



*Royal Model United Nations*  
*2026*

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*Royal Model United Nations 2026*

## LETTER FROM THE SECRETARIAT

Dearest participants of ROYMUN'26,

It is the greatest honor to welcome you to the first edition of Royal Model United Nations 2026 and our JCC committee.

While shaping the ideas from the very beginning, our main goal was to ensure an extensive experience with both academic and organisational perfection.

In this prestigious committee, you will be raising impeccable ideas, debating about the current and the upcoming process, building new structures and turning the non-integrated actions and solutions to a masterpiece. Your board members will be guiding you to reach perfection in any situation.

While preparing, you will be discovering every single step about your topic and you may even find yourself in the middle of this sequence of events. It will be clear that you embrace your role in the committee.

Keep in mind that every speech you deliver, every motion you give, every question that you ask will gain a new perspective for everyone. The key point is to remain active and work confidentially while shaping the decision-making process with your colleagues.

As the Secretary-General, I am impatiently waiting to see your intelligent work and looking forward to sharing this royal experience with you.

Sincerely,  
Imge Belgin  
Secretary-General of ROYMUN'26



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## LETTER FROM THE HEAD OF CRISIS

Dear Delegates,

It is an honour to welcome you to the ROYMUN'26 Conference. I hope this conference will be one of the best experiences you have ever had, and I assure you that you will leave with knowledge of everything related to MUN, crisis committees, and good memories. I am your Head of Crisis, Ömer Alp Şiringöz, from Boğaziçi University Department of Chemistry. The topic of the Spanish Civil War focuses on the sequence of wars, diplomacy, propaganda, and political interventions that changed the course of the history of Europe and shaped today. Battles do not only require military victories to win, but also require engaging in negotiations and making tactical plans. I think this committee will be a great approach to you, delegates, to demonstrate what you have to plan to come out as victorious in conflicts, considering the time of the crisis was just one of the beginnings of more actions from extremist ideologies in Europe.

Before concluding my letter, I would like to add my sincere thanks to every member of the Executive and Organizational Team, and my Chairboard Members Berat Koyuncu, İpek Şen, Onur Çiğdem and Dağhan Aktaş for their tireless efforts in preparing the framework for this committee to become a reality.

I, as the Head of Crisis, together with my Chairboard Members and Crisis Team Members, will work hard to make sure that ROYMUN'26 JCC will be an experience to remember with pillars of knowledge and joy. Who is going to be the victorious side, the Republicans or the Nationalists? Together, the fate of Spain will be decided.

If you have any questions, do not hesitate to reach out to me via:  
[srngzalp17@gmail.com](mailto:srngzalp17@gmail.com)

Sincerely,  
Ömer Alp Şiringöz  
Head of Crisis



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### **3. Introduction to the Committee**

This Joint Crisis Committee aims to revive the political dynamics of the Spanish Civil War that happened in 1936-1939 through two cabinets, including one Republican cabinet with members representing the constitutional state of Spain and one Nationalist cabinet with members representing the rising Nationalist movement led by Francisco Franco, which in real life won the War that resulted in the formation of the Francoist Spanish State. However, the committee structure allows delegates to transcend historical limitations and exercise strategic creativity. Therefore, delegates are expected to pursue innovative policies to advance their side's interests while reshaping history.

For the crisis first-timers, be not afraid. A crisis committee is a dynamic, simulation-based committee in which a constant flow of actions and consequences unfolds through directives and updates, which will be explained in detail during the first session of the conference, with a crisis workshop. In a Joint Crisis Committee, two separate cabinets (rooms) work against each other. One cabinet's action affects the other cabinet, which means the crisis team will have less control over the flow of events, and you, delegates, will lead the way.

The Spanish Civil War consisted of multiple fronts of battles, assassinations, and atrocities alongside an ideological warfare in the heart of a time when global powers reached a point of heated rivalry, which started a world war immediately after the events of this committee.

What is expected from you, delegates, is to reshape the course of history, keeping in mind what conditions shaped these events, and take actions that will not conflict with these conditions. The proxy political environment of the war, ideological extremism, and the personal agendas of all delegates will be as important as the military actions that will lead to glory at the end of the committee.



#### 4. Glossary

**Anarcho-syndicalism:**

A left-wing ideology that advocates for the complete abolition of the state and capitalism, replacing them with decentralized democratic labor unions.

**Anticlericalism:**

The opposition and intense hostility toward any political power, wealth, and cultural influence of the Catholic Church, which played an active role in revolutions in the past, most importantly the French Revolution. Violent acts against the clergy have been seen in the past anticlerical revolutions.

**Carlists:**

The ultra-conservative, traditionalist monarchist political movement in Spain aimed at establishing an alternative branch of the Bourbon dynasty, the last Spanish monarchy on the throne.

**Caudillo:**

A Spanish term for a political-military dictator or leader. Following his appointment as supreme commander, Generalissimo Francisco Franco assumed this title, styling himself as “El Caudillo” to establish an absolute, personalized tag of leadership akin to Germany's “Führer” or Italy's “Duce”.

**CEDA:**

Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas (Spanish Confederation of Autonomous Rights) was a pre-war coalition right-wing political party in the Second Spanish Republic.

**Communist International:**

Also known as Comintern or the Third International, was an international organization founded by Vladimir Lenin and the Russian Communist Party with the primary goal of coordinating and guiding communist parties worldwide to overthrow global capitalism and establish a worldwide Soviet Union.



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### **Falange Española/Falangists:**

Falange Española Tradicionalista y de las Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalista (Traditionalist Spanish Phalanx of the Councils of the National Syndicalist Offensive), abbreviated FET y de las JONS, and commonly known as the Falange, was a radical, ultra-nationalist fascist political party founded in 1933. Emphasizing authoritarian rule, militarism, national-syndicalism, and anti-communism, its paramilitary blue-shirt militias provided massive civilian manpower to the Nationalist war effort.

### **Nationalists:**

The right-wing coalition that launched the July 1936 military coup against the Second Spanish Republic. Unified under Generalissimo Francisco Franco, this side brought conservative military officers, the Catholic Church, wealthy landowners, fascists, and monarchists together under a nationalist and anti-communist banner.

### **Popular Front:**

An electoral alliance of left-wing and centrist political parties, including the Republican Left, Socialists, and Communists, was formed in early 1936. They narrowly won the February 1936 democratic elections, a victory that triggered a chain of events among Spain's right-wing institutions, which catalyzed the military coup.

### **POUM:**

Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (Workers' Party of Marxist Unification) was a revolutionary, anti-Stalinist communist party based primarily in Catalonia. They advocated fighting the war against fascism and carrying out a workers' socialist revolution.

### **Republicans:**

The left-wing coalition defending the democratically elected constitutional government of the Second Spanish Republic. Also known as the Loyalists, this wide alliance included centrist liberals, moderate socialists, communists, regional nationalists, and also anarchists.



## **5. Historical Background**

### **5.1. History of Spain**

Like all European countries, Spain, Iberian Peninsula to be more precise and historically accurate, has a rich history, dating prehistoric times. Of course, we are not expecting you to know the entire history of the peninsula. Thus, we will be writing a section about the events that happened starting from the Castilian era until the twentieth century.

It can be argued that the modern Spanish state was born from a dynastic marriage in 1469 between Isabella I of Castile and Ferdinand II of Aragon, uniting the most powerful crowns on the Iberian Peninsula. They were also known as the Catholic Monarchs (Los Reyes Católicos).

The Muslim rule in the Iberian Peninsula started in 711. Christian powers around the area were not happy with this development and starting from the Battle of Covadonga of 722, they tried to reconquer the area. This series of military campaigns against the Muslim rule by the northern Iberian Christian powers is known as Reconquista. By 1248, Granada was the last Muslim-ruled state in the south. In the year 1492, Granada fell after an eight month long siege by the army of the Catholic Monarchs, providing an end to the Reconquista and establishing a dominant Christian rule to the peninsula. The non-Christians were taxed heavily and the Jewish community in the area were forcibly expelled and forced to convert to Catholicism.

1492 was a turning point for the history of Europe for another reason as well. Funded by the Castilian throne, Christopher Columbus landed in the Americas and with that, the era of colonialism started. Castile claimed exclusive administrative and economic monopoly over the newly encountered territories through the systematic approach of the mercantilist pursuit of mineral wealth and the spiritual mandate of Catholic evangelization. Through the conquistadors, Spain dismantled the Aztec and Inca Empires, rapidly replacing them with an elaborate imperial bureaucracy composed of vice-royalties (New Spain and Peru), regional audiencias (courts), and urban municipal councils.



