlov should supervise all operations in Spain.
- 15 September 1936 gold reserves sent to Cartagena
- 19 September 1936 *Neva* sets sail for Republican Spain
- 22 September 1936 Stalin authorizes the creation of the International Brigades
- 25 September 1936 *Neva* arrives at Alicante.
- 26 September 1936 Stalin orders the *Campeche* to set sail for Spain (arrival in Spain: 4 October 1936).
- 27 September 1936 fall of Toledo
- 29 September 1936 NKVD meeting
- October 1936 Russian military aid increases
- Beginning of October 1936 Purchasing Commission is formed in Paris
- 4 October 1936 *Komsomol* leaves Odessa (arrival in Spain 12 October 1936)
- 7 October 1936 Kremlin announces to Non-Intervention Committee that continued German and Italian military aid made it impossible for the USSR to withhold arms any longer
- 7 October 1936 *Stari Bolshevik* leaves USSR (arrival in Spain: 15 October 1936)
- 13 October 1936 *KIM* leaves USSR (arrival in Spain: 19 October 1936)
- 13 October 1936 *Volgoles* leaves USSR (arrival in Spain: 21 October 1936)

- 15 October 1936 Largo Caballero writes to Rozenberg, asking if the USSR would accept the deposit of the Spanish gold reserves.
- 17 October 1936 Largo Caballero writes to Rozenberg again makes reference to the consent of the USSR for the deposit of the gold.
- 19 October 1936 Pascua meets with Rozengoltz to discuss Spanish-Soviet commercial exchange. A few days later (no date) Grinko and Rozengoltz indicate to Pascua the risks involved if the gold should be placed in France.
- 20 October 1936 Orlov receives telegram from Stalin demanding to immediately transfer the gold to the USSR.
- 20 October 1936 *Lepin* leaves USSR (arrival in Spain: 28 October 1936)
- 22 October 1936 *Andreev* leaves USSR (arrival in Spain: 1 November 1936)
- 23 October 1936 USSR tells the Non-Intervention Committee that it will bind itself to the Agreement only to the same extent that others countries do.
- 25 October 1936 Spanish Gold is sent to the USSR
- 25 October 1936 *Kursk* leaves USSR (arrival in Spain: 3 November 1936)
- 26 October 1936 *Blagoev* leaves USSR (arrival in Spain: 4 November 1936)
- 26 October 1936 *Linhaug* leaves USSR (arrival in Spain: 10 November 1936)
- 28 October 1936 Largo Caballero announces Russian support
- 29 October 1936 Russian tanks appear on battlefronts for the first time (Madrid)
- 30 October 1936 *Hillfern* leaves USSR (arrival in Spain: 7 November 1936)
- November 1936 Madrid under severe threat from the Nationalists
- 1 November 1936 *Sergo Ordzonikidze* leaves USSR (arrival in Spain: 12 November 1936)
- 2 November 1936 Gold begins to arrive in Odessa
- 6 November 1936 Departure of the Spanish government from Madrid to Valencia
- 6 November 1936 Last shipment of gold arrives in USSR
- 6 November 1936 *Artza Mendi* leaves USSR (arrival in Spain: 16 November 1936)
- 11 November 1936 *Aldecoa* leaves USSR (arrival in Spain: 19 November 1936)
- 15 November 1936 *Cabo Palos* leaves USSR (arrival in Spain: 25 November 1936)
- 17 November 1936 *Chicherin* leaves USSR (arrival in Spain: 26 November 1936)
- 20 November 1936 *Mar Caribe* leaves USSR (arrival in Spain: 30 November 1936)
- 11 December 1936 Spanish Republic appeals to the League of Nations
- During December 1936 Mussolini sends ground troops
- 14 December 1936 *Komsomol* sunk by Nationalists
- 21 December 1936 Largo Caballero receives telegram of Stalin, with directives for the Spanish Communist Party.
- 23 December 1936 *Darro* leaves USSR (arrival in Spain: 30 December 1936)
- 25 December 1936 German-Japanese Anti-Comintern Pact

1937

- First 3 months of 1937 arms traffic to Spain said to be at its highest.
- During 1937 nearly all diplomats and advisors were recalled to Russia
- 31 December 1936 Italian-British Gentleman's Agreement
- 2 January 1937 Italian-British Gentleman's Agreement
- 4 January 1937 *Sac-2* leaves USSR (arrival in Spain: 16 January 1937)
- 6 January 1937 *Mar Blanco* leaves USSR (arrival in Spain: 16 January 1937)

- 24 January 1937 Gold had been counted (in the USSR)
- February 1937 Assassinations of prominent Spanish Anarchists reported
- 5 February 1937 Official Soviet receipt for the amount of gold that was received in the USSR was issued
- 5 February 1937 *Aldecoa* leaves USSR (arrival in Spain: 14 February 1937)
- 8 February 1937 fall of Málaga
- 16 February 1937 Largo Caballero and Negrin sell gold to USSR for the first time.
- 16 February 1937 *Turksib* leaves USSR (arrival in Spain: 26 February 1937)
- 27 February 1937 *Darro* leaves USSR (arrival in Spain: some time in March 1937)
- 28 February 1937 *Cabo Santo Tome* leaves USSR (arrival in Spain: 6 March 1937)
- 2 March 1937 *Antonio de Satrustegui* leaves USSR (arrival in Spain: 13 March 1937)
- 15 March 1937 Grinko and Krestinsky executed
- 15 April 1937 founding of France Navigation Company (for transporting supplies to Spain)
- 19 April 1937 Application of Naval Control
- 21 April 1937 *Escolano* leaves USSR (arrival in Spain: 29 April 1937)
- 24 April 1937 Bombing of Guernika
- 25 April 1937 *Cabo Santo Tome* leaves USSR (arrival in Spain: 1 May 1937)
- 29 April 1937 *Cabo Palos* leaves USSR (arrival in Spain: 7 May 1937)
- 2-6 May 1937 "May Days", Riots in Barcelona
- 3 May 1937 *Ciudad de Cadiz* leaves USSR (arrival in Spain: 11 May 1937)
- 8 May 1937 *Sac-2* leaves USSR (arrival in Spain: 21 May 1937)
- 12 May 1937 *Antonio de Satrustegui* leaves USSR (arrival in Spain: 21 May 1937)
- 15 May 1937 Resignation of Largo Caballero
- 17 May 1937 Negrin government in power
- 20 May 1937 *Artea Mendi* leaves USSR (arrival in Spain: 31 May or 1 June 1937)
- 21 May 1937 *Jaron* leaves USSR (arrival in Spain: ? 1937)
- 31 May 1937 *Aldecoa* leaves USSR (arrival in Spain: 21 June 1937)
- During summer 1937 Orlov gets instructions: Soviet Union no longer wanted to provide large-scale assistance for a Republican victory, but wanted to keep the fighting going for as long as possible in Spain.
- 16 June 1937 POUM leaders are arrested
- 19 June 1937 Capture of Bilbao by Nationalist forces (Northern Spain)
- 24 June 1937 *Cabo Santo Tome* leaves USSR (arrival in Spain: 30 June 1937)
- 29 July 1937 *Darro* leaves USSR (arrival in Spain: 0 August 1937)
- 30 July 1937 *Cabo San Agustin* leaves USSR (arrival in Spain: 10 August 1937)
- August 1937 Beginning of Piracy in Mediterranean
- 10 September 1937 Nyon Conference
- October 1937 Negrin ordered Pascua to arrange a credit for \$ 150,000,000.
- 20 October 1937 French border opened
- 29 October 1937 Pascua sent letter to Negrin describing the procrastination of the Soviets concerning his requests for credit.
- 31 October 1937 Spanish government moves to Barcelona
- 14 December 1937 *Guilvinec* leaves USSR (arrival in Spain: 25 December 1937)
- 15 December 1937 Battle of Teruel begins

1938

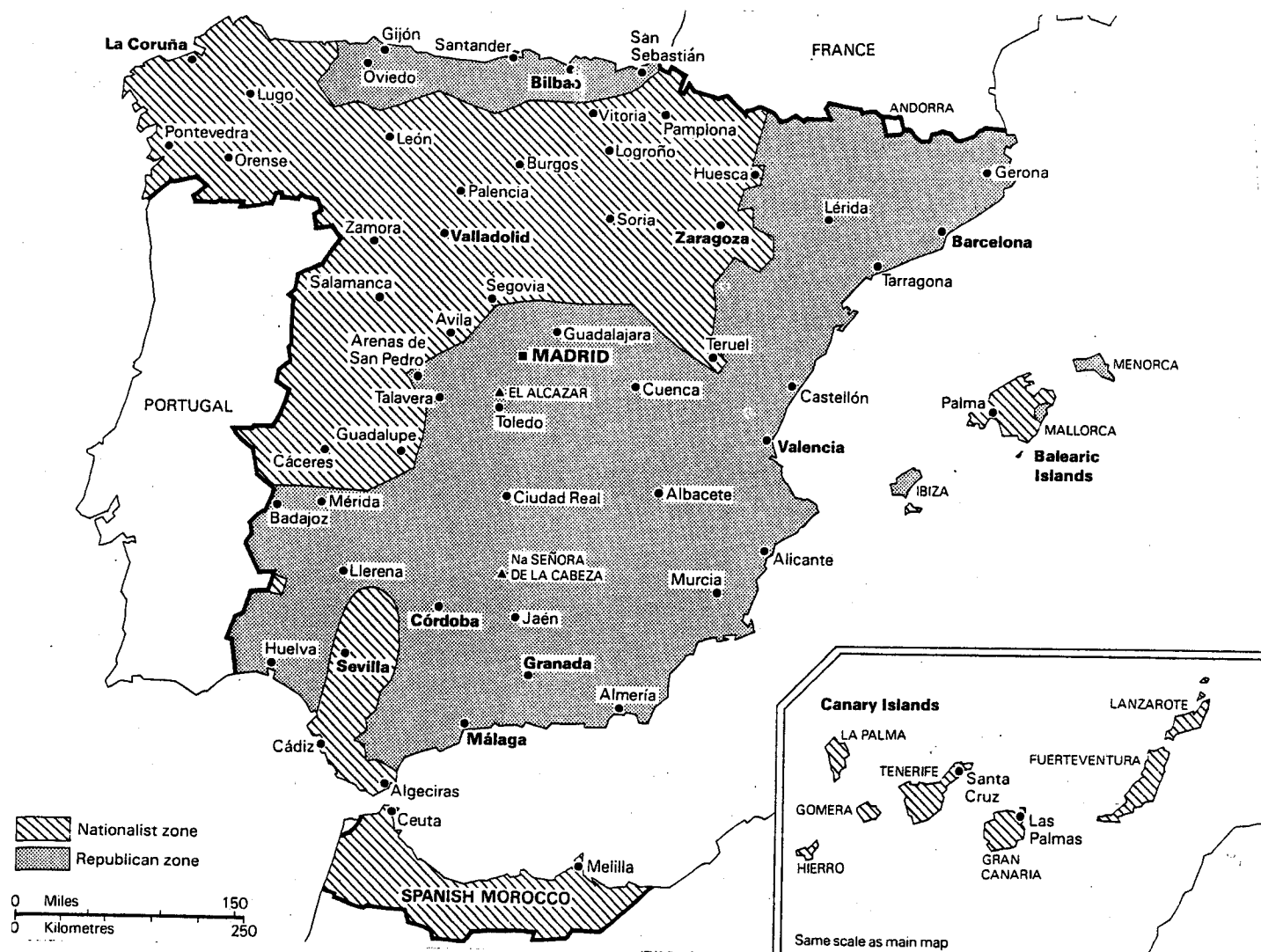
- January 1938 French border closed again
- 23 January 1938 *Bonifacio* leaves USSR (arrival in Spain: 7 February 1938)
- February 1938 *Cabo Santo Tome* leaves USSR (arrival in Spain: February 1938)
- 13 February 1938 *Ain el Turk* leaves USSR (arrival in Spain: 26 February 1938)
- 22 February 1938 Nationalists recapture Teruel
- 26 February 1938 USSR grants credit for \$ 70,000,000
- 1 March 1938 *Gravelines* leaves USSR (arrives in Spain: 13 March 1938)
- 9 March 1938 Blum's Second Ministry
- 9 March 1938 Nationalist offensive in Aragon (towards Mediterranean)
- 9-11 March 1938 Hitler completes the Anschluss
- 16 March 1938 French border opened
- 22 March 1938 *Bougaroni* leaves USSR (arrival in Spain: 2 April 1938)
- 29 March 1938 *Winnipeg* leaves USSR (arrival in Spain: 6 April 1938)
- 5 April 1938 *Bonifacio* leaves USSR (arrival in Spain: 17 April 1938)
- 8 April 1938 Execution of Bukharin and Rykov
- 20 April 1938 End of Blum's second Ministry in France
- May 1938 The Republicans accumulate a \$ 7,500,000 debt for unpaid Soviet supplies
- 13 June 1938 French border closed (under Daladier)
- 13 June 1938 *Ain el Turk* leaves USSR (arrival in Spain: 27 June 1938)
- 14 June 1938 *Winnipeg* leaves USSR (arrival in Spain: 24 July 1938)
- 25 June 1938 Republicans cross the Ebro River
- June 1938 Pascua sent to USSR to negotiate a second loan
- 13 July 1938 Pascua met with Russian officials, who approved a loan of \$ 60,000,000.
- 5 July 1938 withdrawal of the International Brigades from Spanish territory
- 8 August 1938 Soviets claimed that the Republic had spent all of the gold in the USSR
- After 11 August 1938 all shipments that arrived from the USSR were too late to be used in Spain.
- 11 August 1938 *Bougaroni* leaves USSR (arrival in Spain: 11 August 1938)
- September 1938 M n ch Agreement
- 15 November 1938 Republican troops withdraw from the Ebro River
- Early December 1938 Negr n sends De Cisneros to Moscow to ask for loan of \$ 100 million.
- End of 1938 Soviets start to remove equipment and personnel from Spain.

1939

- January-February 1939 French border opened
- 26 January 1939 Surrender of Barcelona
- 5-6 March 1939 Hitler occupies Czechoslovakia
- 19 March 1939 end of the Non-Intervention Committee
- 20 March 1939 German-Italian military alliance
- 28 March 1939 Nationalists enter Madrid
- 31 March 1939 End of Spanish Civil War
- 23 August 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact

DIVISION OF SPAIN¹⁶

AS OF 22 JULY 1936



¹⁶ Paul Preston, *The Spanish Civil War: 1936-1936*. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986).

INTRODUCTION

The Spanish Civil War was this century's definitive battle between those professing a deep belief in democracy and those who have, for centuries, kept Spain in the backward economic and social state that it found itself in 1936. Even when the supporters of the *status quo* lost the elections in February 1936, this conservative group of men refused to give up their power over a Spain that had been trying, for decades, to break itself free from religious control, reactionary military forces, and oppression by the few landholders who controlled the lives of the majority of the population.

This thesis, entitled The Enigma of the Spanish Civil War: *The Motives for Soviet Intervention*, suggests that the circumstances of Soviet intervention are still largely unknown. Numerous scholars have put forth a wide number of hypotheses surrounding the question of Soviet involvement in the Spanish Civil War, but these are, for the most part, unsupported by archival evidence. All too often, the theories brought up to explain Stalin's motives are repetitive and are based on research published in the 1970s and 1980s. It may be time for a "fresh" look. I traveled to Russia in 2000, naively believing that I would be the first to "discover" these hidden documents in the Soviet archives, which might at least put some matters to rest. Sadly, I was not given access to such materials nor am I sure that such documents exist. I found myself in archives that had already been consulted by Western historians, no doubt looking for the same kind of evidence as I.¹⁷ My initial enthusiasm began to wane as the weeks turned into months. And then, suddenly, in one of those rare moments of clarity one occasionally experiences, it dawned on me. Upon my departure to Moscow, my father hugged me at the airport and casually commented, in a way that I knew was not casual at all, "*Marisa, find out what they did with the Spanish gold.*" Ah, yes, the Spanish gold. This subject was made popular under General Francisco Franco's long tenure as head of the Spanish government, in order to explain or account for Spain's economic "backwardness", an issue cited with bitter resentment by most Spaniards educated under the Franco regime.

¹⁷ The Comintern Archives, the Central Party Archives, and the Russian State Historical Library.

“They stole our gold”, is what is most popularly repeated among Spaniards of all generations. Little did I know at the time that this “casual” comment, made in a packed airport, would serve as the basis, the cornerstone, of this dissertation.

The Spanish Civil War has generated a great deal of literature. However, few events in twentieth-century Europe have been more exploited or misinterpreted for propaganda purposes by historians as the Spanish conflict. Although the Civil War took place on the Iberian peninsula, it was not a purely domestic affair. When the Soviet press, on July 20 1936, published the first article about the Spanish Civil War, it did not seem as if the USSR, or any other state, for that matter, expected the war to last for as long as it did. Most, if not all of the European community, thought the Republican government would contain the rebellion in a matter of weeks, at most. The Spanish Civil War, in fact, can be credited for laying the groundwork for a system of European alliances that followed through into World War Two. Italy and Germany, from the outset of the uprising in Morocco, actively aided the Spanish Nationalists, led by General Francisco Franco.

France initially began sending aid to the Spanish Republicans, or Loyalists, but quickly changed its stance *vis-à-vis* the Republican government and, along with Great Britain, became the champion supporter of Non-Intervention. Although the United States did not participate in the Committee for Non-Intervention, President Roosevelt decided to maintain a position of “neutrality” in Spanish affairs and put into place a “moral embargo” on Spain. It was, however, clear that Britain, the United States, Italy, Germany and Portugal either preferred or were actively working for a Nationalist victory in Spain. France, for ideological reasons, “sympathized” with the Republic which was, like the French government, a Popular Front government, but chose to follow the principles of Non-Intervention along with Great Britain. Mexico and the USSR alone, from the outset of the war, openly supported the legally elected Spanish Republican government. The Soviet Union, however, became, virtually, the sole supplier of military aid to Republican Spain.

In 1940, Walter Krivitsky published his memoirs, in which he stated that:

“the story of Soviet intervention in Spain still remains the major mystery of the Spanish Civil War. The world knows that there was Soviet intervention in Spain, and that is about all it does know. It does not know why Stalin intervened in Spain, how he conducted his operations there, who were the undercover men in charge of his campaign, what he expected to get out of it, nor how the venture ended.”¹⁸

It is noteworthy that the questions posed by Krivitsky, concerning Soviet aid, remain largely unanswered. German or Italian intervention, or the lack of British and French intervention in Spain, have been studied and even scrutinized extensively. Soviet intervention, on the other hand, remains largely enigmatic. This is due, in large part, to the inaccessibility of Russian archives to historians. Two points are of special interest in Krivitsky's list of “mysteries”: why Stalin decided to intervene in Spain and what he expected to gain from this foreign venture.

One reason for the lack of information about Soviet motives in Spain is the absence of actual documentation. It was only after Franco's death, in 1975, that any “non-partisan” studies could be published or that unrestricted access to Spanish archives could finally be allowed. Likewise, it was found that Franco had destroyed a great deal of Republican files and the few documents that had managed to be smuggled out of Spain were either destroyed in the Second World War or they were dispersed throughout the world. The Soviet Union had brought back to Moscow numerous Republican files. However, Soviet archives remained sealed until the 1990s. Even today, however, it is extremely difficult for historians to gain access to the relevant documentation in Russia.

Another obstacle faced by historians is the lack of eyewitness accounts regarding Soviet intervention. Most of the Soviet agents and/or military advisors and government officials in Spain were recalled, as of 1937, to the Soviet Union, and subsequently disappeared in the Purges. Nevertheless, two accounts have been widely used by Spanish

¹⁸ Walter G. Krivitsky. *I Was Stalin's Agent*. (London: The Right Book Club, 1940), 93.

Civil War historians: those of Alexander Orlov and Walter Krivitsky. Both men were Soviet agents who later defected, and published memoirs which discuss, among other things, their activities in Spain between 1936-1939. Alexander Orlov was appointed chief of the NKVD branch in Spain and supervised the shipment of the Spanish gold reserves to the USSR. Krivitsky was Chief of the Soviet Intelligence Service in Western Europe. He was responsible for setting up covert firms in Western Europe with the purpose of purchasing and shipping arms to Republican Spain. Krivitsky's memoirs had been considered, until recently, to be unreliable and filled with untruths about both his activities in Spain and about Stalin. It was further argued that historians should not trust the testimony of a defector. With the opening of Russian archives, however, new information now helps prove that Krivitsky's testimony is much closer to the truth than had previously been supposed.

Stalin's reaction to the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War will be examined, as will the reasons for his decision to participate in the Non-Intervention Committee. Of great importance in understanding both Soviet foreign policy at the time and the Spanish Civil War itself, is the central question of Stalin's motives to intervene militarily in Spain. Likewise, the debate surrounding both Soviet foreign policy and the marked decrease of Soviet arms shipments as of 1937, shall be investigated. Another important mystery, which has yet to be resolved, touches upon the question of when, exactly, Stalin decided to send arms to Spain. The final and most controversial of all of the issues surrounding Soviet intervention in Spain, is the question of the Spanish gold reserves and its shipment to the Soviet Union. Stalin's involvement in the Spanish Civil War was, in no way, in the interest of the USSR. Admittedly, Stalin did not over-extend himself in Spain: he never "donated" the amount of troops or arms that both Germany and Italy did and therefore, one could argue, Stalin had very little to lose. By sacrificing next to nothing, Stalin was able to reap the praise of the international Left-wing community, but not actually allow for the Soviet Union to actively participate in a war that was taking place so far away from the USSR.

My research suggests that, firstly, by August 1936, Stalin's interest in an alliance with the Western democracies, in order to counter the growing threat posed by Germany, began to wane. Thus, the argument that has been made, that Stalin was still seeking, during the course of the Spanish Civil War, an alliance with the Entente, is questionable. Had Stalin truly desired such a rapprochement with the West, his neutrality in Spain was of utmost importance. It seems, moreover, likely that by 1937, Stalin was disillusioned by the West and may have been actively contemplating an alliance with Germany. This, therefore, explains the gradual decrease of Soviet arms shipments to the Spanish Republic. A second conclusion to be drawn is that Stalin may have been prompted to intervene in Spain once the possibility of acquiring the Spanish gold reserves emerged. Another argument put forth in this dissertation is that Soviet arms shipments began to decrease at the same time as the Spanish gold reserves were almost completely exhausted, which would suggest that Stalin's primary interest in Spain lay in its gold and not the ultimate victory of the Republic. Stalin preferred sending a minimum amount of military equipment in order to keep the Spanish Civil War going, while he attempted to secure a deal with Hitler. Once this "alliance" was almost achieved, Stalin no longer cared about the fate of Republican Spain, assuming that he ever did. He also realized that he could no longer continue sending arms in quantities that would actually affect the course of the Spanish War since these arms would be used in direct confrontation with troops of a country with whom he was seeking a *rapprochement*. Another reason explaining the decrease in Soviet military aid can be explained by Stalin's preoccupation with the war in the East. It has, in fact, been found that while Stalin was sending military equipment to Republican Spain, he was also covertly sending arms to China.

CHAPTER 1

Foreign Intervention in the Spanish Civil War

On 17 July 1936, General Francisco Franco y Bahamonde led a rebellion in Spanish Morocco against the Spanish Republic government. This revolt quickly spread onto the Spanish Peninsula. Europe did not seem preoccupied with this event and expected the Republican government to crush the uprising fairly quickly since Spain had a history of military "*pronunciamentos*". Franco did not expect the fierce resistance of the general Spanish populace which resulted, by 18-19 July, in Spain's main industrial cities remaining loyal to the government.¹⁹ Only when alarming reports of German and Italian aircraft landings in Spanish Morocco were divulged, did France, Great Britain and the USSR begin to take an active interest in the Spanish Civil War. Raymond Carr argues that historians easily overestimate the international importance of the Spanish Civil War when, in reality, Spain was a mere victim in a complicated European game of foreign policy and alliance making.²⁰ This argument is misleading. In actual fact, the Spanish Civil War played a leading role on the European diplomatic scene until the Munich Crisis overshadowed it.

A contemporary journalist stated that "no greater mistake could be made today than to consider this struggle merely as a localized conflict."²¹ Several European countries had an interest in Spain, and each supported a particular side in the Spanish Civil War because it served either their diplomatic, ideological, or economic interests to do so. Europeans watched the developments in Spain with great interest: "the internationalization process resulting from this foreign intervention gave the Spanish Crisis a decisive importance in the diplomatic scene preceding the Second World War."²²

¹⁹ Madrid, Valencia, Barcelona, Malaga and Bilbao. The cities taken over by the Rebels at the beginning of the uprising included: Pamplona, Burgos, Avila, Salamanca, Segovia, Valladolid and the province of Galicia. Most of the agricultural south, after fierce and intense resistance by the rural population, also came under Franco's control.

²⁰ E. H. Carr. *The Comintern and the Spanish Civil War*. (London: Macmillan, 1984), 17.

²¹ Herbert L. Matthews, "Sketches of the International Brigades", (New York: Time Magazine, 3 January 1937); quoted in Gabriel Jackson, ed. *The Spanish Civil War*. (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1972), 93.

²² Enrique Moradiellos. "The Allies and the Spanish Civil War." In *Spain and the Great Powers in the Twentieth Century*. eds., Sebastian Balfour and Paul Preston, 96-126. (London & New York: Routledge, 1999), 96.

As of 1937, however, the Spanish War was gradually forced into a position of secondary importance with the Anschluss and, later, the Münich Crisis. The Spanish Civil War proved to be injurious to France's interests and, especially, to the diplomatic goals of Great Britain. However, both France and Britain had different reasons for viewing the events in Spain with annoyance.

1.1 THE ENTENTE

In June 1936, a Popular Front coalition was elected in France. When the Spanish Civil War erupted only six weeks after Blum's accession to power, he naturally supported the Spanish Republican government, which was, as well, a Popular Front government. Blum initially agreed to send military aid to the Loyalists on 21 July, 1936. France not only had ideological reasons to side with the Republic, it also had diplomatic and strategic reasons for doing so. Should the Nationalist forces win the war, the possibility of Spain turning into an Italian and/or German satellite would become all too real. The French government's initial enthusiastic support for the Spanish Republic, however, quickly changed. By the beginning of August, France had become the supporter of "Non-Intervention".

How can Blum's change of policy towards the Spanish Republican government be explained? It has been argued that Blum realized that sending military aid to Republican Spain would compromise his political position in France. France was plagued with internal political divisions: Right-wing forces were influential and he perceived that the events unfolding in Spain could spread into France. France was also, according to Harper, in no military position to intervene in Spain and run the risk of fighting a war without British support.²³ Charles Corbin, the French Ambassador in London, had already reported to his government, in July 1936, that the British Cabinet was expressing pro-Franco sentiments.²⁴ France's inaction *vis-à-vis* blatant German and

²³ Glenn T. Harper. *German Economic Policy in Spain during the Spanish War 1936-1939*. (The Hague - Paris: Mouton, 1967), 94.

²⁴ Douglas Little. *Malevolent Neutrality; The United States, Great Britain, and the Origins of the Spanish Civil War*. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), 232.