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The economic core of this global empire relied on systematic extraction. The discovery of silver at Potosí (in modern Bolivia) and Zacatecas (in Mexico) transformed Spain into a global economic superpower. Through the *encomienda* (the system which promised the laborers benefits but ended up being a system of slavery) and *mita* (the system of forced labor) systems, the Spanish crown coerced vast indigenous labor forces into hazardous silver extraction. This wealth was funneled back to Europe via the heavily fortified Spanish treasure fleet system (*flotas*), which docked exclusively at the Castilian port of Seville under the strict oversight of the *Casa de Contratación* (House of Trade).

Through strategic dynastic marriages, the Spanish crown passed to the Habsburg dynasty under Charles I, who also ruled as Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. Spain became the center of a global empire stretching across the Americas, the Low Countries, parts of Italy, and into the Philippines, triggering the *Siglo de Oro* (Spanish Golden Age), an era of unparalleled artistic, literary, cultural, and military might.

However, this massive influx of imported silver proved to be an economic curse. The crown used American silver to fund endless religious and territorial wars across Europe rather than investing in domestic manufacturing, infrastructure, or agriculture. This created a parasitic economic model where Spain imported manufactured goods from its European rivals while exporting raw silver, triggering hyperinflation (the Price Revolution) and a series of royal bankruptcies that left the domestic core fundamentally underdeveloped. The domestic economy decayed under oppressive taxes imposed on Castilian peasants, and consecutive childless or mentally incapacitated rulers culminated in the reign of Charles II. His death in 1700 without an heir ended the Spanish Habsburg line and triggered the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–1714) which pitted the French Bourbon dynasty against the Habsburgs. The war concluded with the Treaty of Utrecht, which recognized the Bourbon candidate, Philip V, as King of Spain, but stripped the country of its European territories in Italy and the Netherlands.

The Bourbon rule, inspired by the French style of bureaucracy, chose to bring centralization to Spain and with the *Decretos de Nueva Planta*, Philip V dismantled traditional autonomous laws (*fueros*) and institutions of the Crown of Aragon, which had backed the Habsburgs, imposing a unified, centralized administration governed directly from Madrid.

During the mid-eighteenth century, the Bourbons implemented the Bourbon Reforms, a series of measures designed to squeeze greater revenue out of the American colonies. They streamlined colonial administration, tightened fiscal collection, and liberalized imperial trade.



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While these reforms initially revived state revenues, they deeply alienated the native-born Spanish elite in the Americas (criollos). Peninsula-born officials (peninsulares) were favored over the criollos when it came to high administrative power and this started to form some cracks in the strong foundation the Bourbon administration tried to establish.

Another thing Spain experienced during this era was the Enlightened Despotism. Charles III implemented sweeping administrative, fiscal, and economic reforms such as expelling the powerful Jesuit order to asserting regal authority over the Church, stimulating trade by liberalizing commerce with the American colonies and funding scientific expeditions, and infrastructure. However, despite these efforts, the structural foundations of Spain remained conservative with the majority of the agricultural land being in the hands of the Church and a small noble elite. The regional populations were angered by the centralization, feeling that their voices would not be heard in a centralized administration.

The beginning of the nineteenth century wasn't what Spain expected. In 1808, Napoleon Bonaparte invaded Spain, deposed the Bourbon monarchy, and placed his brother Joseph on the throne. The Spanish people rejected the French rule, triggering the Peninsular War (Guerra de la Independencia), a guerilla conflict between the French and the Iberian. Central authority was fractured and in the absence of the king, a provisional government assembled in the city of Cádiz and drafted the Constitution of 1812. This revolutionary document established a constitutional monarchy, proclaimed universal male suffrage, and restricted the absolute powers of the crown and Church.

Another thing that was triggered by the fracturing of the central authority was the American colonies' launching of wars of independence. By 1825, Spain had lost its entire continental empire, retaining only Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines. Spain's economy relied heavily on the colonies as mentioned before and the loss of the colonies also shattered the empire's reputation.

The Bourbon King Ferdinand VII was restored to the throne in 1814 and he immediately revoked the Constitution of 1812. He re-established absolute monarchy and revived the Inquisition. This, however, met with the backlash of liberal officers with their cycle of military coups.

Ferdinand VII died in 1833, causing a succession crisis that turned into the Carlist Wars between the Carlists, ultra-traditionalists, religious fundamentalists, and regional regionalists who supported Ferdinand's brother, Don Carlos, and the Liberals (Isabellines), who supported Ferdinand's young daughter, Isabella II, and advocated for a centralized, constitutional monarchy and the secularization of state institutions.



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The military conflict was won by the Liberals and Isabella II ascended to the throne. However, her reign was nothing peaceful. The political instability continued, the economy was stagnant and frequent military interventions by powerful military generals tainted her reign. She was deposed by the Glorious Revolution of 1868.

The search for stability led to the Six Democratic Years (Sexenio Democrático) but the years were nothing short of chaos which included a progressive constitutional monarchy, the election of an Italian prince, Amadeo I who was quickly abdicated and all this experimentation led to the proclamation of the First Spanish Republic.

The First Spanish Republic was a failed attempt at progress that aimed to introduce a federal structure, separate church and state, and grant wide-ranging civil liberties. However, the Republic had inherited the previous problems of Spain such as the Ten Years' War going on in Cuba since 1868, the remnants of the Carlist Wars and the Third Carlist War, the declaration of individual cities and provinces as independent in southern and eastern Spain. The foundation of the First Republic was not strong enough to maintain the public order and the administration under these conditions and it went through four different presidents in less than a year.

The democratic state was collapsing into chaos and the military intervened. In January 1874, General Manuel Pavía led a coup, entering the parliament building with troops and dissolving the republican government, paving the way for the Bourbon Restoration of 1874. Alfonso XII, son of Isabella, ascended to the throne. This time, they had a different approach to prevent the cycle of chaos caused by civil unrest and military interventions. The conservative politician Antonio Cánovas del Castillo designed a highly artificial constitutional framework known as the Restoration System. The core system of this restoration system was called *turismo* and the details of it are in the next section.



## **5.2. Events Leading To The War**

Spain's entry to the twentieth century wasn't the prettiest, the systemic underdevelopment and the institutional corruption was too apparent. The political landscape was dominated by *turnismo* which is a system where the Liberal and Conservative parties rotated power through rigged elections managed by local political bosses known as *caciques*, providing a false sense of stability. However, this so-called stability crumbled with the loss of the Spanish-American War of 1898 and the subsequent loss of Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines, causing the split of the Spanish society into two. One side was traditionalist, they supported the landed aristocracy (*latifundistas*), the powerful Catholic Church hierarchy, and the military command. The other side was the working class, demanding more rights and comfort for the workers.

Social geography also played a part in this split. In the south of the Iberian peninsula, the landless peasants (*braceros*) in Andalusia and Extremadura suffered from seasonal starvation and were oppressed under the *latifundia* agrarian system. Barcelona and the Basque Country was more reliant on industrialization during this time compared to Andalusia and Extremadura and in these regions, the industrial and rural workers organized into radical labor unions, most notably the socialist *Unión General de Trabajo* (UGT) and the massive anarcho-syndicalist *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* (CNT). Another thing that was happening in this region was the rise of regional nationalism and the challenging of the centralist, Castilian-dominated state fiercely defended by conservative traditionalists. Of course, the tension sometimes broke, such as "Tragic Week" (*Semana Trágica*) of 1909 in Barcelona, where working-class conscripts rioted against military mobilization for colonial campaigns in Morocco, causing the deaths of 104 to 150 civilians and 8 military and the execution of 5 civilians.

The decay of the society was visible and in order to stabilise it, General Miguel Primo de Rivera established a paternalistic military dictatorship in 1923 with the explicit blessing of King Alfonso XIII. This move was to protect the monarchy and suppress escalating labor unrest. However, his administration failed to enact meaningful structural reforms and mismanaged public debts, resulting in severe inflation and a loss of military backing, causing the already faltering faith in the monarchy to falter even more. Primo de Rivera resigned in January 1930 and was replaced by General Dámaso Berenguer, who was in turn himself replaced by Admiral Juan Bautista Aznar-Cabañas. However, these changes didn't change the way the public thought about the monarchy and King Alfonso XIII of Spain called for municipal elections for 12 April 1931. Left-wing entities such as the Socialists and Liberal



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Republicans won almost all the provincial capitals and, following the resignation of the government of Aznar-Cabañas, Alfonso XIII fled into exile.

Following the elections, the Second Spanish Republic was proclaimed on 14 April 1931. The new government was led by Prime Minister Manuel Azaña and he was ambitious, he had plans for reforms to stabilise the country while dismantling the traditional hierarchies of Spain.