Italian support of General Franco could also be explained by British warnings that should France choose to intervene actively in Spain on the side of the Republican government, and that a general European war should result from this, Britain would not lift a finger to help France. French fears over a generalized European war erupting as a result of its direct intervention in Spain seem to be founded: Count Galeazzo Ciano, Italy's Minister of Foreign Affairs, makes reference in his secret diary to rumors of the possibility of France's intervention in Spain and warns that should this happen, Italy would be prepared to intervene in full force.²⁵

Blum did, in fact, fear that a general European conflict would erupt should the Civil War not be immediately contained to Spain. This fear prompted Blum to plead, on 1 August 1936, for a general European pact of neutrality, or "Non-Intervention", in Spain. In a speech delivered at Sarlat on 3 August 1936, Delbos, the French Foreign Minister, declared that "we do not want to meddle in the internal affairs of any country that you may care to name. At no price must there be a new crusade of ideals in Europe, for such a crusade would inevitably have war for its outcome."²⁶ France had been receiving alarming reports of both Italian planes landing in Spanish Morocco on 26 July, and of German aircraft arriving in the same area on 29 July, 1936. When word of the arrival, on 4 August, of the German battleship *Deutschland* in Nationalist-controlled Ceuta (Spanish Morocco) was confirmed, the French public cried out with alarm but Blum did not retaliate. Blum had to therefore fashion an instant policy towards the Spanish Civil War which took into account two facts: Britain's refusal to become embroiled in a potential European conflict and, obvious British hostility towards the Spanish Republican government.

The possibility of entering into a war against Germany and Italy, and of facing these two opponents alone, impelled the ever-so-cautious Blum to close French borders and remain silent to Republican pleas for military aid. The Conservative British government was sympathetic toward Hitler's protests over the "unfairness" of the

²⁵ Galeazzo Ciano, *Ciano's Hidden Diary 1937-1938*. (New York: E.P. Dutton & Company Inc., 1953), 89.

²⁶ Gabriel Jackson, ed. *Problems in European Civilization: Domestic Crisis or International Conspiracy?* (Boston: D.H. Heath & Co., 1967), 54.

Versailles Treaty and attempted to placate Germany with a Naval Treaty in 1935.²⁷ The French, in turn, viewed this *rapprochement* with Germany with growing distress. When the Germans remilitarized the Rhineland, on 7 March 1936, France confined herself to verbal protests because she could not count on any military backing from Great Britain. Had France decided to confront Hitler's blatant flouting of the Versailles Treaty, she knew that Britain would prove to be a vacillating ally. Furthermore, Blum was concerned with France's domestic problems and did not want to involve himself in foreign ventures, no matter how much these ventures proved to be a threat to the integrity and ultimate safety of France. By August 1936, France had placed her national security at risk by allowing Germany and Italy to possibly control her southern border.

In May 1935, France had signed a Pact of Mutual Assistance with the Soviet Union.²⁸ French popular opinion, however, surmised that it would be unwise for the French government to pursue any further diplomatic *rapprochements* with the USSR because it would needlessly antagonize Germany, and might "offend" Britain. It would have better served France's interests to militarily ally herself with the Soviet Union, and thus encircle Germany. However, one must not judge Blum's reaction or, rather, lack of it, toward Spanish affairs as a simple choice. France had, for the last thirty-odd years, been developing strong diplomatic ties with Great Britain. By the mid-1930s there were mounting concerns in Europe over the apparent disintegration of the Entente.

Britain was reluctant to support French policy, especially after the victory of the French Popular Front, which followed the Spanish Popular Front electoral victory in February 1936, because Britain worried over the spread of "Left-wing" governments in Europe. The British feared the possibility of Popular Front governments signing military pacts with the USSR, which would, consequently, cause Germany to regard these agreements as a concerted conspiracy and planned attack directed against itself: "a French-Spanish Popular Front alliance in Western Europe, following the French-Soviet

²⁷ This treaty condoned German military rearmament, in direct violation of the Treaty of Versailles, on condition that Germany "promise" to limit the size of her war fleet.

²⁸ This was the result of French fears over growing German aggression and stipulated that one power would assist the other in the event of an attack by a third party.

Pact, would convince Germany and Italy that they were being encircled.”²⁹ Little argues that London’s decision to suspend the sale of military equipment to Spain was not so much motivated by the need to avoid a general war from breaking out in Europe, but more because there was a sincere fear that the Spanish Civil War would turn into a Left-wing revolution, with the possibility of it spreading into Western Europe. Hitler viewed this growing cooling off between France and Britain as an ideal opportunity to further his European plans. The remilitarization of the Rhineland, the Abyssinian Crisis, and the Laval-Hoare Pact which ensued, sent distressing alarms to Moscow, all the while serving to increase Germany’s and Italy’s confidence concerning the reluctance of the Entente to challenge their aggression. When the Spanish Civil War broke out, both Hitler and Mussolini believed that since Britain had not challenged them before, she would certainly not risk going to war over their military intervention in Spain. In fact, “the Fascist powers knew that England shared their sympathies, in as much as a German diplomat reported on October 16 that the British at Gibraltar were supplying ammunition to the insurgents, and information on Soviet shipping to him.”³⁰ Hitler and Mussolini’s prediction proved, in fact, to be true. According to Alpert, “the dominating concerns in Britain were to try to repair the breach with Italy; to keep the USSR out of Western Europe and to guard vital Mediterranean [trade] routes.”³¹ Britain was both aware of and concerned over the diplomatic attachments that were quickly emerging between Germany and Italy. It is also generally believed that Britain’s policy of Appeasement was motivated more by its inherent fear of Bolshevism than by any desire for an alliance with Germany.

According to Cattell, the British, in fact, feared that an alliance with the USSR would curtail any possible *rapprochement* with Germany and Italy.³² The Great Depression led many British policy-makers to believe that the conditions for a Left-wing revolution in Western Europe were ripe. British officials believed that social upheaval

²⁹ Michael Alpert. *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War*. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 16.

³⁰ Gabriel Jackson, ed. *The Spanish Civil War*. (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1972), 317.

³¹ Michael Alpert. *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War*. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 15.

would automatically lead to a Communist-inspired revolution in Spain: Britain did not wish to witness the emergence of a Moscow-controlled satellite in Western Europe. British financiers had heavily invested in Spanish mineral deposits in Asturias.³³ At the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, two major British-owned companies in Spain, ITT and Rio Tinto, saw their assets confiscated by Spanish workers, who had been armed by the Republican government during the first days of the Civil War. Although the Republican government did not desire for a Left-wing revolution to take place, it seemed unable to stop the revolutionary powers from taking control of certain parts of Republican Spain. Moreover, Britain had been receiving reports of hundreds of “well-to-do Spaniards fleeing abroad leaving few doubts in [...] London that the much-dreaded Bolshevik reign of terror had begun.”³⁴ This caused conservative British policy-makers to view the Spanish Civil War as a Left-wing revolution and thus, regard the Spanish Republic with a mixture of distrust and hostility. Franco’s allegations, that the USSR was backing a “Communist Revolution” in Spain, seemed to have been believed in London.³⁵ The British were also concerned with securing their trade routes to the Suez Canal and consequently sought to keep the Southern part of Spain, between Portugal and Gibraltar, free of “anarchy”. These circumstances naturally led the British government to prefer a Franco victory instead of an apparent “Bolshevik” one.

³² David T. Cattell. *Soviet Diplomacy and the Spanish Civil War*. University of California Publications in International Relations, Vol. 5. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 63.

³³ A province in Northern Spain.

³⁴ Douglas Little. *Malevolent Neutrality; The United States, Great Britain, and the Origins of the Spanish Civil War*. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), 222.

³⁵ Baldwin believed that the USSR was actively involved in the Spanish conflict from the beginning of the war. He reportedly stated to Eden that “on no account, French or other, must he bring Great Britain in “to fight against the Russians.”

Quoted in: Douglas Little. *Malevolent Neutrality; The United States, Great Britain, and the Origins of the Spanish Civil War*. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), 226.

1.2 ITALY AND GERMANY

Of all the intervening powers in Spain, Italy proved to be the most loyal ally. Not only was Italian aid generously given to Franco throughout the entire course of the war, but there was also no mention of repayment. Why did Mussolini take the cause of the Spanish Nationalists to heart? According to one specialist on Italian intervention, it was “the pressure of international public opinion [that] made it inevitable that Mussolini should see the prestige of his own regime at stake in Spain.”³⁶ Hence the durability of his commitment to Franco’s cause despite repeated military disappointments. Mussolini did not intervene in Spain for economic reasons: his were strategic. He feared a potential alliance between France and Republican Spain, which would, in turn, jeopardize his interests in the Mediterranean. As Coverdale argues: “should the rebels manage to overthrow the French-backed Republican regime with Italian help, they could be expected at the very least to favor Italian interests and adopt a strongly anti-French line.”³⁷

Alpert similarly believes that Mussolini’s main motive for intervening in Spain was due to Italian geopolitical interests: “helping Franco seemed to be a low-cost and low-risk method of making considerable gains.”³⁸ Mussolini considered this venture “low-risk” because he was fairly confident that the Soviet Union would not intervene in Spain with more than “verbal and perhaps financial support.”³⁹ It has also been argued that Mussolini decided to intervene in Spain out of his inherent hatred of Left-wing movements. Since both France and Spain had elected Popular Front governments, Italy feared that “Communism” would spread across Europe and, especially, pose a threat to his power-hold in Italy. Thus, “Italian aid to the rebels could be viewed as a defense of the Fascist regime itself.”⁴⁰

³⁶ John F. Coverdale. *Italian Intervention in the Spanish Civil War*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), 14.

³⁷ Ibid., 76.

³⁸ Michael Alpert. *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War*. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 39.

³⁹ Ibid., 39.

⁴⁰ John F. Coverdale. *Italian Intervention in the Spanish Civil War*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), 82.

Although Germany and Italy's interests in Spain, and their reasons for intervening in the war were similar, there were, nevertheless, certain distinctions. While Mussolini was hoping to give his troops combat experience, Whealey believes that Hitler did not originally intervene in Spain for the purpose of testing new German military equipment nor was his purpose confined to gaining combat experience for the Condor Legion.⁴¹ Hitler expected the Spanish Revolt to last for a few days, at most. Only when it was acknowledged that the Spanish Civil War would last for a longer, indefinite period of time, did Hitler decide to use Spain as a military testing ground. Another motive for German intervention lay in Spain's mineral wealth. Franco had promised to send to Germany much-needed iron ore, steel and pyrites, which timed in perfectly with Hitler's rearmament plans. Furthermore, by intervening in Spain, Mussolini and Hitler were able to cement their alliance and were also able to test the Entente's reactions to their involvement in Spain even though, as Alpert argues, both leaders believed, by July 1936, that the chances for direct intervention by the Western democracies in Spain were slim.⁴² Nevertheless, Count Ciano alludes to a conversation between Goering and Mussolini, where the Spanish "question" arose. It was stated that Germany "intends to go only to the limits of what is possible, thus preventing a general war from developing over the complications in Spain."⁴³

As the Spanish Civil War dragged on, both Right-wing dictators grew increasingly confident that they would be able to flout the rules of Non-Intervention without reprisals or fear of a joint British and French military attack. In fact, it has been claimed that Hitler "calculated that the democracies would do anything rather than face the possibility of conflict."⁴⁴ In any event, Mussolini and Hitler remained somewhat cautious in 1936: both wanted to avoid the outbreak of a general European conflict as a consequence of their participation in the Spanish Civil War. It is noteworthy that, by

⁴¹ Robert H. Whealey. *Hitler and Spain. The Nazi Role in the Spanish Civil War 1936-1939*. (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1989), 9.

⁴² Michael Alpert. *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 25.

⁴³ *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*. Malcom Muggeridge, ed. (London: Odhams Press Ltd., 1948), 85.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

August of that year, Hitler became increasingly cautious in his Spanish venture by declining Franco's repeated requests for increased military aid. It is believed that Hitler wanted to see the reactions of other powers *vis-à-vis* Spain before becoming too intimately entangled.

Both dictators knew that a "friendly" Spain would allow them not only to threaten France's southern border, but would also serve as a launching point for attacking British commercial sea-routes that ran through the Straits of Gibraltar. Hitler's major concern was that his opponents should awaken to his future military plans in Europe before he had finished preparing for them. He was never as militarily committed in Spain as Mussolini was and he therefore did not care if the war in Spain dragged on for many years. The fire generated by the Spanish Civil War was kept going with just enough fuel to allow Hitler to remilitarize, prepare for his grandiose plans in Eastern Europe, and cement his alliance with Italy, all the while heightening European tensions by causing his opponents to argue amongst themselves. Thus, both Italy and Germany intervened in Spain for geopolitical reasons even though Hitler had no interest in Spain becoming a "German" satellite. In fact, he did not worry over Mussolini's increasingly serious military commitment in Spain. So long as the emerging Spanish government would be a friendly one, and not pose a strategic threat to either Germany or Italy when the time came for a general war, was enough to satisfy Hitler.

CHAPTER 2

Stalin's Reaction in July 1936

Stalin's initial reaction to the outbreak of the Spanish conflict is a question to which no documented answer has yet to emerge. On 25 July 1936, the Spanish Republican government made its first request for urgently needed military equipment to the USSR. Stalin, however, refused all such petitions. As Smyth notes: "[...] for as late as 29 July 1936, Ibaruri [La Passionaria] herself appealed to all countries to save Spanish democracy, by which date neither in word nor deed had the Soviet government come out in clear support of Republican Spain."⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the initial "cold" indifference towards the Spanish Republican plight turned into active involvement in Republican affairs because, by September 1936, "it can be ascertained that the Soviet Union was abandoning its initial attitude of reserve."⁴⁶ Stalin appears to have watched with great interest the developing international diplomatic situation that was arising out of the events taking place in Spain and was prudently observing French and British responses towards them: "Soviet reaction to the Spanish crisis would be within the parameters of its collective security policy and its search for western allies to counter German expansionism."⁴⁷ Did Stalin have a clear policy regarding the course of Soviet diplomacy at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War?

It has been argued that Stalin was "caught by surprise" by the outbreak of the Spanish conflict.⁴⁸ This contention has been made in order to explain Stalin's silence *vis-à-vis* the events in Spain during the first months of the War. Was Stalin "unprepared" for the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War? Rumors about a Spanish military uprising had

⁴⁵ Denis Smyth. "We are with You: Solidarity and Self-Interest in Soviet Policy Towards Republican Spain 1936-1939." In *The Republic Besieged: Civil War in Spain 1936-1939*, eds., Preston, Paul and Ann L. Mackenzie, 87-105. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 90.

⁴⁶ Angel Viñas. "Gold, the Soviet Union and the Spanish Civil War". *European Studies Review*. (Vol. 9, Num. 1. January 1979, 105-128), 110.

⁴⁷ Enrique Moradiellos. "The Allies and the Spanish Civil War." In *Spain and the Great Powers in the Twentieth Century*, eds., Sebastian Balfour and Paul Preston, 96-126. (London & New York: Routledge, 1999), 101.

⁴⁸ Stanley G. Payne. *The Spanish Revolution*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co. Inc., 1970), 264.

Also see: G. Esenwein and Adrian Shubert. *Spain at War: The Spanish Civil War in Context, 1931-1939*. (New York: Longman Publishing Group Limited, 1995).

been circulating for months beforehand, both in Spain and in the rest of Europe. Historians have commented on the extensive network of Soviet spies in the West, during the 1930s. Mesheriakov claims that the USSR, through its secret agents, was already aware, as of April 1936, that preparations for a rebellion by high-ranking military officials in Spain were well under way.⁴⁹ Perhaps the exact date for the planned uprising was not yet known, but that is of minor importance. Morradiellos refers to a delegation of Spanish officers, led by General Goded, which had traveled to London, at the end of May 1936, in order to inform the British government of an upcoming military revolt. The purpose of this warning was to assure the British that the insurrection was not funded nor supported by Italy.⁵⁰ General Goded's commission to London must have been, in all likelihood, reported to the Kremlin as well.

The editors of *Spain Betrayed* include an interesting document which can, likewise, testify to the existence of a very active, and successful, Soviet spy-network in Western Europe. Buried in the Russian archives, the editors of the above mentioned book unearthed a copy of a document produced by the Western Department of SIS.⁵¹ This document reported Soviet military shipments to the Spanish Republic, which violated the Non-Intervention Agreement. The document was to be used in one of the many Non-Intervention Committee meetings, with the intent of proving Soviet covert military intervention in Spain. What is relevant for the purposes of the present investigation is that the Soviet Union had acquired a copy of this classified report through its agents. It could therefore be argued that the USSR may have had, throughout 1936-1939, access to classified information regarding British diplomatic decisions.

Britain was the corner stone, the very foundation, of Litvinov's collective security policy. This fact conveys significant implications in regards to Soviet foreign policy

⁴⁹ M. T. Mesheriakov. "SSSR i Grazhdanskaya Voina v Ispanii." In *Otechestvennaya Istoriya*. (Vol. 3, 1993) : 89-93.

⁵⁰ Enrique Moradiellos. "The Gentle General: The Official British Perception of General Franco During the Spanish Civil War." In *The Republic Besieged: Civil War in Spain 1936-1939*, eds., Preston, Paul and Ann L. Mackenzie, 1-19. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 3. Moradiellos quotes Mr. Shuckburgh, dated May 30, 1936 (In the Foreign Office records, General correspondence, 371/20522 w4919) for the reference of General Goded's visit to London.

itself. Since France was dependent on Britain, collective security was primarily based on the latter for its success. It is also possible to argue that Stalin may have been aware of Britain's policies towards not only Spain, but also the rest of Europe. Haslam believes that "Moscow did not need spies to ascertain Chamberlain's views, though it appears that the Russians had access to British diplomatic codes and ciphers in the late thirties."⁵² Stalin may have ascertained that Britain sought a *rapprochement* with Italy, that it sought to appease Hitler, and that it barely tolerated the Soviet Union. Thus, one could argue that Stalin would have also known, by 1936, that he would not be able to rely on a military alliance with Britain geared specifically against Germany.

Thomas believes that "the reaction of Stalin and the Russian government towards the outbreak of the Spanish War was dictated by the question of how it would affect the current needs of Russian foreign policy."⁵³ Krivitsky had informed his government, on July 19 1936, of German and Italian military aid to the Spanish Nationalists but this information was, according to him, received in silence.⁵⁴ In fact, Trotsky denounced Stalin's silence: "[he] accuse[d] Stalin of betraying the Spanish Revolution and aiding the Fascists."⁵⁵ Herbert L. Matthews states that "contrary to the popular image, the Russian dictator was at first opposed, then reluctant, and at all times full of misgivings on the question of aiding the Republican government."⁵⁶ According to Moradiellos, Stalin distanced himself from the Spanish War because he regarded it as "untimely" and "inconvenient" since it threatened to ruin Soviet efforts at a *rapprochement* with the West.⁵⁷ There are, likewise, a few reports, made by European diplomats in Moscow that describe the "mood" in the Kremlin *vis-à-vis* the Spanish Crisis. According to Paul

⁵¹ Ronald Radosh, Mary R. Habeck and Grigory Sevostianov, eds. *Spain Betrayed. The Soviet Union and the Spanish Civil War*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 99.

⁵² Jonathan Haslam. *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security in Europe, 1933-1939*. (London: The Macmillan Company Ltd., 1984), 150.

⁵³ Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*. (New York: A Touchstone Book, 1986), 338.

⁵⁴ Walter G. Krivitsky. *I Was Stalin's Agent*. (London: The Right Book Club, 1940), 96.

⁵⁵ Anthony Beevor. *The Spanish Civil War*. (London: Orbis Pub., 1982), 115.

⁵⁶ Herbert L. Matthews. *Half of Spain Died*. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973), 154.

⁵⁷ Enrique Moradiellos. "The Allies and the Spanish Civil War." In *Spain and the Great Powers in the Twentieth Century*, eds., Sebastian Balfour and Paul Preston, 96-126. (London & New York: Routledge, 1999), 108.

Preston, it was reported that “the initial reaction of the Soviet Union was one of deep embarrassment about the events in Spain.”⁵⁸

The Italian Chargé d’Affaires in Moscow, Vincenzo Berardis, reported to his government, on 23 July 1936, that:

“a spokesman [for the Soviet leaders] has confirmed that they are very annoyed and perplexed at the Kremlin by the events in Spain and that in no circumstances would the Soviet government get itself mixed up in the internal events of the peninsula where it has everything to lose and nothing to gain.”⁵⁹

Similarly, the French Military Attaché in Moscow reported to Paris that “there was also a moderate group [in the Politburo], to which Stalin belonged, which wanted to avoid any intervention in the Spanish fight, so as not to provoke a reaction from Germany and Italy.”⁶⁰ It is well known that the Politburo was internally divided over which policy to follow towards Spain. Many Politburo members wanted to participate immediately in the Spanish war because they still believed in the Leninist principle of “world revolution”. Stalin, on the other hand, refused to be thoughtlessly pushed into a situation fraught with diplomatic risks. He had been patiently, along with Litvinov, attempting to build a solid alliance system in Europe with the purpose of protecting the Soviet Union from German attack. By intervening in Spain, Stalin risked alienating the Entente powers and thus, lose all of the diplomatic gains he thought he had, until then, achieved.

How, then, should one interpret Stalin’s silence during the first two months of the Spanish Civil War? “Silence” must not be equated with “unpreparedness”. Stalin, in all

⁵⁸ Paul Preston and Ann L. Mackenzie, eds. *The Republic Besieged: Civil War in Spain 1936-1939*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), X.

⁵⁹ Denis Smyth. “We are with You: Solidarity and Self-Interest in Soviet Policy Towards Republican Spain 1936-1939.” In *The Republic Besieged: Civil War in Spain 1936-1939*, eds., Preston, Paul and Ann L. Mackenzie, 87-105. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 90.

Quoted from: Ministero degli Affari Esteri, i Documenti Diplomatici (Rome, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1993, 8a Serie, IV), 761.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 91.

Quoted from: Le Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Documents Diplomatiques Français 1932-1939, 2ième Série, Vol. III, 19 Juillet-19 Novembre 1936. (Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1966), 208.

probability, had already fabricated several diplomatic options from which he could choose, depending on the reaction of other European powers towards the events in Spain. Jackson contends that Spain would offer the perfect conditions under which Stalin could test the effectiveness of collective security:

“if the Western nations, seeing themselves threatened by the spread of Fascist power, could be brought to cooperate with the Soviets in defense of a legitimately elected democratic government, such collective action might halt the uninterrupted series of Fascist triumphs since the rise of Hitler.”⁶¹

Stalin’s “silence” can also be explained by his immersion in internal Soviet affairs: the ‘Ezhovshchina’ or Great Terror, was scheduled to begin shortly after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. “[...] The trial of the first group of Old Bolsheviks, [...] began on 19 August [...] Kamenev was condemned to death on 23 August, and Zinoviev some days later. Stalin’s mind was thus on other things than Spain.”⁶²

The Soviet Union, by not intervening militarily in the early months of the Spanish Civil War, wanted to avoid all foreign policy complications: “Stalin knew that becoming enmeshed in Spain’s troubles might prejudice his chances of securing more anti-fascist allies, and he therefore temporized over the question of aid for as long as he could.”⁶³ Even though one can argue that Stalin planned to adjust his reactions to those of the other leading European powers, most notably France, one thing remains certain: during the early months of the Spanish Civil War, “Soviet intervention in Spain was defensive and aimed at avoiding a Fascist success there rather than at setting up a satellite.”⁶⁴ Meshieriakov similarly notes that once the Spanish Civil War broke out, Soviet delegates

⁶¹ Gabriel Jackson, ed. *The Spanish Civil War*. (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1972), 258.

⁶² Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*. (New York: A Touchstone Book, 1986), 392.

Also see: Jonathan Haslam. *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security in Europe, 1933-1939*. (London: The Macmillan Company Ltd., 1984), 116.

⁶³ G. Esenwein and Adrian Shubert. *Spain at War: The Spanish Civil War in Context, 1931-1939*. (New York: Longman Publishing Group Limited, 1995), 201.

⁶⁴ John F. Coverdale. *Italian Intervention in the Spanish Civil War*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), 98.

were sent to France in order to persuade the latter to actively aid Republican Spain so as to avoid a German and Italian victory.⁶⁵

On the one hand, one could argue that Stalin, in July 1936, viewed the Spanish Civil War as a minor European disturbance.⁶⁶ He did not expect the war to last longer than a couple of weeks, and he also anticipated a swift Republican victory. Stalin, in all likelihood, watched the events which took place in Europe during the last couple of years and the events in Spain, tragic as they may well have seemed, were not significant enough to warrant the Soviet Union's immersion in a costly venture in a country that was not only geographically remote from the USSR, but which also served absolutely no purpose in his grand plans for collective security. On the other hand, one could interpret Stalin's initial silence at the outbreak of the War as being due to fears that the Spanish conflict would escalate into a general European war. Once Stalin began to openly claim his country's support for the Spanish Republic, he did so under the pretext that it was the Soviet Union's duty to support the Republican cause out of the principles of "international class consciousness". Stalin limited his Spanish policy, during the months of July and August 1936, to sending words of encouragement to the Spanish Republic, by collecting donations made by Soviet workers,⁶⁷ and denouncing German and Italian military intervention in Spain. Until 26 September, Soviet aid was limited to shipments of food and medical supplies: Stalin seemed unwilling to commit himself to any more than that.

Recent research has established that Stalin began sending military equipment to the Spanish Republic in September 1936. Krivitsky claims that Stalin's "indecisiveness" (or what is often perceived as indecisiveness) at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War was due to the fact that Stalin wanted to make sure that the Spanish Nationalist forces

⁶⁵ M. T. Mesheriakov. "SSSR i Grazhdanskaya Voina v Ispanii." In *Otechestvennaya Istoriya*. (Vol. 3, 1993): 89-93.

⁶⁶ See chapter 5

⁶⁷ Broué and Témime argue that it served Stalin's purposes to allow for the collection of funds for the Spanish Republic by Russian workers because in this way, "Stalin could ask the Russian workers to make a little extra effort to raise production, which could not fail to contribute toward the achievement of the objectives set by the Five-Year-Plan of 1933."

would not win the war too quickly before he adopted a firm Spanish policy. Hence, Krivitsky claims that Stalin decided to send military aid to Spain once he was assured that the war would last for a longer, indefinite period of time.⁶⁸ Is Krivitsky's hypothesis plausible? On 6 September 1936, Rozenberg, the Soviet Ambassador to Spain, had sent a telegram to his government, warning that the Spanish Republic risked losing the war should military aid not be immediately sent to Spain.

On 28 September, 1936, the city of Toledo fell to the Nationalists. It was then generally acknowledged that the Spanish Republic was threatened with defeat since both General Mola and Franco would be able to launch a concerted attack on Madrid. In November 1936, Madrid was severely threatened by Nationalist troops. When six out of the seven highways leading to Madrid were controlled by Franco: "only then did Stalin make the decision to reply to the desperate appeals by the Republican government. However, he did this in such a way as to derive enormous material benefit from his 'aid'."⁶⁹ The battle for the defense of Madrid was the first in which Soviet airplanes and tanks were used. Van der Esch argues that "Russia only intervened when the Republican government was in imminent danger of defeat."⁷⁰ Had Soviet military equipment not arrived when it did, the war would have ended when the Nationalists entered Madrid.⁷¹ Although it is not known exactly when Stalin decided to send military aid to the Spanish Republic, the decision was, in all likelihood, made before the threat of a Loyalist military defeat arose. Soviet military aid arrived just in time to "save" the Republican government from defeat. Krivitsky's notion can now be set aside since the Nationalist forces came very close to victory in November 1936 and it was precisely due to Soviet military aid that the Spanish Civil War was able to continue for another two years.

Pierre Broué and Émile Témime. *The Revolution and the Civil War in Spain*. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1972), 369.

⁶⁸ Walter G. Krivitsky. *I Was Stalin's Agent*. (London: The Right Book Club, 1940), 94.

⁶⁹ Vadim Z. Rogovin. *1937: Stalin's Year of Terror*. (Oak Park, MI: Mehring Books Inc., 1998), 338.

⁷⁰ P.A.M. Van der Esch. *Prelude to War: The International Repercussions of the Spanish Civil War 1936-1939*. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1951), 35.

⁷¹ In fact, Soviet military aid was critical during the Nationalist attack on Madrid. The USSR is credited for having "saved" the Republic not only with military equipment but also with the introduction of the International Brigades, organized by the Comintern, on the front. In fact, although the International Brigades numerically played a minor role in the battle, their "discipline" and "solidarity" served to boost the morale of the Spanish militia and set the example for future military offensives.

CHAPTER 3

The Soviet Union and the Non-Intervention Agreement

Most European observers believed that the longer the Spanish Civil War dragged on, the more likely it was that it would spread into a general European conflict.⁷² This fear helps to explain the creation of the Non-Intervention Committee, championed by France and Great Britain. By impeding all foreign military aid from arriving to Spain, both Western powers believed that Non-Intervention would help put an end to the Spanish Civil War as soon as possible. Although France was pushing for collective European adherence to Non-Intervention, she may have been further motivated by Italian warnings. Italy reportedly stated that if no agreement on complete neutrality by all European powers in Spain could be reached, then it feared that Europe would be divided into separate blocs which might prove to be dangerous if any localized conflict [i.e.: the Spanish Civil War] should erupt into a full-fledged European war. This warning was received with foreboding in Paris.

Moreover, France knew that the much-awaited favorable German reply to the Non-Intervention Agreement largely depended on a favorable Soviet reply. France, therefore, set out to convince the USSR, on 5 August 1936, to join Britain, herself, Italy and Germany in a collective agreement on strict neutrality in Spain. The British, according to Little, believed that Non-Intervention was the best solution in order to stop the “contagion” of the Bolshevik threat in Paris and Madrid.⁷³ The British government feared the potential involvement of the Soviet Union in the Spanish Civil War, and suspected that Stalin’s goal was to promote a Left-wing uprising and consequently, set up a regime in Western Europe that would be “friendly” to itself. Even though it could be argued that Britain was well aware of Germany and Italy’s blatant violations of Non-Intervention before she received confirmation of Soviet violations, Britain still believed

⁷² However, it is doubtful that Stalin ever shared this belief. Stalin feared a German attack and thus molded his foreign policy in order to counteract this threat. Had Stalin truly believed, at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War, that the events in Spain would escalate into a generalized war, a war that he was in no position to fight, Stalin would not have supplied the Spanish Republic with military equipment since it would have been difficult for him to back out of his commitment should a general war erupt in Europe.

that the Soviet Union posed a bigger threat to European stability than Hitler and Mussolini did. Britain may have also suspected that Stalin's aim was to create diplomatic turmoil in Europe and cause an eventual war to break out between the Entente and Germany and Italy. Thus, Britain viewed the Soviet Union, and its policies, with suspicion.

The USSR agreed to the principles of Non-Intervention on 23 August 1936. Each country, according to Watters, was waiting to see if another power would intervene first in Spain, causing the emergence of a polarized European situation, where certain powers backed one faction and others the alternate camp.⁷⁴ The Non-Intervention Committee, which met for the first time in London on 9 September, 1936, sought to curtail military aid from reaching either side in the Spanish Civil War. The duties of the Non-Intervention Committee were "to investigate reports of arms-smuggling and other violations and devise measures to prevent further foreign intervention. The purpose of Non-Intervention was to contain the fighting on Spanish territory and, by coming to an understanding with Hitler and Mussolini, relax the tension in Europe."⁷⁵ Its goal was to "exchange information on an arms embargo against all Spain and to consider any other points that may arise."⁷⁶ However, the Committee did not have any actual power to enforce its decrees and thus, relied on the willingness and honesty of all of its participants for its effectiveness. The Committee for Non-Intervention, in fact, proved to be powerless in enforcing the Agreement. The only two countries who abided by Non-Intervention throughout the Spanish Civil War, were Britain and, to a lesser extent, France,⁷⁷ even when it was plainly obvious that Portugal⁷⁸, Germany, Italy and the Soviet Union were flagrantly flouting the Agreement.

⁷³ By "Bolshevik", the British assuredly meant Popular Front. For the British there was little difference between the two; one would inevitably lead to the other.

⁷⁴ William E. Watters. *An International Affair: Non-Intervention in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939*. (New York: Exposition Press, 1971), 46.

⁷⁵ Gerald Howson. *Arms for Spain: The Untold Story of the Spanish Civil War*. (New York: St Martins Press, 1998), 115.

⁷⁶ William E. Watters. *An International Affair: Non-Intervention in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939*. (New York: Exposition Press, 1971), 150.

⁷⁷ The French border was opened at various times during the Spanish Civil War: from 17 July 1936 until 8 August 1936, from 20 October 1937 until 13 June 1938, from 16 March 1938 until 13 June 1938 and from January-February 1939. This, therefore, allowed for the delivery of arms to Republican Spain. Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*. (New York: A Touchstone Book, 1986), 943.

What emerged at the Non-Intervention Committee as of September 1936, was a fake, duplicitous situation whereby Germany, Italy, Portugal and the Soviet Union, pledged their loyalty to the Non-Intervention Agreement and participated in its meetings, all the while violating its principles, with the Western powers turning a blind eye. Alpert argues that Germany did not fear the Entente's reactions to its intervention in Spain, but worried over the possibility of the USSR sending military aid to the Republican government.⁷⁹ Italy and Germany were well aware that the Soviet Union was playing the same dangerous diplomatic game as they: feigning adherence to the Non-Intervention Committee while secretly supplying arms to the Republican government. The only difference between the two lay in the fact that Hitler and Mussolini did not worry if the West knew of their direct involvement in Spain, whereas the USSR, it has been argued, was very preoccupied with the Entente's reactions towards Soviet violations.

Germany and Italy continuously impeded the effectiveness of the Committee by stalling the adoption of decisions over policies by keeping it occupied in long, drawn-out debates and mutual accusations so as to ensure that the Republican government did not receive military aid. The Soviet Union was the only power in the London Committee to openly protest the obvious failure of the Committee in effectively curtailing the flow of foreign arms into Spain. The USSR insisted that "once Non-Intervention failed to stop German and Italian supplies, then the legal right of the Spanish government to obtain arms must be respected; otherwise 'Non-Intervention' was equivalent to intervention against the Republican Government."⁸⁰ The Non-Intervention Agreement was successful in but one respect: it obstructed the right of the legally elected Spanish Republican government to buy arms from friendly nations, while easily allowing for German and Italian military aid to reach the Spanish Nationalist forces via Portugal.

⁷⁸ Portugal "helped" the Spanish Nationalists by allowing German and Italian arms to cross its borders into Spain.

⁷⁹ Michael Alpert. *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 11.

⁸⁰ Raymond Carr. *The Spanish Tragedy: The Civil War in Perspective*. (London: Phoenix Press, 1986), 148.

3.1 STALIN AGREES TO THE "FARCE"⁸¹

Why did Stalin decide to agree to the Non-Intervention Agreement? Roberts believes that "Soviet participation in the Non-Intervention Agreement was motivated primarily by a desire to keep in step with French and British policy on Spain."⁸² It has traditionally been believed that Stalin chose to join the Non-Intervention Committee in the hopes that it would awaken the West to German and Italian intervention in Spain and, consequently, to their aggressive policies in Europe. Thus, it has been argued that Stalin joined the Non-Intervention Committee in the hopes of successfully pursuing collective security and allying the Soviet Union with the Western democracies. This argument however, is contradictory.

Haslam contends that Stalin worried over the possibility that should he intervene in Spain, he would be giving sustenance to the accusations, made by Italy and Germany, that the USSR was secretly funding a Left-wing revolution in Spain. This would, consequently, make it even more difficult for Moscow to ally itself with Paris and London. Perhaps Stalin had originally joined the Non-Intervention Agreement in the hopes of demonstrating Soviet "good faith" because he wanted to avoid Soviet diplomatic isolation. However, he also became aware, rather quickly, that he should expect nothing from the Entente in terms of a firm alliance, guaranteeing Soviet security. It is generally believed that Stalin decided to send military equipment to Republican Spain during the first half of September 1936.⁸³ Therefore, Stalin decided to intervene during or soon after he agreed to Non-Intervention. Thus, the above-mentioned hypothesis, that Stalin joined the Non-Intervention Committee in order to ally himself with the West can now be questioned since he violated Non-Intervention soon after agreeing to it.⁸⁴ One might

⁸¹ The Non-Intervention Agreement was referred to as the "Farce of Non-Intervention" since few members abided by its rules.

⁸² Geoffrey Roberts. "Soviet Foreign Policy and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939." In *Spain in an International Context, 1936-1959*, eds., Christian Leitz and David J. Dunthorn, 81-104. (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 85.

⁸³ See Chapter 6

⁸⁴ See: E.H. Carr. *The Comintern and the Spanish Civil War*. (London: Macmillan, 1984). 17. ; David T. Cattell. "The Soviet Union Intervenes." In *Der Spanische Bürgerkrieg in der Internationalen Politik (1936-1939)*, eds., Schieder, Wolfgang and Christof Dipper, 225-232. (München: Nymphenburger Verlagshandlung GmbH, 1976), 227. ; Stanley G. Payne. *The Spanish Revolution*. (New York: W. W.

assume, however, that Stalin could still have entertained the idea, in 1936, that the West could or would eventually “come around” and consequently, lost nothing by continuing to seek an alliance with the Entente, despite his disillusionment. In fact, “the Soviet Union was determined to avoid a diplomatic break with the western powers.”⁸⁵ Signing the Non-Intervention Agreement was safer than a “formal” break with the Entente.

Since the Soviet Union was the only critic of German and Italian involvement in Spain during the Committee meetings, it is possible that Stalin may have originally believed that he could “unmask” Italian and German treachery and, consequently, make France realize the danger that a pro-German Spain posed to her immediate security. He may have hoped that France would eventually view German and Italian intervention in Spain as a direct threat to her integrity and to the safety of her borders and consequently seek a military alliance with the USSR. Stalin could not have predicted France’s indecision towards Spain, nor her honest adherence to the principles of Non-Intervention. Once it was clear that France would not change its stance *vis-à-vis* Non-Intervention, Stalin decided to change his Spanish policy and began sending military aid to the Republic.

It has also been suggested that perhaps initially, Stalin clung to the hope that Non-Intervention could effectively stop German and Italian military aid from reaching the Spanish Nationalist forces.⁸⁶ This possibility, however, seems unlikely: “when Moscow agreed to the French proposal it had no idea or expectation that Germany, Italy and Portugal would formally commit themselves to Non-Intervention.”⁸⁷ These illusions, if he ever did entertain them, quickly evaporated. Stalin, from the outset of the Committee

Norton & Co. Inc., 1970), 267. ; Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*. (New York: A Touchstone Book, 1986), 392.

⁸⁵ Gabriel Jackson, ed. *The Spanish Civil War*. (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1972), 317.

⁸⁶ Denis Smyth. “We are with You: Solidarity and Self-Interest in Soviet Policy Towards Republican Spain 1936-1939.” In *The Republic Besieged: Civil War in Spain 1936-1939*, eds., Preston, Paul and Ann L. Mackenzie, 87-105. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 99. ; David T. Cattell. *Soviet Diplomacy and the Spanish Civil War*. University of California Publications in International Relations, Vol. 5. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 16.

⁸⁷ Geoffrey Roberts. “Soviet Foreign Policy and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939.” In *Spain in an International Context, 1936-1959*, eds., Christian Leitz and David J. Dunthorn, 81-104. (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 85.

meetings, never seriously believed that Non-Intervention would or could effectively curtail foreign military intervention in Spain. Obvious German and Italian military aid continued to be sent to the Spanish Nationalists while the Committee did nothing to put an end to these violations. By agreeing to Non-Intervention however, Stalin would also prove to the Entente that he shared the same goals in Europe as they did. Stalin, therefore, agreed to the proposals and formally signed the Non-Intervention Agreement on 25 August 1936. He even went so far as to propose that the Non-Intervention Committee “set up an effective control system over Spanish and Portuguese ports. If this proposal had been accepted, it would have made non-Intervention a reality. But it was turned down.”⁸⁸

3.2 WHY STALIN AGREED TO THE “FARCE”

Until the end of September 1936, the Soviet Union, it should be remembered, had not sent a single cartridge to Spain. Once it became obvious to both the Soviet Union and the Non-Intervention Committee that Germany and Italy, two of its members, were continuing to send military aid to the rebel forces in Spain, Maisky,⁸⁹ declared, on 7 October, 1936, that the Soviet Union would consider itself free of its obligations to the Committee since other powers were still shipping military supplies to Spain. On 23 October, Maisky declared that the Soviet Union would abide by the Non-Intervention Agreement to the “extent that other countries did”.⁹⁰ Republican Spain had already received Soviet military equipment when these statements were made. Why, then, did the Soviet Union choose to continue participating in the Non-Intervention Committee while clearly violating the rules set forth by the Agreement? It has been argued that the USSR had threatened to leave the Committee but could not since it would be relegated to a position of diplomatic isolation, a situation that it desperately sought to avoid. Evidently, the Committee did not take these Soviet threats too seriously. It was well known, by both the USSR, and Germany and Italy, that should the Soviet Union

⁸⁸ Julio Alvarez del Vayo. *Freedom's Battle*. (New York: Hill & Wang, 1940), 74.

⁸⁹ The Soviet representative at the Non-Intervention Committee.

withdraw its representative from the Non-Intervention Committee, Franco would be the only one to considerably gain from this decision, since no other power in the Committee was willing to be as outspoken as the USSR regarding German and Italian violations. Stalin may have also feared that, by formally breaking with the London Committee, he would increase the chances for the creation of a Four-Power-Pact between Britain, France, Germany and Italy.⁹¹

Although Haslam believes that Stalin did not want to sign the Agreement and only did so in order to avoid isolation,⁹² Cattell claims that Stalin was pleased by the fact that the proposals for Non-Intervention were suggested by the Entente while the USSR stood by in absolute silence: should the Agreement prove to be a failure, “the stigma would fall on the democracies and not the Soviet Union, who could claim simply to have gone along with the majority of states.”⁹³ Berardis, the Italian Chargé d’Affaires in Moscow, makes reference to a general feeling of relief in the Kremlin when Non-Intervention was proposed by France because the USSR would therefore not have to make the difficult decision of choosing between abandoning the Spanish Republic or, should the Soviet Union actively participate in the Spanish Civil War, risk the outbreak of a European conflict.⁹⁴ Likewise, Alpert argues that Stalin may have even surmised that should the Non-Intervention Agreement “miraculously” prove to effectively end Hitler’s and Mussolini’s intervention in Spain, it may “save” the Republican government without accusations of Soviet intervention.⁹⁵ It was also argued by International Communist organizations at the time that the Soviet Union, could not allow for the

⁹⁰ Geoffrey Roberts. “Soviet Foreign Policy and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939.” In *Spain in an International Context, 1936-1959*. eds., Christian Leitz and David J. Dunthorn, 81-104. (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 86.

⁹¹ Soviet fears were not unfounded: two years later, the dreaded Four-Power-Pact did materialize in the form of the Munich Agreement.

⁹² Jonathan Haslam. *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security in Europe, 1933-1939*. (London: The Macmillan Company Ltd., 1984), 113.

⁹³ David T. Cattell. *Soviet Diplomacy and the Spanish Civil War*. University of California Publications in International Relations, Vol. 5. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 15.

⁹⁴ Denis Smyth. “We are with You: Solidarity and Self-Interest in Soviet Policy Towards Republican Spain 1936-1939.” In *The Republic Besieged: Civil War in Spain 1936-1939*, eds., Preston, Paul and Ann L. Mackenzie, 87-105. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 90.
Quoted from: Ministero degli Affari Esteri, i Documenti Diplomatici (Rome, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1993, 8a Serie, IV), 676.

development of a Right-wing victory in Spain. It was popularly believed that it was the “duty” of the USSR to help the Spanish Republican government. Therefore, another argument explaining Stalin’s readiness to sign the Non-Intervention Agreement was that he could then use his adherence to Non-Intervention as an excuse for his lack of involvement in Spain.⁹⁶ It would serve as the perfect “cover” for Stalin’s “abandonment” of the Spanish Republic.⁹⁷

3.3 SOVIET RISKS

Italy and Germany, on the other hand, had confessed, during Non-Intervention Committee meetings, to having supported the Spanish Nationalist forces, but claimed that their military intervention had taken place before they had officially signed the Agreement. In order to strengthen their case, both Italy and Germany claimed that the USSR wanted to set up a Moscow-controlled regime in Spain and that their own military involvement in Spain arose as a direct consequence to this. When Stalin did finally decide to intervene in Spain, Germany and Italy finally had proof for the accusations that they had been making to the London Committee for so long.⁹⁸

Furthermore, at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, Stalin gave strict instructions to the PCE, the Spanish Communist Party, to form an alliance with the moderate forces in the Republican government. The PCE was warned to steer clear from the POUM, the CNT and the FAI, extreme Leftist political groups that supported, and were fighting for, an immediate revolution in Spain. Stalin did not aspire for the PCE,

⁹⁵ Michael Alpert. *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War*. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 51.

⁹⁶ See: Michael Alpert. *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War*. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 51. ; Denis Smyth. “We are with You: Solidarity and Self-Interest in Soviet Policy Towards Republican Spain 1936-1939.” In *The Republic Besieged: Civil War in Spain 1936-1939*. Preston, Paul and Ann L. Mackenzie, eds., pp. 87-105. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 92. ; David T. Cattell. *Soviet Diplomacy and the Spanish Civil War*. University of California Publications in International Relations, Vol. 5. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 15.

⁹⁷ Ironically, this same argument has also been used to explain Stalin’s eventual decision to intervene in Spain.

⁹⁸ One very conservative British newspaper pointed out that “no one expected Germany and Italy to tolerate another Communist state in Europe.”

nor the Comintern, to be associated with church burnings, random executions, and land or business expropriations. He wanted the Spanish bourgeoisie to join the ranks of the PCE, thus demonstrating to the Entente powers that he had no desire for a “Communist” insurrection in Spain. Stalin sought to concentrate on “Socialism in one country” and consequently, the idea of a “world revolution” did not play a role in Soviet foreign policy by 1936. He took every opportunity to make his plans known in the West: he repeatedly tried to assure France and Great Britain that the Soviet Union would not, under any circumstances, support nor fund Left-wing revolutions abroad.⁹⁹

There is, likewise, the possibility that the Show-Trials were central to Soviet foreign policy: Stalin may have believed that he could “entice” the West into an alliance by demonstrating that he was ridding the Soviet Union of its “revolutionary” elements. Stalin’s orders to the PCE have been repeatedly used in order to prove that Stalin sought an alliance with the Entente at all costs, thus sacrificing the spread of the revolution abroad by securing for himself strong European allies.¹⁰⁰ Ironically, the very situation that Stalin had sought to avoid did, in fact, occur: the Loyalists became increasingly dependent on Soviet aid and the PCE was subsequently strengthened and gained greater political and military influence during the course of the Spanish War.

William E. Watters. *An International Affair: Non-Intervention in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939*. (New York: Exposition Press, 1971), 48. Quoted from the London Daily Mail, August 7, 1936, 8.

⁹⁹ The editors of *Spain Betrayed* found a report, by Dimitrov, dated 23 July, 1936, which stated: “We should not, at the present stage, assign the task of creating Soviets and try to establish a dictatorship of the proletariat in Spain. That would be a fatal mistake. Therefore, we must say: act in the guise of defending the Republic; do not abandon the positions of the democratic regime in Spain at this point.”

This new evidence therefore supports the theory that the Soviet Union and the PCE “disguised their true objective: social revolution. They would do this by pretending that their ultimate goal was merely a bourgeois democratic regime.”

Ronald Radosh, Mary R. Habeck and Grigory Sevostianov, eds. *Spain Betrayed. The Soviet Union and the Spanish Civil War*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 5-11.

¹⁰⁰ See: George Esenwein and Adrian Shubert. *Spain at War: The Spanish Civil War in Context, 1931-1939*. (New York: Longman Publishing Group Limited, 1995), 203. ; Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*. (New York: A Touchstone Book, 1986), 339. ; Raymond Carr. *The Spanish Tragedy: The Civil War in Perspective*. (London: Phoenix Press, 1986), 106. ; Robert G. Wesson. *Soviet Foreign Policy in Perspective*. (Illinois: The Dorsey Press, 1969), 124. ; Michael Alpert. *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War*. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 50. ; Denis Smyth. “We are with You: Solidarity and Self-Interest in Soviet Policy Towards Republican Spain 1936-1939.” In *The Republic Besieged: Civil War in Spain 1936-1939*, eds., Preston, Paul and Ann L. Mackenzie, 87-105. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 100.

The fact remains, however, that the only way for Stalin to secure his borders against an eventual German attack, was to either create solid military alliances with the West or come to an understanding with Hitler. Soviet involvement in the Spanish Civil War would never secure a *rapprochement* with either one of these two potential allies. Thus far, it would seem as if it was in Stalin's diplomatic interests to, not only join the Non-Intervention Committee, but also adhere to it. By deciding to send military aid to Spain, Stalin chose to risk entering into a general war and/or alienate his potential allies since the latter would perceive the USSR as an aggressor. Stalin also ran the risk of losing his merchant marine fleet to Italian attack in the Mediterranean. Furthermore, should the USSR become embroiled in a European war, Spain could not offer it any immediate protection from a German and/or Italian attack and, likewise, all of the personnel and military equipment which would have been sent to Republican Spain would be rendered useless in a European war: the distance between both powers would make the transport back to the USSR virtually impossible.

Furthermore, while Stalin was negotiating with the Republican government over the method of payment for his military aid, he also published a decree, on 28 August 1936, banning the export of all war *matériel* to Spain. Simultaneously, Krivitsky and other Soviet agents were already in Western Europe, organizing the purchase and delivery of military supplies bound for Republican Spain. Stalin's duplicitous policy is also demonstrated by the fact that while Maisky was denying the accusations made in the London Committee regarding his government's military aid to Republican Spain, ships, carrying military equipment bound for Loyalist Spain, were leaving Soviet ports and flying other national flags. These ships docked at Republican ports and, once the deliveries were made, returned to the USSR under Soviet ensigns. As Jackson has argued, it was next to impossible to conceal Soviet shipments, which sailed through the Dardanelles and the Mediterranean Sea, because both routes were patrolled by Italian submarines and German agents, who reported the sailing of Soviet ships to their respective governments.¹⁰¹ Thus, "the supply routes would hence have to be kept secret.

¹⁰¹ Watt had discovered a report by a German agent stationed in Ankara, with detailed information regarding ships setting sail from Soviet ports in the Black Sea.

Given the geographical problems, and Stalin's own internal problems [i.e. Purges], the scheme to assist the Republic was a risky one, whenever the decision was taken."¹⁰²

See: Watt, Donald C. "Soviet Military Aid to the Spanish Republic in the Civil War 1936-1938. In *Der Spanische Bürgerkrieg in der Internationalen Politik (1936-1939)*. eds., Schieder, Wolfgang and Christof Dipper, 249-255. (München: Nymphenburger Verlagshandlung GmbH, 1976).

¹⁰² Hugh Thomas. *The Spanish Civil War*. (New York: A Touchstone Book, 1986), 443.

CHAPTER 4

The Soviet Union Intervenes: Stalin's motives

Stalin was well aware of German and Italian agents patrolling the Mediterranean: Soviet shipments to Spain could not be kept secret and therefore, one can argue that Stalin realized the huge risks involved with supplying the Republic with military equipment. By mid-October 1936, according to Jackson, newspaper and espionage reports concerning Soviet violations of the Agreement were submitted to the Non-Intervention Committee.¹⁰³ However, it is still unclear why Stalin decided to subject the Soviet Union to such attacks in the Committee.

The underlying reason(s) which seek(s) to explain Stalin's decision to alter his Spanish policy and send military equipment is/are still debatable. It can, however, assuredly be claimed that Stalin expected to be financially compensated for his "aid". He knew that he would not be able to compete with the amount of military aid that was being sent by Hitler and Mussolini. Spanish Civil War historians often fail to mention the fact that Soviet intervention in Spain ran counter to its interests at the time. It is clear that in terms of "logical" foreign policy, the Soviet Union should have adhered to the Non-Intervention Agreement. Nevertheless, Stalin did, in fact, choose to intervene in Spain and a vast array of theories explaining his decision to do so have subsequently been put forth. Most of the arguments that seek to explain Soviet motives in Spain either make dubious diplomatic and strategic sense or are in themselves inconsistent. Nevertheless, Stalin evidently did see his involvement in Spain as offering the Soviet Union some benefit that was considered important enough for him to take all of the diplomatic and strategic risks mentioned thus far. Soviet motives in the Spanish Civil War have been subject to much debate and little consensus. The reason for this lies, mainly, in the fact that no documents have yet surfaced in order to put this matter to rest.

¹⁰³ Gabriel Jackson, ed. *The Spanish Civil War*. (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1972), 316.

4.1 MILITARY MOTIVES

Most hypotheses regarding the reason(s) for Soviet intervention in Spain center around a similar argument: Stalin's motives in Spain were propelled by Soviet interests. Stalin did not "selflessly" decide to "help" the Spanish Republic out of his solidarity for the cause of "Democracy". It is generally acknowledged that "Stalin came to regard Spain as a crucial element in his foreign policy strategy."¹⁰⁴ Each country intervened or chose not to intervene in Spain, for its own political, diplomatic, and/or economic interests. However, Germany and Italy had much more to gain with a Franco victory than the Soviet Union had with a Republican triumph. German and Italian active military aid assured them of the possibility of securing strategic naval bases in the Mediterranean.¹⁰⁵ Mussolini and Hitler used Spain as a testing ground for new military equipment and innovative combat techniques. Some scholars have proposed that Stalin's motives in Spain also lay in his desire for the USSR to gain military experience.¹⁰⁶ However, it is known that Stalin did not send any ground troops to Spain. In fact, not a single Russian, apart from a few pilots and tank drivers, ever fought in a Spanish battle.¹⁰⁷ Instead, Stalin chose to send military advisors and instructors, for the purpose of training Spaniards for combat.

While in Spain, Soviet advisors were carefully isolated from the rest of the population, under the watchful eye of NKVD agents. Stalin reputedly ordered his military personnel, before leaving for Spain, to "stay out of range of the artillery fire."¹⁰⁸ Although Stalin may have wanted to avoid the spread and propagation of rumors that "Russians were invading Spain", this was not the principal reason for their seclusion. It

¹⁰⁴ G. Esenwein and Adrian Shubert. *Spain at War: The Spanish Civil War in Context, 1931-1939*. (New York: Longman Publishing Group Limited, 1995), 202.

¹⁰⁵ Italy gaining the Balearic Islands and Germany the Canary Islands

¹⁰⁶ See: John J. Muste. *Say that We Saw Spain Die. Literary Consequences of the Spanish Civil War*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966), 18. ; Pierre Broué and Émile Témime. *The Revolution and the Civil War in Spain*. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1972), 366. ; Raymond Carr. *The Spanish Tragedy: The Civil War in Perspective*. (London: Phoenix Press, 1986), 230.