His work offended the traditionalists in two ways, religious and military. In terms of religion, the Constitution of 1931 ended state financial subsidies to the clergy, dissolved the influential Jesuit order and banned religious congregations from teaching in schools. This, of course, was seen as blasphemy and caused the devoted Catholics to view the Republic as an anti-religious regime.

In terms of the military, Azaña offered officers early retirement on full pay to reduce the army's size and revoked the promotions granted by the previous dictatorship. The military's pride was wounded by this and in August 1932, General José Sanjurjo attempted a premature military coup (the Sanjurjada) in Seville. His goal was not to overthrow the Republic but to overthrow the Azaña government. The coup failed due to poor organization and the fact that Azaña got information about the coup even before it started. Sanjurjo was able to hold power for about 24 hours but due to the government response, he accepted defeat.

It can be argued that the biggest failure of the Azaña government came in the handling of the agrarian question. The Agrarian Reform Law of 1932 was an ambitious one, it aimed to seize underutilized latifundia lands and settle peasant families on them. However, the plan perhaps was too ambitious. By late 1933, only a tiny fraction of the intended families were able to settle into these lands. The failure was caused by the complex legal frameworks, bureaucratic delays and insufficient state funding. The rural peasantry felt deeply betrayed by this delay and this led to the Casas Viejas incident in January 1933, which was a civil uprising staged by a group of anarchists and resulted in the death of 26 people, 23 civilians and 3 military personnel, caused by the government assault guards. The Casas Viejas was a huge scandal for the Azaña government, causing the left-wing coalition to shatter and the rise of the right-wing opposition.

The right-wing united under the Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas (CEDA) and in the elections of November 1933, won. President Niceto Alcalá-Zamora formed a new, conservative government and Spain entered the period known as the Black Years (Biennio Negro). The new administration systematically dismantled the reforms of the previous two years. Agrarian redistribution was halted, landowners were permitted to slash rural wages, religious schools were covertly allowed to reopen, and a broad amnesty was granted to the military officers involved in Sanjurjo's 1932 coup. Social tension reached a boiling point as rural starvation returned, and urban workers watched their hard-won wage increases vanish.



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In October 1934, three ministers from CEDA were admitted into the cabinet and for the Spanish left, this was unacceptable. Fearing that Spain was about to slide into a fascist dictatorship similar to Adolf Hitler's Germany or Benito Mussolini's Italy, the left called for a revolutionary general strike across the country. While the strike collapsed quickly in Madrid and Barcelona due to poor planning and swift military intervention, it erupted into a full-scale armed workers' insurrection in the northern mining region of Asturias. The Asturian miners, utilizing dynamite and captured arms, seized control of towns, established revolutionary committees, and fought with disciplined determination.

The government responded violently. War Minister Diego Hidalgo bypassed regular channels and deployed the elite Spanish Army of Africa which was composed of the brutal Spanish Foreign Legion and Moroccan colonial troops (Regulares), commanded via remote coordination by General Francisco Franco. The suppression of the Asturias revolt was ruthless. Over 1,000 miners were killed in the fighting or summarily executed, and tens of thousands of workers, including prominent left-wing politicians, were imprisoned.

In January 1936, the fragmented left united under the Popular Front (Frente Popular), creating a strong opposition to the right. In the election of 16 February 1936, parliamentary victory went to the Popular Front and Azaña was back in power. However, this time, the working class didn't wait for the government to fix the decaying structure. Instead, they took matters into their own hands. Peasants immediately began massive, coordinated seizures of latifundia land across Extremadura and Andalusia. Workers launched a relentless wave of general strikes that brought the economy to a standstill. In the cities, radicalized youths from the Socialist and Fascist movements engaged in daily street battles, assassinations, and bombings. The Falange, extreme nationalist political group founded in 1933 by José Antonio Primo de Rivera, though performing poorly in the elections, saw its membership explode as wealthy conservatives abandoned parliamentary parties and funded fascist paramilitaries to fight the left in the streets. Behind the scenes, senior military figures began systematically plotting a military coup. Generals such as Emilio Mola (the chief strategist, known as "The Director"), Gonzalo Queipo de Llano, and José Sanjurjo coordinated a vast network of conspirators within the garrison towns. General Francisco Franco, who had been semi-exiled by the government to a command in the Canary Islands, initially hesitated but remained deeply involved in the communications.



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The system was already breaking down and it needed a spark to fully break down. That spark came in July 1936. On July 12, left-wing assault guard lieutenant José Castillo was gunned down by rightist falangists in Madrid. The next morning, in direct retaliation, a group of state police officers and leftist militants abducted José Calvo Sotelo, the preeminent leader of the monarchist, counter-revolutionary opposition in the Cortes. Calvo Sotelo was shot in the back of the head and his body dumped at a city cemetery. This assassination was proof to the Spanish middle class and the conservative establishment that the Republican government couldn't and wouldn't maintain the basic public order.

On July 17, 1936, the military garrison in Spanish Morocco rose in rebellion ahead of schedule. Over the next forty-eight hours, garrisons across mainland Spain followed suit. The conspirators anticipated a swift, surgical military coup that would march on Madrid, depose the Popular Front government, and restore authoritarian order. However, they drastically underestimated the resilience of the Spanish working class. In Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, and across the industrialized north, the government initially hesitated to act, but radical trade unions (CNT and UGT) demanded arms, broke into arsenals, and formed improvised workers' militias. These militias, alongside the Civil Guard and Assault Guards, confronted the rebelling military units in the streets. The coup failed and that was the beginning of the civil war.



## **6. The Spanish Civil War**

### **6.1. The Military Coup**

It's the nature of time that the old ways must give in. It's the nature of time that the new ways come in sin. But the new ways are not always accepted by the followers of the old ways, and although reforms are generally good for a society, if the society has different thoughts and beliefs regarding these reforms it can easily split into two. Many would say that a society split into two is very similar to dry wood; with the right spark, it can easily ignite.

The spark for this particular event was the assassination of José Calvo Sotelo, a prominent right-wing monarchist leader. He was murdered in retaliation for the killing of a leftist officer, Lieutenant José Castillo. Sotelo's killing by the Republican Assault Guards fueled the polarization even more and marked a point of no return. It convinced wavering officers who had been hesitant that the government could no longer guarantee safety or order; and accelerated the chaotic process. There were talks and plans for the coup to take place at the end of the month, but on 17th of July, only four days after the assassination, nationalist Spanish military made their move to take control of Spain.

Military involvement in politics was not something unusual in the history of the country. Public declarations called pronunciamiento were very popular. These declarations typically included mid-to-high ranking military officials to announce their distaste and opposition to the government as an attempt to trigger wider support. Therefore, pronunciamientos would not fully match the coup d'état definition as they were often bloodless.

General Emilio Mola, known by the codename "The Director", on the other hand, was not planning to pursue a bloodless solution. He famously stated: "It is necessary to spread terror... eliminating without scruples or hesitation all those who do not think as we do." Mola's plan was explicitly designed to be "extremely violent" to quickly crush any resistance from the organized working class. His plan was to organize a simultaneous uprising of garrisons across Spain. After the initial chaos, the goal was to converge on the capital and overthrow the government in the name of establishing a military directory ruled by himself.



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General Francisco Franco, who would be the second man in charge in this new order was convinced to join the cause after the 13th of July assassination. Franco was the officer in command of the Army of Africa, Spain's most elite and battle-hardened fighting force, stationed in Spanish Morocco.

The coup was originally intended to begin across Spain on July 18. However, in Melilla (Spanish Morocco), the conspirators were discovered by government authorities on the morning of July 17. Forced to act prematurely, the officers seized the city. By that evening, the uprising had spread to Ceuta and Tetuán, resulting in the Republic's loss of control of the Spanish soil on the African continent. General Franco, residing in the Canary Islands during the events, was forced to rent a British Aircraft the next morning to get to Morocco and take command of his forces.

The Army of Africa's swift alignment with the insurgents was critical for the coup's success, yet they faced problems. According to General Emilio Mola's plan, the Spanish Navy was to side with the coup and was tasked with transporting the elite Army of Africa from Morocco across the Strait of Gibraltar and to the Spanish Mainland. However, while the majority of the naval officer corps supported the coup, the junior ranks and enlisted men remained largely loyal to the Republic. A key figure in this event was Benjamín Balboa, a loyalist radio telegrapher at the naval base in Madrid.

When the Ministry of Marine sent out orders to the fleet to suppress the rebellion, and the rebel officers attempted to ignore them or join the coup, Balboa intercepted their communications. He contacted the radio operators on individual ships directly, informing them that their officers were part of a fascist conspiracy and urging the crews to seize control of the vessels.

Between July 18 and 20, 1936, violent mutinies erupted on the most significant ships of the Spanish Navy. On three important battleships and several destroyers, the sailors formed "Ship Committees." These sailors arrested and mostly executed their officers to prevent the ships from assisting the Army of Africa.