¹⁰⁷ Soviet personnel in Spain were, in fact, quite negligible. It is believed that a total of 2,000 Russians "served" in Spain at any given time during the war. The Nationalist forces had less manpower and more arms, while the Republicans generally relied on the "advice" and training by Soviet technicians.

¹⁰⁸ Walter G. Krivitsky. *I Was Stalin's Agent*. (London: The Right Book Club, 1940), 95.

is, in all likelihood, possible to explain this forced segregation with Stalin's inherent fear of his officials becoming "infected" by Western ideas, or through contacts with the POUM and/or the CNT-FAI. In any case, Stalin's "stratagem" was not effective enough to convince him that his military staff had not been "contaminated" and, consequently, as of 1937, most of the Soviet personnel was recalled to Moscow. Many disappeared in the Purges:¹⁰⁹ "it was not until the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 that Soviet citizens were told by Khrushchev that between 1937 and 1941 the 'cadre of leaders who had gained military experience in the Far East and Spain was almost completely liquidated.'"

¹¹⁰ The Soviet Union may have been able to acquire useful information about the performance of their military equipment in comparison to Germany's, but this was hardly a reason for Stalin to involve his country in the Civil War. Once the decision to intervene in Spain had been made, he may have realized that, by intervening, he gained the extra "bonus" of testing out his new military equipment in actual combat.

Stalin was also well aware that the Spanish Republican government included Anarchist and "Trotskyite" political parties and trade unions. The POUM and the CNT-FAI proved to be the PCE's greatest rivals in solidifying its support among the Spanish working class and agrarian population. These political parties were also the Soviet Union's most outspoken opponents. Stalin must have feared the possibility of his political "enemies" flocking to Spain, and that with his aid, they might one day challenge his authority. Naturally, Stalin could not permit himself to encourage a potential political threat to his own Soviet power-base, however loosely construed. Krivitsky claims that "Stalin was determined to support with arms and man-power only those groups in Spain which were ready to accept his leadership without reservation."¹¹¹ The question, then,

¹⁰⁹ Most Soviet military and diplomatic officials involved in the Spanish Civil War were either killed upon their return to Moscow, or "disappeared". Most notably, Krestinsky, Grinko, and Stashevsky (they were most intimately involved in the appropriation of the Spanish gold reserves); Antonov-Ovseenko and Rozenberg (Soviet diplomatic representatives in Republican Spain); General Berzin and Gorev, (military commanders in Republican Spain); Kleber, Gal and Čopić (leaders of the International Brigades), Koltsov, a prominent Pravda correspondent in Spain was executed, and Krivitsky was found shot in a hotel in Washington. Only Malinovsky and Ehrenburg mysteriously survived the Purges upon their return to the USSR.

¹¹⁰ Khrushchev, however, offers no explanation for Stalin's motives.

Raymond Carr. *The Spanish Tragedy: The Civil War in Perspective*. (London: Phoenix Press, 1986), 235.

¹¹¹ Walter G. Krivitsky. *I Was Stalin's Agent*. (London: The Right Book Club, 1940), 110.

still remains: why did Stalin decide to “help” the Spanish Republic when this same government was comprised of a large percentage of Left-wing forces who not only demanded an immediate revolution but also publicly criticized the leader of the Soviet Union?

4.2 IDEOLOGICAL MOTIVES

Roberts claims that “[...] in this particular episode in the history of Soviet foreign policy, ideology mattered. By and large Soviet and Comintern policy towards Spain was what it was said to be and its ideological and political inspiration was transparent in public pronouncements on the subject.”¹¹² Likewise, Rosenstone argues that Soviet idealism was a main contributor to the Soviet decision to intervene in Spain: “some Russian leaders found in Spain a fire that rekindled their faith in revolution; others who thought their own revolution was being betrayed at home wished to partake in this new, pure struggle.”¹¹³ In contrast to this, Matthews believes that “the Russian dictator was one of the most secretive and enigmatic figures of history. [...] his policies were not, of course, guided by idealism, morality, or any love for Spain.”¹¹⁴ Did “ideology” play a leading role in Stalin’s decision to intervene in Spain?

Haslam wrongly claims that Stalin was influenced to send military equipment to Spain after hearing La Pasionaria’s pleas for military aid, which “struck a sympathetic chord outside the Narkomindel and before long opinion in Moscow was beginning to swing against the policy of caution favored at Kuznetsky Most and, [...] reportedly also by Stalin,”¹¹⁵ One thing is certain: Stalin did not send military aid to the Republic out of ideological solidarity. It is generally agreed that had the Soviet Union sent military aid during the first weeks of the Spanish Civil War, the Republicans would have probably

¹¹² Geoffrey Roberts. “Soviet Foreign Policy and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939.” In *Spain in an International Context, 1936-1959*, eds., Christian Leitz and David J. Dunthorn, 81-104. (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 84.

¹¹³ Robert A. Rosenstone. *Crusade of the Left: The Lincoln Battalion in the Spanish Civil War*. (New York: Pegasus, 1969), 86.

¹¹⁴ Herbert L. Matthews. *Half of Spain Died*. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1973), 154.

¹¹⁵ Jonathan Haslam. *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security in Europe, 1933-1939*. (London: The Macmillan Company Ltd., 1984), 110.

been able to defeat the Insurgents. Furthermore, Soviet military aid, when it finally did arrive, never proved to be quantitatively enough in order to secure a Loyalist victory.

As stated earlier, Stalin was no longer interested in the idea of a world revolution and a Communist regime in Spain was not on Stalin's political or diplomatic agenda. The PCE was a relatively minor political party until 1937, when its power and influence grew due to the increasing influence that the Soviet Union held in Spanish domestic affairs. Stalin, however, chose to decrease Soviet military aid to the Spanish Republic during the height of the PCE's political influence in the Spanish Republican government. It is therefore evident that Stalin did not intervene in Spain with the purpose of increasing the PCE's power-hold only to drastically curtail his involvement once the PCE had finally gained greater influence in Spanish politics. The PCE proved to be, in fact, the most counter-revolutionary political force in Spain throughout the Civil War. The PCE, under strict Comintern orders, called for unity among all political parties in the Republican camp in order to combat the Nationalist forces. Talk of revolution, expropriation, collectivization, or the spontaneous murder of the "Bourgeoisie" or members of religious orders was forbidden and severely punished.

Through these orders, Stalin sought to give the Spanish Republican government some semblance of respectability in the eyes of the Western Democracies. In fact, Alpert believes that "Stalin shared Litvinov's concern not to alienate the Western Democracies by seeming to encourage revolution."¹¹⁶ Once the Soviet Union did military intervene in Spain, ideology did play a role in Soviet policies within Republican Spain. However, "ideology" itself was not the driving force behind Stalin's motives.¹¹⁷ It was simply a consequence of Soviet intervention.

¹¹⁶ Michael Alpert. *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 50.

¹¹⁷ For further discussion on Soviet intervention in Spanish domestic affairs, see chapter 7.

4.3 INTERNATIONAL OPINION

It has also been proposed that had Stalin decided to remain neutral and let the Spanish Republic “fend” for itself, he would most certainly have risked antagonizing the International Left-wing community and subsequently lose their support.¹¹⁸ How could Stalin, it was argued at the time, the leader of the first “Socialist country”, not help the Spanish Republic in its hour of need? Although it can be assumed that Stalin did take into consideration his and the USSR’s international reputation, it also seems likely that by the 1930s, foreign opinions towards the Soviet Union had ceased to be his overriding priority. Some scholars have traced a direct link between the Purges and Stalin’s decision to intervene in Spain.¹¹⁹ It has been argued that Stalin decided to involve the Soviet Union in Spain in the hopes that the war would distract his international supporters from the events taking place at home.¹²⁰ Is this a viable argument?

Stalin was preparing for the Purges, which were scheduled to commence in the summer of 1936. He must have known that the show-trials would not only cause the Soviet Union to lose international credibility, but also cause International Left-wing organizations to criticize the events taking place in the USSR. According to Pierre Broué and Émile Témime, the Soviet Union had “ceased to be the inspiration of the world revolutionary movement” through the “liquidation of the Bolshevik old-guard and [the] decapitat[ion] of the international Communist movement through a series of trials and purges.”¹²¹ Hochman concludes that “by the end of 1937 all prospects of effective united

¹¹⁸ See: Stanley G. Payne. *The Spanish Revolution*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co. Inc., 1970), 269; John J. Muste. *Say that We Saw Spain Die. Literary Consequences of the Spanish Civil War*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966), 18. ; Gerald Howson. *Arms for Spain: The Untold Story of the Spanish Civil War*. (New York: St Martins Press, 1998), 123. ; Robert A. Rosenstone. *Crusade of the Left: The Lincoln Battalion in the Spanish Civil War*. (New York: Pegasus, 1969), 86. ; Walter G. Krivitsky. *I Was Stalin’s Agent*. (London: The Right Book Club, 1940), 99. ; Anthony Beevor. *The Spanish Civil War*. (London: Orbis Pub., 1982), 115.

¹¹⁹ Fernando Schwartz. *La Internacionalización de la Guerra Civil Española. Julio de 1936- Marzo de 1937*. (Barcelona: Ediciones Ariel, 1971), 203.

¹²⁰ Walter G. Krivitsky. *I Was Stalin’s Agent*. (London: The Right Book Club, 1940), 99. Also see: Pierre Broué and Émile Témime. *The Revolution and the Civil War in Spain*. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1972), 369.

¹²¹ Pierre Broué and Émile Témime. *The Revolution and the Civil War in Spain*. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1972), 190.

actions by anti-fascists were ruined.”¹²² Since the Ezhovshchina began in September 1936, one could assume that Stalin must have planned the Show-Trials in advance. This would suggest that when Stalin signed the Non-Intervention Agreement at the end of August 1936, he did so with the knowledge that both his agreement to Non-Intervention and the advent of the Purges would doubly alienate his international supporters.

He also attempted to send arms secretly to the Republic. According to Krivitsky, Stalin had clearly ordered that, under no circumstances, should the arms sent to Spain be traced to the Soviet Union. Thus, had Stalin been concerned primarily by international opinion, he would not have gone to such painstaking lengths to hide his intervention in Spain nor, of course, would he have signed a Non-Aggression Pact with Hitler, which shattered “Communist Parties and alienated friends of the Soviet Union all over the world.”¹²³ Stalin was concerned, in 1936 as in 1939, with protecting the Soviet Union. He must have known that his domestic policies would cause international outrage but, nevertheless, decided to adhere to Non-Intervention. These decisions imply that Stalin did not choose to intervene in Spain out of international pressure to do so nor did he intervene in order to please his supporters and/or to distract their attention over the Purges.

¹²² Jiri Hochman. *The Soviet Union and the Failure of Collective Security, 1934-1938*. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1984), 91-92.

¹²³ Robert A. Rosenstone. *Crusade of the Left: The Lincoln Battalion in the Spanish Civil War*. (New York: Pegasus, 1969), 344.

4.4 FRANCE

It has also been argued that Stalin was prompted to intervene in Spain owing to his need to protect the USSR.¹²⁴ France, it was believed, and the preservation of her political integrity, was ‘vital’ to Stalin’s collective security policy. Stalin knew that, should the Spanish Nationalists win the war, the chances that Spain would strategically support, or actively help Hitler and Mussolini in the event of war were almost certain. Stalin may have viewed the potential threat to France as a potential threat to the Soviet Union.¹²⁵ Despite the discouraging signs displayed by both the Entente powers towards their Spanish Civil War policy, Smyth believes that “it was the Soviet preoccupation with protecting the strategic position of their potential ally, France, that produced the twists and turns in Russian policy towards Spain in the vital early phases of the Civil War.”¹²⁶ Thus, his preoccupation over securing French borders was motivated by the idea that only in this way could he avert the threat that Germany posed to the USSR.

Stalin may have also felt that a victorious Spanish Republican Government, under his “guidance”, would help him solidify an alliance with the West.¹²⁷ The French-Soviet Pact of 1935 was an important step in the search for collective security pursued by both Stalin and Litvinov. Smyth therefore argues that the Soviet Union intervened in Spain because it suspected that France was too “paralyzed by internal dissent over Spain to take

¹²⁴ See: Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*. (New York: A Touchstone Book, 1986), 339. ; Denis Smyth. “We are with You: Solidarity and Self-Interest in Soviet Policy Towards Republican Spain 1936-1939.” In *The Republic Besieged: Civil War in Spain 1936-1939*, eds., Preston, Paul and Ann L. Mackenzie, 87-105. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 98. ; Paul Preston and Ann L. Mackenzie, eds. *The Republic Besieged Civil War in Spain 1936-1939*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), XIII. ; Pierre Broué and Émile Témime. *The Revolution and the Civil War in Spain*. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1972), 368.

¹²⁵ If France was encircled by hostile powers, then it would not be able to help the USSR in case of a German attack. One must also keep in mind that Spain was strategically important for France in order to have access to its troops since one third of them were stationed in North Africa at this time. A neutral Spain would be needed if France sought to allow for its troops to cross into France.

¹²⁶ Denis Smyth. “We are with You: Solidarity and Self-Interest in Soviet Policy Towards Republican Spain 1936-1939.” In *The Republic Besieged: Civil War in Spain 1936-1939*, eds., Preston, Paul and Ann L. Mackenzie, 87-105. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 97.

¹²⁷ See: George Esenwein and Adrian Shubert. *Spain at War: The Spanish Civil War in Context, 1931-1939*. (New York: Longman Publishing Group Limited, 1995), 202. ; Francisco J. Romero Salvado. *Twentieth-Century Spain: Politics and Society in Spain 1898-1998*. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 103.

action to help itself”¹²⁸ Nevertheless, Stalin was also aware of the fact that the Pact with France was useless if it did not also include Great Britain. This, however, Stalin knew would be next to impossible since Great-Britain was not at all interested in an alliance with Soviet Russia. This may therefore explain Stalin’s need to project the Soviet Union as a nation desiring peace and democracy and, in no way, a nation that sought to promote a Left-wing revolution. One could argue that Spain did not fit into Stalin’s collective security policy because it served no purpose in the protection of the USSR. However, the theory behind collective security was based “on the idea that a threat to the peace and security of any nation is a threat to the security of every other peaceful nation. Even though Spain was far away from the USSR, the loss of its independence was a threat to the USSR.”¹²⁹

Stalin also knew that his military intervention in Spain would decrease his chances of gaining Britain as an ally, which is what he arguably most sought in 1936. Hence the contradiction in Stalinist policy *vis-à-vis* the Spanish Civil War. If the Soviet government committed itself to helping the Republic, Stalin would certainly lose all hope of gaining Britain as an ally against Germany; but if he chose to remain neutral, France risked being surrounded by pro-Axis states. The fact remains that German and Italian aid to Franco was more of an immediate threat to France than it ever was to the USSR. France’s cautious foreign policy could not have encouraged Stalin to embark on a potentially costly and diplomatically dangerous mission in Spain.

4.5 CALLING HITLER’S “BLUFF”

Cattell believes that Stalin’s motive in Spain was both to distract Hitler and to deplete his armaments on the battlefield before Germany became too militarily powerful. Likewise, Orlov recalls that “the Politburo [came] to the conclusion that it would be more

¹²⁸ Denis Smyth. “We are with You: Solidarity and Self-Interest in Soviet Policy Towards Republican Spain 1936-1939.” In *The Republic Besieged: Civil War in Spain 1936-1939*, eds., Preston, Paul and Ann L. Mackenzie, 87-105. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 99.

¹²⁹ David T. Cattell. “The Soviet Union Intervenes.” In *Der Spanische Bürgerkrieg in der Internationalen Politik (1936-1939)*, eds., Schieder, Wolfgang and Christof Dipper, 225-232. (München: Nymphenburger Verlagshandlung GmbH, 1976), 227.

advantageous to the Soviet Union if neither of the warring camps gained preponderant strength and if the war in Spain dragged on for as long as possible [...] it would tie up Hitler there for a longer time.”¹³⁰ Stalin’s military “plan” seemed to be outwardly successful since Hitler responded to Soviet military aid, in November 1936, by sending “an exclusively German military unit to Spain, the Condor Legion.”¹³¹ Nevertheless, the question of depleting German military equipment in Spain is questionable since Hitler, unlike Mussolini, never sent large-scale military equipment to Spain. The theory of “distracting” Hitler in Spain, in order to gain time to either rearm, solidify an alliance with the West or attempt to pursue a *rapprochement* with Nazi Germany are three viable explanations. Stalin would be able to keep the war in Spain from decisively ending, by sending just enough military equipment to avoid a Nationalist victory. This entire foreign venture could be pursued at little to no cost for the Soviet Union.

Krivitsky mentions another hypothesis which seeks to explain Stalin’s decision to intervene in Spain: Stalin had considered the possibility that should the Republican government win the Spanish Civil War, with his aid, the Western democracies would consequently be forced to alter their policies towards the Soviet Union, as would Hitler and Mussolini, since the latter would have suffered their first military defeat in Spain.¹³² This outcome could therefore cause a drastic shift in European attitudes towards their Soviet diplomacy since, until 1936, Europe had only witnessed German and Italian diplomatic and military victories. A Republican victory, with the backing of the USSR, it has been argued, would help secure collective security alliances, or at the very least, show Hitler that the Soviet Union was militarily powerful, which one assumes Stalin would have wanted to portray, especially since the Purges of the Red Army high command were taking place. Thus, “once [Stalin] was master of the Spanish government, of vital and strategic importance to France and Great Britain, he would find what he was seeking. He would be a force to be reckoned with, an ally to be coveted.”¹³³

¹³⁰ Alexander Orlov. *The Secret History of Stalin’s Crimes*. (London: Jarrolds, 1954), 244.

¹³¹ Enrique Moradiellos. “The Allies and the Spanish Civil War.” In *Spain and the Great Powers in the Twentieth Century*, eds., Sebastian Balfour and Paul Preston, 96-126. (London & New York: Routledge, 1999), 113.

¹³² Walter G. Krivitsky. *I Was Stalin’s Agent*. (London: The Right Book Club, 1940), 98.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 94.

Stalin could also show that, unlike the West, he was not willing to back down in the face of German aggression. Stalin believed that Europe underestimated Soviet military power and he may have thought that his involvement in Spain would serve to dissuade Hitler from attacking the USSR. Whether this “Machiavellian” portrayal of Stalin’s foreign policy goals is realistic or not cannot be answered because no one can know what, exactly, was going on in Stalin’s mind at the time. Hence the conviction of Geoffrey Roberts, that “the script of the story of Soviet intervention in Spain was written as it happened. Soviet policy was a series of improvisations and adaptations whose outcome was indeterminate and whose result could have been a radically different story.”¹³⁴ One thing, however, remains certain: Stalin’s foreign policy goals did not necessarily require a Republican victory in Spain. Had Stalin wanted the Republic to win the war, he would not have waited so long before delivering arms and, likewise, he would and, indeed, could, have sent more military equipment to the Republican forces. Instead, Stalin chose to delay the outcome of the Spanish Civil War by sending just enough war *matériel* to keep the war going, but not enough to have any real effect on the course of the war.¹³⁵ Thus, it could also be argued that Stalin may have toyed with the idea of a *rapprochement* with Hitler in order to avoid Soviet isolation and delay a German attack against the USSR. However, in order to achieve this, Stalin had to convince Hitler that he had something to offer and that he was the leader of a country which was powerful enough for Hitler to consider him as an “equal” in stature and influence to Germany. As Catell rightly argues, “Stalin as a dictator himself must have realized the importance of success and an aura of invincibility to Mussolini and Hitler for keeping a hold on their followers.”¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Geoffrey Roberts. “Soviet Foreign Policy and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939.” In *Spain in an International Context, 1936-1959*. Christian Leitz and David J. Dunthorn, Eds., 81-104. (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 84.

¹³⁵ This argument, however, shall be discussed in greater detail in chapter 5.4

¹³⁶ David T. Cattell. “The Soviet Union Intervenes.” In *Der Spanische Bürgerkrieg in der Internationalen Politik (1936-1939)*, eds., Schieder, Wolfgang and Christof Dipper, 225-232. (München: Nymphenburger Verlagshandlung GmbH, 1976), 230.

Cattell, however, does not believe that Stalin decided to intervene in Spain for the purpose of using it as a bargaining chip for an alliance with Germany.

4.6 OTHER SOVIET MOTIVES

Puzzo claims that “the war in Spain provided the supreme test of the new Soviet diplomacy aimed at *rapprochement* with the Western democracies and collective security against fascist aggression and, concomitantly of the political viability of the Popular Front movement.”¹³⁷ Stalin still had no guarantee that France would support the USSR militarily in the event of a German attack. It is possible that Stalin, in July 1936, was still hoping to secure a military alliance with France that would lend more weight to the Mutual Assistance Pact that had been signed by both countries. Moradiellos similarly argues that Stalin sought to “test the willingness or reluctance of the democracies to collaborate with the Soviet Union in the containment of German aggressive plans.”¹³⁸ In doing so, Stalin would be able to protect the security of France while testing the “viability” of collective security. This view does not account for the motives behind Stalin’s decision to intervene in Spain. It does, however, serve to demonstrate that Stalin did not hesitate to pursue conflicting policies. Cattell attributes Stalin’s decision to intervene in Spain to two possibilities:

“it is probable that the Soviet government backed both tactics as part of one consistent policy; intervention to counteract Italian and German aid until a system of effective control could be inaugurated and support of the London Committee as the ultimate method of eliminating Spain as a source of European rivalry.”¹³⁹

Thus, Stalin used “double-dealings” in order to “keep all courses open”¹⁴⁰

It has also been argued that Stalin decided to send military aid to the Republic only when it was clear that Germany and Italy were making little effort to hide their involvement in Spain, and had no intention to end their military support after they signed the Non-Intervention Agreement. Thus, “the events that were to produce an eventual

¹³⁷ Dante A. Puzzo. *Spain and the Great Powers 1936-1941*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 244.

¹³⁸ Enrique Moradiellos. “The Allies and the Spanish Civil War.” In *Spain and the Great Powers in the Twentieth Century*. Sebastian Balfour and Paul Preston, eds., 96-126. (London & New York: Routledge, 1999), 109.

¹³⁹ David T. Cattell. *Soviet Diplomacy and the Spanish Civil War*. University of California Publications in International Relations, Vol. 5. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 20.

volte face in Soviet policy towards the Spanish Civil War also began on 29 July 1936. On that day, the first aircraft of a contingent on 20 German Junkers 52s arrived in Spanish Morocco.”¹⁴¹ By August, when it was plainly obvious that Germany and Italy were aiding the rebellious Spanish officers and that Britain and France were going to stand back and allow them to do so, Stalin, it has been argued, decided to send military equipment to Spain: German and Italian violations of the Non-Intervention Agreement triggered his response.¹⁴²

It is also true, as Broué and Témime suggest, that the Spanish Civil War was becoming too “internationalized”, too diplomatically important, for Stalin to remain on the side-lines of neutrality as he watched Hitler and Mussolini set up a potential pro-Axis regime in Spain.¹⁴³ Alpert similarly claims that “the Soviet Union could not afford to stay distant if it was to retain its leadership of the anti-fascist world.”¹⁴⁴ Furthermore, it has also been argued that the international community, which was only too well aware of Italy’s and Germany’s involvement in Spain, would view Franco’s victory as an Axis victory, and thus, as the military defeat of the Soviet Union.¹⁴⁵ This theory, however, also does not explain convincingly Stalin’s decision to intervene in Spain: if the Soviet Union had decided not to intervene in the Spanish Civil War from the outset, the potential

¹⁴⁰ Hugh Thomas. *The Spanish Civil War*. (New York: A Touchstone Book, 1986), 393.

¹⁴¹ Denis Smyth. “We are with You: Solidarity and Self-Interest in Soviet Policy Towards Republican Spain 1936-1939.” In *The Republic Besieged: Civil War in Spain 1936-1939*. eds., Paul Preston and Ann L. Mackenzie, 87-105. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 91.

¹⁴² See: David T. Cattell. *Soviet Diplomacy and the Spanish Civil War*. University of California Publications in International Relations, Vol. 5. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 2.; Stanley G. Payne. *The Spanish Revolution*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co. Inc., 1970), 267. ; P.A.M. Van der Esch. *Prelude to War: The International Repercussions of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939)*. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1951), 21. ; George Esenwein and Adrian Shubert. *Spain at War: The Spanish Civil War in Context, 1931-1939*. (New York: Longman Publishing Group Limited, 1995), 203. ; Denis Smyth. “We are with You: Solidarity and Self-Interest in Soviet Policy Towards Republican Spain 1936-1939.” In *The Republic Besieged: Civil War in Spain 1936-1939*. eds., Paul Preston and Ann L. Mackenzie, 87-105. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 91. ; Paul Preston and Ann L. Mackenzie, eds. *The Republic Besieged Civil War in Spain 1936-1939*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), XI. ; Ivan Maisky. *Spanish Notebooks*. (London: Hutchinson of London, 1966), 74. ; Francisco J. Romero Salvado. *Twentieth-Century Spain: Politics and Society in Spain 1898-1998*. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 102.

¹⁴³ Pierre Broué and Émile Témime. *The Revolution and the Civil War in Spain*. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1972), 368.

¹⁴⁴ Michael Alpert. *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War*. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 49.

defeat of the Spanish Republic would not be perceived as a Soviet defeat since there would have been no connection between the two governments. Roberts, on the other hand, believes that four developments in Soviet policy caused a marked change towards Spain: evidence of continuing German and Italian help to Franco; the realization that military aid was what the Republican government needed and wanted; the financial aid and logistical feasibility of Soviet aid had been demonstrated and, finally, the decision to intervene in Spain can be linked to Stalin's return to Moscow from his vacation and the receipt of reports by Soviet agents stationed in Spain.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ Pierre Broué and Émile Témime. *The Revolution and the Civil War in Spain*. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1972), 368.

CHAPTER 5

The Importance of the Spanish Civil War

Stalin did not follow one clear diplomatic policy towards Spain. His foreign policy goals were molded to fit the changing events in Europe. So too, his motives, interests, and needs changed in the course of the Spanish Civil War: “viewing the whole history of the Committee now, retrospectively, [...] the motives impelling the Soviet government at different periods during those two and a half years were not entirely the same.”¹⁴⁷ One thing is certain: Stalin’s priority, throughout the 1930s, lay in the domestic needs of his country. In order to successfully complete the five-year-plan, rearm, and face the socioeconomic challenges that plagued the Soviet Union, a peaceful environment was needed. Stalin was well aware of the internal weaknesses of the Soviet Union.

5.1 STALIN: MAKER OF SOVIET POLICY IN SPAIN

Stalin was much more intimately involved in foreign policy decisions than most historians have realized. According to Novikov, Stalin personally examined most of the requests for military aid made by the Spanish Republican government and adjusted the quantities to be sent.¹⁴⁸ Likewise, other documents, found by Howson, serve to demonstrate how intimately involved Stalin was with every detail of Operation “X”.¹⁴⁹ When Uritsky sent his reports to Stalin for approval, “even such minor [decisions] as the withdrawal of quite small sums of money, were referred to [Stalin] before being

¹⁴⁶ Geoffrey Roberts. “Soviet Foreign Policy and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939.” *In Spain in an International Context, 1936-1959*, eds., Christian Leitz and David J. Dunthorn, 81-104. (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 87.

¹⁴⁷ Ivan Maisky. *Spanish Notebooks*. (London: Hutchinson of London, 1966), 31.

¹⁴⁸ M. V. Novikov. *SSSR, Komintern i Grazhdanskaya Voina v Ispanii 1936-1939*. 2 Vols. (Yaroslavl: 1995).