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As a result, the Republic retained control over the majority of the fleet, which led to the loyalist sailors establishing a naval blockade of the Strait of Gibraltar, effectively blocking the Army of Africa from getting involved with the coup in Madrid and other important cities. As a result, the coup's leaders were forced to ask for international assistance from other parties such as Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy.

During the naval blockade and the chaos in the Mediterranean, the coup was spreading to the Mainland. On July 18, the rebellion spread to the Iberian Peninsula. However, this was not a simple "soldiers versus politicians" situation. Most of the working class sympathized with the Republic and its reforms, which promised a better life for poor citizens.

Upon the outbreak of the coup, civilian worker's organizations decided on a general strike to paralyze rebel logistics in cities where the coup was contested. Unions such as the socialist UGT (Unión General de Trabajadores) and anarcho-syndicalist CNT (Confederación Nacional del Trabajo) demanded weapons. While the Republican government initially hesitated to arm the populace to avoid a social revolution, the unions took independent action. Civilians and workers formed their own militia forces, sometimes even besieging rebel soldiers in their barracks.

Even though these groups prevented the immediate victory of the fascist coup, due to their different views and revolutionary goals, the fragmentation of power created significant tensions between the unions and the Republican government's desire to restore state order and a conventional military hierarchy.

In addition, the fascist coup was not united in the means of "all armed forces against the government". At the time, there were three main groups of armed forces in Spain which had different goals and hesitations.

**The Army:** Roughly 70% of officers joined the rebels, but many rank-and-file soldiers remained in Republican territory.

**The Civil Guard:** This paramilitary police force was split almost down the middle, with their loyalty often determined by their geographical location at the time of the coup.

**The Navy and Air Force:** These branches remained predominantly loyal to the Republic, which initially prevented the rebels from transporting their elite troops from Morocco to the mainland.

In the South, Republicans faced a hard time against the rebels; since it was the story of the working class with no military education versus a formidable military soon to be aided by the battle-hardened Army of Africa.



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Seville was the most significant victory for the military rebels in the south. General Gonzalo Queipo de Llano led the uprising in the city. Despite having only a small number of troops initially, he used a combination of tactical bluffing and extreme violence to seize key administrative centers. Using radio to spread terror and misinformation and famously delivering aggressive broadcasts that promised brutal retribution to those who resisted. Republican workers built small pockets of resistance with barricades in urban regions such as Triana and La Macarena but these too were overcome by the military after several days of urban combat and use of artillery; providing the Nationalists with a vital port and a logistical base to receive the Army of Africa via airlift.

However, in the other parts of Andalusia region such as the Málaga and Almería, in the east; the coup failed. The coup found almost no footing in Almería. The local authorities and security forces remained loyal to the Republican government. The city became an important maritime link for the Republic and a destination for refugees fleeing the Nationalist advance from the west.

The military garrison in Málaga attempted to rise, but was promptly suppressed by the combined efforts of the loyal-to-Republic Civil Guard and workers' militias. For the first several months of the war, Málaga remained a Republican stronghold, though it was geographically isolated and subject to frequent naval bombardment.

In the North, the rebel armies were ruled by General Emilio Mola, who was the primary architect of the entire conspiracy. His success in the North, was the ideological and military anchor for the Nationalists.

Navarre was the primary launchpad for the coup. It was also one of the cities that had strong connections to Spain's monarchical history and had a traditionalist, ultra-Catholic monarchist movement called the Carlists. Mola secured the support of the Carlists, having the coup take on the character of a religious crusade. Their well-trained militias (Requetés) provided Mola with thousands of motivated fighters.

The Old Castile region which had the provinces like Burgos, Valladolid, Salamanca, and Ávila was largely conservative and agrarian, immediately joined the rebels and provided fertile ground for the rebellion. In Burgos, the rebels established the National Defense Council, which became the first provisional government of the Nationalist zone.



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The Basque region, on the other hand, was more chaotic and harder to control; with its provinces split based on local political allegiances. Álava, with its Catholic population, fell quickly to the rebels, aligning with the conservatives. Biscay and Gipuzkoa however remained loyal to the Republic. Even though their population too was Catholic and conservative, the leaders of the Basque Nationalist Party chose to support the Republic in exchange for their guaranteed autonomy.

Asturias region, which was the heart of coal mines, had a Republican worker majority and an organized labor movement. Being the leader of the revolution of 1934, leftist militias were able to hold the rebels off for an extended time. The region's capital Oviedo was only seized by the rebels after miners' militias had left to help support the defense of Madrid. Even after the fall of their capital, the other cities of the Asturias region stayed loyal to the Republic, besieging the Nationalist forces in Oviedo with their militia consisting of miners for months.

The main event that turned what was planned to be a quick coup d'état into a bloody civil war was the rebellion's failure of Spain's two largest and most important cities; Madrid and Barcelona. In both cities, the combination of government-loyal security forces and the massive mobilization of armed trade unions proved overwhelming for the rebels.

Unlike the swift and successful takeovers carried out by rebel forces in cities such as Seville, the uprising in Madrid was marked by indecision and poor coordination. The rebels failed to secure key strategic locations, including telecommunications centers and government buildings, during the crucial early hours of the coup. Instead, General Fanjul and approximately 2,000 soldiers and Falangist volunteers retreated to the Montaña Barracks, where they hoped to hold out until reinforcements from General Mola's forces arrived from the north. As Fanjul wasted time waiting for reinforcements from the North, the government oversaw the distribution of thousands of rifles to members of the major labor unions.

The confrontation came on July 20, when the Montaña Barracks were surrounded by a large force of armed workers, supported by loyalist Assault Guards and artillery units. Following a fierce bombardment and a chaotic internal struggle among the defenders, the barracks were stormed by Republican forces. General Fanjul was captured, and the rebel uprising in Madrid was effectively crushed, ensuring that the capital remained under Republican control for the onset of the civil war.



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Barcelona also proved to be one of the greatest setbacks for the rebellion. General Manuel Goded, one of the leading figures in the military uprising, flew from Mallorca to Barcelona on July 19 to take over the command of the rebellion in Catalonia. However, upon his arrival, he found the city already swallowed up by intense urban fighting and far more resistant than the coup had anticipated.

A major factor in the failure of the uprising was the rapid mobilization of the CNT-FAI, the powerful anarcho-syndicalist movement that found widespread support among Barcelona's working class. Anticipating a military revolt, anarchist militants had spent days preparing for conflict. They seized weapons from ships in the harbor and government depots, while workers throughout the city erected barricades and organized armed resistance against the rebel forces. Equally important was the loyalty of the security forces to the Republican government and the Catalan Generalitat. The Civil Guard, under the command of General José Aranguren, along with the Assault Guards refused to join the rebellion. Their professional military support provided crucial assistance to the workers' militias, enabling them to contain rebel troops within their barracks and strategic positions across the city.

By the evening of July 19, the situation had become hopeless for the rebelling military. General Goded found himself surrounded at the Captaincy General headquarters, with Republican and workers' forces firmly in control of the city. Recognizing the complete failure of the uprising and seeking to prevent further bloodshed, he surrendered to the Republican authorities. He was subsequently compelled to broadcast a radio message urging his supporters to lay down their arms, marking the definitive collapse of the rebellion in Barcelona.

With all their wins and losses, it was clear that the coup succeeded in the agricultural north and west and parts of Andalusia, but failed in the urban, industrial, and administrative centers. Therefore, Spain was physically and politically split in two, ensuring that neither side could achieve an immediate victory; and since the coup failed to take the capital, the pronunciamiento transformed into a protracted, total war that would last three years.



## **6.2. Spanish Revolution of 1936**

As the civil war progressed and as the world viewed Spain through the lens of a binary struggle between democracy and fascism, a profound social transformation was occurring within the Republican zone. While the unions worked with the Civil Guard to defeat a military coup, they had other intentions as well. A revolution that sought to dismantle the state and capitalism entirely.

By July 20, it was clear that the military coup would not succeed, and the Spanish government had effectively collapsed in the Republican zone. The police were discredited or had joined the rebels, the army was in open revolt, and the formal government held legal authority but possessed no actual power. Power had shifted to the "street" specifically to the revolutionary committees.

Unlike the Russian Revolution, which was led by a vanguard party (the Bolsheviks), the Spanish Revolution was bottom-up and dominated by the CNT-FAI. The CNT, as mentioned before, was a massive anarcho-syndicalist union with over a million members. The FAI (Iberian Anarchist Federation), on the other hand, acted as the ideological core; ensuring the union remained committed to anarchist principles.

Their goal was Libertarian Communism: a society without a state, where the means of production were owned collectively and managed through federations of workers' councils. For these revolutionaries, the war against Franco and the social revolution were inseparable.