¹⁴⁹ Operation ‘X’: “The Transportation of Special Goods to Ours Friends in ‘X’”, ‘X’ denoting Spain. A Section ‘X’ was also created at the same time. It consisted of “officers of the NKVD, the GRU, and the army, navy, air force, transport and finance departments responsible for choosing, transporting and auditing the costs of the materials and personnel to be sent to Spain.” It was set up under the supervision of Uritsky and the overall commander of the operation was Voroshilov.

See: Gerald Howson. *Arms for Spain: The Untold Story of the Spanish Civil War*. (New York: St Martins Press, 1998), 125.

implemented.”¹⁵⁰ Ribalkin similarly suggests that the difficulty in mapping out Stalin’s goals in Spain is due, partly, to the fact that Stalin’s policies and decisions were adopted unexpectedly and changed according to his moods.¹⁵¹ This does not mean that Stalin did not maintain “a keen interest in Spanish affairs,” which, according to Roberts, he did: but Roberts then goes on to claim that “it is likely that once a general policy and a level of intervention and aid were established, they were maintained on an everyday basis by a combination of inertia and neglect.”¹⁵² Yet Soviet policy in Spain was anything but static. Stalin’s plans and motives changed in response to European events. He did not necessarily have the same goals at the end of 1939 as he did in 1936.

5.2 COLLECTIVE SECURITY

It has been argued that Spain was a “sideshow”¹⁵³, that, in Stalin’s view, “Spain was only a very minor element in a disturbing international situation.”¹⁵⁴ However, before this issue can be dealt with, one must look at Soviet foreign policy. Only then can one gain a clearer picture of whether the events in Spain were of secondary importance to Stalin or not. Stalin was faced with the knowledge that Hitler planned to eventually attack the USSR and thus, according to Cattell, he had the choice of pursuing three foreign policy options.¹⁵⁵ The first was to develop a system of collective security which would bring France and Great Britain into an alliance against Germany, this move would both secure Soviet borders and also encircle Germany and avoid the outbreak of a war in Eastern Europe. The second option lay in causing Germany to fight a premature war, one which Hitler was not yet ready for, and thus wear down his military forces before they

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 126.

¹⁵¹ Yurii Ribalkin. “Tainyi Put’ ‘Zolotogo Karavana’.” In *Argumenty i Fakty*. (Vol. 14, 1996), 7.

¹⁵² Geoffrey Roberts. “Soviet Foreign Policy and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939.” In *Spain in an International Context, 1936-1959*, eds., Christian Leitz and David J. Dunthorn, 81-104. (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 91.

¹⁵³ See: E.H. Carr. *The Comintern and the Spanish Civil War*. (London: Macmillan, 1984). 17.

¹⁵⁴ Pierre Broué and Émile Témime. *The Revolution and the Civil War in Spain*. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1972), 367.

¹⁵⁵ David T. Cattell. “The Soviet Union Intervenes.” In *Der Spanische Bürgerkrieg in der Internationalen Politik (1936-1939)*, eds., Schieder, Wolfgang and Christof Dipper, 225-232. (München: Nymphenburger Verlagshandlung GmbH, 1976), 225-226.

became too powerful. The last option lay in appeasing Hitler. Stalin probably never completely dismissed any one of these three options.¹⁵⁶

Broué and Témime, Roberts and Mesheriakov have traced a similar pattern in Soviet attitudes toward the Spanish Civil War: “first, a defacto position of neutrality, accompanied by clear-cut evidence of sympathy and solidarity; after October 1936, a substantial contribution in military aid, with a correspondingly vigorous attitude in favor of the Republic on the Non-Intervention Committee; finally, after summer 1938, a gradual slowing down of military aid, ending in the total abandonment of the Republic.”¹⁵⁷ With new evidence that has recently emerged, however, it is now ascertained that the Soviet Union, in fact, never “abandoned” the Spanish Republic. It had been widely believed, until recently, that the Soviet Union had stopped sending arms to Spain because, towards the end of the war, no further Soviet equipment had been received. It is now confirmed that military equipment did, in fact, continue to leave Soviet ports, bound for Republican Spain, but never reached its final destination since French authorities had effectively prevented the passage of this equipment across the border.¹⁵⁸ Although the amount of ships sent to the Republic steadily decreased from 1937 onwards, Soviet shipments continued to arrive in France until the end of the war.

Based on the arguments that have been presented thus far, it is safe to assume that Stalin’s policy in Spain, in 1936, was two-fold: to distract Germany and Italy with the war in Spain and, at the same time, try to gain Britain and keep France as Soviet allies. However, as of 1937, Stalin may have begun to realize that if he attempted to pursue one of the above-stated policies, he would inevitably fail in the other. Which of the two options proved to be more important for Stalin? One can assume, based on the available

¹⁵⁶ However, no documents have surfaced which would testify to this for the moment.

¹⁵⁷ Pierre Broué and Émile Témime. *The Revolution and the Civil War in Spain*. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1972), 367.

Also see: Geoffrey Roberts. “Soviet Foreign Policy and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939.” In *Spain in an International Context, 1936-1959*, eds., Christian Leitz and David J. Dunthorn, 81-104. (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 86. ; M. T. Mesheriakov. “SSSR i Grazhdanskaya Voina v Ispanii.” In *Otechestvennaya Istoriya*. (Vol. 3, 1993) : 89-93.

¹⁵⁸ Howson has found that Soviet shipments in January-February 1939 were not used in the war.

material, that, as of 1937, distracting Hitler and Mussolini in Spain was more important to Stalin than pursuing an alliance with the Entente.

Haslam claims that the creation of the Anti-Comintern Pact not only increased Soviet isolation, but also made the USSR more dependent on the West. His theory is questionable:

“to suggest, as many authors do, that maintaining good relations with Britain and France was an important factor in Moscow’s strategic and diplomatic calculations is to completely misunderstand the character and orientation of Soviet foreign policy in this period.”¹⁵⁹

Nevertheless, the emergence of the Anti-Comintern Pact must have raised alarms in the Kremlin.¹⁶⁰ Likewise, Stalin must have viewed the Anglo-Italian “Gentleman’s Agreement”, signed on 2 January 1937, with growing mistrust and agitation.¹⁶¹ By the end of 1935, it could be argued that Stalin already realized that his foreign policy goals were at odds with Britain’s.¹⁶² Stalin may have suspected, even before Munich, that should Hitler’s and Mussolini’s aggressive policy in Spain be allowed to continue, their next attack would be directed towards Soviet Russia. Stalin also believed that Britain would not lift a finger in the event of a German attack against the Soviet Union. Thus, one can argue that between 1936-1937, Stalin already mistrusted British intentions.

The advent of the Munich Crisis is when it is believed that Stalin decided to change his foreign policy goals and began to seek an alliance with Germany which, in turn, caused Soviet military aid to Spain to decrease. Cattell also believes that even before Munich, Stalin no longer sought an alliance with the West because he “had become thoroughly dissatisfied with the weakness of the democracies and no longer

¹⁵⁹ Geoffrey Roberts. “Soviet Foreign Policy and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939.” In *Spain in an International Context, 1936-1959*, eds., Christian Leitz and David J. Dunthorn, 81-104. (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 88.

¹⁶⁰ On 25 December 1936, Berlin and Tokyo sign the Anti-Comintern Pact. On 6 November 1937, Rome joined the Pact.

¹⁶¹ This “Gentleman’s Agreement” provided for a “*modus vivendi* between the two powers in the Mediterranean.”

Jonathan Haslam. *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security in Europe, 1933-1939*. (London: The Macmillan Company Ltd., 1984), 124.

wanted their friendship.”¹⁶³ In fact, Stalin may have viewed the Entente’s inability to stand up against blatant German and Italian intervention in Spain as another convincing example of their “unreliability” as allies. Likewise, Payne argues that Stalin had no confidence in political or military agreements with Western countries unless these were immediately implemented by concrete action, and “it was clear almost from the start that Britain and France had little stomach for direct enforcement of the Non-Intervention Agreement.”¹⁶⁴ Thus, the only other option for Stalin to follow in order to avoid being dragged into a war, or face diplomatic isolation, was to come to an “understanding” with Germany. Thomas alludes to the possibility that a “friendship with Hitler, at the democracies’ expense, was a policy which Stalin had probably contemplated as a possibility, even at the most enthusiastic moments of the Popular Front.”¹⁶⁵ Thomas also argues that Stalin kept the plausibility of a German alliance in the back of his mind throughout the Spanish Civil War, as a “back-up” plan in case collective security failed. It can be argued, however, that a German *rapprochement* was much more than a Soviet “back-up plan” in 1936-1937.

According to Haslam, Stalin had lost faith in the success of collective security as early as the beginning of 1937. He also claims that this is when Stalin decided to follow the same policy as the West in seeking a *rapprochement* with Germany. Alpert believes that “by the beginning of the Spanish Civil War, in July 1936, the Soviet Union was already having doubts about collective security.”¹⁶⁶ Roberts similarly believes that by July 1936, collective security had already passed its peak of importance in the Soviet foreign policy agenda:

“in truth, cuddling up to Britain and France was the last thing on the Soviet diplomatic agenda in summer 1936. Moscow was disillusioned with collective security and suspicious and hostile towards Britain and France [...] Relations with Britain and France deteriorated even further as a result of Moscow’s intervention in

¹⁶² British behavior *vis-à-vis* the remilitarization of the Rhineland and the Abyssinian Crisis.

¹⁶³ David T. Cattell. *Soviet Diplomacy and the Spanish Civil War*. University of California Publications in International Relations, Vol. 5. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 119.

¹⁶⁴ Stanley G. Payne. *The Spanish Revolution*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co. Inc., 1970), 268.

¹⁶⁵ Hugh Thomas. *The Spanish Civil War*. (New York: A Touchstone Book, 1986), 850.

¹⁶⁶ Michael Alpert. *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War*. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 11.

the Spanish Civil War and its obstreperous activities in the Non-Intervention Committee.”¹⁶⁷

Krivitsky recalls, when the Spanish Civil War broke out, that “I had up to then been devoting nearly all my energies to my secret service network in Nazi Germany. Stalin’s efforts to reach an understanding with Hitler were still unsuccessful, and the Kremlin was deeply concerned over the German-Japanese pact then being negotiated in Berlin.”¹⁶⁸

5.3 RAPPROCHEMENT WITH HITLER

Although Cattell believes in the possibility that Stalin changed his diplomatic priorities by seeking an alliance with Hitler during the Spanish Civil War, he also mentions that there is no documentary proof yet to be found attesting to this. He then states that “all the outward reactions of the Soviet Union to Hitler at this time [1937] indicates her belief that an alliance with Germany was of no value.”¹⁶⁹ Cattell questions whether an alliance with Germany ever was a Soviet diplomatic goal before 1939.

“According to a Soviet diplomat quoted in 1940 in papers of the British Foreign Office, Stalin [had] been obsessed with the idea of an agreement with Germany since 1933”¹⁷⁰ Krivitsky similarly states that Stalin had, ever since Hitler’s accession to power, been trying to come to terms with Hitler, “sometimes believing that his efforts would eventually bear the fruit of his labors, and at the same time, keeping the door open to a rapprochement with Great Britain.”¹⁷¹ It has also been argued that Litvinov, in 1935, was already hinting to the German ambassador in Moscow at a potential alliance between their governments.¹⁷² Krivitsky recalls that in December 1936, Stalin had ordered him to

¹⁶⁷ Geoffrey Roberts. “Soviet Foreign Policy and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939.” In *Spain in an International Context, 1936-1959*, eds., Christian Leitz and David J. Dunthorn, 81-104. (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 89.

¹⁶⁸ Walter G. Krivitsky. *I Was Stalin’s Agent*. (London: The Right Book Club, 1940), 95.

¹⁶⁹ David T. Cattell. *Soviet Diplomacy and the Spanish Civil War*. University of California Publications in International Relations, Vol. 5. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 120.

¹⁷⁰ D. Rancour-Laferrière. *The Mind of Stalin. A Psychoanalytic Study*. (Ann Arbor, MI.: Ardis, 1988), 80.

¹⁷¹ Walter G. Krivitsky. *I Was Stalin’s Agent*. (London: The Right Book Club, 1940), 93.

¹⁷² D. Rancour-Laferrière. *The Mind of Stalin. A Psychoanalytic Study*. (Ann Arbor, MI.: Ardis, 1988), 80.

contact his commercial agent in Berlin, one David Kandelaki, in order to begin making overtures for an alliance with Hitler. Similarly, Haslam argues that

“rumors of talks between Kandelaki and the Germans were soon floating across Europe [...] those most opposed to Suritz’s advice, one must surmise, were not against unilateral moves to improve relations with Berlin, even at the cost of enhancing Hitler’s sense of self-importance. Stalin was particularly receptive to such moves when Britain and France appeared to be playing the same game. This was precisely the situation at the beginning of 1937.”¹⁷³

Rogovin claims that Stalin’s principal goal was “an alliance with Hitler [...] exploratory negotiations between Soviet diplomats and German political figures about such an agreement had been held throughout 1936.”¹⁷⁴ Likewise, Matthews claims that “Stalin had in mind [as of 1937], and was quietly negotiating, the sinister alliance with Hitler which permitted Germany to launch World War Two.”¹⁷⁵ Hochman also argues that during active Soviet involvement in the Spanish Civil War, Stalin was seeking some sort of political alliance with Germany.¹⁷⁶ Although Hochman does not stipulate an approximate date for his decision, one can assume that the author is referring to the period between 1936-1937 since this was when Soviet intervention in Spain was most “active”. Rancour-Laferrière also argues that Stalin was attempting to ally himself with Hitler well before 1939 and, finally, Olaya claims that Spain was, in actual fact, the first concession made by Stalin to Germany for the future Non-Aggression Pact of 1939.

Smyth believes that “Stalin’s Spanish policy was an integrated part of Soviet international strategy as a whole. It was the general strategic implications of Fascist intervention in Spain which prompted Soviet concern over that country and their eventual engagement there.”¹⁷⁷ It can therefore be argued that the Spanish Civil War was a

¹⁷³ Jonathan Haslam. *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security in Europe, 1933-1939*. (London: The Macmillan Company Ltd., 1984), 123.

¹⁷⁴ Vadim Z. Rogovin. *1937: Stalin’s Year of Terror*. (Oak Park, MI.: Mehring Books Inc., 1998), 340.

¹⁷⁵ Herbert L. Matthews. *Half of Spain Died*. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1973), 7.

¹⁷⁶ While no documentary proof of this theory has yet emerged, I agree with Hochman’s hypothesis.

¹⁷⁷ Denis Smyth. “We are with You: Solidarity and Self-Interest in Soviet Policy Towards Republican Spain 1936-1939.” In *The Republic Besieged: Civil War in Spain 1936-1939*, eds., Preston, Paul and Ann L. Mackenzie, 87-105. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 95.

decisive event, which formed Stalin's decision to shift potential allies: from working towards a *rapprochement* with the West, Stalin turned to Hitler, who proved, at least for the time being, to be a much more stable ally. Cattell rightly argues that

“the end of the Civil War in Spain and the complete victory of Franco came at the same time that Soviet foreign policy made its complete about-face. [...] The Soviet leaders decided on appeasement and agreement with Hitler. It is no accident that this reversal came with the end of the Spanish Civil War.”¹⁷⁸

Although there are apparently no documents which would establish that Stalin's principal motive for intervening in Spain was a potential alliance with Hitler, it is possible to argue that when Stalin saw the West's indecision and lack of action against Germany's remilitarization of the Rhineland, he may have already realized that he could not count on the West to act in concert with him to end German aggression. Thus, “in a situation in which three hostile ideologies and forces- democracy, communism, and fascism- were vying for survival or supremacy, the Soviet Union, the least powerful of the three, feared isolation above all. Consequently, when she saw she was unable to ally with the movement she considered less dangerous to herself and her survival, she turned to the other.”¹⁷⁹

5.4 SOVIET ARMS: NEVER ENOUGH

Roberts believes that “the immediate and continuing motive, and aim, was to help the Republic”¹⁸⁰ and that, consequently, the goal of Soviet policy in Spain was to ensure a Republican military victory over Franco.¹⁸¹ However, it is now generally agreed that Soviet military aid would “save” the Republic in moments of crisis and was not sent with

¹⁷⁸ David T. Cattell. “The Forgotten Crisis.” In *Der Spanische Bürgerkrieg in der Internationalen Politik (1936-1939)*, eds., Schieder, Wolfgang and Christof Dipper, 256-271. (München: Nymphenburger Verlagshandlung GmbH, 1976), 257.

¹⁷⁹ David T. Cattell. *Soviet Diplomacy and the Spanish Civil War*. University of California Publications in International Relations, Vol. 5. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 132.

¹⁸⁰ Geoffrey Roberts. “Soviet Foreign Policy and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939.” In *Spain in an International Context, 1936-1959*, eds., Christian Leitz and David J. Dunthorn, 81-104. (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 85.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 88.

the purpose of ensuring a Republican victory.¹⁸² Thus, “with the international situation gradually deteriorating for the Republic, Vicente Polo, Spanish Chargé d’Affaires in Moscow, observed a marked coolness towards the Spanish question and encountered numerous unresolvable problems.”¹⁸³ The gradual decrease in Soviet military aid can be traced to mid-1937 and a marked decrease is noted as of 1938.¹⁸⁴ As stated earlier, Stalin’s decision to prolong the war in Spain was motivated purely by Soviet foreign policy purposes. Stalin’s diplomatic maneuvers, by late 1937, show that it is a very real possibility that Stalin wanted to keep a war going on in Spain until he could come to some sort of an alliance with Hitler.

Although Orlov mentions, in his memoirs, that Stalin had ordered Soviet military aid to Spain to continue throughout the war, Stalin also reportedly stated that he did not want Soviet military aid to be sent in quantities that would actually affect the course of the war by ensuring a Republican victory.¹⁸⁵ At the end of 1936, “military aid had given the Republic the edge in equipment and armament. But this was not to last. Soviet supplies remained the chief prop though they arrived rather to stave off defeat rather than to underwrite victory.”¹⁸⁶ Conversely, just as the prolongation of the Spanish Civil War served Stalin’s foreign policy purposes, it has been argued that it served German interests as well: Hitler did not wish for a quick Nationalist victory either.¹⁸⁷ Hitler wished to prolong the Spanish Civil War for as long as possible, but did so in order to distract the rest of Europe from his preparations for a future attack in Eastern Europe. One could

¹⁸² Raymond Carr. *The Spanish Tragedy: The Civil War in Perspective*. (London: Phoenix Press, 1986), 141.

¹⁸³ Angel Viñas. “Gold, the Soviet Union and the Spanish Civil War”. *European Studies Review*. (Vol. 9, Num. 1. January 1979: 105-128), 121.

¹⁸⁴ See: Robert G. Wesson. *Soviet Foreign Policy in Perspective*. (Illinois: The Dorsey Press, 1969), 125. ; Gerald Howson. *Arms for Spain: The Untold Story of the Spanish Civil War*. (New York: St Martins Press, 1998), 235. ; David T. Cattell. *Soviet Diplomacy and the Spanish Civil War*. University of California Publications in International Relations, Vol. 5. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 70. ; Yuri Ribalkin. *Sovetskaya Voennaya Pomoshch Respublikanskoi Ispanii 1936-1939*. (Moscow: 2000), 193.; Herbert L. Matthews. *Half of Spain Died*. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1973), 158. ; Raymond Carr. *The Spanish Tragedy: The Civil War in Perspective*. (London: Phoenix Press, 1986), 229.

¹⁸⁵ Alexander Orlov. *The Secret History of Stalin’s Crimes*. (London: Jarrolds, 1954), 244.

¹⁸⁶ Raymond Carr. *The Spanish Tragedy: The Civil War in Perspective*. (London: Phoenix Press, 1986), 141.

¹⁸⁷ Glenn T. Harper. *German Economic Policy in Spain during the Spanish War 1936-1939*. (The Hague - Paris: Mouton, 1967), 96.

conclude that it was the policy of both Hitler and Stalin to keep the war going in Spain in order to avoid the outbreak of a general war.

Had the Soviet government not intervened on the side of Republican Spain, the war would have ended much sooner because the Republicans would have never been able to withstand Nationalist offensives, backed by German and Italian troops and sophisticated military equipment, without themselves receiving foreign military assistance. However, Soviet military aid proved never to be substantial enough to affect the course of the Spanish Civil War: “a major effort to win a Leftist triumph would be too expensive and run the risk of direct conflict with Germany, but continuation of the struggle at a lower rate of Soviet assistance would allow Stalin to retain his Spanish gambit at minimal risk.”¹⁸⁸

The Republic continuously lacked arms, and most of the Soviet equipment sent in 1936, when the fate of Spain was being sealed, was old and/or defective. Matthews mentions the condition of the arms upon arrival in Spain: “arms of all sorts were bought, often obsolete, sometimes faulty, always exorbitantly expensive.”¹⁸⁹ Likewise, Krivitsky, another eyewitness, recalls that “not all of the material coming from Russia [...] was always of the best quality.”¹⁹⁰ The cargo on the *Campeche*, for instance, consisted of old and almost unusable arms, from various countries. According to Howson, the only useful weapons were “6, but only 6 Vickers light Howitzers.”¹⁹¹ Had Stalin decided to send, at the beginning of the war, reliable military equipment, and enough of it, the Republic would have probably been able to defeat the Insurgents. However, Stalin was not willing to invest the troops and war *matériel* that would have been required for a Loyalist victory.

What, then, are the theories put forth by historians seeking to explain the decrease of Soviet military shipments to Republican Spain? It has been argued that Spain fell into

Also see: George Esenwein and Adrian Shubert. *Spain at War: The Spanish Civil War in Context, 1931-1939*. (New York: Longman Publishing Group Limited, 1995).

¹⁸⁸ Stanley G. Payne. *The Spanish Revolution*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co. Inc., 1970), 274.

¹⁸⁹ Herbert L. Matthews. *Half of Spain Died*. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973), 156.

¹⁹⁰ Walter G. Krivitsky. *I Was Stalin's Agent*. (London: The Right Book Club, 1940), 105.

a position of secondary importance because Stalin became increasingly preoccupied with the threat posed by Japan on his Eastern borders: “the international repercussions of the latter [Japanese aggression in China] were already tending to overshadow the Spanish issue, and Soviet diplomacy was more than ever obliged to keep both fronts in mind.”¹⁹² Likewise, Thomas traces the origins to the Russo-German Pact of Non-Aggression to June 1937, when Japan began severely threatening Soviet borders with its attacks against China. Stalin also began sending military aid to the Chinese, which may have caused a decrease in arm shipments to Spain.¹⁹³ In fact, Count Ciano states on 30 August 1937: “Rosso told me this morning that the Russians want to disengage themselves from Spain because of the Chinese situation, and that they will reduce their aid to a minimum.”¹⁹⁴ Events in Czechoslovakia most certainly did, as well, influence the decrease in Soviet military aid. According to Payne, “the crucial issue was Czechoslovakia in 1938; by comparison the fate of the Spanish Left was secondary.”¹⁹⁵ Thus, “after Münich, the Spanish Republic was abandoned definitively by Russia. Stalin knew that he could not depend on a firm British alliance [...] and this accounts for his dropping of Spain.”¹⁹⁶

Furthermore, it has been argued that the Soviet Union decided to decrease its shipments to Spain because of the expenses incurred due to the war. This theory can now be discounted since it is well known that the Soviet Union did not pay for any of the supplies which were being sent to Spain. The Spanish Republic, through its gold reserves, paid for all of the costs of the war. Payne also states that the Soviet Union decreased its shipments due to growing fears of a war against Germany.¹⁹⁷ If Stalin ever did fear a war against Germany due to his involvement in Spain, he feared it in 1936, when European diplomacy towards Spain was still unsure. By 1938, it is very likely that

¹⁹¹ Gerald Howson. *Arms for Spain: The Untold Story of the Spanish Civil War*. (New York: St Martin's Press, 1998), 126.

¹⁹² Max Beloff. *The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia, 1929-1941*. (London & New York: Oxford University Press, 1949), 100.

¹⁹³ See Appendix 3.

¹⁹⁴ G. Ciano. *Ciano's Hidden Diary 1937-1938*. (New York: E.P. Dutton & Company Inc., 1953), 6.

¹⁹⁵ Stanley G. Payne. *The Spanish Revolution*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co. Inc., 1970), 276.

¹⁹⁶ Pierre Broué. *Staline et la Revolution: Le Cas Espagnol*. (Fayard: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1993), 498.

¹⁹⁷ Both of these arguments have been put forth by : Stanley G. Payne. *The Spanish Revolution*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co. Inc., 1970), 273-274.

he no longer believed that his direct involvement in Spain would cause an undeclared war to break out against Germany.

Cattell makes a series of other arguments, attempting to explain why Soviet arms shipments decreased.¹⁹⁸ He believes that the decrease in Soviet shipments to Spain may be due to the fact that it could no longer afford to send to Spain military equipment that it itself needed. The Soviet war industry was not yet fully developed and Stalin was more concerned with Soviet rearming, before sending military equipment abroad. This argument has been disproved by Olaya, who found that in May 1938, the USSR had approached the French government about buying fighter planes and bombers.¹⁹⁹ Cattell also alludes to the possibility that the Kremlin had never planned on supplying the Spanish republic with long-term military aid. This argument is, again, questionable. If Stalin had not planned on sending long-term military aid, why did he accept the deposit of the Spanish gold reserves?²⁰⁰

Cattell also mentions the possibility that the USSR knew that it could not compete with the aid being sent by Germany and Italy and that the Nationalists would eventually win the war. Therefore, Stalin apparently reasoned that there was no point in wasting resources or risk alienating the West and/or Germany. Cattell, after making this last argument, does not, however, explain why Stalin decided to intervene in Spain in the first place. The argument that he puts forth in order to explain the decrease in Soviet arms can easily be used to show that Soviet intervention in Spain was diplomatically and strategically illogical. Ribalkin, however, believes that another reason for the decrease of Soviet arms could be that the Republican government openly criticized the USSR and, when military commanders refused to obey Soviet commands, Stalin became very "upset" and, consequently, his policy toward Spain changed. In fact, it is known that "the [Republican] government was putting up discreet posters in Valencia and Barcelona

¹⁹⁸ David T. Cattell. *Soviet Diplomacy and the Spanish Civil War*. University of California Publications in International Relations, Vol. 5. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 70.

¹⁹⁹ Olaya found this information in the Archives of the Ministry of Defense in France, Paris, Carton 5, n.579, Documents classified as "Top Secret".

See: Francisco Olaya Morales. *El Oro de Negrin*. (Mostoles: Ediciones Madre Tierra, 1990).

²⁰⁰ It was understood that the gold reserves would serve as credit for arms purchases.

asking the people not to speak badly of Russia and to remember that the Soviet Union was the only great power which had aided the Republic.”²⁰¹

Howson mentions three other possibilities for the decrease of foreign shipments to the Republic from June 1937 to June 1938.²⁰² He states that by 1937, most of the arms deals between the Republic and foreign arms dealers had either been cancelled or were in the process of re-negotiation. Furthermore, the northern ports left under Republican rule, those in Asturias and the Basque Country, were either under constant attack by Nationalist forces, or had run out of money to pay for more arms. Howson finally argues that delivery to the Republic (whose ports were situated along the Mediterranean coast) had become impossible due to increased Italian and German U-boat patrols.