In Catalonia and Aragon, the CNT-FAI and the POUM (Anti-Stalinist Marxists) established the Central Anti-Fascist Militias Committee. This body, rather than the government, controlled public order, food distribution, and the front-line militias.



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Catalonia, and specifically Barcelona, became the epicenter of the revolution. George Orwell, arriving in December 1936, famously described a city where "the working class was in the saddle". Over 3,000 enterprises were collectivized. In Barcelona, the CNT took over the railways, trams, buses, and electricity. Within days, the city's transport system was running more efficiently than under private ownership, with unified fares and improved worker safety. Decisions were made by assemblies of workers. In many cases, specialized "technical committees" were formed to handle engineering and accounting, but they remained answerable to the rank-and-file.

Since the government lacked a military industry, the unions converted car factories and textile mills into munitions plants, demonstrating a high degree of spontaneous organization that can only come in a moment of crisis.

While the cities saw industrial shifts, the countryside experienced the most radical transformations. As militia columns pushed into Aragon, they encouraged peasants to collectivize the land. In many villages, fences were torn down, and land was worked in common. In some radical instances, money was abolished and replaced with "coupons" or "ration cards" based on need. With these drastic changes, the Council of Aragon was formed. This was an autonomous revolutionary government established by the anarchists to coordinate the hundreds of rural collectives. It operated largely independently of the central Republican government.

Having lived under semi-feudal conditions for generations, many peasants joined collectives enthusiastically. Those who disagreed with this new anarcho-syndicalist commune system were often pressured by the presence of armed anarchist militias. However, as a result of these new implementations, production increased in the first year due to the rationalization of land use.

Not all reforms were about production and agriculture. The newly found spirit of revolution extended beyond the workplace, seeking to re-define what a human is and reform human relations: the unions changed gender roles as well as the education and justice systems.

The most important step towards a feminist society was *Mujeres Libres* (Free Women) organization. This anarchist organization had almost 30,000 members who fought for the double liberation of women. Both liberation from class exploitation and from patriarchy. They set up childcare centers, literacy programs, and fought for reproductive rights.



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The revolution looked back to find futuristic standards and decided to implement the ideas of Francisco Ferrer; a Spanish radical freethinker, anarchist, and educationist who was executed for an attempt of assassination of the Spanish king 25 years ago. Modern schools based on his pedagogy theories were established, focusing on rationalist, non-religious education and the elimination of memorization-based education.

The justice reforms, however, were not as successful as their other social counterparts. Justice quickly turned into gang justice and mob violence. Traditional courts were to be replaced by “Popular Tribunals” but similar to Spanish inquisition which occurred five hundred years prior, a “Red Terror” started with extrajudicial killings of churchmen, landowners, and perceived fascists in the early, chaotic months of the war.

Therefore, it was clear that the revolution faced two major enemies: the Nationalists and, increasingly, the Republican government itself. The Republic itself was defended from the military by the workers, but government officials were not happy with the changes that came with the revolution. The official Republican government remained in Madrid and the Generalitat in Barcelona, but since they lost their power with the loss of army and police, they were upset with the fact that the actual power resided in local revolutionary committees. They wanted to present a respectable image of the Spanish Republic to France and Britain to secure aid. To gain legitimacy and access to resources, the CNT made the controversial decision to join the government in November 1936, attempting to turn the revolution into an official state project.

However, since the Western democracies maintained a policy of Non-Intervention, the Republic turned to the Soviet Union for arms. But the Soviet aid didn't come cheap, as it gave massive political influence to the Spanish Communist Party (PCE).

The PCE, backed by the Soviet Union, argued that the revolution was a distraction. Their slogan was "Win the War First." However, the Anarchists and the POUM argued that the revolution was the best way to win the war by giving the workers something to fight for.



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The tension between the revolutionary committees and the centralizing state reached a breaking point in Barcelona in May 1937, known as the May Days. The order gave in to chaos over a dispute regarding who would control the Barcelona Telephone Exchange, a strategic hub held by the CNT. The tension erupted into a "civil war within the civil war" as street fighting broke out between the Anarchists/POUM and the government-controlled assault guards sided with PCE-backed forces.

The government prevailed. The revolutionary forces were defeated. This marked the effective end of the revolution. Largo Caballero (the former prime minister who was seen as too sympathetic to the unions) was replaced as Prime Minister by Juan Negrín, who favored a centralized, Soviet-aligned war effort. The POUM was declared illegal, its leaders were "disappeared" or executed by Soviet agents, and the CNT was stripped of its administrative powers. In August 1937, the Republican army forcibly dissolved the Council of Aragon, the anarchist stronghold of agricultural collectives. With the internal revolution suppressed, the Republic focused on building the People's Republican Army (EPR), a conventional military structure that replaced the spontaneous militias.

While the Republic was mired in internal conflict, the Nationalists were focused on political unification and systematic military expansion. Having similar ideological ideas with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, they received tremendous international support which was consistent, and higher quality military aid that was often superior in organization to the aid received by the Republicans.

Germany provided the Condor Legion, a specialized unit of the Luftwaffe. This was not merely about manpower but about technical superiority, providing modern aircraft and the "88" anti-aircraft guns. They also provided tanks and instructors through the logistical companies HISMA and ROWAK.

Italy, being weaker in industry, contributed with heavy manpower. Benito Mussolini provided the largest contingent of foreign troops, the Corpo Truppe Volontarie (CTV) which at its peak numbered around 50,000 to 70,000 soldiers. Mussolini's forces also provided significant naval support in the Mediterranean to intercept Republican supplies.

The Nationalist were also good at politics, securing good relations with Portugal. This provided a safe rear for the rebel army. They were also influential enough that they were able to get 8000-10000 volunteers from the Portuguese people and secure German and Italian supplies to enter Spain via Portuguese ports, bypassing the Non-Intervention Committee's naval patrols.



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While the Republican government in Valencia (and later Barcelona) was struggling to contain the revolutionary fervor of the CNT and the growing influence of the PCE, General Franco used this time to consolidate his power and professionalize his army.

Recognizing the stalemate at Madrid, the rebelling military shifted its focus to the "War in the North" conquering the Basque country and the industrial heartlands of Asturias. The loss of the North was a catastrophic blow to the Republican economy. By early 1938, the Nationalist forces launched the Aragon Offensive. They broke through the weakened Republican lines which were still recovering from the loss of revolutionary morale and reached the Mediterranean at Vinaròs in April 1938. This was a massive strategic victory because it gave the Nationalists control over Spain's heavy industry, coal mines, and iron ore, which were essential for a long-term war effort. These territory changes split the Republic in two, isolating Catalonia from Madrid and Valencia.



### **6.3. The Siege of Madrid and the Nationalist Offensives**

The March on Madrid occurred between August and November 1936, and it was the primary Nationalist military campaign during the opening phase of the Spanish Civil War. Its objective was the swift capture of the capital to end the conflict quickly following the partial failure of the July coup d'etat.

For the success of this campaign, Nationalist thought that it was crucial they used the battle-hardened Army of Africa. With international help from the Nazi Germany, the rebellious military performed a critical logistical feat.

The Army of Africa was stuck in Morocco by a Republican naval blockade. To bypass this, Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy provided several types of military transport aircraft. This was the first major military airlift in history, transporting roughly 13,000 troops across the Strait of Gibraltar to Seville. This intervention was decisive; without it, the Nationalist rebellion likely would have collapsed.

Under the command of General Juan Yagüe, Nationalist columns began a rapid northward push from Seville in early August 1936. A column is a tactical formation where personnel, vehicles, or vessels are arranged one behind the other. This phase is often called the "War of Columns." The Army of Africa used highly mobile, motorized columns. They bypassed major resistance centers, surrounding them and forcing Republican militias who were often poorly trained and lacked communication to retreat.

The turning point of this operation was the capture of the city of Badajoz. The city had the utmost importance for the rebel forces since it linked the Nationalist northern and southern zones. During the Massacre of Badajoz, hundreds of Republican supporters were executed on the public trade areas, serving as a psychological terror tactic to discourage resistance in towns along the road to Madrid.



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By September, the Nationalists had reached Maqueda, nearly 80 kilometers from Madrid. General Franco decided to divert his forces south to liberate the Alcazar of Toledo before marching directly on the capital. This was a decision that showed Franco's personality traits and showed that he prioritized the continued support from his military. Alcazar had a Nationalist garrison besieged by Republican forces for months, which was the main reason for this diversion. While this move cost Franco approximately two weeks, the successful liberation provided him with a massive symbolic and propaganda victory. It also solidified his leadership, leading to his appointment as Generalísimo and Head of State by his fellow generals on October 1st.