Howson is not the only historian who argues that one of the main reasons for the decrease in Soviet shipments to the Republic was due to the difficulties of sending these shipments via the Mediterranean because of the increased risk of attack by Italian submarines: “by August [1937] the Russians were loath to risk further shipments and these were drastically cut. The increasing losses in shipping inevitably placed a strain on the continuation of the Soviet commitment to the survival of the Republic.”²⁰³ According to Alvarez del Vayo, “after the sinking of the Russian freighter *Komsomol* on December 14, 1936 off the coast of Africa by the Italians, shipments of Russian material to Loyalist ports by sea fell off.”²⁰⁴ In fact, between October 1936 and July 1937, 96 Soviet merchant ships were captured and three were sunk.”²⁰⁵

²⁰¹ Gabriel Jackson, ed. *The Spanish Civil War*. (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1972), 405.

²⁰² Gerald Howson. *Arms for Spain: The Untold Story of the Spanish Civil War*. (New York: St Martins Press, 1998), 235.

²⁰³ Jonathan Haslam. *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security in Europe, 1933-1939*. (London: The Macmillan Company Ltd., 1984), 146.

²⁰⁴ Julio Alvarez del Vayo. *Freedom's Battle*. (New York: Hill & Wang, 1940), 77.

²⁰⁵ Jonathan Haslam. *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security in Europe, 1933-1939*. (London: The Macmillan Company Ltd., 1984), 146.

Howson has found documents in Russian archives, which now shows that only eight Soviet ships were used throughout the war. Thus, Haslam's argument will have to be revised since the Soviet Union could have used non-Soviet ships, as it evidently did, throughout the course of the Spanish conflict.

Nevertheless, Soviet shipments continued to be made quite frequently during 1937. Had the Soviet Union been as “disturbed” with the attacks against its fleet, military aid to Spain would have decreased as of the beginning of January 1937.²⁰⁶ Similarly, Howson argues that it became impossible to supply the Republic by ship through the Mediterranean as of August 1937 because the Nationalists controlled Gibraltar, making it difficult to supply the Republic through the Mediterranean. While it is clear that the 1938 naval blockade did affect the shipping of war *matériel* from the USSR to Republican ports, this explanation is no longer convincing: it is known that the Soviet Union did, in fact, continue to send ships to Spain through another maritime route: ships would depart from Murmansk, avoid the English Channel by making a large detour through the Atlantic, and dock at Bordeaux.²⁰⁷ Howson claims that the France Navigation Company,²⁰⁸ made 12 voyages by following this new maritime route between December 1937 and August 1938.²⁰⁹ It was clearly not “impossible” to send military equipment to Spain due to increased enemy patrolling of the Mediterranean.

Furthermore, in a telegram, dated on 4 February 1938, to Stalin, Voroshilov stated that he had closed a deal in the United States for the purchase of American aircraft.²¹⁰ He then goes on to say that the delivery of these planes would take seven months. Curiously, there is no mention that the time-delay would create any problems for the delivery to Spain. Had the Soviet Union been remotely preoccupied with the risks of Italian attack in the Mediterranean, seven months, especially in 1938, would have presented a huge inconvenience for them.²¹¹ Thus, the fact that Italian submarines were patrolling the Mediterranean did not affect Soviet shipments as greatly as had previously been argued.

²⁰⁶ The first three months is when Soviet shipments were most frequent.

²⁰⁷ Gerald Howson. *Arms for Spain: The Untold Story of the Spanish Civil War*. (New York: St Martins Press, 1998), 235.

²⁰⁸ A Soviet “front” company created by the French Communist Party, with the purpose of shipping military equipment to Spain.

²⁰⁹ Gerald Howson. *Arms for Spain: The Untold Story of the Spanish Civil War*. (New York: St Martins Press, 1998), 235.

²¹⁰ Ronald Radosh, Mary R. Habeck and Grigory Sevostianov, eds. *Spain Betrayed. The Soviet Union and the Spanish Civil War*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 422.

²¹¹ See Document in Appendix 1.

Stalin's decision to intervene in Spain, and his decision to decrease the amount of military aid shipped to the Republican government had nothing to do with the events taking place in Spain. Stalin did not care whether the Republic was losing or winning battles. Therefore, Pascua's sense that the "Spanish Civil War was in itself a minor matter in Moscow's international calculations"²¹² may very well be correct. However, it is not entirely true. As we have seen, Stalin was also very concerned over the events taking place in Spain because these were based on grander foreign policy schemes. A question then arises: if Stalin's goal was to keep the war in Spain from reaching a decisive conclusion, why did he let Franco's forces eventually win? One could argue that by 1939, Stalin no longer cared about the outcome of the war in Spain because he had almost assured himself of an alliance with Germany by this time. In a memorandum from Voroshilov to Stalin, dated 16 February 1939, it was stated "that according to information from the Soviet embassy in Paris, Negrin was trying, through Pascua, to obtain a reply to several letters regarding the promised supply of arms to the Republican army. Stalin's thoughts are expressed by a scribble on the left margin of the page: 'this question is no longer important.'"²¹³ Curiously, the decrease in Soviet arms deliveries coincides with the date for when the USSR began making requests for the Republic to sell its gold reserves.

George Esenwein and Adrian Schubert argue that the gradual decrease in Soviet aid to the Republic was influenced mostly by Stalin's foreign policy: "continued Soviet assistance to the faltering Republican cause was increasingly conflicting with Stalin's efforts to prepare the ground for a Russo-German non-aggression pact."²¹⁴ One cannot argue that the Spanish Civil War played a minor role in Stalin's foreign policy since it was used as a "stepping-stone" for an alliance with Hitler. However, a Republican defeat or victory was inconsequential for Stalin. In fact, "on 26 November 1938, after the

²¹² Manuel Azaña, *Obras Completas*, 4 vols., (Mexico: oasis, 1966-68, Vol. IV, *Memorias Politicas y de Guerra*), 734. ; quoted in Denis Smyth. "We are with You: Solidarity and Self-Interest in Soviet Policy Towards Republican Spain 1936-1939." In *The Republic Besieged: Civil War in Spain 1936-1939*, eds., Preston, Paul and Ann L. Mackenzie, 87-105. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 94.

²¹³ Gerald Howson. *Arms for Spain: The Untold Story of the Spanish Civil War*. (New York: St Martins Press, 1998), 244.

²¹⁴ G. Esenwein and Adrian Shubert. *Spain at War: The Spanish Civil War in Context, 1931-1939*. (New York: Longman Publishing Group Limited, 1995), 204.

Republican defeat at Ebro,²¹⁵ Negrin wrote to Molotov, asking news about the delivery of arms which had not yet arrived ‘due to a temporary slackening’”²¹⁶ Thus, one can conclude that the Spanish Civil War was both important and secondary for the Soviet Union. It was significant in that it allowed for Stalin to effectively pursue his goals for Soviet security and it was a “minor” event since Stalin did not place too much importance over the outcome of the war.

²¹⁵ The Ebro offensive was the fiercest battle in the Spanish Civil War and it was, until 1939, the largest air battle in history. The Republicans intended to launch a surprise attack, in the hopes that Franco would be forced to divert his troops in Valencia, to the Ebro river. The Republicans had hoped to keep Franco’s forces on the defensive and keep the war going until a general European conflict, which was expected to erupt due to the crisis that was brewing in Czechoslovakia, would begin. The Republican government was hoping to gain France and Britain as allies and keep large contingents of Italian troops and German military equipment trapped in Spain. However, the Republicans were overwhelmed by the superiority of enemy manpower, aircraft and artillery. The Ebro offensive ended on 18 November, 1938, with the Republican forces being pushed back to the North bank of the river.

²¹⁶ Angel Viñas. “Gold, the Soviet Union and the Spanish Civil War”. *European Studies Review*. (Vol. 9, Num. 1. January 1979: 105-128), 122.

CHAPTER 6

When did Stalin Decide to Intervene in Spain?

Alongside the controversy surrounding the reasons for Stalin's decision to intervene in Spain is the question of when Stalin decided to send military equipment. Soviet foreign policy may be better understood in relation to when the decision to send military supplies was made. A Politburo meeting was held on 21 July 1936, with the purpose of discussing the events that were taking place in Spain.²¹⁷ However, since no minutes of the meeting have surfaced, it is not clear what, exactly, was discussed. Nevertheless, Whealey believes that no concrete conclusions had yet been made regarding Soviet military aid to Spain.

Payne argues that Stalin had decided, during this meeting, to wait and see how the situation developed before involving the Soviet Union in a foreign venture.²¹⁸ The Politburo itself was divided over which course of action to pursue in Spain. While certain members urged active and immediate Soviet support for the Spanish Republic, Stalin, it is believed, belonged to the moderate camp and hesitated to send military equipment to Spain during the first few months of the Spanish Civil War. On 26 July 1936, a Comintern meeting was held in Prague, where, under Stalin's eventual approval, it was decided that it would begin recruiting combatants for what would become the International Brigades.

On 7 August 1936, Krestinsky, in a letter addressed to Shtein, made mention of the difficulty in sending arms to Spain.²¹⁹ It is also known that Litvinov sent a letter to Rozenberg in which he stated that "the question of aid to the Spanish government was discussed by us many times, but we came to the conclusion that it was impossible to

²¹⁷ Robert H. Whealey. *Hitler and Spain. The Nazi Role in the Spanish Civil War 1936-1939*. (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1989), 21.

²¹⁸ Stanley G. Payne. *The Spanish Revolution*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co. Inc., 1970), 264.

²¹⁹ Geoffrey Roberts. "Soviet Foreign Policy and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939." In *Spain in an International Context, 1936-1959*, eds., Christian Leitz and David J. Dunthorn, 81-104. (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 87.

supply such aid from here.”²²⁰ Litvinov outlined, in this same letter, the reasons for Soviet refusal to supply the Spanish Republic with military equipment: the fact that Spain was too far away, the cost of the transportation would be too high, the risk of losing Soviet transport ships, and the fact that the Soviet Union had already bound itself to the Non-Intervention Agreement. Although the date for when this last letter was written is unknown, one can deduce that it had been composed sometime between August 23 1936, when the Soviet Union agreed to Non-Intervention, and mid-September 1936, which is the approximate time-frame for the Soviet decision to send arms to Spain. These two letters demonstrate, however, that the issue of sending military equipment to the Spanish Republic was already being discussed in Moscow by the beginnings of August and it had already been concluded that it was not in Soviet interests to supply the Republic with military *matériel*.

In late August, according to Krivitsky, three high officials of the Spanish Republic had been sent to the Soviet Union in order to purchase military equipment in exchange for “huge sums of Spanish gold.”²²¹ Stalin kept these officials “hidden” in a hotel in Odessa and, “to conceal the operation, Stalin issued, on Friday, August 28 1936, through the Commissar of Foreign Trade, a decree forbidding the delivery of any military material to Spain.”²²² It is unfortunately not known who these Spanish “officials” were, or what they purchased because there are no known records that mention this unofficial visit.

Did Stalin, when he adhered to Non-Intervention on 23 August, ever plan on abiding by its rules? In light of the evidence that has recently emerged regarding Soviet shipping to Republican Spain, it is now safe to conclude that the Soviet Union never planned on remaining neutral when Stalin agreed to the Non-Intervention Agreement. Although it is still not known exactly when Stalin decided to send military aid to Spain, the general consensus among historians is that the decision had been made, at the latest,

²²⁰ M. T. Mesheriakov. “SSSR i Grazhdanskaya Voina v Ispanii.” In *Otechestvennaya Istoriya*. (Vol. 3, 1993): 89-93.

²²¹ Walter G. Krivitsky. *I Was Stalin's Agent*. (London: The Right Book Club, 1940), 98.

²²² *Ibid.*, 98.

during the first half of September, 1936. According to both Orlov and Krivitsky, Stalin had decided to intervene in Spain as of 13-14 September. It has been found that, on 26 September, the *Campeche* set sail from the Crimea with military supplies bound for Spain. This was, according to Howson, the first Soviet ship to deliver military aid to Spain.²²³ Howson also claims that the *Campeche* had been ordered to depart at the last minute and Voroshilov supervised the hasty loading of military equipment which, again, hints at the probability that the decision to begin supplying the Republic with arms had been made in mid-September. Krivitsky and Orlov, on the other hand, claim that the *Neva*, which set sail on 18 September and arrived at Cartagena on 25 September, 1936, was the first ship to carry arms to Spain while Howson believes that in fact, this ship only carried non-military supplies.²²⁴

In any case, if one were to assume that the *Neva* was, in fact, the first ship to deliver arms, and that it arrived in Spain on 25 September, one could then argue that the decision to intervene had been made even earlier. Coverdale believes that Stalin decided to intervene in Spain between 20 and 25 August 1936 and supports his argument with the fact that it was from this date onwards that Soviet military advisors and governmental officials began to arrive in Spain.²²⁵ Thomas, on the other hand, claims that "the decision [to intervene] must have been taken some time in August since weapons began to reach Spain in mid-October."²²⁶ Krivitsky, likewise, claims that he had been ordered, on 2

²²³ Gerald Howson. *Arms for Spain: The Untold Story of the Spanish Civil War*. (New York: St Martins Press, 1998), 126.

²²⁴ Landis, Whealey and Haslam claim that the *Neva* did carry military equipment. See: Arthur H. Landis. *Spain: The Unfinished Revolution*. (New York: International Publishers, 1972), 241. ; Robert H. Whealey. *Hitler and Spain. The Nazi Role in the Spanish Civil War 1936-1939*. (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1989), 22. ; Jonathan Haslam. *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security in Europe, 1933-1939*. (London: The Macmillan Company Ltd., 1984), 115.

Denis Smyth, on the other hand, claims that the *Neva* did not carry military cargo. See: Denis Smyth. "We are with You: Solidarity and Self-Interest in Soviet Policy Towards Republican Spain 1936-1939." In *The Republic Besieged: Civil War in Spain 1936-1939*, eds., Preston, Paul and Ann L. Mackenzie, 87-105. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 88.

²²⁵ "On 25 August, Antonov-Ovseenko arrived in Spain as Consul-General in Catalonia. On the following day, Alexander Orlov was appointed as a Soviet advisor to the Republican government. At the same time, Marcel Rozenberg arrived in Madrid as Soviet Ambassador and was accompanied by numerous Soviet military advisors: Ian Berzin, Vladimir Gorev, Y.V. Sumshkevich, G. Pavlov, and N.N. Voronov." John F. Coverdale. *Italian Intervention in the Spanish Civil War*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), 98.

²²⁶ Hugh Thomas. *The Spanish Civil War*. (New York: A Touchstone Book, 1986), 440.

September 1936, to begin preparing for the shipment of arms, in Western Europe, to Republican Spain.²²⁷ Thus, he believes that the decision to intervene in Spain was made by Stalin on 31 August 1936. Novikov similarly argues that the final decision to intervene in Spain was made at the beginning of September.²²⁸

Alpert mentions the possibility of another meeting which had taken place on 14 September, with the purpose of discussing the organization of arm shipments to Spain. It can now be ascertained, with the help of Soviet documents, that on 16 September, 1936, Operation "X" was approved. What is also known is that on 29 September, Stalin approved two important decisions regarding his country's involvement in Spain during a Politburo meeting: the creation of special secret firms in Western Europe, under Krivitsky's supervision and the dispatch of Soviet military advisors to Spain. New research on the subject has only served to cause more controversy as to the exact date of Stalin's decision to intervene in Spain. Yurii Ribalkin claims to have found, in Soviet military archives, proof that during the 29 September, the Politburo voted on a resolution to send considerable military aid to the Spanish Republic.²²⁹ If this is true, then the issue surrounding the departure of the *Campeche*, which set sail on 26 September 1936, would need to be looked into further. Novikov mentions that alongside these preparations, the Soviet Union knew that the gold reserves would be sent to Spain for the payment of these supplies. As Krivitsky states, "[Stalin] even made sure before moving that there was enough gold in the Bank of Spain to more than cover the costs of his material aid."²³⁰

Note: Thomas was not yet aware of Howson's newfound Soviet shipping information.

²²⁷ Walter G. Krivitsky. *I Was Stalin's Agent*. (London: The Right Book Club, 1940), 100.

²²⁸ M. V. Novikov. *SSSR, Komintern i Grazhdanskaya Voina v Ispanii 1936-1939*. 2 Vols. (Yaroslavl: 1995).

²²⁹ Yurii Ribalkin. "Sobre la Cuestión de la Ayuda Militar Sovietica en la España Republicana 1936-1939." In *Actas de la I Conferencia de Hispanistas de Rusia*, 242-246. (Madrid: 1995), 242.

Stalin also decided not to send any of his leading military advisors to Spain:

“at a session of the Military Council which preceded the trial of the Soviet generals, Stalin declared: Tukhachevsky and Uborevich have asked to be sent to Spain. We say: No, we do not need any big names. To Spain we will send people who are little known...we will send people without big names, our lower and midlevel officer staff.”²³¹

Krivitsky had been recalled to Moscow on 19 September, 1936 in order to give a full report concerning German and Italian involvement in Spain. Alpert mentions the possibility that the decision to send military aid may have taken another month or so after Krivitsky's report.²³² This can now be disproved due to new information regarding Soviet shipments to Spain.²³³ Alpert also puts forth another possible date for Stalin's decision to militarily intervene in Spain: “the decision to send military aid to Spain may have been taken at a session of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party in early September, while Stalin was away on vacation.”²³⁴ The latter date is more realistic since it is known that ships departed from the Soviet Union, with military cargo, well before mid-October.

It is also possible that Stalin made two separate decisions regarding his intervention in Spain. The initial amount of military aid that was sent to Spain (as in the case of the *Campeche*) and the arrival of Soviet military advisors, was not substantial enough to help secure a Republican victory. Thus, the initial aid sent to Spain was inconsequential. The first large-scale shipment of arms (aboard the *Komsomol*) arrived in Spain on 15 October. Curiously, once the Spanish Republican government officially stated that it would be sending its gold reserves to the USSR, a marked increase in Soviet arms deliveries is noted. In fact, the Spanish gold reserves had departed from the port of Cartagena on the same date that the *Komsomol* docked at Alicante.

²³⁰ Walter G. Krivitsky. *I Was Stalin's Agent*. (London: The Right Book Club, 1940), 95.

²³¹ Vadim Z. Rogovin. *1937: Stalin's Year of Terror*. (Oak Park, MI.: Mehring Books Inc., 1998), 343.

²³² Michael Alpert. *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 52.

²³³ The *Campeche* set sail for Spain on 26 September 1936.

CHAPTER 7

The Cost(s) of Soviet Aid

Unlike Italian aid to General Franco, the Republic was expected to pay, and did, in fact, pay for all Soviet shipments. As Broué and Témime rightly observe, the Soviet Union's aid to the Republic did have a commercial aspect to it and as much as the Soviet Union professed its "solidarity" with the Spanish Republic, it did not "give" anything to the Republic: the Soviet Union sold its aid to Spain. However, before embarking on the issue of the Spanish gold, it is important to briefly mention another price the Spanish Republic had to pay for Soviet "aid": direct Soviet interference in the internal political affairs of the Republican government.

7.1 SOVIET INTERVENTION/INTERFERENCE IN DOMESTIC AFFAIRS

It has been found that "the arms monopoly by the USSR enabled it to control the political 'evolution' of the Republic."²³⁵ When the USSR began to send military advisors to Spain, NKVD agents were sent with them, bringing the Soviet Union's domestic problems onto the Spanish arena and, consequently, weakening the Republican Front: "involvement blended into intervention; intervention inexorably became interference."²³⁶

So great was his aversion to the CNT-FAI and POUM, whose stronghold in Spain was located in the autonomous province of Catalonia, that, for example, Stalin reputedly forbade the unloading of Soviet planes in Barcelona, fearing that the aircraft would be used by his "enemies" and re-directed the ship to Alicante. In doing so, Stalin single-handedly delayed the arrival of much-needed planes on the Republican front. Krivitsky recalls that even before Stalin consented to send military aid to the Madrid government, the Politburo had already decided to create a GPU department in Spain in order to control

²³⁴ Michael Alpert. *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 51.

²³⁵ Burnett Bolloten. *The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution*. (London & Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 157.

²³⁶ Jonathan Haslam. *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security in Europe, 1933-1939*. (London: The Macmillan Company Ltd., 1984), 109.

the activities of the PCE and the International Brigades. The GPU would also “watch-over” other Left-wing parties in the Spanish Republican camp (most notably the POUM and the CNT-FAI).

The first sign which would serve to foreshadow the subsequent purges in Spain, came with the expulsion of the POUM in December 1936 from the Generalitat²³⁷ in Catalonia and its founders, Nin and Maurin, were labeled “Trotskyites”.²³⁸ The expulsion of the POUM had been achieved by the PCE, with the support of the CNT-FAI (an Anarchist party and trade union). However, by February 1937, reports of arrests of members of the CNT-FAI were reported as well. The PCE was, in fact, nothing more than an instrument of Soviet will. The Spanish population began to express outrage at the excesses perpetrated by the Spanish secret police which, in any event, was under Soviet control. Stalin did not seem bothered by reports that these random arrests and assassinations were “offending” the Spaniards.

General Mola had repeatedly made mention of a “Fifth Column” of Nationalist supporters, who were “hiding” in Madrid and secretly waiting for Franco to “liberate” them. Agents under the joint control of the Soviet Union and the PCE were used in order to track down this “mysterious” Fifth Column. In summer 1937, a “new body, whose professed function was counter-espionage,” was created under the name of SIM (Servicio de Investigación Militar) and it “quickly spread its tentacles to all parts of Republican Spain, occupying itself with the suppression of all forms of opposition and employed the familiar instruments of imprisonment, investigation and torture.”²³⁹

Rogovin claims that the “transformation of the Civil War in Spain, from an arena of struggle ‘against all tyranny’, into a means for implementing Stalin’s geopolitical maneuvers and into an arena for exterminating Communist dissidents determined the

²³⁷ The Catalanian Parliament.

²³⁸ Even though it had been already ascertained that the POUM had split from Trotsky. E. H. Carr. *The Comintern and the Spanish Civil War*. (London: Macmillan, 1984), 35.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 44.

defeat of the Spanish Revolution.”²⁴⁰ Likewise, the increase of Soviet military aid had the “unforeseen result of subordinating the policies and contributions of the Republic more and more effectively to the influences and directives emanating from Moscow.”²⁴¹ In fact, military tactics were decided by those who controlled the delivery of arms, namely, the PCE which was, in turn, an instrument of Soviet policy within the Republican government. The PCE grew in political importance and saw its power formidably increased precisely because it was controlled by the sole arms supplier of the Republican government. Thus, Republican affairs of state were under the control of Moscow by 1937 and since Stalin used the Spanish Civil War in order to further Soviet international schemes, the fate of the Republic remained largely in his hands and under his control.

Republican Spain soon felt the shadow of the Soviet Show-Trials and the random assassinations of members of the Spanish Anarchist and “Trotskyite” parties. Furthermore, it can now be ascertained that the PCE, as well as the Soviet Union, played a leading role in Largo Caballero’s ²⁴² political decline and eventual resignation as head of the Spanish Republican government, as well as contributing to the disruption of Republican military effectiveness.²⁴³

²⁴⁰ Vadim Z. Rogovin. *1937: Stalin's Year of Terror*. (Oak Park, MI: Mehring Books Inc., 1998), 370.

²⁴¹ E. H. Carr. *The Comintern and the Spanish Civil War*. (London: Macmillan, 1984), 28.

²⁴² Head of the Spanish Socialist Party in the 1930s and Prime Minister from 4 September, 1936 until 17 May, 1937.

²⁴³ The events which took place in May 1937 in Barcelona, known as the ‘May Events’ or ‘May Days’ have been vividly recounted by George Orwell. This “Civil War” within the Civil War had far-reaching political consequences for the Republican camp. It defined the point when “revolutionary” drives were no longer important, or as consequential as they were at the outbreak of the war. Communist power and control increased as a result of the events in May 1937 and it is widely believed that the entire “drama” had been planned by the PCE, with the backing of the Soviet Union, in order to replace the head of the Spanish Republic, Largo Caballero, with Juan Negrin, a much more “complaisant” ally. On 3 May, the PSUC (The Catalan Socialist Party, largely under Communist influence by then) stormed the central telephone exchange, a building which had been occupied by the CNT since the outbreak of the war. Revolutionaries went on strike and set up barricades in and around Barcelona. Among these “radicals”, there were members of the POUM, the CNT-FAI, the Libertarian Youths and a dissident Anarchist group called “the Friends of Durruti”. These forces fought against the PSCU and the Catalanian government. Eventually, due to the internal divisions on the “revolutionary” side, the fighting ended and on 6 May, order was restored in the Catalan capital at the expense of Catalan autonomy. The “May Days” also caused the political downfall of Largo Caballero who was accused by the Communists of not being able to decisively squash the “uncontrollable” forces within the Republican camp. Largo Caballero refused to submit to Communist demands (that the POUM be disbanded and that the Anarchist newspaper be put under the strict control of the central government), and he was forced to resign from his posts of war minister and

7.2 THE SPANISH GOLD: A FURTHER MOTIVE FOR INTERVENING ?

Another controversial issue surrounding the Spanish Civil War is the transfer of the Spanish gold reserves to the Soviet Union. José Giral was the first leader of the Spanish Republican government to decide to use the gold reserves in order to finance the war. On 24 July 1936, the Spanish Republican government chose to send a portion of its gold reserves to France. According to Viñas, commercial transactions between these two countries lasted until March 1937. By this time, French banks had acquired an estimated 174 tons of Spanish gold, or 27.4% of the total gold reserves of the Bank of Spain.²⁴⁴ French banks, however, proved to be less enamored of the idea that the Republican government was purchasing arms with their indirect “help”. The Republicans encountered numerous difficulties when attempting to withdraw funds from its accounts. French banks reportedly delayed the release of the requested capital, or froze its accounts, which inevitably led to delays in purchasing much-needed war *matériel*. Furthermore, “the banks in Paris, London, and New York were refusing to accept Republican money [and] they were leaking information about Republican transactions to the Press [...] governments were obstructing the movement of funds from country to country.”²⁴⁵ In light of the difficulties encountered by the Spanish Republican government, Negrín²⁴⁶ ultimately decided to send a large portion of the reserves to the Soviet Union.

Thomas argues that “there were alternatives to Russia in the United States or in South America”²⁴⁷ as potential arms suppliers. However, if the Republic chose to deposit its gold in any other country, it risked losing its only method of funding the war, and, consequently, its defeat would be assured due to the constant flow of German and Italian military equipment to General Franco. The Republic feared that another country might wish to see a speedy conclusion to the Spanish Civil War by allowing the Nationalists to

head of the Republican government. Largo Caballero was not politically strong enough to form a new government.

²⁴⁴ Angel Viñas. “The Financing of the Spanish Civil War.” In *Revolution and War in Spain 1931-1939*. ed., Paul Preston, 266-283. (London: Routledge, 1984), 268.

²⁴⁵ Gerald Howson. *Arms for Spain: The Untold Story of the Spanish Civil War*. (New York: St Martins Press, 1998), 121.

²⁴⁶ Juan Negrín was Finance Minister under Largo Caballero and later Prime Minister from May 1937 until the end of the war.

continue receiving German and Italian aid, while having its own bank accounts rendered useless, such as it had already experienced with French banks. Britain and the United States would have much rather preferred a Nationalist victory and would have done anything to end the war in Spain as quickly as possible, so as to “contain” the potentially explosive situation in Europe. Although Mexico openly supported the Republican cause from the outset of the war, logistically it was ineffective. Nor could it supply the Republic with the necessary military equipment.