Led by General Jose Enrique Varela, the assault began on November 8, focusing on the Casa de Campo park and the University City area. The Nationalists expected the city to fall within days. However, Francisco Franco's political gains were not without a cost. The delay caused by the Toledo diversion allowed the Republican government to fortify Madrid: the city was prepared for a siege.

Just as the Nationalists reached the outskirts, the first units of the International Brigades arrived. The International Brigades were military units composed of foreign volunteers who traveled to Spain to fight in defense of the Spanish Republic. The formation of the International Brigades was primarily organized by the Comintern under the direction of the Soviet Union. While the Soviet Union provided the logistical framework and leadership, the recruitment was a global effort. The volunteers were organized into several numbered brigades, often grouped by language or nationality to facilitate communication.

Simultaneously, Soviet T-26 tanks and Polikarpov fighter planes arrived, countering the German and Italian equipment that had previously given the Nationalists total air and armor superiority.

The defense became a matter of ideological survival. Under the slogan "No Pasaran" (They shall not pass), Republican militias and civilians engaged in brutal house-to-house fighting, particularly in the University City.



### **Battle of Jarama**

By late November, the Nationalist offensive on Madrid stalled. General Francisco Franco realized that a direct frontal assault was too costly, leading him to attempt several encirclement maneuvers in The Battles of Jarama and Guadalajara fought in February and March 1937 respectively. These two battles were designed to cut off the capital from the Republican stronghold in Valencia.

In the Battle of Jarama, the Nationalist objective was to cross the Jarama River and seize the Madrid-Valencia highway, which served as the Republic's primary supply artery. The offensive was led by General Organa and General Varela, utilizing the elite Army of Africa. The Republicans, commanded by General Pozas and General Miaja, relied on a mix of the newly formed Popular Army and the International Brigades.

The combat was characterized by brutal, close-quarters infantry engagements and the first major tank duels between Soviet T-26s and German Panzer Is. Despite initial Nationalist gains and the crossing of the river, the Republican lines eventually held mostly with the help of heavy involvement of the XV International Brigade. This included the British Battalion, the Abraham Lincoln Battalion, and the Balkan Dimitrov Battalion. These units suffered staggering casualties holding the heights known as Suicide Hill against Nationalist machine-gun fire and artillery.

The battle ended in a costly stalemate. The Nationalists gained a small land across the Jarama River, but they failed in their main objective which was to cut the Valencia road. Both sides suffered high casualties, leading to a period of trench warfare in the sector that lasted until the end of the war.



## **Battle of Guadalajara**

Following the stalemate at Jarama, the Nationalists attempted a pincer movement from the northeast. This offensive was notable for being almost entirely led by the Italian Corpo Truppe Volontarie as front line soldiers.

Benito Mussolini sought a prestigious victory to showcase Fascist military might. General Mario Roatta commanded roughly 35,000 Italian troops, supported by 80 tanks and significant motorized transport, aiming for a lightning war tactic that is similar to blitzkrieg to reach Madrid.

The offensive initially broke through Republican lines, but with most historically important wars, the weather turned into a decisive factor. Heavy rain and sleet turned the terrain into mud, bogging down Italian motorized columns and grounding the Nationalist air force. In contrast, the Republican air force, utilizing Soviet-made "Chato" and "Rata" fighters based on paved runways near Madrid, achieved air superiority.

Guadalajara saw a symbolic clash between the Italian CTV and the Garibaldi Battalion of the XII International Brigade, which was composed of Italian anti-fascist exiles. This underscored the ideological nature of the intervention.

Soviet T-26 tanks, which outclassed the Italian L3/35 light tankettes, commanded a Republican counter-offensive. The Italian forces, overextended and demoralized by the weather and lack of air support, collapsed into a disorganized retreat.

Guadalajara was a major Republican victory. It ended the immediate threat of the encirclement of Madrid and served as a significant blow to Mussolini's international prestige. For the Republicans, it provided a much-needed boost to morale and proved that their nascent Popular Army could defeat a professional European force. However, this victory might have harmed the Republican success in the long run; since it reinforced the Non-Intervention stance of Britain and France. Western democracies wrongly concluded that the Republic might be able to win without external democratic aid, while Hitler and Mussolini became more determined to ensure a Nationalist victory through increased support.

The Battles of Jarama and Guadalajara were also the first examples of direct combat between the interveners, where foreign intervention moved beyond equipment and advisors to large-scale troop commitments.



## **The War in the North**

While the siege of Madrid was stalemated, Francisco Franco, knowing the Republican Forces would not let Madrid fall easily, turned his attention to the north. Nationalist initiated offensives to capture Basque Country, Cantabria and Asturias. The isolated northern territory was crucial for the Nationalist due to its industry, coal mines. This was a doom scenario for the Republican Forces because this section was completely cut off from the main Republican territories, causing massive logistical and internal problems.

The Northern Campaign began in early 1937 with a groundbreaking Nationalist offensive to Basque Country. This specific offensive became known worldwide for introducing the devastating effects of terror bombing against civilian populus. On April 26, 1937 the German and Italian legions bombed the defenseless Basque town of Guernica. The attack caused the demolition of town and massive civilian casualties, demonstrating fascist air supremacy and showed the World an early glance of the upcoming World World 2's air combat.

The Republicans constructed the ‘Iron Belt’ a ginormous defensive fortification around the city of Bilbao. Nationalist artillery and air support from the Germans and Italians were a lot to take. Republicans also suffered from within, a Republican engineer handed the blueprints of the Iron Ring to the Nationalist, allowing Franco's troops to exploit Iron Ring's weak spots. On June 11, 1937 the Nationalist launched a highly concentrated assault on a specific blind spot. With pinpoint bombardment from Nationalist artillery and German Condor Legion's air bombardment which shattered the line. Nationalist infantry poured through the “impenetrable” defensive line and the defence collapsed in the matter of days.

On June 19 , 1937, Bilbao fell, leaving the crucial industry to Nationalist's hands. This battle was catastrophic for the Republic due to them losing a big portion of their manufacturing capabilities for weapons and ammunition.

After the capture of the Basque Country, the Nationalist forces pushed westward into Cantabriai and Asturias. Desperate Republican miners and “militias” fought a losing battle against the Nationalists. By late October 1937, Asturias collapsed, effectively ending the war in the north. This operation provided Franco with massive economic and industrial output, while also eliminating a major front.



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### **Drive to the Sea**

By late 1937, following the fall of the Republican-held North, the war was about to come to a conclusion. With the northern side of the country secured, Francisco Franco had the opportunity to move his veteran Army of the North toward the eastern front, resulting in a series of battles.

The first of these battles was the Battle of Teruel, which was initiated by the Republican government as a preemptive move against a planned Nationalist offensive on Madrid. It is one of the most brutal battles of the war due to the extreme winter conditions, with temperatures dropping to 20°C.

The combat began on December 15, when Republican forces under the command of General Vicente Rojo launched a surprise offensive on the city of Teruel which held significant importance to the Nationalists. The attack caught the fascist forces off guard, and after weeks of intense fighting, Republican troops successfully encircled the city.

On January 8, the Nationalist garrison surrendered, giving the Republic control of Teruel. The victory carried enormous symbolic value, as it marked the first time during the war that the Republicans had captured a provincial capital from Nationalist forces, providing a highly needed boost to morale and propaganda efforts.

Despite this setback, General Franco was not ready to let go of the city; he viewed the loss of Teruel as unacceptable. With his decision, Nationalists used a significant portion of his reserved soldiers to launch a counter-offensive. The harsh winter conditions added another layer of difficulty to a well fortified city, but supported by superior artillery and air power, Nationalist forces established a sustained assault to regain control of Teruel.

After weeks of brutal urban combat fought in freezing temperatures, the Nationalists finally recaptured Teruel on February 22.

With the fall of Teruel, the first offensive victory of the Republicans was canceled. Being seen as a success story, the battles over Teruel proved as an overall disastrous outcome for the Republican war effort. In addition to losing the city, the Republican army suffered heavy casualties and expended large quantities of equipment that could not easily be replaced.



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Capitalizing on the Republican exhaustion following Teruel, Franco launched the Aragon Offensive in March. This campaign was characterized by "blitzkrieg" tactics, utilizing concentrated motorized columns and overwhelming air superiority.

Exhausted by the losses suffered during the battle and weakened by declining morale, Republican forces were unable to provide an effective defense against the Nationalist advance which resulted with the collapse of the Republican front in Aragon.

Franco's armies pushed eastward at remarkable speed, often advancing dozens of miles per day and capturing key towns such as Belchite, Caspe, and Lerida. Nationalist success was further enhanced by the overwhelming support provided by the Italian Aviazione Legionaria and the German Condor Legion. Faced with a much larger and more modern enemy air force, the Republican Air Force struggled to contest control of the skies, allowing Nationalist ground operations to proceed with devastating effectiveness.

The offensive reached its most significant milestone on April 15, when Nationalist troops arrived at the Mediterranean coast near the town of Vinaròs. This achievement, often referred to as the Drive to the Sea, represented one of the most important strategic victories of the war. By reaching the coast, Franco's forces effectively divided the territory of the Second Spanish Republic into two separate and isolated regions: Catalonia in the northeast and the central-southern Republican zone, which included Madrid and Valencia.

The consequences of this division were severe for the Republican war effort. Communications and supply routes between the two Republican territories were effectively severed, making military coordination increasingly difficult. Catalonia, which served as the Republic's principal industrial center, was now cut off from both the capital and the agriculturally productive regions of southern Spain. The loss of internal connectivity further weakened the Republic's ability to sustain the war and forced the leftists to make desperate moves in order to turn the tides, which would later be called the Battle of Ebro.

The Battle of the Ebro was the Republic's last-ditch effort to reconnect the two zones and reverse the tide of the war. It was the longest, largest, and bloodiest battle of the entire conflict.

Prime Minister Juan Negrín and General Vicente Rojo hoped that a major offensive would demonstrate the Republic's viability to the international community. They aimed to prolong the war until a general European conflict broke out, which they hoped would force Britain and France to intervene against the fascist-backed Nationalists.



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On the night of July 25, the Republican Army of the Ebro, commanded by Juan Modesto, launched a massive surprise crossing of the Ebro River. Using boats and pontoon bridges, they caught the Nationalists off guard and pushed several miles inland toward Gandesa.

Franco chose to engage in a war of attrition rather than bypassing the Republican salient. For four months, the two sides fought a brutal stationary battle. The Nationalists controlled the heights and possessed overwhelming air and artillery superiority. They also controlled the dams upstream, frequently opening them to create floods that destroyed Republican pontoon bridges, cutting off supplies to the troops across the river.

By November 1938, the Republican forces were forced back across the Ebro. The Battle of the Ebro effectively destroyed the Republic's best remaining units and exhausted its remaining war materiel. The war had 100,000 to 120,000 casualties totaling from both sides, resulting in the effective destruction of the Republican army.

The failure of the Ebro offensive, in addition with the Munich Agreement in September 1938 which signaled that Britain and France would not intervene, sealed the fate of the Republic.



## *Royal Model United Nations 2026*

### **The Final Offensive**

The Final Offensive began on March 26, 1939 was not a fierce battle nor a tactical maneuvers but rather a rapid massive occupation on completely demoralised and depleted Republican forces. Following the internal conflicts caused by Colonel Segismundo Casado's coup in Madrid, the republican chain of command collapsed. Casado had hoped to negotiate an "honorable" peace deal with the Nationalist but General Francisco Franco had other plans.

His objective and plan was absolute annihilation so he rejected all diplomatic conducts and demanded unconditional surrender for all remaining Republican territories and air forces. Cassado failed to meet these demands in time, Franco ordered Nationalist armies to make a synchronized attack on the central and southern zone, attacking Toledo, the Tagis Valley and Andalusia.

The Nationalist strategy during the final offensive was focused purely on speed and encirclement to prevent any kind of Republican evacuation. Franco directed mechanized units, especially Italian Corpo Truppe Volontarie and Army of the Levante to cut off the Mediterranean coast, especially Valencia Cartagena and Alicante. Facing the might of the Nationalist army the Republican army simply dissolved into thin air. With no certain orders , a nonexistent morale and no ammunition; many Republican soldiers demobilized themselves. They abandoned their trenches, discarded their uniforms and rifles. These soldiers desperately tried to blend into the civilian population or they ran toward the sea.

On March 28, 1939, Nationalist troops marched into the devastated "ruins" of Madrid without resistance, formally ending the siege of the capital without any extra effort.

The most tragic operational outcome of this final offensive occurred at the Mediterranean ports, where Nationalist strategy successfully created a massive, inescapable trap. Believing that international ships sent by democracies would rescue them, tens of thousands of Republican politicians, officers, and soldiers flooded into the port city of Alicante. However, the Nationalist naval blockade and the intimidating presence of fascist aviation ensured that almost no rescue vessels arrived. By March 30, the Italian CTV completely surrounded the port, trapping approximately 15,000 desperate Republicans on the docks. With no escape possible, mass suicides occurred among the Republican leadership on the piers, and the rest were systematically rounded up into concentration camps. The rapid, bloodless conquest of the coast fulfilled Franco's final strategic objective, completely neutralizing the last remnants of the Republic and culminating in his final victory dispatch on April 1, 1939.



#### **6.4. How the War Ended**

After the stalemate in Madrid while continuing the siege of Madrid, the Nationalist side began focusing on other fronts of the war with the Republicans. With successes on these fronts came the Republic's fall.

##### **Ebro**

First glance of this fall was marked with the Battle of Ebro. This battle was the Republic's last hope to connect their divided territories. Initially the offensive plan was a success but with the German and Italian air support aid given to the Nationalist side the Republic's plan of offense turned into attrition warfare. By the end of 1938 the Republicans were pushed across the river resulting in the Republic losing their best soldiers, officers and a huge chunk of their aircraft forces.

##### **The Fall of Catalonia**

Francisco Franco, knowing the Republic's weakness; launched a great offense against Catalonia. Catalonia was the core of the Republic's industry and the Republican soldiers lacked ammunition, morale and faced starvation. The Republican forces tried resisting but their efforts were in vain under these circumstances.

On January 26, 1939, Nationalist troops took Barcelona without firing a single shot. The event was so impactful that it started one of the biggest refugee crises in modern history.

Soon after the Fall of Catalonia the President of the Republic, Manuel Azana resigned in exile. Britain and France officially recognized Franco's Nationalist government in February 1939.



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## *Royal Model United Nations 2026*

### **La Retirada**

After the fall of Barcelona approximately 450.000 to 500.000 civilians and soldiers retreated and fled toward the border of France. This event took place in the starkest time of the winter season. Refugees had to go through steep cold and mountains full of snow without proper clothing and food. At the same time these refugees were targeted by German and Italian aerial bombardment. The French government, not being prepared for such an event, initially kept their borders closed. Eventually due to international pressure, France finally caved in and permitted civilians to cross at first. Soon after they accepted the leftovers of the diminished Spanish Republic's army. The French government forced The Spanish Republic's forces to hand over their weaponry to the French government. In the end the French government placed these refugees in internment camps on the beaches of France.

The refugees were not relieved because there wasn't any humanitarian aid by the French government due to political fears and economical problems. Many refugees lost their lives because of the cold, hunger and the bombardments. Afterward around 150.000 refugees were sent back to Spain and were executed by the newly formed Franco's regime. Those who stayed in France surprisingly became an important part of the French Resistance against the Nazi occupation during World War 2. A minor part of these refugees were rather lucky compared to the rest of the refugees. These groups were exiled to Latin American nations which welcomed their Spaniards "brothers".

After the fall of Catalonia, the Republic still controlled a large part of central and southern Spain including Madrid. Their army was approximately half a million strong however the morale of the men was quite low and the political leadership was slowly fading away.

The Prime Minister Juan Negrin, supported by the Spanish Communist Party (the PCE) , argued for continuation of the war at all costs. His vision was there would be another Great War in Europe and he thought if he could hold on until the war broke out, Britain and France would aid them against Franco's forces. While the Prime Minister was planning on this course of action on the other side of the spectrum, many military officers and some "light socialists" and anarchists believed the Prime Minister's plan was a suicide. Their army lacked food, weapons, ammunition and the morale of their soldiers was quite low. This idea was led by Colonel Segismundo Casado, the commander of the Republican Army of the Center, who believed they could overthrow Negrin and negotiate a peace with Franco that would guarantee no retribution against the Republican soldiers.



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### **Casado's Coup**

In March 1939, international tensions grew rapidly. Colonel Casado launched a military coup against the Prime Minister Negrin in Madrid to secure a peace with Francisco Franco. The coup ignited fighting within the Republican camps, weakening their defences against Franco even further. After a few days of bloody combat, Casado gained the upper hand and crushed the communists that were loyal to Negrin, resulting in the death of thousands. demanded surrender from the Republicans. Casado's hope for a peace was in vain and naive. When their envoys contacted Nationalist base, Franco refused any terms and demanded unconditional surrender.