The USSR was the only option left for the Republic, if it wished to continue funding the war and acquiring military supplies. Little is known about the circumstances in which the gold reserves were transferred to the Soviet Union. Stalin reputedly warned the Politburo that the Soviet Union must remain cautious (i.e.: secretive) when intervening in Spain, because it would be doing so while officially upholding neutrality. The financial arrangement between both governments, as well as the shipment of the gold itself, was conducted secretly, between a small number of Republican and Soviet officials. The main reason for such secrecy can be explained, no doubt, by the fear of a potential German, Italian, and/or Spanish Nationalist attack on the precious cargo while it was being transported to Odessa.

Most of what is known about the transfer of the Spanish gold reserves to the USSR comes from the memoirs of the participants and these are not supported by any documentary evidence. Sources such as Marcelino Pascua,²⁴⁸ who were involved in the “gold question”, are extensively quoted by historians when, in actual fact, they knew very little of what was actually taking place at the time. Pascua’s testimony, it is now ascertained, demonstrates that he was not even aware of when his government’s decision to send the gold reserves to the USSR was made. On 7 October, 1936, “Pascua had instructions to promote active Soviet intervention (which perhaps would indicate that it

²⁴⁷ Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*. (New York: A Touchstone Book, 1986), 441.

²⁴⁸ The Republican Ambassador in the Soviet Union.

had not until then been initiated) and, obviously, he was unaware that preparations for this were already under way.”²⁴⁹

There is another example of Pascua’s ignorance. When he was sent by his government to negotiate a second loan agreement with the USSR, the Loyalist government was well aware that the gold deposited in the Soviet Union had almost completely been spent, but did not advise him of this fact. Pascua thus mentions his shock and bewilderment when he was informed of this by Soviet officials. Examples such as these lead me to believe that many of those who took part in the transfer of the gold shipment to the Soviet Union were not as well “informed” as historians had previously thought. Most of the participants directly involved in the “gold question” either did not leave any personal accounts, or, as in the case of Soviet officials, soon disappeared in the Purges. Two of the Soviet officials most intimately involved in the “gold question” were arrested during the Ezhovshchina: G.F. Grinko and N.N. Krestinsky. Their signatures appear on the official Soviet receipt, issued on 5 February 1937, declaring the total amount of gold received. They were shot on 15 March 1938 for “anti-Soviet” and “Trotskyite” activities. Bolloten also mentions that Stashevsky, Negrin’s Soviet advisor on economic matters, also disappeared in similar circumstances.²⁵⁰ The fact that most Soviet witnesses involved in the transfer of the gold, with the exception of Alexander Orlov, “disappeared”, shroud the circumstances in which the gold reserves were shipped to the USSR with great controversy.

Marcelino Pascua claims that the Republican Government transferred the gold to the USSR because it was primarily concerned with its safety. The reserves had been located in Madrid and there was much worry that the gold could be captured by advancing Nationalist forces. The Republic could not afford to lose its only guarantee of acquiring arms for the war effort. Negrin received a unanimous vote from his Cabinet, on 13 September, 1936, to move the gold to a “safer” location within Spain. The gold

²⁴⁹ Angel Viñas. “Gold, the Soviet Union and the Spanish Civil War”. *European Studies Review*. (Vol. 9, Num. 1. January 1979 : 105-128), 110.

²⁵⁰ Burnett Bolloten. *The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution*. (London & Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 153.

was transported to the port city of Cartagena on 15 September. It has always been believed that the Spanish Republican government decided to move the gold reserves to Cartagena for its “safety”. Bolloten believes, as do I, that it was also sent there with the idea of shipping it abroad and eventually converting it into foreign funds so as to purchase much-needed war *matériel*.²⁵¹

In a letter dated 15 October, 1936, Largo Caballero asked Rozenberg whether the Soviet Union would consent to the deposit of a portion of the Spanish gold reserves.²⁵² Curiously, Largo Caballero’s request was made on the same day that the gold had been transferred to Cartagena and on the same day that the first large-scale Soviet military shipment arrived in Spain. It is presumed that an affirmative answer had been received from the Soviet Union on either the 16 or 17 October because on the 17, Largo Caballero sent another telegram to Rozenberg, confirming the approval of the Soviet Union to “safeguard” the gold. Olaya believes that this official telegram to Rozenberg should not be taken too seriously by historians, who use it to determine the date for when conversations regarding the shipment of the Spanish gold began to take place between both governments. Olaya mentions the “oddness” of the letter since Largo Caballero makes no reference to paying off the large and rapidly accumulating debt that the Republic had incurred for the material that had already been received.²⁵³ One would assume, argues Olaya, that relevant information such as this would have been mentioned. Thus, Olaya believes that this letter was a mere “formality” between both governments and claims that conversations between both governments had been taking place well before 15 October.

Another issue which arises out of Largo Caballero’s telegram is brought up by Ribalkin, who claims that the Soviet reply to this first letter was received 1-2 days later, which is striking if one considers the delays that usually plagued the Soviet bureaucracy. “Such speed,” Ribalkin argues, “unheard of in Soviet diplomacy before or since, strongly suggests that discussions about the gold had been going on for some time, probably since

²⁵¹ Ibid., 145.

²⁵² See Appendix 2 for a transcript of the correspondence.

²⁵³ Francisco Olaya Morales. *El Oro de Negrin*. (Mostoles: Ediciones Madre Tierra, 1990).

the middle of September, and that Largo Caballero's request and the ensuing Soviet reply were mere formalities."²⁵⁴ Ribalkin, however, does not give any references or sources for these arguments. However, as Howson mentions, Ribalkin had access to the relevant military archives and, "one assumes that [his theory] is based on documentary evidence."²⁵⁵ Furthermore, it has also been established that Alexander Orlov had been chosen to supervise the delivery of the gold reserves to Odessa during a Politburo meeting held on 14 September, 1936, one day before the gold was shipped to Cartagena.

It had long been thought that the Spanish Republican government decided to ship its gold outside of the country because of fears of a concerted Nationalist and Italian air raid or because of a possible Anarchist attack. This excuse can be contested since Cartagena was adequately armed and, as Bolloten argues, "the Nationalists knew that it would be futile to attempt to take Cartagena by assault, since they lacked the naval power" to do so.²⁵⁶ Olaya similarly notes that Cartagena was the safest port from which Soviet ships could depart since it was not under threat of an enemy raid.²⁵⁷ One could therefore argue that, not only was there little danger of an enemy attack in and around Cartagena, but also, that the Spanish Republic already knew, by 15 September, that the gold was destined for the USSR when it decided to transfer the gold reserves to Cartagena.

The gold in an enemy attack, the gold was sent to the Soviet Union with the purpose of paying off the large debt that the Republic had already incurred and the balance would serve as a credit guarantee against future Soviet arms deliveries. The fact that Giral had already sent gold to France with the purpose of buying arms only strengthens Bolloten's argument. Why would Negrin and Largo Caballero not plan on following the same financial strategy as their predecessor? The Republic needed arms, after all, and the Committee for Non-Intervention made it illegal for the Republican

²⁵⁴ Gerald Howson. *Arms for Spain: The Untold Story of the Spanish Civil War*. (New York: St Martins Press, 1998), 128.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 128.

²⁵⁶ Burnett Bolloten. *The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution*. (London & Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 158.

²⁵⁷ Francisco Olaya Morales. *El Oro de Negrin*. (Mostoles: Ediciones Madre Tierra, 1990).

government to purchase military equipment from a country that was a member of the Committee. Thus, the Republic had no choice but to deposit its gold reserves in foreign banks, where the funds could be withdrawn and used to secretly purchase arms from private dealers or from states who were willing to violate the rules set forth by Non-Intervention. Mesheriakov makes mention of a document, found in Russian archives, of a Soviet agent in Paris (whose name is unknown), who reportedly told NKVD officials on 9 August, that the Spanish Republic was growing desperate for military aid and would agree to “do anything” in order to receive military equipment as soon as possible.²⁵⁸ Stalin, in all probability, was well aware of the problems that the Republican government faced: he knew that the Republic was in desperate need of an arms supplier.

It had always been assumed that the Spanish Republic turned to the Soviet Union as a last resort, that only when France refused to send military aid to the Republic did it turn to the Soviet Union. It has now been proven, with the help of new Russian documents, published by the editors of *Spain Betrayed*, that the Spanish Republic had already decided to turn to the Soviet Union for military aid before France’s official refusal.²⁵⁹ The fact remains that the decision to send the Spanish gold reserves to another country, especially to the Soviet Union, was a decision that was forced upon the Republican government by the Non-Intervention Committee. The Republican officials who made the final decision to ship the gold to the Soviet Union were not hoping for increased Soviet influence in Spanish affairs. The Spanish government was well aware of the risks involved when it decided to send such a large portion of the gold reserves to a country that was as far away as the Soviet Union. The Spanish Republic was also well

²⁵⁸ M. T. Mesheriakov. “SSSR i Grazhdanskaya Voina v Ispanii.” In *Otechestvennaya Istoriya*. (Vol. 3, 1993) : 89-93.

²⁵⁹ The editors of *Spain Betrayed* have finally put at least one matter regarding Soviet intervention in Spain to rest: it has always been assumed that the Republican government sought Soviet military aid only after it had been refused such aid from France. A letter, from José Giral, to the Soviet Ambassador in France, dated 25 July, 1936, in which Giral asks if the Soviet Union would agree to send military equipment to the Republic, now disproves the original hypothesis since, on the very same date, the French cabinet had met to decide whether or not it would agree to send military aid to Spain. It was only after a couple of days that the French government decided to alter its policy by proposing Non-Intervention. Thus, Giral’s request was made before he knew of France’s decision.

Ronald Radosh, Mary R. Habeck and Grigory Sevostianov, eds. *Spain Betrayed. The Soviet Union and the Spanish Civil War*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 11-13.

aware that such a move would increase its dependence on one particular country, whose political and/or ideological interests and goals were not always similar to its own.

According to Viñas, the decision to send the Spanish gold abroad was made once a recipient had been decided on.²⁶⁰ On 23 October, 1936, Negrin made the final decision to send the gold reserves to the Soviet Union. The final details of the gold shipment to the USSR were arranged by both Negrin and Stashevsky, the Soviet Economic Attaché. However, “it cannot yet be documented whether this was an autonomous idea independently adopted by higher Republican echelons, or a reaction to prior suggestions from the Soviets, perhaps from Rozenberg.”²⁶¹

During the Franco regime, it was popularly argued that the Soviet Union virtually blackmailed the Republican government into sending its gold reserves to the USSR in order to receive arms. As Krivitsky states:

“there was also that hoard of gold in Spain, £ 140,000,000, which the government was willing to spend for war materials. How much of this gold could be transported to Russia in payment for munitions delivered in Spain, while the Soviet Union officially adhered to its announced policy of strict non-intervention was no doubt an urgent question.”²⁶²

According to Alvarez Del Vayo,²⁶³ the initial discussion concerning the shipment of the Spanish gold reserves came from the Soviet Union, who “feared” that it should fall into Nationalist hands. Viñas mentions that Pascua had met with Rozengoltz, the Soviet Commissar of Foreign Trade, on 19 October, 1936, in order to discuss the commercial exchange between their two countries.

Viñas also alludes to another meeting, held between Ambassador Pascua, Rozengoltz and Grinko, People’s Commissar for Finance, a couple of days after 19

²⁶⁰ Angel Viñas. *El Oro Español en la Guerra Civil*. (Madrid: Instituto de Estudios Fiscales, 1976), 178.

²⁶¹ Angel Viñas. “Gold, the Soviet Union and the Spanish Civil War”. *European Studies Review*. (Vol. 9, Num. 1. January 1979 : 105-128), 112.

²⁶² Walter G. Krivitsky. *I Was Stalin’s Agent*. (London: The Right Book Club, 1940), 99.

²⁶³ Republican Foreign Minister.

October 1936.²⁶⁴ Although the exact date of this second meeting is not mentioned by any author, it is known that during this meeting, the two Soviet Commissars warned Pascua of the dangers of depositing the gold reserves in France. They also pledged a guarantee that the Republic would be able to withdraw its funds as it saw fit, should it decide to send its gold to the Soviet Union instead. Pascua immediately contacted his government with the details of this discussion. He was not yet aware that, by this time, his government was already contemplating sending the gold to the Soviet Union.²⁶⁵ Similarly, "Arthur Stashevsky was exerting all his efforts to gather into Soviet hands the control of the finances of the Republic."²⁶⁶ Krivitsky also claims that Stashevsky had offered to ship the Spanish gold to Russia, and pledged to send military supplies to the desperate Republic in exchange. Although Krivitsky does not specify a date for this conversation, it can be assumed that it may have heavily influenced Negrin's final decision to send the gold reserves to the USSR.²⁶⁷

In the 1970s and 1980s, historians began to argue that the decision to send the Spanish gold reserves to the USSR had been made independently by Negrin and Largo Caballero.²⁶⁸ Orlov recalls "Negrin sound[ing] out our Soviet Trade Attaché about storing the gold in Russia. The envoy cabled Moscow and Stalin leaped at the opportunity."²⁶⁹ It was known that Soviet ships had begun to arrive in Spain, some with arms, before the gold had left Cartagena. How then, it was postulated, could the Soviet Union use the possibility of acquiring arms as "bait" in order to gain the Spanish gold, if Stalin had already sent military aid to Spain? According to Viñas, the Spanish Republic decided to send a considerable portion of the gold reserves to the USSR only after learning that Soviet military aid was arriving imminently. Viñas, however, is not sure if the final

²⁶⁴ Angel Viñas. "Gold, the Soviet Union and the Spanish Civil War". *European Studies Review*. (Vol. 9, Num. 1. January 1979 : 105-128), 112.

²⁶⁵ It is possible that his government had even decided, by this date, to send the gold to the USSR.

²⁶⁶ Walter G. Krivitsky. *I Was Stalin's Agent*. (London: The Right Book Club, 1940), 118.

²⁶⁷ Francisco Olaya Morales. *El Oro de Negrin*. (Mostoles: Ediciones Madre Tierra, 1990).

²⁶⁸ See: E.H. Carr. *The Comintern and the Spanish Civil War*. (London: Macmillan, 1984), 26. ; Gerald Howson. *Arms for Spain: The Untold Story of the Spanish Civil War*. (New York: St Martins Press, 1998), 121. ; Burnett Bolloten. *The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution*. (London & Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 158.

²⁶⁹ Alexander Orlov. "How Stalin Relieved Spain of \$6000,000,000" In *Readers Digest*, (November, 1966): 37-50; quoted in Stanley G. Payne. *The Spanish Revolution*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co. Inc., 1970), 269.

decision to send the gold to the Soviet Union resulted from word that Soviet aid would be arriving soon or if it was made by the USSR in order to guarantee future Soviet arms shipments since the equipment which had been received until then had not amounted to much.²⁷⁰ One can assume that discussions concerning the transfer of the gold reserves to the Soviet Union had been taking place for some time prior to the shipment of the gold to Odessa. Indeed, “such measures were anything but improvised and would have required prior contacts between Largo Caballero and Negrin, as well as with Soviet embassy officials in Madrid.”²⁷¹

Ribalkin further claims that only when Stalin was assured that the gold would be sent to the Soviet Union did he begin to send any extensive military aid to the Spanish Republic.²⁷² Ribalkin, however, does not want to venture too far in this hypothesis because he is quick to note that Soviet specialists were, in fact, sent to Spain long before any commercial transactions had been established between the two states. According to Mesheriakov, De los Rios, a Republican official in France, had asked Soviet agents, at the beginning of August 1936, to organize shipments of arms to Republican Spain.²⁷³ De los Rios reportedly claimed that he was ready to travel to Moscow in order to draft a commercial arrangement with the Soviet government concerning the purchase and the delivery of arms in exchange for Spanish gold.²⁷⁴ Nevertheless, the exact date for when conversations began between the two governments over the shipment of the gold reserves remains controversial: “more time elapsed between adopting the decisions and carrying them out in the Soviet case.”²⁷⁵ Another reason explaining the arrival of Soviet arms and

²⁷⁰ Angel Viñas. *El Oro Español en la Guerra Civil*. (Madrid: Instituto de Estudios Fiscales, 1976), 184.

²⁷¹ Angel Viñas. “Gold, the Soviet Union and the Spanish Civil War”. *European Studies Review*. (Vol. 9, Num. 1. January 1979: 105-128), 111.

One must, however, remember that there are still no documents which would prove that any such talks had taken place, besides Largo Caballero’s letter to Rozenberg, dated on 15 October 1936.

²⁷² Gerald Howson. *Arms for Spain: The Untold Story of the Spanish Civil War*. (New York: St Martins Press, 1998), 128.

This would serve to explain the larger-scale shipments made to the Republic after the gold was sent to the USSR.

²⁷³ M. T. Mesheriakov. “SSSR i Grazhdanskaya Voina v Ispanii.” In *Otechestvennaya Istoriya*. (Vol. 3, 1993): 89-93.

²⁷⁴ Could this be the delegation, mentioned by Krivitsky, of unknown Spanish officials who had traveled to the USSR on 28 August, 1936, with the purpose of purchasing Soviet arms with Republican gold?

²⁷⁵ Angel Viñas. “Gold, the Soviet Union and the Spanish Civil War”. *European Studies Review*. (Vol. 9, Num. 1. January 1979: 105-128), 110.

advisors before the gold reserves were delivered to the USSR may lie in the possibility that the Soviet Union was “proving” its “good intentions” by sending the Republic, on credit, military equipment before the gold had been received. Nevertheless, the temptation of securing an arms supplier may have been difficult for the Republic to ignore, since it was increasingly obvious that it could not find any other dependable suppliers. The USSR must have seemed to be the Republic’s only viable option if it wanted to continue having a fighting chance in the war.

Could Stalin’s interest in the Spanish gold have played a larger role in Stalin’s motives to intervene in the Spanish Civil War than has otherwise been thought until now? Viñas argues that while Pascua was sent to the Soviet Union in order to discuss the financial agreement between both countries, “[he] was able to appreciate the Soviet leaders’ awareness of the international complications that might befall them through their intervention in Spain.”²⁷⁶ One could therefore argue that Stalin was prepared at a certain point to risk these “international complications” by supplying the Spanish Republic with arms, in exchange for the Spanish gold reserves. Consequently, not only was the Spanish Republic persuaded by the USSR to send its gold reserves to Moscow, but the possibility of acquiring this large sum of gold may have also largely contributed to Stalin’s decision to begin sending military aid to the Republic.

Schwartz similarly believes in the possibility that while the decision was made to send arms to Spain, Stalin was further enticed by Rozenberg’s suggestions of acquiring the Spanish gold reserves.²⁷⁷ Curiously, Broué and Témime mention that “the dispatch of the gold to Russia came at the time when Russian aid was greatest.”²⁷⁸ Matthews similarly argues that by the time any substantial Soviet military equipment arrived in Spain, “probably not accidentally, the shipments of Spanish gold were well on their way to Odessa.”²⁷⁹ It is, in fact, well known that Soviet military aid increased almost

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 117.

²⁷⁷ Fernando Schwartz. *La Internacionalización de la Guerra Civil Española. Julio de 1936- Marzo de 1937*. (Barcelona: Ediciones Ariel, 1971), 205.

²⁷⁸ Pierre Broué and Émile Témime. *The Revolution and the Civil War in Spain*. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1972), 371.

²⁷⁹ Herbert L. Matthews. *Half of Spain Died*. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1973), 163.

immediately after the gold had been sent to the USSR. Likewise, Orlov describes Stalin's reaction when the gold had finally been shipped safely to Russia: "NKVD chief Yezhov quoted to a friend of mine Stalin's gleeful words: 'they will never see their gold again, just as they do not see their own ears.'"²⁸⁰ On 20 October,²⁸¹ Orlov received a telegram from Stalin:

"together with Ambassador Rozenberg, arrange with the head of the Spanish government, Caballero, for the shipment of the gold reserves of Spain to the Soviet Union. [...] This operation must be carried out with the utmost secrecy. If the Spaniards demand from you a receipt for the cargo, refuse. I repeat, refuse to sign anything, and say that a formal receipt will be issued in Moscow by the State Bank."²⁸²

On 25 October, 1936, four ships, carrying the Spanish gold reserves, left the port of Cartagena and docked at Odessa between 2 and 6 November 1936.

There still remains somewhat of a discrepancy regarding the amount of gold that was sent to the USSR. Olaya claims that the total amount of the gold reserves in the Bank of Spain at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War was calculated at 720 tons, with a value of \$715-719 million,²⁸³ while Thomas claims that the entire gold reserves for the same period amounted to 700 tons, with a value of \$788 million.²⁸⁴ Viñas, on the other hand, claims that it corresponded to 635 tons and valued at \$ 715 million.²⁸⁵ Nevertheless, the amount of gold that was sent to the Soviet Union is generally acknowledged to total approximately 510 tons with a value of \$ 518 million.²⁸⁶ The gold was sent to Moscow for two purposes: it would serve to cover the cost of Soviet military

²⁸⁰ Alexander Orlov. "How Stalin Relieved Spain of \$6000,000,000" In *Readers Digest*, (November, 1966): 37-50; quoted in Stanley G. Payne. *The Spanish Revolution*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co. Inc., 1970), 269.

²⁸¹ Three days after Largo Caballero's letter to Rozenberg, confirming the shipment of Spanish gold to Russia.

²⁸² Burnett Bolloten. *The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution*. (London & Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 147.

Quoted from: US Congress Senate, Committee on the Judiciary Scope of Soviet Activity in the United States, 3430.

²⁸³ Francisco Olaya Morales. *El Oro de Negrin*. (Mostoles: Ediciones Madre Tierra, 1990).

²⁸⁴ Hugh Thomas. *The Spanish Civil War*. (New York: A Touchstone Book, 1986), 974.

²⁸⁵ Angel Viñas. "Gold, the Soviet Union and the Spanish Civil War". *European Studies Review*. (Vol. 9, Num. 1. January 1979 : 105-128), 115.

²⁸⁶ This is based on Angel Viñas' research.

aid, and the balance would be transferred to the Banque Commerciale pour L'Europe du Nord (BCEN), a Soviet-controlled bank in France, which would allow for the Republic to covertly withdraw foreign currency in order to purchase arms wherever it chose. According to Viñas, soon after the gold shipment left Spain, the BCEN began approving Republican financial transactions.²⁸⁷

The Soviet Union offered certain guarantees to its "client": "freedom to dispose of the gold confidentially, the ease with which their counter-value in foreign exchange could be transferred through the Soviet apparatus in the West without fear of the funds being blocked, and the absolute secrecy which would shroud the operation."²⁸⁸ Furthermore, it was agreed that the Republic would be able to re-export the gold reserves from the USSR whenever it decided.²⁸⁹ Hence, "Stalin's insistence on guaranteed payment thus coincided with the practical situation of the Republic."²⁹⁰ By sending the gold to the Soviet Union, the Republic was guaranteed a fairly constant flow of airplanes, arms, munitions, tanks, and military advisors. The Soviet Union, in turn, received the guarantee, through the shipment of the gold to Moscow, that it would be financially compensated for its military "aid". Thus, Stalin kept both the costs and the risks of his involvement in Spain to a bare minimum: he was guaranteed payment for his "help" through the transfer of the Spanish gold reserves to the USSR.

It can now be safely assumed that the original argument made by historians during the Franco years, that it was, in fact, the Soviet Union who "coaxed" the Republic to ship the gold to the USSR, seems to actually be closer to the truth than the argument put forth by later historians. Howson argues that even though it has been widely believed that the decision to send the Spanish gold to Moscow was made independently by the Spanish Republican government, it can now be argued that, in fact, it was suggested first

²⁸⁷ Angel Viñas. *El Oro Español en la Guerra Civil*. (Madrid: Instituto de Estudios Fiscales, 1976), 198.

²⁸⁸ Angel Viñas. "Gold, the Soviet Union and the Spanish Civil War". *European Studies Review*. (Vol. 9, Num. 1. January 1979 : 105-128), 113.

²⁸⁹ Ribalkin makes mention of a document which he discovered in Russian archives: a report dated on 24 November, 1936, by a Polish agent (whose name is unknown), stating that if the Republican government wanted to receive Soviet arms, it would be forced to keep the gold reserves in the Soviet Union.²⁸⁹ This clearly violated the initial promise made by the Soviet Union, which explicitly guaranteed that the Spanish Republic would be able to re-export its gold reserves whenever it wanted.

by the Soviet government.²⁹¹ Ribalkin believes that the main reason for Stalin's relatively "late" decision to intervene in Spain was due, in large part, to the fact that he was influenced by the knowledge that the Republic had decided to send a considerable portion of its gold reserves to Moscow in October and that, consequently, the entire cost of Soviet military intervention would be covered by the Republicans themselves.²⁹²

Soviet offers to "safeguard" the gold were thus timed to coincide with the refusal of certain Banks in France to release the desired funds since Franco was threatening to file legal claims against the banks in the event he won the war.²⁹³ Stalin, in all likelihood, must have realized that if he intervened in Spain, he would be securing a financially profitable deal. Since the USSR held a virtual monopoly as the main supplier of arms to the Spanish Republic, he realized that he would also be able to rid Soviet arsenals of weapons which had become obsolete by 1936, and sell these relics to the Republic at a high price.²⁹⁴ Thus, one can argue that the earlier shipments that had been made to the Republic on credit, which consisted of old and/or unusable arms, were sent with the purpose of staving off a Republican defeat. Large-scale military shipments were made only when the gold reserves were sent to Odessa. This well-timed "coincidence" may serve to explain another motive for Stalin's military involvement in Spain.

One can therefore trace a link between the moment Stalin decided to supply the Republic with arms and the possibility of acquiring the Spanish gold reserves. It is very possible that, as Ribalkin argues, the main reason for Stalin's *volte-face* with respect to his foreign policy, was the possibility of acquiring Spain's gold reserves, which were the fourth largest in the world at that time.²⁹⁵ However, Ribalkin hesitates in continuing this line of argumentation because these claims are largely based on circumstantial evidence.

²⁹⁰ Gabriel Jackson, ed. *The Spanish Civil War*. (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1972), 318.

²⁹¹ Gerald Howson. *Arms for Spain: The Untold Story of the Spanish Civil War*. (New York: St Martins Press, 1998), 128.

²⁹² Yurii Ribalkin. "Tainii Put 'Zolotogo Karavana'." In *Argumenty i Fakty*. (Vol. 14, 1996), 7.

²⁹³ Walter G. Krivitsky. *I Was Stalin's Agent*. (London: The Right Book Club, 1940), 118.

²⁹⁴ Pierre Broué and Émile Témime. *The Revolution and the Civil War in Spain*. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1972), 370.

²⁹⁵ Yurii Ribalkin. "Tainii Put 'Zolotogo Karavana'." In *Argumenty i Fakty*. (Vol. 14, 1996), 7.

Russian archives, as yet unavailable to foreign inspection, may hold the key to solving this enigma.