### **The End**

With low morale, starvation and lack of weaponry, the Republican forces were cornered. Their front lines against the Nationalist got brutally crushed. After the coup the Republic's chain of command was shattered to pieces. On March 28 1939, Nationalist troops entered Madrid without any opposition, marking the end of the Madrid siege that had been going on for almost three years. After a few days, the handful remaining cities such as: Valencia, Alicante and Almeria fell without any resistance. Thousands and thousands of Republicans waited in ports, hoping for ships to come and take them into exile but only a few arrived; many were captured on the docks. Shortly after Francisco Franco declared victory, ending the Spanish Civil war and establishing a new Spanish Government.



## **7. Other Contexts**

### **7.1. Political and Ideological Extremism in Europe**

At the root of Western European insecurity in the interwar years (1918-1939, the period between the two world wars) lay France's fears of a rearmed and revanchist Germany. France had been immensely weakened by the First World War. France's only comfort had been the clauses of the Treaty of Versailles, which had reduced the German army, abolished the General Staff and forbidden Germany to have an air force.

The League of Nations, the organization that had been founded to protect the peace that had been sustained with the Treaty of Versailles, was already broken before a world war started and therefore could not interfere with the war in Spain. The United States refused to become a member of the League, and Germany left the League a few months after Adolf Hitler took power in 1933. The withdrawal of Japan in the same year and the absence of the Soviet Union until 1934 were further factors in the League's weakness.

The accession to power of Adolf Hitler in January 1933 began a new period of constant tension in Europe. Germany rejected the Versailles settlement, and Hitler announced in March 1935 a new German army. Britain was not prepared to accept a common front against Germany, so France now turned to the Soviet Union.

Italy's unredeemed colonial aims were not satisfied at Versailles. By the end of 1922, Fascism took over Italy and gained popularity, sympathy and respect from the rest of Europe as well. Especially in Britain, it was seen as a bold attempt to crush Bolshevism and to replace impotent Liberal parliamentarianism with a more progressive government. The Italian leader, Benito Mussolini, "Il Duce", had many admirers in London. Winston Churchill said to Italian journalists in 1927:

"If I had been an Italian, I should have been wholeheartedly with you from the start to finish in your triumphal struggle against the bestial appetites and passions of Leninism."

Europe and America saw the Soviet Union and the Moscow-controlled Communist International as menaces to peace and stability. This fear divided European opinion in the interwar years and paralysed the will to tackle the Nazi-Fascist threat, and they hoped that Nazi Germany would destroy Communism.



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The Soviet Union was in turmoil at the time. Within the Soviet Republic, internal struggles were reaching a climax. The war in Spain was worrying, because it was accompanied by revolutionary excesses of murder, robbery, expropriation and the more typically Spanish killing of priests and burning of churches. It was a poor advertisement for the new Soviet policy of reassuring the Western bourgeoisie.

In Spain, when the Popular Front won the elections of 18 February 1936 and formed a moderate Government. Some countries saw the Popular Front as a threat, a “Trojan Horse” of a Communist takeover in the Western World. Italy had eventually got away from invading Abyssinia (Ethiopia), and Germany had militarized the Rhineland, signalling something bigger.

One of the most striking aspects of the Spanish political psychology was the mobilization of fear based on foreign examples. The growth of the revolutionary left, though very little of it was communist, climaxed by the victory of the Popular Front in 1936, convinced much of the right-wing that Spain was going through something like Russia did in 1917. The right-wing, which governed Spain from 1934 to 1936 and still had votes, might have mounted a reaction that would undo the left-wing, taking the form of Italian or German Fascism.

The basic reality was the polarization between the multiparty revolutionary left-wing and the conservative and Catholic right-wing, a polarization unconsciously defined by the opposing sides as a contest between fascism and communism.

The Falange avoided the usage of the term “fascist” to deny that the Falange was a fascist movement or an imitation of the Italian party. Nevertheless, fascism was popular among radical young Falangists, already in 1935.



## **7.2. Foreign Involvement and the Great Powers**

The French government wanted to maintain a global anti-war sentiment and was also worried that sympathisers of the Nationalists would cause a civil war in France. So, a Non-Intervention plan had been proposed in a joint diplomatic initiative by the governments of France and the United Kingdom.

On 3 August, Count Charles de Chambrun, the French ambassador at Rome, presented the French government's non-intervention plan to Count Ciano, the Italian foreign minister, to study it. By this time, French diplomats were calling at every foreign ministry in Europe (including Germany) with their Non-Intervention plan. In Berlin, German Foreign Minister Von Neurath told the French ambassador that Germany would not send arms to Spain and that any Non-Intervention agreement must include the Soviet Union.

However, the Italians and Germans delayed signing because they were, in fact, shipping war material, supplying manpower and aircraft to Franco. By 24 August, the Soviet Union had agreed to Non-Intervention, and Germany changed its mind. To refuse to accept the agreement would mean that France would no longer be able to resist internal pressure to support the Spanish Republic, which it could do more easily than Germany could help Franco. Now that other countries had accepted the French plan to go on supporting Franco was very risky, Hitler decided to accept the French proposal.

This Non-Intervention agreement did not stop both sides from not helping. The Russian newspaper Pravda announced that the Russian workers had contributed 12,145,000 roubles to aid the Republican Spain. The first Soviet supply ship to reach Spain was the Neva, which dropped anchor in Alicante on 25 September. This ship carried food, though the German charge in Spain was informed by a harbour official that packing cases marked "pressed meats" actually carried rifles.

Italy, on the other hand, supplied machine guns, artillery, aircraft, the expeditionary air corps *Aviazione Legionaria*, and a force of military volunteers, *Corpo Truppe Volontarie (CTV)*, to the Nationalist cause, and assisted with the Mediterranean blockade. While Germany gave various aid and military support to the Nationalists, including the formation of the *Condor Legion* as a land and air force, which led to many Nationalist victories. The German army had played a pivotal role in certain operations like *Operation Ursula* with the assistance of U-Boats and the most famous bombing of Guernica with the air force.



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Most civil volunteers who fought in the war were for the Republicans, the International Brigades (an organisation of the Comintern), militias from Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT) and the Workers' Party of Marxist Unification (POUM). There was also a small contingent from the British Independent Labour Party, which included the famous writer George Orwell.

### **Portugal**

After the Popular Front victory in Spain in February 1936, nearly 15000 Spaniards, including significant monarchists and conservatives, took refuge in Portugal. Portugal was worried that if it stayed neutral, Britain and the French would protect it from a possible attack from Franco. Portugal continued to maintain uneasy relations with the Spanish Republic until 23 October 1936, when the Spanish Government publicly accused Portugal of contravening the Non-Intervention agreement. This was true, but Portugal had signed the pact unwillingly and only after intense British pressure.

Portugal was, of course, protecting its own interests. They had no intention of respecting Non-Intervention because they did not believe France was doing so either. On 21 August, Portugal allowed two German ships, which were prevented by the Spanish Government blockade from entering Cadiz, to dock at Lisbon, and dispatched the war material they were carrying into Franco's territory. A few days later, Franco thanked Portuguese Prime Minister Salazar for the valuable assistance received.



## **8. Aftermath**

Spain had agreed to join Germany, Italy and Japan in the Anti-Comintern Pact. The Pact was a mere statement, to be added to by future agreement. On 31 March, Spain signed a Treaty of Friendship with Germany, which included a clause mutually promising not to give any advantage to an enemy.

The Condor Legion held a final parade on the airfield at Leon on 19 May before Franco and the senior Spanish and Italian generals. The debt to Germany was fixed at 288,7 million Reichsmarks. The CTV set sail for home on 31 May. They had left nearly 4000 dead in Spain. As for the debt of some 8,3 billion lire. An agreement was reached to fix the sum at 5 billion lire (56 million £) to be paid over ten years by Spanish exports. The Soviet aid ended after Germany, save for the material sent in late 1938.

The Non-Intervention Committee held its last meeting on 20 April 1939, to wind up business. Non-Intervention was meant to dissuade foreign countries from sending arms to Spain, but this would only have worked had the consequences of doing so been serious. If even Britain's ally, France, continually permitted volunteers and weapons to pass over the frontier, why should Germany and Italy have worried? In any case, as early as August 1936, these two countries realised that Non-Intervention was only a “face-saving” device.

Once Non-Intervention was in place, Spain was seen as a side issue. Italy's actions in Spain were not the central question for Britain: the Chiefs of Staff stressed that Britain could not afford a war with Italy, given British imperial responsibilities. What Italy did in Spain was merely an example of behaviour which Foreign Secretary Eden would not tolerate, but Prime Minister Chamberlain would put up with for the sake of a settlement over the bigger questions of Central Europe.

This, however, is the major question in the discussion of the importance of the Spanish Civil War in the international politics of the late 1930s. Of course, today it is easy to see that the behaviour of the Democracies over Spain could not have avoided sending a message to the Dictators that they would be able to do what they liked anywhere else.



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