7.3 SOVIET "SWINDLING" ?

The Soviets, however, had assured the Republican Government that, "since the war was being fought on behalf of all progressive humanity, they were allowing generous discounts on all items."²⁹⁶ Was this so? What can now be ascertained is that the Soviet Union charged the initial price for the equipment in rubles, then converted the currency into US dollars, and then converted once again into pesetas. The Republican government, however, never saw the initial ruble price for the stock, nor did it know what conversion rate was being used in the calculations. It has been recently found that the Soviet Union manipulated the exchange rates so that "the Republic ended up paying a great deal more than they should have done and [...] the Russians were left with a hidden but very substantial, profit."²⁹⁷ Moreover, once the gold was safely in Moscow, "[the Russians] saw that while they were about it, they could present bills for the arms in such a way as to cheat the Republicans out of millions of dollars, which, as the documents in the Russian State Military Archives (RGVA) now show, they did."²⁹⁸ Thus, a situation emerged whereby the Republican government had no idea how they were being charged for Soviet military equipment, and the Soviet Union was consequently able to reap considerable profits from its trade with the Spanish Republic.

Nevertheless, a debate surrounding the question of whether or not the Soviet Union cheated the Republican government out of a large portion of its gold reserves still exists.²⁹⁹ Viñas believes that the Soviet Union did not "dupe" the Republic out of its gold and claims that the prices charged the Republic matched the value of the equipment that was sent during the war. However, Viñas also realized that he did not yet have access to

²⁹⁶ Gerald Howson. *Arms for Spain: The Untold Story of the Spanish Civil War*. (New York: St Martins Press, 1998), 146.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 147.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 129.

²⁹⁹ For a summary of the debate, see: Gerald Howson. *Arms for Spain: The Untold Story of the Spanish Civil War*. (New York: St Martins Press, 1998), 123-129.

all of the relevant documents to finally put this matter to rest. Ribalkin, who did use Russian archives, similarly claims that the Soviets did not “cheat” the Republic out of its gold and that the value of the merchandise corresponded with the charges.

Howson, on the other hand, believes that the Soviet government did overcharge the Republican government for the arms that were shipped: “when comparing the sets of totals in the 1936 and 1939 lists, I found that out of every \$ 20 million charged to the Republicans, about \$ 6 million represented an overcharge.”³⁰⁰ Howson claims, furthermore, that the Soviet Union cheated the Republicans over the arms sales in order to “acquire the gold reserves as cheaply as possible.”³⁰¹ According to Herbert L. Matthews, “the Russians charged for everything and asked such high prices that a number of the charges were still in dispute when the war ended.”³⁰² During the war, Negrin reputedly found out that the Soviet Union was not only melting gold coins into bars,³⁰³ but that the Soviet Union was also charging the Republican government for this unsolicited “service”. As Bolloten mentions, there is no record of Negrin protesting or informing other Republican officials of his discovery nor is there any evidence that the Soviet Union ever reimbursed the Republican government for these charges or that a credit was issued in order to replace the value of the coins that were melted.³⁰⁴ Similarly, another question also remains unresolved: the issue of whether the Soviet Union cheated the Spanish government over the rest of the gold reserves sent to the BCEN from Moscow. No conclusions, however, can be made until the BCEN opens its archives.

Howson has also discovered that the Soviet Union charged the Spanish Republican government not only for the actual cargo that was shipped, but also for all of

³⁰⁰ Gerald Howson. *Arms for Spain: The Untold Story of the Spanish Civil War*. (New York: St Martins Press, 1998), 150.

³⁰¹ Ibid., 151.

³⁰² Herbert L. Matthews. *The Yoke and the Arrows. A Report on Spain*. (New York: George Braziller Inc., 1957), 98.

³⁰³ Thus decreasing the worth of the gold. Likewise, Bolloten also mentions that “the Spanish treasury was never credited with the numismatic value of the rare and antique coins. Yet extraordinary care was taken in listing coins that were false, defective or contained less than the legal amount of gold.” Burnett Bolloten. *The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution*. (London & Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 151.

³⁰⁴ Burnett Bolloten. *The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution*. (London & Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 152.

the activities related to the shipment of the military equipment. Since the Soviet Union would not be able to “swindle” the Republican government for the cost of training Spanish militiamen or for the transport of Soviet military advisors because the Republic would have most certainly uncovered what was occurring in Russian accounting departments *vis-à-vis* their gold reserves, the Soviet Union charged fair prices for the services offered by their military personnel in Spain. The Soviets then compensated for this “honesty” by charging the Republic for every imaginable detail of their “involvement”.³⁰⁵

7.4 SOVIET CREDIT

The last ship to dock at Odessa with the Spanish gold arrived on 6 November, 1936 and “the official receipt [for the amount of gold that was sent] was issued on 5 February 1937, bearing the signatures of Marcelino Pascua, Spanish Ambassador, G. F. Grinko, People’s Commissar of Finance, and N. N. Krestinsky, Deputy People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs.”³⁰⁶ The Soviet military equipment that had been sent to Spain before and during the reception and the counting of the gold reserves had been supplied on credit. According to Viñas, Negrin still believed that he could receive further credit from the Soviet Union after the reserves had been sent to Moscow.

However, once the gold had been enumerated, the Soviet Union refused to supply any further war *matériel* to the Republicans on credit. This may have caused an initial misunderstanding between both governments for “the Republic needed foreign exchange

³⁰⁵ It can now be ascertained that the Spanish Republic was charged for the cost of training the Republican army, for the transportation of the gold to the USSR and for the travel and pay of all Soviet advisors sent to Spain. They were also charged a sum for the living expenses of the families of the Soviet advisors during their stay in Spain. The Republic was also charged for a month’s paid holiday for these advisors and their families when they would be reunited in Russia, the salary of all Soviet personnel involved in Operation “X”, the salary of all who worked in the training camps, in both Spain and the Soviet Union, including the salaries of the cooks and the maids, and those of the railway and dock workers, oil and petrol that was consumed, not only on the ships sent to Spain, but on the military bases where the Republican army was being trained.

Gerald Howson. *Arms for Spain: The Untold Story of the Spanish Civil War*. (New York: St Martins Press, 1998), 151.

³⁰⁶ Burnett Bolloten. *The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution*. (London & Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 147.

to finance its imports, and it was logical that it should attempt to hold on to the greatest possible amount of gold as a line of reserve.”³⁰⁷ Considering the increased volume of the Republic’s indebtedness, Soviet financial spokesmen had repeatedly made clear their cautious attitude in supplying further military equipment on credit. Largo Caballero and Negrin decided to resort to the deposit of a part of the gold: “the first order involved liquidating part of the debt accumulated for military supplies and on 16 February 1937, the Soviets were informed of the Republican desire to sell gold for \$51,160,168.”³⁰⁸ By the end of 1936, the Republican government had sold 80% of the total amount of gold sent to Moscow.³⁰⁹

According to Haslam, the Spanish Republicans sensed a gradual decline in Soviet concerns over their fate, especially as of July 1937.³¹⁰ On 25 July 1937, Pascua met with Stalin, who approved Republican requests for more aid: “the decision to increase aid to Spain came at a time when the Soviet leadership also finally decided to supply armaments and munitions to the Chinese, a decision reached at the end of the month July [1937].”³¹¹ Appendix 3 exemplifies the kind of document which has now been made available to historians. It is a memorandum to Voroshilov concerning the purchase of DC-3s:

“the covert operation to supply Mao, known as Z or Zet, was at least as important to Stalin as Soviet aid to the Republicans and at times, the two were actually linked. The Soviets hoped to buy three Dc-3s with Spanish money and then before delivering them to Spain, use them to evacuate men from China. Their friends would be none the wiser about the reasons for the delay of the shipment.”³¹²

When Negrin sent Pascua to Moscow, in October 1937, in order to request a loan of \$150,000,000, the Soviets countered the offer with a considerably smaller amount, which was unacceptable to the Republican government. It is also interesting to note that

³⁰⁷ Angel Viñas. “Gold, the Soviet Union and the Spanish Civil War”. *European Studies Review*. (Vol. 9, Num. 1. January 1979: 105-128), 116.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 117.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 118.

³¹⁰ Jonathan Haslam. *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security in Europe, 1933-1939*. (London: The Macmillan Company Ltd., 1984), 143.

³¹¹ Ibid., 143.

Pascua, in one of his reports during his stay in Moscow, stated on 29 October: "I am continuing to press for credits. However, you have no idea how difficult it is to get a quick decision. They [the Soviets] are extremely calculating, procrastinating, and at times not absolutely dependable."³¹³ This is in marked contrast to the "speedy" Soviet response to Largo Caballero's letter, asking the Soviet Union to accept the deposit of the Spanish gold reserves.³¹⁴

Pascua's loan request falls, coincidentally, at the same time that the Soviet Union began to decrease its military aid to Spain. However, "early in 1938, Negrin adopted a new tactic: requests for loans were made simultaneously with new sales of gold and payments to the USSR were delayed."³¹⁵ Pascua was faced with increased Soviet requests to pay off the existing debts incurred by the Republican government but Negrin refused. It would seem, according to Viñas, that the USSR began to revise the financial position that it had taken, up to that point, *vis-à-vis* the Republican government. Finally, in February 1938, the Soviet Union agreed to supply the Republic with a loan of \$ 70,000,000, "with a gold guarantee at 50% and 35 metric tons of coins from the gold deposit were to be taken to serve as a pledge."³¹⁶ Such a credit would serve to counter the existing Republican debt. Negrin, apparently, was not satisfied with the credit amount offered by the Soviets but was in no position to refuse the offer. According to Viñas, by May 1938, the Republican government had again incurred a debt of \$ 7,500,000 and this amount was rapidly increasing.

³¹² Ronald Radosh, Mary R. Habeck and Grigory Sevostianov, eds. *Spain Betrayed. The Soviet Union and the Spanish Civil War*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 424.

³¹³ Burnett Bolloten. *The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution*. (London & Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 153.

³¹⁴ One should remember that the Soviet government had sent its reply, stating that it consented to the deposit of the Spanish gold reserves in the USSR just two days after this first letter.

³¹⁵ Angel Viñas. "Gold, the Soviet Union and the Spanish Civil War". In *European Studies Review*. (Vol. 9, Num. 1. January 1979. pp. 105-128), 118.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 119.

In June, Negrin decided to send Pascua to Moscow in order to negotiate the terms for a second loan. Viñas states that:

“from late April 1938, Negrin was able to ensure a relatively sustained flow of Soviet supplies, despite both Münich and danger spots faced by the USSR in Asia which also caused grave concern to the Kremlin. [...] On 13 July 1938, Pascua met with the Soviet leaders who accepted the proposal of Negrin for a total loan of \$ 60,000,000.”³¹⁷

Although it appears that the promised Soviet credit was granted to the Republic, very little is known about this Soviet credit. Nevertheless, the Spanish Republic was advised, on 8 August 1938, that, from the original gold sent to the USSR, only 1.5 tons remained. Negrin sent Ignacio De Cisneros³¹⁸ to negotiate another Soviet loan in December of that same year.

De Cisneros mentions, in his memoirs, how surprised he was to see Stalin agree to, what he considered to be, an astronomical credit amount. Only after Stalin had agreed to supply the requested equipment did he and his advisors bring up the question of payment. De Cisneros had apparently not been informed by his government that the Republican gold reserves had been depleted by this time. He was shocked when Stalin agreed to a loan in order to cover the cost of the *matériel*, in the amount of \$103 million dollars: “lists in the RGVA show, however, that the material sent fell short of the material promised: 168 aircraft instead of 250, 40 tanks instead of 250, 539 pieces of artillery instead of 650, and again, many of them old and foreign, and 2,770 machine-guns instead of 4,000.”³¹⁹ The subsequent arms shipments to Spain arrived too late to be of any use to the Republican government. Catalonia was, by this time, already overrun by Nationalist troops. Thus, “gradually, during 1938, Stalin withdrew his hand from Spain. All he got out of the venture was a pile of Spanish gold.”³²⁰

³¹⁷ Ibid., 121-122.

³¹⁸ Republican Air Force commander.

³¹⁹ Gerald Howson. *Arms for Spain: The Untold Story of the Spanish Civil War*. (New York: St Martins Press, 1998), 243.

CONCLUSION

History has shown that Stalin was one of, if not the, cruelest dictator of the twentieth century. When one examines the history of the Spanish Civil War, however, the Soviet Union's "help" and "support" for Republican Spain is repeatedly noted, and we have been taught that, as opposed to Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, the Soviet Union "helped" its ideological "brothers" in Spain since, thanks to Soviet military support, the Republican government was offered a fighting chance, so to speak, against German and Italian-backed Franco. However, with the emergence of new information, one can no longer claim that Stalin supported the Republican cause out of solidarity. In fact, research has shown that "the Soviets faked the prices of arms [...] in order to obtain the gold reserves in Spain."³²¹

Apart from sending its gold reserves to the USSR, the Republican government "paid" for Soviet military involvement in the war through the direct interference of Soviet agents in the domestic affairs of Spain. This is, ironically, one of the main reasons for the failure of the Republic to defeat the Nationalist forces. A "civil war" within a civil war emerged in Republican Spain and Soviet-style Purges were significant enough to contribute to the loss of morale among both the civilian population and military cadres. In fact, it is fairly certain that the Soviet Union used "the possibility of aid as virtual blackmail. [NKVD agents] would eventually succeed in implementing almost every important decision that Moscow dictated, while pushing out of power those Spaniards who tried to oppose them."³²² Furthermore, Soviet military aid, when it finally did arrive to Spain, was sent with the purpose of staving off a Republican defeat. Stalin's motives in Spain should be examined *vis-à-vis* his desire to pursue collective security. Once he had effectively ceased to believe that he could ever rally the Entente against Germany, he began making overtures for what would become the Nazi-Soviet Pact. Not only was, as

³²⁰ Walter G. Krivitsky. *I Was Stalin's Agent*. (London: The Right Book Club, 1940), 134.

³²¹ Ronald Radosh, Mary R. Habeck and Grigory Sevostianov, eds. *Spain Betrayed. The Soviet Union and the Spanish Civil War*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), XVII.

³²² *Ibid.*, XIX.

Cantelupo³²³ states, the Axis formed in Spain, but the events in Spain also served to awaken Stalin to the “reality” of the balance of power in Europe. Thus, one could similarly claim that the root of the Russo-German Pact of 1939 can be traced to the situation that came into being in Spain.

Recent evidence suggests that Stalin was not interested in the victory of the Spanish Republic. This is not to say that he did not want the Republic to “squash” the Spanish Nationalists: a Popular Front victory would have been viewed positively in the Kremlin. However, Stalin would not attempt to “help” the Republic win the Civil War. In fact, the use of the word Soviet “aid” in Spain takes on an ironic meaning in light of the new information concerning the actions taken by the Soviet Union within Spain during the war. In fact, although the Spanish Civil War could not have lasted for as long as it did without Soviet military intervention, it is also true that the Republic could not defeat Franco’s forces with Soviet military equipment. In actual fact, it served Stalin’s interest to prolong the war in Spain. Hence Orlov’s statement: “I was shocked by the Machiavellian calculations of the Politburo, which in its desire to gain time, wanted the Spanish people to bleed as long as possible.”³²⁴

Also shocking is the well-known fact that so many, if not most, of the Soviet participants in the Spanish Civil War disappeared in the Purges.³²⁵ This included: “air force personnel, cadres in mechanized units, military intelligence, [...] political commissars and Spanish Civil War veterans.”³²⁶ Of special interest here is the murder of the Soviet officials who were most intimately involved in the “Spanish gold question”. Although the reasons advanced for the Purges are too numerous and ambivalent to discuss here, the connection with the Spanish Civil War has long been known but has also evaded a documented explanation. One cannot help but conclude that perhaps these

³²³ Italian Ambassador to Nationalist Spain. See: Raymond Carr. *The Spanish Tragedy: The Civil War in Perspective*. (London: Phoenix Press, 1986), 229.

³²⁴ Alexander Orlov. *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes*. (London: Jarrolds, 1954), 244.

³²⁵ Krivitsky, one of the only agents who lived long enough to recount his activities in Western Europe, stated that he “happen[s] to be the sole survivor abroad of the groups of Soviet officials who had a direct hand in organizing Soviet intervention in Spain.”

Walter G. Krivitsky. *I Was Stalin's Agent*. (London: The Right Book Club, 1940), 93.

³²⁶ Chris Ward. *Stalin's Russia*. (New York: Routledge, 1993), 120.

individuals “knew” too much. The one surviving account about the circumstances in which the Spanish gold reserves were acquired and deposited in Soviet banks comes from a Soviet agent who defected. This “escape”, no doubt, accounts for the very existence of Orlov’s published memoirs.

Until recently, historians have tended to repeat what earlier scholars wrote about Soviet intervention in Spain. Due to the collapse of the USSR and the availability of some Republican documents in Russian archives, historians can now gain a clearer picture about Soviet involvement in the Spanish Civil War. However, this new information is quite limited in character since Russian archives on the subject have still to be made available to Western scholars; nor have many post-Soviet historians made use of such material, the exception being Yurii Ribalkin, whose studies were published in 1996 and 2000. Howson similarly points out that “it is now for the Russian authorities to make a start [...] by opening all their Spanish Civil War records to the public, for the sake of establishing the facts at least and, from then, the historical truth.”³²⁷ Nevertheless, new findings are slowly emerging. Historians now have, for instance, a clearer understanding of Soviet military support to the Spanish Republic. We now have accurate information concerning the frequency of Soviet shipments and information on the cargo on board the ships. We also have a better idea of Soviet intervention in Spanish domestic affairs.

What, then, can definitely be surmised about Soviet intervention in the Spanish Civil War? To begin with, Stalin’s silence at the outset of the war was not, as has been argued on numerous occasions, due to his lack of “preparedness” or to his “indecisiveness”. His silence can be explained by a cautious attitude to entanglements abroad, given that he was responsible both for “Soviet” foreign policy as such, and the tactics of the Comintern. Secondly, Stalin decided to join the Non-Intervention Committee because he lost nothing by signing the Agreement. This argument is central to understanding Stalin’s decision to send military equipment to Spain, in direct violation of the Non-Intervention Agreement. Although Stalin had been pursuing a policy of

³²⁷ Gerald Howson. *Arms for Spain: The Untold Story of the Spanish Civil War*. (New York: St Martins Press, 1998), 152.

collective security and attempting to gain both France and Great Britain as allies in order to stave off German aggression, one could argue that Stalin no longer believed that such an alliance with the Entente was possible after September 1936. However, one must also view Soviet intervention in Spain in relation to the West's attitude towards Non-Intervention and, conversely, towards Nazi Germany. Although one can argue that it did not serve Soviet interests to intervene in Spain, the fact remains that there were certain motives.

One may lie in Stalin's desire for a *rapprochement* with Germany well before 1939. In fact, coupled with his eventual abandonment of collective security, it can be argued that Stalin, in 1936-1937, may have decided to leave open the possibility for seeking an alliance with Hitler even though Germany, since 1933, had no interest in such an alliance. Once an agreement with Hitler had almost been concluded, Stalin may have decided to drastically decrease the military equipment being sent to Spain. It is known that Soviet shipments did continue to be sent to Republican Spain until the end of the war, but this "aid" proved to never be adequate enough for the Republic's needs in order to secure a decisive victory over Franco. Thomas asserts that "it might also be pointed out that those who backed their side with credit, Germany and Italy, had that much more incentive to go on with their support of all kinds in order to recover payment eventually, while those who sold assistance for cash, Russia, could at least be content that they had received money for value. Some would also add that those who insisted on payment may have doubted the likely success of their side, whilst those on extended credit were confident of it."³²⁸

Curiously, Soviet military aid began to decrease at the same time that the Spanish gold reserves had almost been exhausted. Although, unsurprisingly, I found no documents on the Russian side to confirm this, it certainly can be assumed that the possibility of acquiring the Spanish gold reserves played a very important role in Stalin's decision to intervene.³²⁹ Granted, military advisors had been sent to Spain, as had a

³²⁸ Hugh Thomas. *The Spanish Civil War*. (New York: A Touchstone Book, 1986), 977.

³²⁹ The Soviet government had already demonstrated its "need" for hard currency by selling grain abroad during the Ukrainian famine.

limited amount of military supplies, before the gold had been sent to the USSR. One can assume that talks between both governments had taken place well before October 15, 1936. Likewise, an increase in Soviet shipments is observed once the gold reserves are safely delivered to the USSR. This serves to explain why Stalin began to send more military aid only once the gold had been received.

Yet, it is still not clear, from the records so far published, to what degree Stalin was prompted to intervene more heavily as the possibility of receiving the Spanish gold reserves arose. It is also still unclear whether the Republican government made the decision to send the gold reserves to the USSR independently, or whether this was done in response to Soviet "coaxing". The exact date for Stalin's decision to intervene in Spain still remains to be established. Based on the departure dates of the first Soviet shipment to Spain, one can conclude that the decision was made sometime in the first half of September 1936.

Scholars writing on Soviet foreign policy in the 1930s are faced with two principal obstacles: the inherent lack of available sources and, hence, the problem of reconstructing the process and circumstances in which various options were either adopted by Stalin or dropped. It is very possible that Stalin not only repeatedly changed his mind on which policies to adopt, but also was bound by the existence of the Comintern and the Politburo. The Purges finally put an end to this unique situation. The defeat of the Republican side in Spain coincided with the arrest and execution of Stalin's potential foes, as he believed, within the USSR, which then enabled the now all-powerful dictator to conclude an alliance with Hitler. The betrayal of Spain anticipated Stalin's betrayal of his own people. They were to pay a horrendous price in the Second World War for victory over an enemy who could have been stopped in Spain.

APPENDIX 1³³⁰

To the Politburo CC VKP (b)
Comrade Stalin

4 February 1938

The Spanish command is asking us to help acquire several two-motor airplanes and one hundred aircraft motors for Spain, since firms are refusing to sell these goods to Spanish representatives. Our people in the USA have told us about an opportunity to buy seven DC-3 airplanes from the Douglas firm and one hundred motors from the Wright firm, which could be delivered to the Soviet Union and after that sent to Spain.

The timing and conditions for delivery of the aircraft are the following:

1. DC-3 airplanes: price 122,981 Am. Dollars each, delivery in three months;
2. Motors: price 7,819 Am. Dollars each, delivery in seven months, beginning in April this year.

The cost of the entire order, including transportation of the equipment to the Union:

1,725,000 Am. Dollars, which we will request from the Spaniards beforehand. Thus, financing of the order on our part is not required.

I enclose a draft directive.

K. Voroshilov

³³⁰ Ronald Radosh, Mary R. Habeck and Grigory Sevostianov, eds. *Spain Betrayed. The Soviet Union and the Spanish Civil War*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), Document 66.

APPENDIX 2³³¹

Madrid, le 15 Octobre 1936

Monsieur L'Ambassadeur,

J'ai pris la décision, en ma qualité de Président du Conseil, de Vous prier de déposer à Votre Gouvernement qu'il veuille bien consentir qu'une quantité d'or d'environ cinq cents tonnes soit mis en dépôt au Commissariat du Peuple des Finances de l'URSS. Le montant précis doit être établi lors de la livraison de l'or à cet Commissariat.

Je vous prie, Monsieur L'Ambassadeur, d'agréer l'assurance de ma haute considération.

Monsieur M. Rosenberg,

Ambassadeur de l'Union des Républiques Soviétiques Socialistes.

Francisco Largo Caballero

Madrid, le 17 Octobre 1936

Monsieur L'Ambassadeur,

En me référant à ma lettre en date du 15 Octobre, je Vous prie de vouloir bien communiquer à Votre Gouvernement que nous proposons d'effectuer – sur le compte de l'or que Votre Gouvernement a consenti de faire admettre en dépôt en URSS – des paiements de certaines commandes à l'étranger ainsi que d'effectuer par l'entremise du Commissariat du Peuple des Finances de L'URSS et de correspondents de la Banque d'État de L'URSS des transferts en devises.

Je Vous prie, Monsieur L'Ambassadeur, d'agréer l'assurance de ma haute considération.

Monsieur M. Rosenberg,

Ambassadeur de l'Union des Républiques Soviétiques Socialistes.

Francisco Largo Caballero

³³¹ Marcelino Pascua. "Oro Español en Moscú". In *Cuadernos para el Dialogo*. Vol. 81-82, Junio y Julio, 11-18. (Madrid: Artes Graficas Iberoamericanas, 1970), 17.

APPENDIX 3³³²

10 April 1938

To: The People's Commissar of Defense of the USSR
Marshal of the Soviet Union
Com. Voroshilov

From: Dep. Chief of Intelligence Directorate of the RKKA
Senior Major of State Security
Com. Gendin

Without deciding beforehand the question of purchasing all ten aircraft, I gave Thomson a directive to conclude a deal to acquire three DC-3s (ready for formal acceptance in April of this year) in order to use them in the "Zet" Operation, where there is now a severe lack of transport aircraft given the increased transportation of people from the Soviet Union to "Zet" and the evacuation from there also of a significant number of our people. With the purchase of three DC-3s for the "Zet" Operation we will be able to present a demand to the "friends" about the immediate repayment of the cost of these aircraft to us.

³³² Ronald Radosh, Mary R. Habeck and Grigory Sevostianov, eds., *Spain Betrayed. The Soviet Union and the Spanish Civil War*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), Document 69.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

New studies on Soviet intervention in Spain are slowly emerging, largely due to the opening of previously sealed Russian archives. Gerald Howson's extensive work on Soviet arms shipments to the Spanish Republic is invaluable since he appears to be one of the few Western scholars who had access to Russian archives. Michael Alpert's recent analysis of the Spanish Civil War in an international context, is likewise, very useful. Yale University Press has published an interesting collection of documents found in Russian archives, which have been translated into English. This collection, entitled *Spain Betrayed: The Soviet Union and the Spanish Civil War*, serves to put certain historical inconsistencies to rest. It deals specifically with Soviet intervention in Spanish domestic affairs between 1936-1939 and looks closely at the subversive activities of the PCE, the NKVD and the GPU, especially towards other Left-wing organizations in Spain.

The work of Yurii Ribalkin also deserves mention. The author is, primarily, a military historian. He has written extensively on Soviet military intervention in Spain and has access to Russian archival material which, in most cases, still remains sealed to non-Russians. The works of Hugh Thomas, Raymond Carr, Gabriel Jackson, Paul Preston and Stanley Payne deserve to be singled out as the most complete and comprehensive works on the Spanish Civil War although they are somewhat redundant. The recent *Spain at War: The Spanish Civil War in Context, 1931-1939* by George Esenwein and Adrian Shubert offers a solid, overall survey of the Spanish Civil War. Burnett Bolloten's *The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution* is an ambitious and monumental work with an anti-Communist perspective.

David T. Cattell is still considered to be the "authority" on Soviet intervention in the Spanish Civil War, even though it is generally agreed that his work is the product of the Cold War. Not much has been written about the intervention of the USSR in Spain before or since Cattell's *Soviet Diplomacy and the Spanish Civil War*, however, other works, by E.H. Carr, Denis Smyth and Enrique Moradiellos are insightful, the last two being especially noteworthy owing to their use of archival diplomatic material made

available in various European countries. Jonathan Haslam's *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security* is a standard work which is widely cited by western scholars but it does not make use of archives in the USSR. Angel Viñas is considered to be the authority on the Spanish gold and its subsequent shipment to the Soviet Union. Broué and Témime's monumental work: *The Revolution and the Civil War in Spain* is, likewise, very useful in understanding the underlying issues of Soviet involvement in the Spanish Civil war.

For generalized works on foreign intervention in Spain, Dante Puzzo and William Watters are suggested readings even though they have become somewhat outdated. John F. Coverdale is considered to be the authority on Italian intervention in Spain and both Robert H. Whealey and Glenn T. Harper are suggested for German intervention in Spain. Furthermore, Douglas Little's *Malevolent Neutrality* and Glyn Stone's article, "Britain, Non-Intervention and the Spanish Civil War" are quite useful.

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